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## Notes from the Chief

In this edition, *The AMEDD Historian*, covers a variety of topics related to Army Medicine. Drs. Sanders Marble and Dennis B. Worthen have written insightful articles exemplifying the maxim that "history is about people" in their features about Raymond Bliss and Andrew Craigie. Scott C. Woodard's article on "living history" demonstrates another way the Army Medical Department Center of History and Heritage tells the story of Army Medicine. In a reflection of the past, Tom Harper Kelly reminds us of the innovation demonstrated by soldiers in the European Theater battling trench foot. Archivist volunteer, Christopher Califa, highlights one of our unique research collection files on an Army Nurse stationed on a Navy ship during World War II. Finally, the newsletter concludes with two book reviews. "Woody" Woodard digests a graphic novel covering a medic in Afghanistan and "Scotty" Knight reviews a book featuring combat medicine from the Second World War, Korea, and Vietnam. Lastly, thanks to Scott C. Woodard for serving as the guest editor for this edition. Please submit your original work and suggestions to improve your story - instructions are on the last page. Happy New Year!

Nolan A. (Andy) Watson  
Acting Chief, ACHH

## Award for Valor Feature

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, Sergeant David B. Bleak, Medical Company, 223d Infantry Regiment, 40th Infantry Division, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and indomitable courage above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy in the vicinity of Minari-gol, Korea, on 14 June 1952. As a Medical Aidman, he volunteered to accompany a reconnaissance patrol committed to engage the enemy and capture a prisoner for interrogation. Forging up the rugged slope of the key terrain, the group was subjected to intense automatic weapons and small-arms fire and suffered several casualties. After administering to the wounded, he continued to advance with the patrol. Nearing the military crest of the hill, while attempting to cross the fire-swept area to attend the wounded, he came under hostile fire from a small group of the enemy concealed in a trench. Entering the trench he closed with the enemy, killed two with his bare hands, and a third with his trench knife. Moving from the emplacement, he saw a concussion grenade fall in front of a companion and quickly shifting his position, shielded the man from the impact of the blast. Later, while ministering to the wounded, he was struck by a hostile bullet but, despite the wound, he undertook to evacuate a wounded comrade. As he moved down the hill with his heavy burden, he was attacked by two enemy soldiers with fixed bayonets. Closing with the aggressors, he grabbed them and smacked their heads together, then carried his helpless comrade down the hill to safety. SGT Bleak's dauntless courage and intrepid actions reflect utmost credit upon himself and are in keeping with the honored traditions of the military service.



Sergeant David B. Bleak. US Army Medical Department Center of History and Heritage.

## Shades of Valley Forge: Ad Hoc Preventive Measures against Trench Foot in the European Theater of Operations

Tom Harper Kelly

In late December 1944, Lieutenant A. Preston Price of the 1st Infantry Division was visited at his fox-hole in Belgium by an old Citadel classmate serving in an adjacent company, Lieutenant Jack Lewis. Price's unit was suffering many casualties from trench foot. Lewis complained, as usual, that he could not feel his toes. Price watched as Lewis, unaware that he had a severe case of trench foot, pulled off his combat boot and removed his sock and "several of his toes come with the cloth, leaving several naked toe bones exposed."

### Cold Injury, Ground Type

"Cold Injury, Ground Type" or "trench foot", plagued Army Ground Forces during the Second World War especially during the winter of 1944-1945 in the European Theater of Operations ("ETO"). Trench foot is a contracting of the blood vessels and reduction of oxygen supply to the tissues in the feet caused by the feet being wet for a prolonged period. The symptoms of trench foot are numbness followed by swelling; then by intense pain; and, in some cases, by tissue death, with gangrene. During the Second World War, the treatment was long, recovery slow, and sufferers were prone to recurrence.

As early as November, 1944, falling temperatures and autumn rains contributed to rising trench foot rates that reached crisis levels even before the Battle of the Bulge. The German counteroffensive in the Ardennes, and the brutal winter conditions during the winter of 1944-1945 further exacerbated the trench

foot problem in the American armies. By late December 1944, stateside newspapers were reporting that trench foot was "as effective as bullets in knocking men out of battle" and that almost 18,000 men had been affected by the condition. In total, during the months of November and December 1944 there were approximately 23,000 losses to trench foot in the American armies, almost all combat infantrymen. By late January more stories appeared in the American press describing the lack of proper clothing and equipment for American soldiers on the frontlines including one from a reporter in the field with the 75th Infantry Division wrote that "The American doughboy, asked to fight the war under terrible winter conditions, is not equipped to meet it." The January 29, 1945 issue of *Newsweek* included a story titled "Shades of Valley Forge" detailing the failings of the Army Quartermaster Corps, specifically, "[t]he regulation shoes do not keep out the cold and dampness . . . The resulting trench foot may lead to gangrene and amputation." Meanwhile General Eisenhower's headquarters rebuffed such reports as "isolated cases."

### "The Men Devised Many Ingenious Ways to Cope"

On January 30, 1945, an older but otherwise non-descript infantry replacement arrived at the headquarters of L Company, 310th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division near Kozen, Germany. While several senior officers knew that the soldier, ostensibly a private, was in fact Major Arthur Goodfriend an editor of the Army newspaper *The Stars and Stripes*, Goodfriend's identity was intentionally concealed so that he could learn first-hand how the front-line soldier withstood winter warfare conditions.



20 February 1945, German Prisoners taken in the drive south of Colmar carry a wounded American soldier with them as they are marched out of the battle area. US Army Signal Corps.





6 January 1945, 83rd Division (K Company, 3rd Battalion, 331st Infantry Regiment) infantrymen warm themselves around a fire in Fays, Belgium. US Army Signal Corps.

The men of the company he joined did not embody the Army's propaganda that the American soldier was "the best equipped soldier in the world" as they huddled around a woodstove in a forward command post wearing only field jackets (their heavy and clumsy overcoats long since discarded), many with gloves "out at the fingers" some wearing socks over or inside of them in order to prevent frostbite. Goodfriend noted that as a matter of necessity "the men devised many ingenious ways to cope with this problem and as a newcomer I received much expert advice." The veteran soldiers Goodfriend joined were quick to advise him to keep his feet dry and warm, but after his first day on the line he found that it was impossible to keep either his socks or combat boots dry and that the general consensus seemed to be that the Army's combat boots were "rotten". Even the battalion commander told Goodfriend that he believed "The men who made the combat boot should be put in jail" because the boots soaked up moisture

so easily.

The veterans told Goodfriend to put on two or three pairs of socks so long as they did not make his boots fit too tightly and decrease circulation, but with the caveat that "most of our shoes are too tight anyway and when they fill up with water they get even smaller." They also recommended that he stick a felt or cardboard pad into his overshoes, which Goodfriend had not discarded unlike most combat troops, and Goodfriend noticed that the men "grabbed the high thick felt and leather boots worn by some of the Germans" littered around the area. According to Goodfriend, to the G.I. "rightly or wrongly the equipment he saw on Germans was generally rated as better than his own" and the "premature announcement of large quantities of winter equipment in the rear, on the ocean, or in preparation back in the United States had depressed the front-line soldier's morale and weakened his respect for the Army."

### "Lousy" Footwear

Due to failures in planning by the Office of the Quartermaster General, field commanders on the Continent, the Chief Quartermaster of the ETO, American combat troops were not properly supplied with uniforms and footwear for winter campaigning when they needed them most despite frantic efforts to rush supplies to the front. In the final analysis, bluntly stated in the official history of the Quartermaster, "[t]o a large extent, the special cold climate clothing and equipment arrived in the ETO too late to be really useful during the coldest winter months."

The combat divisions of the American armies fighting in ETO during the winter of 1944-45 were issued a variety of footwear, all flawed and none a panacea for trench foot. Type II and Type III service shoes, ankle height boots that were meant to be worn with canvas leggings,



31 January 1945, Metz, France. SSG Orville Koehler of Hamilton, Ohio, 9th Armored Division, inspects a new issue of shoe-pak footgear. He is holding a felt innersole for one shoe. US Army Signal Corps.

which when wet from snow would freeze, tighten, and restrict blood flow to the feet. The critical difference between these boots was that the Type II had a smooth-surfaced leather whereas the Type III shoe had a flesh-side-out or “reversed upper” leather. Some soldiers, like those in the 78th Division observed by Major Goodfriend, were equipped with the new “combat boot” which was approximately 10 inches high and had a flesh-side-out bottom, like the Type III service shoe, but had a smooth-surfaced leather cuff with two buckles that dispensed with the need for leggings. To waterproof the soldiers’ boots the Army supplied dubbin or dubbing, a wax and oil mixture. However, in one battalion commander’s estimation (later confirmed by the General Board of the ETO), “all the dubbin in the world” could not keep moisture out of the combat boots his troops were issued and, worse still, it shut out air making the soldiers’ feet perspire more and their feet colder.

All of the aforementioned types of boots were meant to be worn with canvas or rubber overshoes in winter conditions, however, overshoes were of marginal utility in combat operations. They were cumbersome and, more importantly, were an extra pair of boots that a soldier needed to carry. Therefore, overshoes were routinely lost or abandoned. A soldier in the 90th Infantry Division noted that overshoes were discarded because they “filled with water and made running or walking an exhaustive labor.” An 84th Infantry Division soldier, “gave up on the overshoes. You couldn’t run in those things—they were too heavy” and a soldier in the 26th Infantry Division left his overshoes along the side of a road because “they had not kept my feet dry and had rubbed my heels raw with blisters.” Some soldiers stuffed straw or newspapers inside their overshoes which served two purposes, it insulated the feet and improved the fit of the boots in the overshoes. Others, rather than discard their overshoes, threw out their boots. James H. Langford, a rifleman in the 99th Infantry Division, recalled that during the first days of the Battle of the Bulge “The overshoes were too small to fit over my shoes and I could not keep [my] feet in condition with just the shoes” and so Langford improvised, “I had on a pair of four-buckle overshoes and three or four pairs of socks in order to keep my feet warm and dry.” Another 99th Division soldier, William F. McCurdie, recalled that a sergeant in his platoon likewise did not wear boots, but rather seven pairs of socks inside of his overshoes.

The shoepac, a high moccasin type boot with rubber foot and leather top and issued with felt insoles, was considered the best form of footgear for preventing trench foot in the ETO. However, during the harshest winter months of 1944-1945 the shoepac was only issued in large numbers to infantry troops of the 7th Army in the Vosges Mountains of France. The 7th Army, unlike the other American armies in Northwest Europe, had drawn its winter supplies through Mediterranean Theater supply channels. Having learned hard lessons during the winter of 1943-1944, in which 1:4 casualties during the period of December 4, 1943 – February 19, 1944 were a result of trench foot, quartermasters in the Mediterranean proactively requisitioned large numbers of shoepacs. The shoepac was still imperfect, the leather tops were not waterproof, their rubber soles wore out quickly, and the rubber bottoms failed to ventilate the foot which caused excess sweating and a condition known as “shoepac foot.” Robert J. McDonnell, a rifleman in the 79th Infantry Division, recalled that when wearing shoepacs his feet “sweat so much that after a good hike you could remove your socks and wring the sweat out.” Also, the felt innersoles dampened easily and were hard to dry. To combat this, soldiers in the 100th Infantry Division made replacements from discarded cardboard 10-in-1 ration boxes.



20 January 1945. Gerimont, Belgium. Taking the well-known ‘ten minute break’ are, L-R: Sgt. Albert L. Soli, Westwood, Calif., Pvt. Jimmy Ferguson, Granby, MO., and T/Sgt. Robert Kircher Maplewood, N.J. Pvt. Ferguson is displaying his ‘booties’ which are used to replace shoes and socks when they get wet. These ‘booties’ or shoe-pacs as they are sometimes called, are a new winter innovation, and when not worn, are carried by the men inside their shirts for warmth. US Army Signal Corps. From the collection of The National WWII Museum.

The issues with the footwear issued to American soldiers in ETO during the winter of 1944-1945 were



20 January 1945, Gerimont, Belgium. These are "booties" which are worn to replace shoes and socks when they get wet. They are made from salvaged and captured blankets by the 216th and 540th Quartermaster Battalions. US Army Signal Corps.

legion, but perhaps the most eloquent summation of the Chief Surgeon of the ETO, Major General Paul R. Hawley, who reported in late 1944, "The plain truth is that the footwear furnished U.S. troops is, in general, lousy."

#### The 30th Infantry Division's Blanket "Booties"

The 30th Infantry Division may have created the most ingenious expedient item to combat trench foot. The 30th Infantry Division did not receive specialized winter equipment like mittens, heavy jackets, snow capes, and shoepacs in large quantities until after its part in the Battle of the Bulge was over. The division's history notes that in the bitter cold the infantrymen were "hardest hit by weather as well as bullets" and that "[t]he main reason why many line-company soldiers kept fighting was to get themselves houses within which to bed down." Colonel Branner P. Purdue, the commander of the 120th Infantry Regiment which along with the rest of the division was heavily engaged in reducing the Bulge salient, ar-

anged to have "booties" made from salvaged and captured blankets to provide warm footwear for his troops. Each pair of booties was cut in the approximate shape and size of the combat boot and sewn three layers thick, but were compact enough to be carried inside a soldier's shirt until they were needed. By the middle of January 1945 enough booties had been made to provide them to every soldier in the regiment, and to each new replacement upon their arrival.

Captain Murray Pulver, a company commander in the 120th Infantry, recalled that "the booties inside of our overshoes made very warm footwear." To Gus Rouff, a mortarman in the 120th Infantry, there was "no doubt they saved many of us from getting trench feet." Rouff carried his booties inside of his shirt until periods of inactivity when he could remove his wet combat boots to dry, and wear his booties inside of his overshoes. Captain Pulver wore his booties inside of his overshoes during an attack, a decision that saved him from serious injury when a German grenade landed under his right foot and exploded. Pulver's overshoe was blown to pieces, but the extra thickness of the booty had absorbed much of the force of the explosion and left Pulver with only a bruise on his foot.

The 30th Infantry Division's booties received substantial attention in *The Stars and Stripes* and *Newsweek*. Other units, like the 8th, 78th, and 44th Infantry Divisions, appear to have produced their own booties based off of Col. Purdue's example, and the Medical Department's history of the European Theater acknowledged that the wearing of blanket booties inside of overshoes was one of the best forms of protection developed against trench foot in part because the toes and feet were allowed free movement typically lacking in other footwear.

#### Too Little, Too Late

While it is difficult to evenly apportion blame unpreparedness of the American armies in the ETO during the winter of 1944-1945, but it is much easier to quantify the effect of the resultant trench foot epidemic. From October 1944 to April 1945, approximately three American infantry divisions in Europe were hospitalized for trench foot, amounting to 9.25% of the total number of casualties during the entire Continental campaign.

Ironically, by the time supplies of winter footwear arrived in sufficient quantities to equip all combat troops and the Army's trench foot prevention education campaign began in earnest the fighting waned, temperatures rose, and the trench foot rate plummeted. While merely a footnote in the Battle of the Bulge epoch, the ad hoc methods of preventing trench foot demonstrate how despite material shortages of critical winter



uniform items, unit commanders and individual soldiers maintained combat effectiveness in one of the worst winters in recent history.

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