

# I Was There



Landing at Salerno Bay, south of Naples

## World War II Stories

By

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# Table Of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>A Gem from Caserta</b>                                      | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Tools of the Trade</b>                                      | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Serious Trouble Brewing Among the Cornstalks – July 20</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Trouble at the Paladino Farm Italy 1944 – Late August</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Lieutenant Jim Sawtell - September</b>                      | <b>10</b> |
| <b>The Battle for Campibizenzio, Italy 1944 - Late October</b> | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Lieutenant Polly Petrie, Anc, Florence, Italy, 1944</b>     | <b>14</b> |
| <b>B Co. Commander Capt. King Diary Excerpt</b>                | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Honorable Discharge – October 1945</b>                      | <b>21</b> |
| <b>Enlisted Records and Report of Separation</b>               | <b>22</b> |
| <b>Honorable Discharge – March 1948</b>                        | <b>23</b> |
| <b>Bronze Star Medal Award – June 1985</b>                     | <b>24</b> |
| <b>Name Plate and Photo From Medal Collection</b>              | <b>25</b> |
| <b>Medal Collection, With Patches &amp; Dog-tags</b>           | <b>26</b> |
| <b>Army Reserve ID As 1st Lieut. – July 1961</b>               | <b>26</b> |

## **A Gem from Caserta**

The hot humid air was saturated with stench of all kinds, body odor from several thousand troops and many, many nationalities, each with different ethnic habits and their own understanding of cleanliness. Plus, vomit or plain puke was everywhere, covering every steel floor, deck, and stairway, of our troop ship. Not to mention, the latrines, if some of the guys failed to make it! I am glad that wives and mothers were elsewhere. Tossing it over the side was now a reality!

The Mediterranean Sea was especially wild, rough, and sickening. Even enemy bomber pilots extracted their “pound of flesh” as they tried to bomb us out of existence. Submarines were a menace of the worst kind. Depth charges were rolled off the fantail of our troop ship nightly to discourage and hopefully fatally damage any aggressive sub. Some guys, regardless of rank, soon became “naval experts” and exhausted everyone with their verbal routine and

constant chatter. You know the type! For one, who “hates” water, I was just thankful for daylight each morning. A “meal” was available once daily at stand-up tables. Troops were called by lot number. It was sickening to wade in vomit, look at the gruel served from a ten-quart water pail and expect to ingest it. No thanks! A cup of black as ink coffee was enough.

As soon as daylight came, I rushed to the outside deck, found a comfortable resting spot and soon enjoyed the warmth of the clear Mediterranean sunshine. The U.S. Navy deserves much credit for getting us to and from the ETO (European Theatre of Operations). I shall never forget their devotion to duty, to each other, and to their pride and proficiency. Our destination, the Italian Port of Naples had been completely destroyed by allied bombers weeks before our arrival. Ships were mostly “belly-up” and everywhere in the seemingly protected harbor. Some were rocking gently, others, in the mud and some entangled together. Not a pretty sight to see!

It was now our turn to climb away from this carnage and death. It was a chore! We reached solid ground by helping each other and passing our two duffle bags, one at a time up the gangplank until we cleared – there was an “A” bag and a “B” bag, each with personal belongings. This brought forth raw, rough, and dirty language, and of course profanity. I’ll never know why. I charged it to a release of tension and the joy of being free with fresh air and sunshine. The dangerous part of this was to move along 2” x 12” x 12’ overlapping heavy planks. The total reaching from keel to keel of the many ships needed to get us out of there. This was done carrying both the “A” bag and the “B” bag, helping some older men and many others without the strength or courage to go it alone and being alert to the constant rocking of the several ships under us. I did not see nor hear of anyone slipping and going down between the hulls. If so, the current of the deep salt water would have solved any disposal problem.

After being on shore for a day or two, I was confronted with a mystical nagging in my head, heart, and psyche. It was not homesickness, hunger, nor anything I could identify. It was a busy time. I had developed much expertise in organizing and conducting training exercises for the troops, so I kept very busy doing just that. We lived and trained exclusively in the fields above Naples for a couple of days, until truck transportation became available to move us north and into combat.

The nagging and restless feeling in my head would not stop. So I quit what I was doing and just walked thru the beautiful green rolling pastures. I felt energized and much relieved. This was Ladino Clover in bloom, red, pink, white, and purple blossoms. I felt that I was getting closer to something that I wanted and needed. Not over ten feet ahead was a special plot of Ladino Clover plants all tall and sturdy and of specimen size, color, and quality. This was the “holy grail” of Ladino Clover. Mere animal fodder, but beautiful. In a few days, it would disappear, either consumed by cattle, tread- down by dozens of hoofs, or maybe by hundreds of army boots marching thru. But I am going to cut one specimen because I had to! That was sixty-two years before writing this.

That evening I carefully placed that four-leaf clover among other souvenirs in my shiny new, black bi-fold wallet my mother had just mailed to me for my birthday. The clear plastic picture holders were adequate. So, from this date forward I had the added responsibility of preserving this “Gem from Caserta” and it was to take care of me for a lifetime also. It was truly a combat veteran! It was carried with me through dozens of battles, firefights, soaking rainstorms and yes, even the raging Arno River. We did it together! This lone gem from Caserta was my “friend” and my “companion”. It saved my life numerous times. It has changed like I have changed during these sixty-two years. It has dried-out, discolored, shriveled, and is brittle to the touch.

So, did I carry this beautiful four-leaf clover home with me or did it; with its supernatural powers bring me back to this great land of milk and honey? We will never know!



*From Vera Brown Tosoni, 12/16/22: “I actually still have my dad's wallet with the four-leaf clover in it from the story ‘Gem From Caserta’.”*

### **Tools of the Trade**

Miguel was not keen on this trip nor was he sure of himself when advised of our plans for the coming evening. We could be forced to reach for different “Tools” to get this job done! Orders from higher-up emphasized “no firearms” of any type will be used for security purposes, or offensively. We need information about the enemy, topography, approach, and withdrawal routes etc. “Just go up this hill,” said the S-2, as he jabbed his finger on to a map, stop, look, and listen, every few yards or so. In any event, come back with useable information, and no, I do not need a body count on this trip. All this said as I talked to Miguel on what we had to do to prepare.

First let me inspect your M-I rifle and especially your bayonet and scabbard which should always be attached to his canvas web ammunition belt. He searched for it and soon returned with a wide grin on his face and his bayonet with scabbard in hand. Now, clean them. He did. They'll be no rattles squeaks or thuds as we walk. Every item will be securely tied down. Our mission required stealth of the highest order because the enemy is too close to do otherwise.

A farm road was up ahead, settled between a stone wall on either side. We had seen it days before in daylight. It was not a strange area to us. Clouds, partial moonlight, reflections, and distortion, of all types did not make movement easier. It was so dark among the large trees lining each side of the farm road that I reached to my rear often to check on Miguel. He was a good soldier, but I had to make sure he was holding tightly to my web pistol belt. If for some reason we became separated, I doubt he could have navigated alone back to our starting point. Not a word was spoken. But, likewise, the enemy did not reveal themselves either.

Miguel did not enjoy this work, but he never complained. Miguel now had his bayonet secured to the "business end" of his rifle and was ready to "stand guard" on the west side of the centuries old farm road. I signaled to him to tiptoe across the road, select a good camouflaged defensive position from which he could "see" me as well as northward towards possible danger. Oh! By the way "I'll be opposite you in this slit trench provided by the courtesy of Uncle Adolph". It is an "active" area. The soil is fresh from recent excavation, plus, indications of limited foot travel at the site, this knowledge was obtained by crawling about the small area and using all my senses to gather the facts needed to help us stay alive. In the meantime, I snuggled down into the rain-soaked slit trench that wasn't even mine. Two to three inches of very cold rainwater was my welcome mat. "Ouch!" My 45 cal Thompson submachine gun was placed on the berm of the trench, instantly available, but only as a last resort. But why would I need it? My lethal trench knife was always at my side and that "Tool", I trusted!

Crickets were chirping. A few birds were restlessly flitting from branch to branch and the black of night was not as intense. But what is that clacking sound I hear and getting closer and closer. Of course, hob nailed boots running on the solid surface of the farm road. It didn't sound pleasant at all. I was now fully alert and very tense as I stretched- out for some rest.

An enemy soldier was on me instantly! He had left the roadway, jumped the stone wall, and landed on me. I was in the prone position face down. A difficult spot to be in but, after all it was his slit trench, and I was in it. Oh, how I missed the clear, staccato notes of the Thompson at this moment. My trench knife was pinned under me by his weight and how do I get it out? No time to think. Just act and react to each of his movements.

I didn't lack the courage but where is the strength to finish this job? I soon realized that the mud was an asset. I could feel my right arm slowly freeing-up from the load. Luckily, my right hand was turned inward so I could grab the handle of the trench knife as my arm moved up-ward. The lubrication of the muddy water turned the tables in my favor. Immediately the

“owner” of this slit trench felt the bite as I “probed” between his upper left ribs while twisting the blade vigorously. He struggled to protect himself and get out of there ASAP. Finally, my compassion softened only for a second and I said, “raus mit dir”, out you go. Now!

Before daylight I reached for my Thompson, walked over to Miguel, and motioned that it was over. I ran my checklist through my mind before leaving. When I could feel tall wet grass under foot I stooped over and pulled the blade of my trench knife through it several times. My olive drab woolen shirttail made a great towel! The blade was now clean and dry and in “its” scabbard. With Miguel hanging onto my belt we headed southeast at a comfortable steady pace. Mission completed.

### **Serious Trouble Brewing Among the Cornstalks - Late September**

The enemy drilled dozens of 81mm mortar shells into my ever-changing position in a small cornfield. They appeared to be bracketing me for the inevitable kill. This is the way it was done with high angle fire weapons- one beyond the target, one short of the target, and then number three, on target. I counted each round and where they hit and certainly, planned a substantial move pretty much in accordance with their firing rhythm. But anyway, I was never where they expected me to be. If they changed their firing rhythm, then it would have meant trouble or worse. When a mortar round hit the ground and exploded, the result would be dozens of hot, searing pieces of shrapnel of various sizes flying at high velocity in all directions. This was enough to remove the leaves and tassels from the sturdy cornstalks and leave me without the concealment so necessary for survival. The corn was now nearly obliterated, and I was ready to make a dash for the nearest downhill “exit,” and that pesky battery.

The PRC 10’s in my company were lifeless, and all of them with dead batteries. So we were out of contact and temporarily out of business. We didn’t know exactly where battalion HQ was located but did know they had at least one spare PRC 10 battery. Well, we needed it now in a hurry, no delays! Crawling in the mud between the rows of corn was no picnic. The stench was heavy from the fresh organic fertilizer used and this didn’t help my disposition nor the appearance of my clothing. I smelled badly! Further, I promptly had a good laugh all by myself. This was “status” of a proud college kid like me or, so I thought. [*See page 41 of B Co. Capt. King’s diary for his mention of Alson getting the battery “Cpl. Alson W. Brown, a splendid soldier.”*]

The Italian country folks needed every scrap of food available including corn, potatoes melons and whatever else they could grow in their shallow, rocky, and acidic soils. I felt badly about the destruction from the mortar bombardment of their corn, but I survived and that was all that mattered at the moment. It had already been a long day and I was exhausted. I needed a short “breather” from the continuous mortar shelling. The tremendous expenditure of ammunition by the German army just to hammer away for two or more hours at one skinny kid from the USA brought a belly laugh. Perhaps Hitler or General “smiling” Albert

Kesselring authorized the expenditure. But the German Deutschbank at Düsseldorf will land hard on someone when the combat reports flood- in showing their enemy kill ratio of zero vs. the expenditure of 90 expensive mortar shells. Not a good combat ratio.

That mess was cause for mild disorientation! The enemy mortar crew eased off a bit, now my job was to find that damn battery ASAP. I quickly became oriented again and headed due south on the run. I enjoyed this! It was my style, relaxing and stretching as I poured on the speed, all at my own pace. Time was no longer on my side, I had to move and fast. About 200 yards beyond the next turn was the crew with battery in hand. No delays, no conversation, just the usual teasing, bitching, and condemnation about their soft job. I did not delay, picked up the battery, hit the trail on the run bounding from boulder to boulder again, all uphill now with weapon and battery tucked away. Not a hitch, that is, until now. Rounding a corner in the narrow trail I moved fast and effortlessly like a cross-country runner, which I was, only to come face-to-face with a big Kraut solider standing in the doorway of a wine cellar. My very first impulse was to drill him right there. My 45 cal Thompson was in my hand and in a firing position instantly, like lighting! Then I began to think, don't shoot this poor beggar, give him a break. Furthermore, he didn't have a chance- his hands were now in the air and the Geneva Convention code was on my mind. So, I carefully replaced my toys, gave him a smile because I just didn't have time for him anyway. My mission was a battery, not a prisoner. After patting him down I gestured that he should follow me up the mountain. He did, but the pace I set due to the impeding darkness was far and beyond what this big guy could handle. So I had to slow the pace, but only slightly. Darkness was already touching the treetops. The "big kid" was still with me, but he learned who the boss was that night. He gave me no trouble- just puffing-away behind me and grunting with every step. He was the enemy, and I was the Captor- no argument! He was a nice, mild person just happy to be out of the fray and with someone who obeyed the rules of this miserable game.

As I passed the communications site, I drew my left arm back and with an under arm motion hurled the battery to the first person I saw- followed with a flow of profanity that shook the mountain and the troops- take your freaking battery and shove it where the sun doesn't shine, hang the prisoner and don't bother me for 24 hours and put two intelligent guards near my sack- then everyone shut-up. Hold on, wait a minute, wake me at 5 a.m. for hot rations and black coffee- and don't forget to feed Heine. No, No not the dog, my prisoner, you fool.

### **Trouble at the Paladino Farm Italy 1944 – Late August**

When told about this combat patrol, I expected it to be another routine job. I had handled them many times before. Nothing "Routine" about it at all! S-2/G-2 (intelligence) at higher headquarters always refused to join me when invited, finding too much to do!

Weather reports seemed acceptable for late August – mostly in the lower 80's, clear skies, some clouds late in the day, no rain. The selected troops were checking their gear and

equipment. Ammo; grenades, and other ordnance were issued including rifle grenades and hand grenades. It was estimated to be a two-hour gradual climb to our destination, The Paladino Farm. We were expected to “clean-out” some Nazi troublemakers who were blocking the progress of our battalion. No problem, we’ll be glad to accommodate!

The guys preferred the cool of the nighttime air, so that was it, a nighttime combat patrol. The guys were edgy and apprehensive about this job. They knew that a single file formation was mandatory, except for an occasional new man who learned “quickly” from “enforcers” in the column, and to keep his mouth shut too, and no grunting.

The vegetation varied from full-size trees to scrub growth, brush, some grass, and bare ground. The well-worn trail was very difficult to follow in most places. It is now 8:40 p.m. We leave at 9:30 p.m. It will be dark by then, allowing us to be at the target area about 11:30 p.m. Your squad leader will check for fitness of each man, knowledge of the mission and their gear. You will grab one c-ration per man, fill your canteen and then take a short break, and don’t forget a piss call! You have fifty minutes once we start there will be no stopping on the trail, unless of course, we hit opposition. If so, the decision will be mine to make. Keep up the pace, develop an easy stride, and always keep the man in front of you in view. Do not lose contact. Do not fall out of line. Dropouts will be reported up the line in a whisper. It is now 11:30 p.m. Problems are already cropping up. Three men, for different reasons have asked to return to our base camp. Permission granted! The enemy burp guns didn’t help their attitude one bit, stomach pains, headaches, sore feet, fear, etc. Two men just could not keep up the pace. After hearing several bursts of gunfire then several more bursts of this close fire took the heart out of some of the guys. It was from our right front, probably from our objective, The Paladino Farm. I halted the column, pulled my poncho from my backpack pulled it over my head and with a flashlight studied maps for location of The Paladino Farm and surroundings, with terrain maps and aerial photos; it was confirmed. We were at the objective. Now it was 12:30 a.m. and time to go to work on the Nazi’s. I had warned the guys not to drink water from the Paladino Farm, as it was most likely polluted and deadly. If the Nazi’s let the dogs out of the farmhouse, we have another set of problems. But I will let the 45 cal. Thompson sub do the talking on this one loud and clear, and positive. It was now 12:45 a.m. and time to get serious. As our forces dwindled, I knew it would not be a picnic in the pack. The Bar-man was ordered “up front” (Browning automatic rifle) immediately!

It was now obvious the enemy was manning a “listening Post” at the Paladino Farm but then; they were ready to “agitate” us if threatened. They had two or more fretful German Shepherd dogs with them. By now, I was so close to the Paladino Farm House I could hear whining and the brusque reprimands of the handler from inside the house. The dogs knew trouble was brewing! The Nazi’s are fully alert and ready. Shots were fired randomly. I would not back down as the troops had urged I do. During the lull I tried to figure out why the elite Nazi’s were assigned to this remote section of the Italian front. It was simple! General “Smiling” Albert Kesselring was the German Commander and Hitler demanded that he “save the peninsular” and drive us out! It didn’t work!



After twenty minutes of intense fire, I signaled for a situation report. PFC Downing dead, Witheral disabled, Novich and Peters unaccounted for. I could not hear the rattle of the BAR so I assumed he ran out of ammo or targets, or both or was dead. Of the original ten men in the column four remained on the line and fit for duty. The success of the mission was now in doubt, but we were going to stick with it, regardless! I told as many of the troops as I could contact that we had very limited tactical advantage but could maneuver somewhat. My cal 45 SMG was my friend and constant companion. It could speak loudly in several “languages” as the Nazi’s were aware. It was a super weapon for close combat such as in the Paladino Farm House. That is, if I could ever get inside. In all of my bragging about this 45 cal it was not equal to the enemy’s heavy MG, better known as the “burp” gun or “diarrhea gun” as the guys called it.

At 1:00 a.m. I found myself in a bad situation. I was pinned in the middle of the narrow steep inclined walkway facing the burp gun in the attic window above. The soil had been walked on for centuries and was hard and unforgiving. It was not my idea of a pleasant evening!

I had not planned for such extensive nighttime combat. Where are the guys? Who was dead or wounded? How many could or could not continue? I was frantic without information. So, I made a decision. When the time was right, I would jump up and make a run for the downhill escape route. It failed! But I was hoping the remaining guys had gotten out. As I moved, the upstairs gunner must have observed some minor changes in light patterns and opened with all 500 rounds per minute, or so it seemed.

Every bullet had to go over my head, missing by mere fractions of an inch. I could feel the breeze, hear the noise, and particularly, the ripping and tearing of my clothes as the gunner was systematically rendering my clothes to rags. Yes, another unsafe move! I must get into a spread-eagle position without tantalizing the gunner. Roll on my back, yes. It was a slight move and I made it! The spread-eagle position left me vulnerable to being neutered on the spot. I took my chances! Sporadic firing from the attic window continued. I would stretch, take a deep breath, and relax, this helped. My move will come soon. Skylight had long disappeared. I was alone in the pitch-blackness. Now, it was my time to turn the tables on the Nazi. I was sure the MG was locked in place and when he fired again, I just wouldn’t be there.

It worked, but no chances! I rolled to my right, always with an eye on the attic window for light or reflection. I was out of there, silently, and soon on the escape path to the south. I had to break contact or be caught in first light of the morning. The troops were aware of this plan. It worked! Some of them were waiting for me along the escape route.

It was daylight at our base camp and plenty of questions: Did you get to the Paladino Farm? Anyone hurt or killed? How far was it? Any enemy at the Farm? What was your delay? But wait a second; you’re a mess, dirt, mud debris. Your pack all chewed to shreds, foot powder

spread all over, a new pair of woolen socks shredded to bits and destroyed. Your underclothes, note pad, poncho, shot to hell.

Oh, was the farmer's daughter home?

Hey, call the medic this hard ass is a mess. Have him checked for bullet burns, smears and burns skin creases etc. No, forget the social aspects of my business trip thank you.

### **Lieutenant Jim Sawtell – September**

*A true story written by Col Alson W. Brown 61 years after this incident. Jim Sawtell was not his real name. Changed to protect his identity.*

Lieutenant Sawtell and I met a few minutes before darkness on a hot sticky evening high in the Dolomites of Northern Italy. It was September 1944. In a few moments it would be pitch black, and I knew it. We were six thousand feet up the shoulder of a steep rocky mountainside east of Florence and that's all that mattered at the time.

There was no end to the horrific battle that had been in progress all that day. Everyone was exhausted and edgy. Good men were lost! To make matters worse the battle could and probably would go on much of the night. Then there were combat patrols to organize and men to instruct, local security and much more. Jim was four to five years older than me. He had a wife and two young children to provide for. He joined our unit as a replacement with no previous combat experience.

So, what to do? I told him to hang on to my belt and I'll get you to a spot for the night. The new day started off with rain showers, fog, and low hanging clouds. We skirted the mess area, grabbed a can of scrambled eggs with weak black acidic coffee at the courtesy of C-Rations, Inc.!

As soon as possible I introduced Jim around to as many of the guys as we could locate. He was meek and quiet, but always very much the gentleman. It had been a long tough night, but even at day light, he seemed eager to learn more and continuously asked questions. So, our plan for the day was that Jim would hang with me until he felt confident, knew our attack and defensive plans, and had a grasp of how we battled the enemy.

Jim must have known that I would soon cut him loose. He knew very well that each of us had to carry our own load, and what a load it would be! We discussed every bit of it. Tomorrow he would be leader of the second platoon of four tough men, depending on how many made it through the night. At times he would be father, mother, clergyman, advisor, doctor, companion, confidant, and whatever, as well as a hardnosed disciplinarian. We were fighting a tough cruel war against cruel people. Could Jim make it? It was never positive, but I supported him every step of way, because by now we were friends!

It was time for another delicious “C” ration. There was no variety, limited choices – NONE! But anyway, it would get us where we had to go. Our desire to become better acquainted was much delayed because of the terrible pounding from artillery, mortar, aircrafts, machine gun, small arms, and sniper fire. There was a partially sunny sloping field close by. This was the place to have lunch and Jim agreed.

Before we sat down, I scanned the area carefully for scouts and snipers, to be sure we were as safe as possible. Jim followed every move. Tall grass screened us from positions on the higher ground behind us. Jim sat on my right; his right hand was pulling his wallet from his rear pocket. As he was doing so, he said to me, pointing to a picture in the open wallet, “This is a picture of my wife, this other picture is of the girl I really love. If anything happens to me be sure you remove her picture from my wallet and get rid of it.” Simultaneously, from our rear there was a loud sharp, pop! Jim slumped forward.

### **The Battle for Campibizenzio, Italy 1944 – Late October**

It was a bitch! Everything about it was nasty. Even without the determined enemy, it would have been only a give and take struggle against terrible weather, the dangerous Arno River, the steep unforgiving terrain, delayed arrival of supplies, care for the large number of sick and wounded and severe supply and evacuation problems. We knew, or thought we knew, how to handle all of this!

Several indigent laborers followed our attack column by about one hour. Each was leading a loaded Missouri pack mule. The head “mule skinner” was an American Sergeant from you guessed it, Missouri. When on the move, he would stop frequently and carefully inspect each mule and its load. He wanted to be sure the load had not shifted, causing skin galls and friction soars. After all, the mule was USA government property and had a serial number to prove it! Where? A tattoo in the right ear, my serial number was not in my ear but a number hung on a chain around my neck called a “dog tag.” The lesson here is to never knowingly harm, lose, damage, or mutilate government property. Any “supply sergeant” will not hesitate to provide answers to your questions, along with monetary charges, and in language you will never forget! Keep your “mule free of blemishes!

In this fracas for control of Campibizenzio there didn’t seem to be a starting nor ending point. The moment the troops climbed up and over the face of the very steep cliff like terrain all hell broke loose. It was November. Darkness comes quickly. The troops yelled to each other, “let’s get the bastards this time whatever it takes.” We had to hustle just to get in position and hopefully hold the ground before the enemy hit.

It is estimated that within ten minutes a company size enemy unit burst around us, disregarding our fire and bombardment with mortars, hand grenades and rifle grenades. They had mounted bayonets, to be sure none of us survived. We had been in this kind of a pickle many times previously. Not one of our troops panicked nor backed down because it was the

enemy tactic when in a tight and questionable situation. They swirled around and among us firing indiscriminately. It soon turned pitch black.

As always, they turned to their favorite weapon, the 81 mm mortar. After pulling their troops back a short distance, instantly mortar shells burst among us. Orders to our troops to find cover and protection were worthless. I tried and missed! I was too busy organizing our defensive positions. How could I give an order without obeying it myself? So, in a half crouch, I ran towards the back of the lone building for protection. But on the way, several of the guys needed help. A kid with mortar shrapnel in his jugular was down; another close by was also bleeding from his head and face. With only two hands, I plugged the jugular first with one thumb and pulled out my first aid kit with the other. A tense situation! I knew both of these kids and they knew me. Still in a half crouch I had to stand up to be effective. I called for PFC Malloy our medic. I was surprised to have him respond so quickly. He was just to my rear and promised he would take care of the two guys I was trying to help. The “jugular” first then the “face” - right now! As I stood to stretch, an 81 mm mortar shell landed less than two feet in front of me. The full force of the explosion caught me in my stomach and intestines; I went down carrying the damage of the concussion for the rest of my life.

At the field hospital, the next day, Dr. Crandall reported to me that he had to remove twenty-eight inches of intestines, scrape away a lot of gangrene and install a “double barrel” colostomy. It was then, after Dr. Crandall’s discussion that I knew my combat days had ended. He confirmed it! I knew it! I was a tired old man at twenty-three years of age.

Early the next morning the heavy rain was easing off and some of the guys, except those injured or on guard duty, were drying off and opening c-rations. Our medic PFC Malloy knew where I spent the night! He politely shook me awake and reported that he had called the battalion medical officer. I would be on my way out of there at daybreak. In twenty minutes, I was guided by a couple of guys to the trail leading down to the Arno. After the soaking the previous night every pebble, stone, boulder, and branch were as slippery as glare ice. But down we went anyway, mules leading the way.

The mules, maybe six or seven of them were mostly loaded and standing steady the way they were trained. Neither a hair nor a whisker moved. On the other hand, the mule skinnners would not shut up, each vying for “a place in the sun,” by pleading to “transport” a wounded G.I., or even a cadaver. At that juncture, the sergeant in charge walked past and I somehow gathered the strength to sit up and advise him that I would not “ride that beast” down that seventy-five degree slope nor would I be carried “through, over, nor under the Arno.” No comment! I walked, limped, or crawled to the bottom of the three-thousand-foot treacherous trail with my right hand grasping the heavy leather britchen worn by all the mules as part of their leather harness. It would prevent the load from inching forward as he went downhill. This mule’s name was Mustard!

My feet were now well into the Arno, too far, too cold, too swift, too deadly – roaring and ugly- but in we went. I will never ever forget it! Mustard kept his patience and balance and position in line. He was courageous, sure and steady. I was able to continue hanging onto his britchen and with my left hand hang on to a two-inch manila rope secured across this raging torrent by army engineers.

By now the Arno was at least twice its normal width or more. Also the depth was over five feet deep. Less than eighteen hours earlier we had crossed the Arno and most of us never got the soles of our boots wet. There was very loud shouting from the shoreline. Several guys were watching. What happened? I turned toward the noise just in time to see a helpless mule make a complete barrel roll upside down, out of control, and headed south at forty mph. He was out of sight in less than twenty-five seconds. Does this mean that one indigent mule skinner also made the trip? We will never know! And just maybe they are still on the move out in the Tyrrhenian Sea or snagged along the Arno or beached and rescued. I like to believe the later possibilities. Within minutes Mustard was out of the Arno tugging me along and headed for the first aid shack a mile or two distance. The US Medics were very strict about their protocol. First, the first aid station, for immediate attention and evaluation, second, to a field hospital for more care, attention, and surgery, if needed. The next and final stop was to a general hospital, all close by.

I was freezing and soaked completely, by the ice-cold Arno. At the aid station, a couple of pfc medics pulled me from Mustard. After I hugged him and thanked him, they literally threw me into the aid station and kicked me into a corner. Wow! Yelling to the doctor “this guy is all done” so do not hurry! I responded immediately loud and clear “I hear you, I am not all done, so get busy!” The stone and cement aid station, no door, no windows, no heat, was a terrible experience. Being wet I guessed my body temperature did not exceed 93–94 degrees Fahrenheit. Within the hour the doctor, maybe a Lieutenant who appeared to hate his job had me dragged into his office, decided a sedative would be appropriate and said, “I am sending you to the field hospital right now by ambulance” “It’s a short ride, good luck!” I suspected that I was angrily and loudly “sputtering” for some unknown reason to someone, but what for and why? Extreme shivering and shaking didn’t help. Several attendants were yelling for me to shut up. “He has a very high fever and is nuts and delirious.” He misses his Thompson 45 cal sub machine gun, ammo, hand grenades, trench knife, compass, canteen, first aid kit, backpack, you name it. One of you guys sit with him and explain that all that stuff will be picked up and returned to the QM for sorting, cleaning and maybe reissued.

It was midnight before I was carefully unloaded from the ambulance, placed on a stretcher and carried into the hospital. Dr. Crandall and a couple of nurses lifted the tent flaps and in we went. My first reaction was the sight of the two large generators whining away- bright lights, very understanding doctors and nurses, and guess what? Heat! Being in severe pain, horizontal, and disoriented, did not improve my disposition.

A team of doctors, nurses, anesthesiologists, orderlies, and others began their lifesaving tasks immediately. Dr. Crandall, a LTC, was directing every move from his position on my right side. He was fingering my dog tags, verified my name, age, family address etc. It was at this point that he said, "Oh! I am Dr. Crandall from Boston Mass General Hospital, "I will be your surgeon and we'll take good care of you," "and by the way, my family and I vacation at Lake Winnepesaukee each summer probably not far from your home?" He was right! But that was the end of the line for me.

He introduced me to his nurse. We shook hands. She said her name was Lieutenant Polly Petrie. Just call me Polly.

### **Lieutenant Polly Petrie, Anc, Florence, Italy, 1944**

I padded around the wardrooms of the 24th General Hospital just trying to get another glimpse of my wardroom nurse. Her name was Polly. Always busy, with never a moment to just chat or to relax. I really felt sorry for the nurses. Their pace was dictated by the flow of sick and combat wounded men coming and leaving. I sure was a sight, wearing army hospital PJ's and robe, flat scuffs and bent over like an old man, suffering in lots of ways you'll never know. Not a pretty sight at all! Would I now pay for my dastardly deeds on the battlefield? Hold on just a darn minute! That was yesterday! This is here and now, today! Polly, please stop a minute and help me forget forever what I have seen and done: inhuman, disrespectful, cruel, unjust, and ungodly! But that is what I was trained to do and instructed others to also do. Can we talk about this stuff or is there only one common interest existing in our lives? Each Other! I knew and so did Polly!

She slipped a small piece of paper to me through my medical ward attendant. It said, "My husband was killed in air combat over southern Germany a month ago. This is my first notice of it. I have orders to go home. I travel via Naples and Casablanca to NYC. I leave in a week. Love you, Polly." I was stunned and shattered. As a ward nurse she had access to my hospital records. She knew my name, home address and personal stats. But did I know Polly? Of course, not, we were complete strangers!

A young, (Italian) hospital assistant was a great guy. He arrived early each morning and cheered me up. Like every morning, he placed his violin against the wall behind my bed, along with his instructions that he knew I would keep watch over it or at least that is what I made out of his conversation. I did and wanted to. He appreciated it. At five o'clock p.m. we reversed the procedure; he lovingly patted the violin case, smoothed his shiny, wavy hair, shook hands, good night and left. Only once did he agree to play for me just a few bars of a simple unfamiliar tune. But I did express appreciation. I often wonder what became of him. By the way, weeks prior to this, I saw him come into the ward, survey it and walk to my bed, and politely asked if he could please place his violin there. Each night on leaving, he would reach behind my bed, remove the violin, embrace it, salute me, and be gone. Our final

encounter occurred two weeks later. There was no way I could alert him that I would be leaving in December. News travels fast in a confined area.

Nurses, doctors, and other medical people from the hospital were already lined-up outside. Looking spiffy in their class A uniforms. Luggage had already been loaded on 6' x 6' transport trucks and lots of bus drivers were receiving final instructions. I never did get a glimpse of Polly. Where could she be? Would we ever meet again? Oh, Well.

We had first met here in the 24th General Hospital PX earlier. It was a quick “bump and stare” type of meeting. The only words spoken were “excuse me.” She did not respond. My bed was moved to a location adjacent to a door opening between wards, a very “high traffic” area. I didn't know why so I tried to patch the answer together from the coming, going and yes, stopping of the nurses as they hustled by. One very special nurse was kind and gentle beyond the call of duty. She would sit on the foot of my bed on her own time. Expose one of my feet at a time and peel away the large accumulation of dried skin from the soles of my feet. Sometimes we wouldn't talk and other times I would sleep. Combat boots, wet, then dry, and then wet again day in and day out most days never being removed and dried was the problem. New York Harbor froze solid that January/February of 1945. We docked at Staten Island during the first deep freeze in years. My orders also included a two-week lay over at Halloran General Hospital for intestinal “repair” surgery. In the interim, I casually searched for Polly, especially at each of the two large PX stores, where else? Yes, she was shopping alone. When I had her eye, I waved. We both waved and started at a fast walk toward each other; we had lots to talk about. The crush of the hundreds of shoppers and soldiers going home all at the same time was too much.

I assumed she was going home to Minneapolis; the ticket agent at the PX, with manifest in hand was of no help. She was not listed on his copy; maybe he had the wrong list. Polly and I never walked in the park or on the sidewalk together, or went to a movie, or whispered softly to each other or held hands, nothing! In fact, we never talked at all, ever! And now Polly was gone!

The 24th General Hospital was a huge complex of wardrooms, operating facilities, kitchens, storage rooms etc. Although I was getting stronger every day I was still hurting badly. The neat rectangular protective box Polly had fashioned to steady the clamps in my colostomy would be scheduled for removal soon. I knew I would miss it!

# Excerpts From Diary of Capt. King, Commander B Co., 349<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 17 June – 29 October

<https://www.mtmestas.com/349th-infantryregiment.htm>

Compiled by Art Pease, January, 2023

This diary was kept by the captain of Alson W. Brown's company in Italy. It stops just two days before Alson was wounded and evacuated but page 57 says that SSgt. Brown was commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. He was apparently a Squad Leader sometime earlier and based on the page 41 entry, he had been promoted to Cpl. ["Cpl Alson W. Brown, a splendid soldier"] in late September and must have gotten at least one promotion within the month before he was wounded on October 31. As men were killed or wounded and evacuated, others moved up into their positions. I think this usually happened with the affected outfit but certainly not always.

I've copied excerpts that relate to the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. The entire diary may be accessed at the 349<sup>th</sup> infantry web site by using the link above where one can read the whole diary – 63 hand-written pages – to get an excellent idea of the combat in which S/Sgt. Brown was involved in the months before he was wounded. There may be more places in Capt. King's diary that describe actions in which Alson was involved but unless he is mentioned, it is impossible to tell. I don't know who his squad or platoon leaders were in the early months.

June:

Pg 1

June 1944  
Took command of B Co., 349th Inf - Lago Albano, Italy  
N.C.O.  
C.O. Capt King  
Exo. Lt Claude Payne  
1st Plt Lt Weaver + Lt Brown  
2nd Plt Lt Beckwith  
3rd Plt Lt Hackson, Emil W.  
4th Plt Lt Young, Ross L.  
1st Sgt - Sgt Koch  
2nd Sgt - Sgt Ballou  
1st Plt - T/Sgt Jackson  
2nd Plt - T/Sgt Matthews  
3rd Plt - T/Sgt Palmer  
4th Plt - T/Sgt Edwards.

July 20th: [This identical page was also in the diary as Pg 41, but this seems the most accurate date.]

Pg 11

accurate fire on us. At about 1400, I sent Cpl Alson W Brown, a splendid soldier, with a message to the Bn C.O., showing our position and requesting batteries for the radios, which was not working. When the radios were placed in operation, I received the run down the slope, was fired at several times by MG fire, but made it to the CP & back with the new battery. We put him in for the Bronze Star, but he received a Division Commendation instead. When the battery was put into the radios I received a message to pull back when the little bears arrived. They come up at



Read Alson's telling of the battery incident in "Serious Trouble Brewing Among the Cornstalks" his Memoir. It also appears that he may have actually gotten his Bronze Star for this incident, although he had to wait until 1985! See the award letter with the Memoir

July 28-August 9:

Pg 13

time I had the following officers:  
ExCO - Lt Payne  
1st Plt - Lt Jubb - new officer  
2nd Plt - Lt Bullock - formerly act 1st Sgt  
commissioned on field of  
battle.  
3rd Plt - Lt Horton - the peerless!  
4th Plt - Lt Peery - a new officer

Mid-August:

Pg 16

We began to send combat patrols out thru the 442. All were night patrols, mostly ambush, but some were to clear out groups of houses. None of patrolling was very effective, mainly because of the ill defined position and the threat of mine fields. No effort was made to push

The 442<sup>nd</sup> is the famous unit made up of Japanese-Americans, mostly volunteers and many from the internment camps. This unit won much praise and many medals for its fighting prowess in Italy.

Mid-August:

Pg 17

stream that had held us up for so long. We ~~were~~ passed thru the Japs who were on the North bank and we entered a small town just W of Florence called San Donnino.

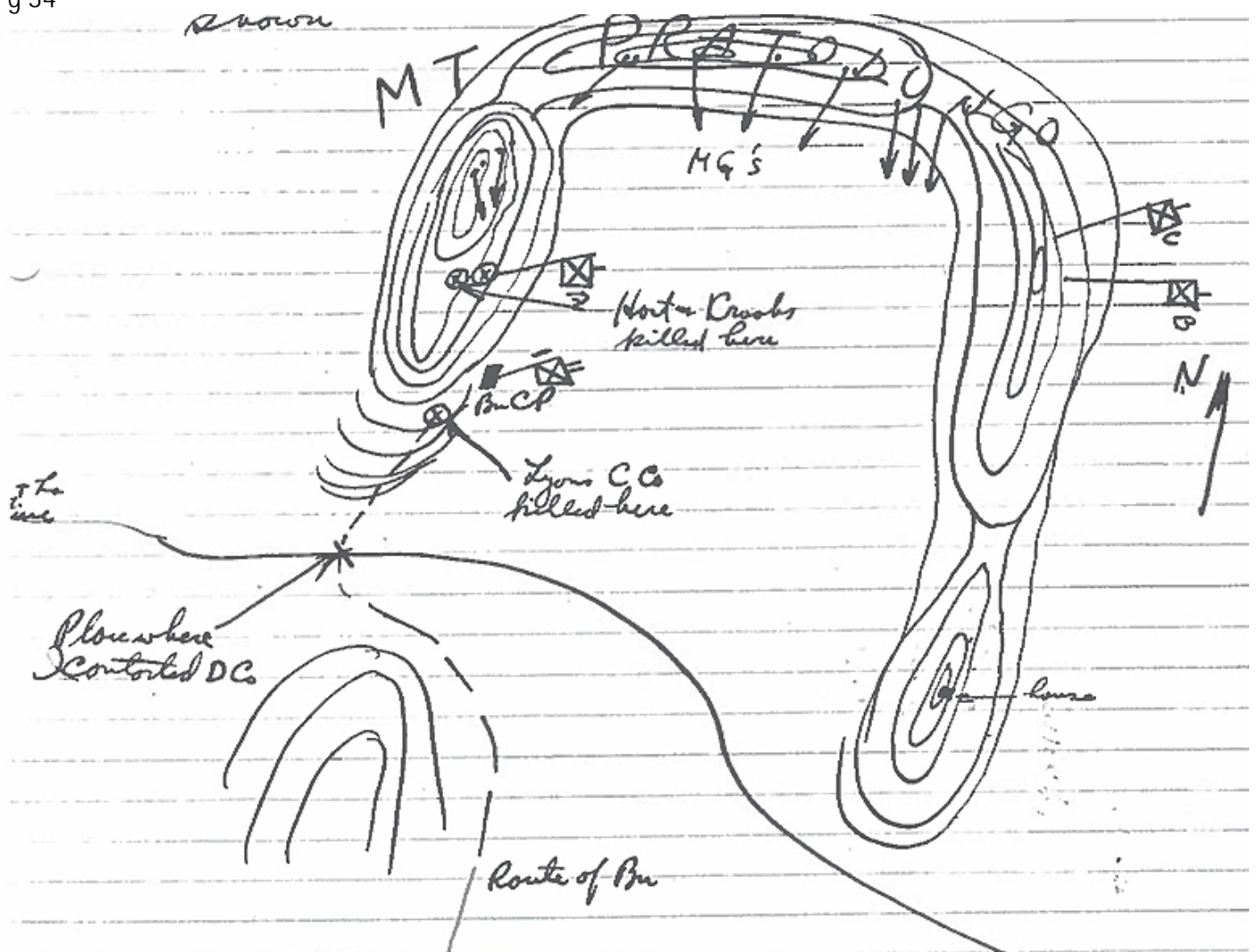
September 25<sup>th</sup>:

Pg 32

like ten-pins, and those LMG's choked with sand operated like magic - not a stoppage. Sgt. Brown of the 1st Platoon did a wonderful job - Pete Warrdorf was up with him and they captured an officer & 2 soldiers who had come all the way up before giving up. Brown had wounded the officer, and the poor bastard was dying rapidly. He couldn't stand, sat down & keeled over, dead. Pete grabbed the pistol.

September 26<sup>th</sup>:

Pg 34

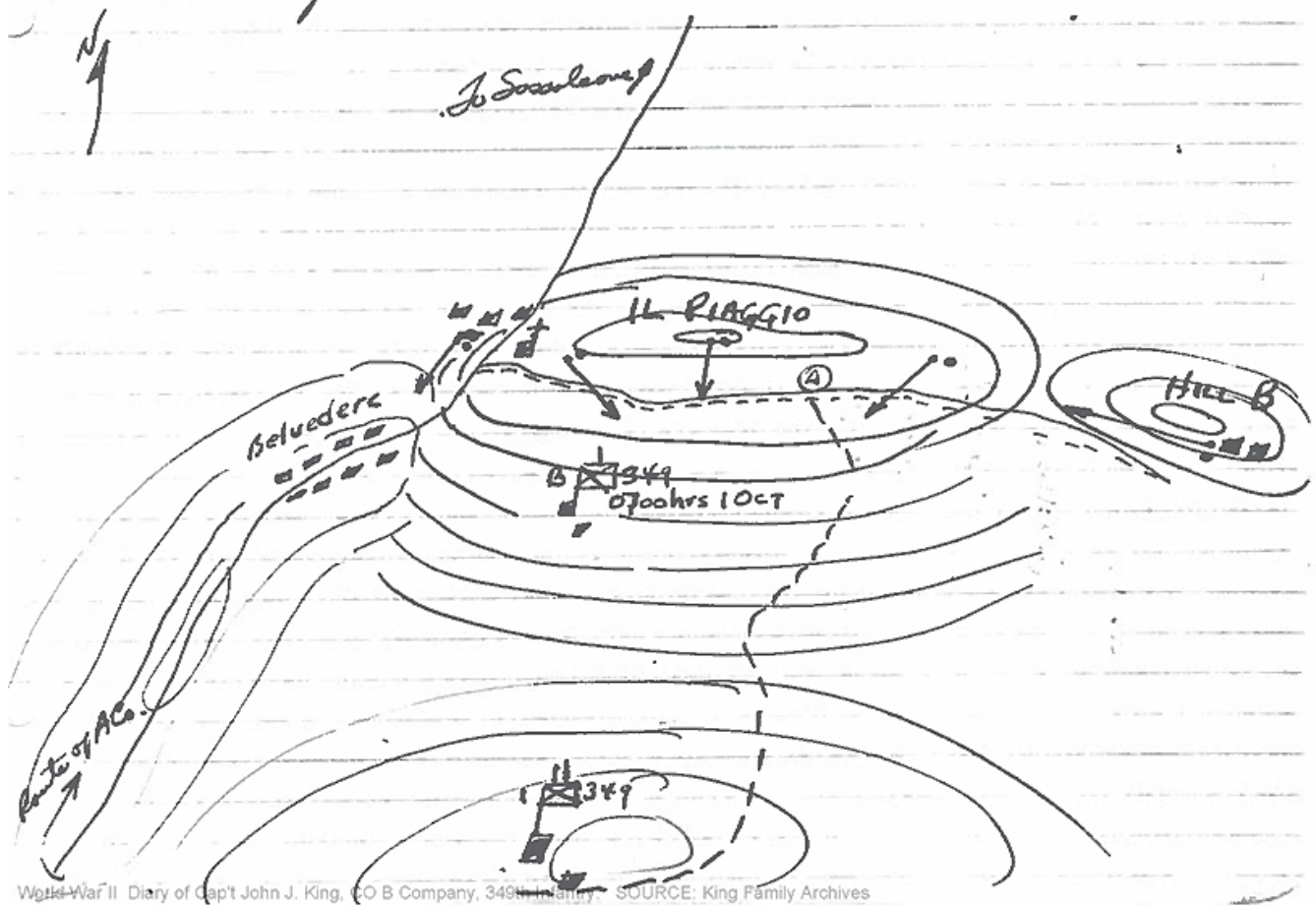


Note ☒ represents positions of Companies at 0100 hours 26 Sep 44.



September 30:

Pg 43



World War II Diary of Capt John J. King, CO B Company, 349th Infantry. SOURCE: King Family Archives

October 2<sup>th</sup>:

Pg 48

dozed - he was off his unit so I sent him back. S/Sgt Brown's squad did a wonderful job and was occupying the reverse slope just below the crest when he himself came to me & said "Wardoff's dead" God damn it!! The second loss of a wonderful leader in 10 days!! T/4 Hanson looked him over and he'd evidently been killed by a concussion grenade - no marks at all. Bob, meanwhile got close to

3rd Bn on 42 because they would be late & they hadn't worked it yet. It was getting light so I went up to the top & saw Brown & asked him if he had been up to the very top & he said no, so I told him to follow me. I crawled up & was just about to lean across a slit trench when I looked down & saw a big old Krant, scared as hell; he whispered "Nicht schießen" and he sure could have emptied his automatic rifle at us with no trouble at all. He was well equipped and husky and came along nicely enough.

rice plover potted and a cow in a corner. Now that Pete was dead, I put T/Sgt Ambury as C.O. of 1st Plat. Bob Buller had the 2nd; Harry Harry the 3rd and Andy the 4th. Ross young I kept with me. At about 1000, Ding came up and told

October 5<sup>th</sup>:

then prisoner. I ordered the 1st Platoon to occupy the position now held by the 3rd after the assault started and to remain there to be used for counterattacks and as security. The weapons platoon was not to join in the

receiving orders. I had no officers left, all having been wounded or taken ill. S/Sgt Brown commanded the 1st Plat; S/Sgt Richardson had the 2nd & T/Sgt Knitly had the 3rd. Ramirez





## Honorable Discharge

*This is to certify that*

ALSON W BROWN    11 079 506    STAFF SERGEANT  
COMPANY B 349th INFANTRY

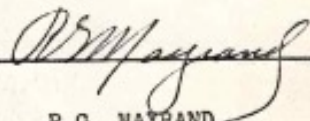
Army of the United States

*is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military  
service of the United States of America.*

*This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest  
and Faithful Service to this country.*

*Given at* SEPARATION CENTER  
PORT DIX NEW JERSEY

*Date*            28 OCTOBER 1945

  
R.G. MATRAND  
MAJOR A.C.



**ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION  
HONORABLE DISCHARGE**

|   |  |  |  |   |                            |
|---|--|--|--|---|----------------------------|
| 1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL<br><b>Brown Alson W</b>  |  | 2. ARMY SERIAL NO.<br><b>11 079 506</b>  | 3. GRADE<br><b>S-Sgt</b>                           | 4. ARM. OR SERVICE<br><b>Inf</b>  | 5. COMPONENT<br><b>ERC</b> |
| 6. ORGANIZATION<br><b>Co B 349th Inf</b>  |  | 7. DATE OF SEPARATION<br><b>28 Oct 45</b>  | 8. PLACE OF SEPARATION<br><b>Sep Ctr Ft Dix NJ</b> |   |                            |
| 9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES<br><b>Box 92 Wentworth, NH</b>  |  |  | 10. DATE OF BIRTH<br><b>31 May 22</b>              | 11. PLACE OF BIRTH<br><b>Wentworth, NH</b>  |                            |
| 12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT<br><b>See #9</b>   |  |  | 13. COLOR EYES<br><b>Blue</b>                      | 14. COLOR HAIR<br><b>Brown</b>  | 15. HEIGHT<br><b>5-6</b>   |
|   |  |  | 16. WEIGHT<br><b>135..</b>                         | 17. NO. DEPEND.<br><b>0</b>   |                            |
| 18. RACE<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WHITE <input type="checkbox"/> NEGRO <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify) |  | 19. MARITAL STATUS<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify) |  | 20. U.S. CITIZEN<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |                            |
| 21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO.<br><b>Student College X-02</b>  |  |  |  |   |                            |

**MILITARY HISTORY**


|   |          |  |          |   |           |  |  |
|---|----------|--|----------|---|-----------|--|--|
| 22. DATE OF INDUCTION<br><b>25 May 42</b>   |          | 23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT<br><b>16 April 43</b> |          | 24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE   |           | 25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE<br><b>Ft Devens, Mass</b>  |  |
| 26. REGISTERED<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO   |          | 27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO.<br><b>None</b>      |          | 28. COUNTY AND STATE<br><b>Hrafton Co. NH</b>   |           | 29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE<br><b>See #9</b>  |  |
| 30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO.<br><b>Squad Leader 745</b>  |          |  |          | 31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (i.e., Infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.)<br><b>GO #20 Hq 349th Inf. Combat Inf Badga- 15 Jun 44</b> |           |  |  |
| 32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS<br><b>Naples-Foggia Po Valley Rome-Arno<br/>GO 33 WD 45 as amended</b>  |          |  |          |   |           |  |  |
| 33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS<br><b>European-African-Middle Eastern Service Medal<br/>Good Conduct Medal Purple Heart GO 27 Hq 24th Gen Hosp. 31 Oct 44</b> |          |  |          |   |           |  |  |
| 34. WORDS RECEIVED IN ACTION<br><b>E T O -- 31 Oct 44</b>   |          |  |          |   |           |  |  |
| 35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES   |          |  |          | 36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U. S. AND RETURN  |           |  |  |
| SMALLPOX<br><b>16 Feb 44</b>  |          | TYPHOID<br><b>10 Feb 45</b>                  |          | TETANUS<br><b>16 Feb 44</b>   |           | OTHER (specify)<br><b>None</b>   |  |
| DATE OF DEPARTURE<br><b>8 Mar 44</b>  |          | DESTINATION<br><b>M T O</b>                  |          | DATE OF ARRIVAL<br><b>28 Mar 44</b>   |           |  |  |
| 37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE   |          |  |          | 38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD<br><b>S-Sgt.</b>   |           |  |  |
| CONTINENTAL SERVICE   |          | FOREIGN SERVICE                              |          | U S A   |           | 6 Feb 45   |  |
| YEARS   | MONTHS   | DAYS   | YEARS    | MONTHS  | DAYS      |  |  |
| <b>1</b>  | <b>5</b> | <b>14</b>                                    | <b>-</b> | <b>10</b>   | <b>29</b> |  |  |
| 39. PRIOR SERVICE<br><b>None</b>  |          |  |          |   |           |  |  |
| 40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION<br><b>Convenience of the Government AR 615-365 15 Dec 1944<br/>and RR 1-1 Demobilization.</b>                       |          |  |          |   |           |  |  |
| 41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED<br><b>None</b>   |          |  |          |   |           | 42. EDUCATION (Years)<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grammar <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> College |  |

**PAY DATA**

|                                |          |                       |            |                      |      |                |          |  |  |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------------------|------------|----------------------|------|----------------|----------|--|--|
| 43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES |          | 44. MUSTERING OUT PAY |            | 45. SOLDIER DEPOSITS |      | 46. TRAVEL PAY |          | 47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER |  |
| YEARS                          | MONTHS   | DAYS                  | TOTAL      | THIS MONTH           | None | 19.45          | \$201.87 | J. HARRIS COL FD                             |  |
| <b>3</b>                       | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>              | <b>300</b> | <b>100</b>           |      |                |          |  |  |

**INSURANCE NOTICE**

|  |            |              |          |  |                  |   |              |  |  |                                      |  |
|--|------------|--------------|----------|--|------------------|---|--------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>IMPORTANT</b> IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-DAY FROM THE LAST PREMIUM DUE, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C. |            |              |          |  |                  |   |              |  |  |                                      |  |
| 48. KIND OF INSURANCE  |            | 49. NOW PAID |          | 50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance |                  | 51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) |              | 52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH                   |  | 53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO          |  |
| Nat. Serv.   | U.S. Govt. | None         | Admitted | Discont. by V. A.                              | <b>31 Oct 45</b> | <b>30 Nov 45</b>                                  | <b>.6.50</b> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue | <input type="checkbox"/> Continue Only | <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue |  |

|   |                   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|---|-------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 54.  | RIGHT THUMB PRINT | 55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives)<br><b>Lapel Button Issued<br/>ASR Score (2 September 1945) -- 71<br/>Inactive ERC From 25 May 42 TO 15 Apr 43</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|   |                   | 56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED<br><b>Alson W. Brown</b>   |  |  |  |  | 57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature)<br><b>J. E. WHITE JR.,<br/>CAPT., AC</b> |  |  |  |  |

WD AGO FORM 53, 55  
7 November 1944

This form supersedes all previous editions of WD AGO Forms 53 and 55 for enlisted persons entitled to an Honorable Discharge, which will not be used after receipt of this revision.

# Honorable Discharge



from the Armed Forces of the United States of America

*This is to certify that*

ALSON W BROWN 11 079 509 Staff Sergeant ERC

*was Honorably Discharged from the*

## Army of the United States

*on the* 5th *day of* March 1948 *This certificate is awarded*  
*as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service*

*Theodore Simmington Jr.*

THEODORE SIMMINGTON JR  
Captain, AGD

Assistant Adjutant General  
FIRST SERVICE COMMAND, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS





# THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING: THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 24 AUGUST 1962 HAS AWARDED

## THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

STAFF SERGEANT ALSON W. BROWN, UNITED STATES ARMY

FOR

meritorious achievement in ground combat against the armed enemy during World War II in the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater of Operations.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON  
THIS 25th DAY OF June 19 85

*Ronald J. Lelandro*  
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL



*John D. Marshall, Jr.*  
SECRETARY OF THE ARMY



Name Plate and Photo From Medal Collection





US Army Reserve ID





# Excerpts From Diary of Capt. King, Commander B Co., 349<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 17 June – 29 October

<https://www.mtmestas.com/349th-infantryregiment.htm>

Compiled by Art Pease, January, 2023

This diary was kept by the captain of Alson W. Brown's company in Italy. It stops just two days before Alson was wounded and evacuated but page 57 says that SSgt. Brown was commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. He was apparently a Squad Leader sometime earlier and based on the page 41 entry, he had been promoted to Cpl. ["Cpl Alson W. Brown, a splendid soldier"] in late September and must have gotten at least one promotion within the month before he was wounded on October 31. As men were killed or wounded and evacuated, others moved up into their positions. I think this usually happened with the affected outfit but certainly not always.

I've copied excerpts that relate to the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. The entire diary may be accessed at the 349<sup>th</sup> infantry web site by using the link above where one can read the whole diary – 63 hand-written pages – to get an excellent idea of the combat in which S/Sgt. Brown was involved in the months before he was wounded. There may be more places in Capt. King's diary that describe actions in which Alson was involved but unless he is mentioned, it is impossible to tell. I don't know who his squad or platoon leaders were in the early months.

June:

Pg 1

June 1944  
Took command of B Co., 349<sup>th</sup> Inf - Lago Albano, Italy

| N.C.O.                       |                          |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| C.O. Capt King               | 1st Sgt - Sgt Koch       |
| Exo. Lt Claude Payne         | T/Sgt Ballou             |
| 1st Plt Lt Weaver + Lt Brown | 1st Plt - T/Sgt Jussier  |
| 2nd Plt Lt Beckwith          | 2nd Plt - T/Sgt Matthews |
| 3rd Plt Lt Heston, Emil W.   | 3rd Plt - T/Sgt Palmer   |
| 4th Plt Lt Young, Ross L.    | 4th Plt - T/Sgt Edwards  |

July 20th: [This identical page was also in the diary as Pg 41, but this seems the most accurate date.]

Pg 11

... accurate fire on us. At about 1400, I sent Cpl Alson W Brown, a splendid soldier, with a message to the Pz C.O., showing our position and requesting batteries for the radios, which was not working. When the radios were placed in operation, I received the run down the slope, was fired at several times by MG fire, but made it to the CP & back with the new battery. We put him in for the Bronze Star, but he received a Division Commendation instead. When the battery was put into the radios I received a message to pull back when the little bears arrived. They come up at

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July 28-August 9:

Pg 13

time I had the following officers:  
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1st Plt - Lt Jubb - new officer  
2nd Plt - Lt Bullock - formerly act 1st Sgt  
commissioned on field of  
battle.  
3rd Plt - Lt Horton - the peerless!  
4th Plt - Lt Peery - a new officer

Mid-August:

Pg 16

We began to send combat patrols out thru the 442. All were night patrols, mostly ambush, but some were to clear out groups of houses. None of patrolling was very effective, mainly because of the ill defined position and the threat of mine fields. No effort was made to push

The 442<sup>nd</sup> is the famous unit made up of Japanese-Americans, mostly volunteers and many from the internment camps. This unit won much praise and many medals for its fighting prowess in Italy.

Mid-August:

Pg 17

stream that had held us up for so long. We ~~were~~ passed thru the Japs who were on the North bank and we entered a small town just W of Florence called San Donnino.



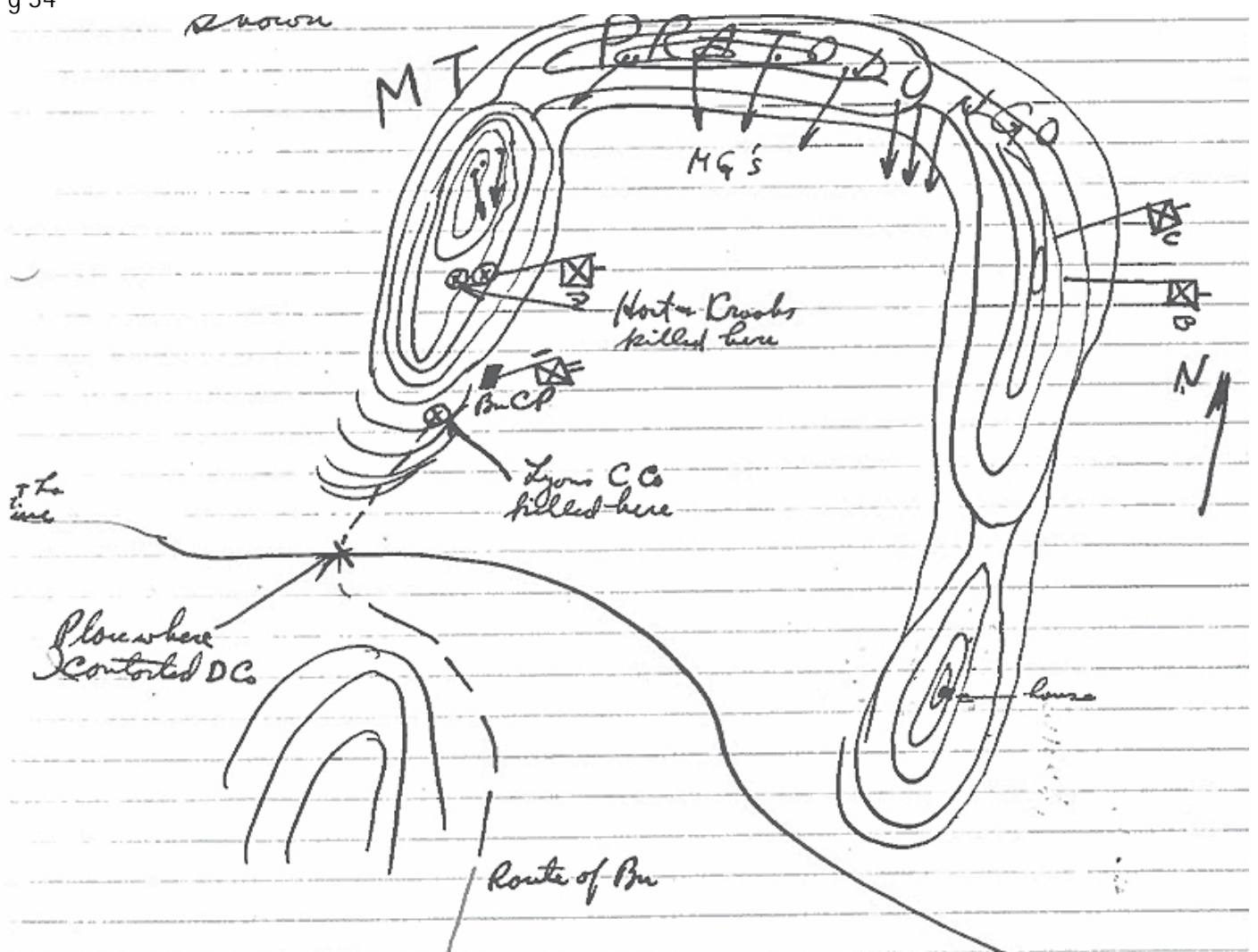
September 25<sup>th</sup>:

Pg 32

like ten-pins, and those LMG's choked with sand operated like magic - not a stoppage. Sgt. Brown of the 1st Platoon did a wonderful job - Pete Warrdoy was up with him and they captured an officer & 2 soldiers who had come all the way up before giving up. Brown had wounded the officer, and the poor bastard was dying rapidly. He couldn't stand, sat down & keeled over, dead. Pete grabbed the pistol.

September 26<sup>th</sup>:

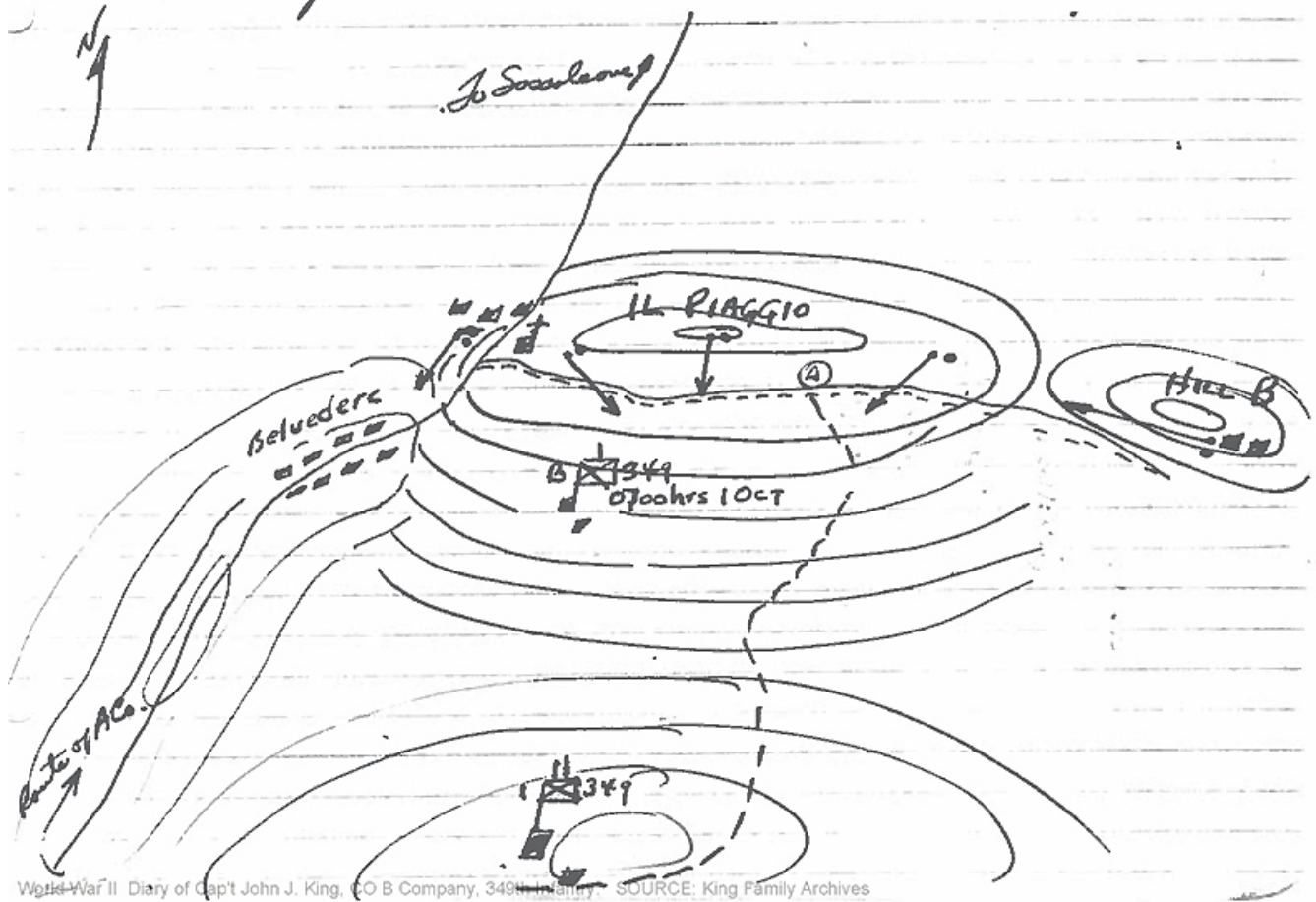
Pg 34



Note  represents positions of Companies at 0100 hours 26 Sep 44.

September 30:

Pg 43



World War II Diary of Capt John J. King, CO B Company, 349th Infantry. SOURCE: King Family Archives

October 2<sup>th</sup>:

Pg 48

dozed - he was off his unit so I sent him back. S/Sgt Brown's squad did a wonderful job and was occupying the reverse slope just below the crest when he himself came to me & said "Wardoff's dead" God damn it!! The second loss of a wonderful leader in 10 days!! T/4 Hudson looked him over and he'd evidently been killed by a concussion grenade - no marks at all. Bob, meanwhile got close to

3rd Bn on 42 because they would be late & they hadn't worked it yet. It was getting light so I went up to the top & saw Brown & asked him if he had been up to the very top & he said no, so I told him to follow me. I crawled up & was just about to lean across a slit trench when I looked down & saw a big old Krant, scared as hell; he whispered "Nicht schießen" and he sure could have emptied his automatic rifle at us with no trouble at all. He was well equipped and husky and came along nicely enough.

rice plem pallet and a cow in a corner. Now that Pete was dead, I put T/Sgt Ambury as C.O. of 1st Plat. Bob Buller had the 2nd; Harry Harry the 3rd and Andy the 4th. Ross young I kept with me. At about 1000, Ling came up and told

October 5<sup>th</sup>:

then prisoner. I ordered the 1st Platoon to occupy the position now held by the 3rd after the assault started and to remain there to be used for counterattacks and as security. The weapons platoon was not to join in the

receiving orders. I had no officers left, all having been wounded or taken ill. S/Sgt Brown commanded the 1st Plat; S/Sgt Richardson had the 2nd & T/Sgt Knitly had the 3rd. Ramirez

## Misc. Notes Re: Brown Family

6/20/1930    Wentworth   Groton, Vt., Times

•Dr. William Prettyman and family are at their summer place at Baker's Pond. *[From Steve Rand, 1/3/23:" Dr Prettyman employed my immigrant grandmother, Wilhemina Wessler, at his place in NY. When the family came to the upper Baker Pond for the summer, they brought her with them, perhaps as a nurse to the kids. Alson Brown lived right down the street. One thing lead to another. and so on.] [They were married in June, 1917.*



*Record*

**RAND-BROWN**

3/4/43

Miss Juliet E. Brown, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Alson L. Brown of Wentworth, and Robert H. Rand, son of Mrs. Albert M. Rand of Garland street, and the late Mr. Rand, were married February 22 in Enid, Okla., where Mr. Rand is stationed at Enid Field. Both are graduates of the University of New Hampshire and Mr. Rand is a graduate of Plymouth High School. Before entering the U. S. Army Mr. Rand was prominent in the organization of the Plymouth Flying Club and is a member of the firm of Rand's Hardware Co. of Plymouth.