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# "The War Comes First"<sup>1059</sup>: Lt. Col. Francis Carroll Grevemberg and the Development of a World War II Antiaircraft Artillery Officer

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“The War Comes First”:  
Lt. Col. Francis Carroll Grevemberg and the Development of a World War II Antiaircraft  
Artillery Officer

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
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in  
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by

Robert Janous

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Marketa, my family, and especially to my grandfather Evzen Feyfar who like Francis C. Grevemberg served in the antiaircraft unit in the post World War II Czechoslovak Army.

## Acknowledgment

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Francis and Dorothy.....	4
Francis and the Louisiana National Guard.....	9
Scotland and England .....	15
Training for North Africa.....	20
Landing in North Africa: Operation Torch.....	23
Invasion of Sicily: Operation Husky.....	37
Invasion of Italy: Operation Avalanche.....	49
Landing at Anzio: Operation Shingle .....	56
Invasion of Southern France: Operation Dragoon.....	62
Lt. Col. Grevemberg's Return Home.....	69
Bibliography .....	72
Vita.....	75

## **Abstract**

This thesis deals with the life and career and intimate life of Francis Carroll Grevemberg, an antiaircraft World War II officer from New Orleans, Louisiana. Grevemberg joined the Louisiana National Guard in 1932 and began his military career in the midst of the Great Depression. In the reorganization of the U.S. Army before World War II, the War Department transformed Grevemberg's cavalry regiment into a coastal artillery battalion with antiaircraft capability. During World War II, Grevemberg saw continuous action in the North Africa, Italy and Southern France. He regularly wrote letters from battlefields to his wife Dorothy. These letters provide a important window into a young's officer's feelings, thoughts and affection in the unfolding of World War II. They are documents of a soldier's emotional release during times of crises. Lt. Col. Grevemberg is a rare, World War II antiaircraft artillery officer who took part and survived five amphibious landings in the Mediterranean.

Francis Carroll Grevemberg, New Orleans, Louisiana, Louisiana National Guard, Antiaircraft Artillery Officer, World War II, Mediterranean Amphibious Operations, North Africa-Operation Torch, Sicily-Operation Husky, Italy-Operation Avalanche, Anzio-Operation Shingle, Southern France-Operation Dragoon.



## Introduction

Francis C. Grevemberg hailed from an old Louisiana family and was a distinguished World War II soldier from New Orleans. He is a well known Louisiana figure from the post World War II era. In 1952, Grevemberg was appointed by newly elected Governor Robert Kennon as the head of the Louisiana State Police.<sup>1</sup> He took the office as new superintendent on May 13, 1952 in Baton Rouge<sup>2</sup>, the Capital City of Louisiana. Grevemberg was famous for his strict enforcement of Louisiana state laws, especially those dealing with gambling, narcotics trafficking, prostitution, and vice. Grevemberg raided with his State Troopers gambling operations areas and closed them. He did this along the “Golden Coast”, across the Mississippi river from Baton Rouge, in Calcasieu parish in the west, Bossier City in the north, and in St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Jefferson, Orleans, and St. Bernard parishes in the Southeast. Grevemberg’s first raid in New Orleans was made on September 10, 1952, and his target was the former Top Hat Club on St. Ann Street, right off of Broad Street.<sup>3</sup>

Grevemberg and his troopers made more than 1,000 such raids, shut down much of the states illegal gambling industry, and destroyed a total of 8,229 slot machines.<sup>4</sup> During the period of 1952-1955, Grevemberg gained the reputation of being a tough but honest public official. He is remembered for his very successful fight against organized crime in Louisiana. During this time, he and his family were under constant threats from the mob, which attempted to kidnap his wife Dorothy<sup>5</sup> and their twin sons.<sup>6</sup>

In 1955, Grevemberg left his position as Commandant of the State Police<sup>7</sup> and ran unsuccessfully as the Democratic Party candidate for the Office of Governor of Louisiana for the

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<sup>1</sup> *Acadiana Profile*, December 1993, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Francis C. Grevemberg and W. Thomas Angers, *My Wars: Nazis, Mobsters, Gambling and Corruption. Colonel Francis C. Grevemberg Remembers* (Lafayette: Beau Bayou Publishing Company, 2004), 66.

<sup>3</sup> Edward F. Hass, *DeLesseps S. Morrison and the Image of Reform: New Orleans Politics, 1946-1961* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 189-190.

<sup>4</sup> *Acadiana Profile*, December 1993, 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 80-81.

<sup>7</sup> Hass, *DeLesseps S. Morrison and the Image of Reform*, 224.

first time.<sup>8</sup> Five years later, Grevemberg switched parties and ran a second time for the Governor's office as a Republican candidate.<sup>9</sup> He lost again.

Next to his distinguished public service after the war, Grevemberg should be also remembered for his outstanding military career and his unique role in World War II. He volunteered for the Louisiana National Guard in 1932 and began his military career in the midst of the Great Depression. In the reorganization of the U.S. military leading up to World War II, the War Department transferred Grevemberg's cavalry regiment into a coastal artillery battalion with antiaircraft capability, a new type of unit for a new type of air war.

During World War II Grevemberg participated in five amphibious landings during Allied actions in the North Africa, Italy and Southern France campaigns. Before the war he rose from private to lieutenant; during the war, given his extensive battlefield experience, he advanced spectacularly from captain and company commander to lieutenant colonel.

He became a respected expert in the new field of antiaircraft artillery, engaging the German *Luftwaffe* in numerous battles in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and France. During the landings in Italy and Southern France he advanced to planning capacities in the headquarters units. His spectacular military career from a young man with little education joining the Louisiana National Guard to a highly decorated antiaircraft artillery officer is a shining example of what Stephen E. Ambrose has called "the citizen soldier."<sup>10</sup>

Young men like Grevemberg constituted the core of the Western forces of democracy holding the totalitarian Axis powers Italy and Germany at bay and eventually defeating the Nazis and saving democracy. If we want to understand the success of the American citizen soldiers during the World War II, we need to study and understand the role that citizen soldiers like Grevemberg played in the war, the initiative they took to develop new weapons systems and tactics on the battlefield, the courage they showed under fire.

Yet Grevemberg's military career also has a highly personal side to it. He regularly wrote letters to his wife. These letters are full of information about progress on the battlefield, as far as censors allowed that kind of reporting to happen. This unique collection of private "ego documents" in the Grevembergs collection allows the historian access and insight into a

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<sup>8</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U. S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

warrior's private emotional life in war. These intimate letters between spouses during wartime gives us a glimpse of the management of emotions and feelings in the midst of battle.

While Grevemberg would be involved in the most serious of murderous artillery barrages during the day, he would regularly sit down at the end of the day and pen long and most tender letters to his wife reporting his actions and fighting progress as well as record his daily anxieties and worries about the stability of his marriage and the faithfulness of his wife back home. At times these letters verge on the bathetic. Yet the letter writing must have provided an important form of psychological release from a life of intensive battlefield stress. It also was a coping strategy for geographical distance.

In these letters Grevemberg reveals himself as fragile, love-sick and a pouting hero as Achilles during the siege of Troy. Historians need to know more about the intimate side and emotional life of soldiers. This then is a contribution towards a more complex and multi-dimensional history of American citizen soldiers during World War II beyond the din of the battlefield. Such an analysis is possible because it is based on the extensive personal records of Francis C. Grevemberg's deposited at and housed by the Earl K. Long Library at the University of New Orleans.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eight boxes of Francis Carroll Grevemberg Papers [FCG Papers] have been organized by the archivists at UNO, however, no box numbers have been assigned yet. I will briefly describe the contents of each box used and cited in this thesis and cite them using short abbreviations such as "Promotions Box" etc. All archival references in this thesis will refer to the Francis C. Grevemberg Collection.

## Francis and Dorothy

Francis Carroll Grevemberg was born at his grandmother's summer home in Biloxi, Mississippi on June 4, 1914.<sup>12</sup> He was a descendant of an old Louisiana family. His father Francis "Frank" Bartholomew Grevemberg and his mother Onita Jumonville Grevemberg both came from two prominent families in South Louisiana. His parents divorced when Francis was about thirteen years old. Grevemberg's father was a civil engineer. After his divorce he lived in downtown New Orleans where he had his own business in the French Quarter.<sup>13</sup> Francis' father remarried a lady called Eve. They moved to Baton Rouge where "Frank" worked for the State Capitol. Francis' mother never remarried.

Francis had three older siblings, one sister and two brothers. His sister's name was Mary Louise; she was six years older than him. His older brother's name was Ernest, he was four years older. Francis second brother's name was Alvin; he was only two years older. Francis said: "Looking back at those who influenced my life's accomplishments, I must say that [the] main role model was my eldes [oldest] brother [Ernest]...He died at the age of 26 of typhoid fever."<sup>14</sup> Francis continued: "He [Ernest] was truly my example of what I wanted to be. He taught me how to box and made me stronger and fearless."<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, Ernest did not live long enough to teach his younger brother more about life.

Ernest was a civil engineer like his father. He had a surveying job in Oakdale, Louisiana, where he fell in love with a beautiful local girl. He worked in Oakdale only for six months before he became very ill. He contracted typhoid fever. Instead of being put into the hospital, his girlfriend's mother decided to take care of him at their home. Francis recalled: "She really should have taken him to a hospital; but she nursed him, and he [Ernest] died in her home."<sup>16</sup>

Francis grew up as a child in a home on Joliet Street in New Orleans. His father bought a family house there, because his parents lived just around the corner on Sycamore Street. From that moment in time onward, Francis was very close to another person who influenced his early life the most. This was his grandfather Francis B. Grevemberg. His grandfather became very ill

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<sup>12</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

too. When he was sixty-nine years old, he had a stroke. Both his right arm and leg were paralyzed. He lost his speech for a while but it came back to him before he turned seventy. Francis' grandfather liked to sit on the front porch in his rocking chair all day long. Francis remembered: "I visited him often on that porch swing...Living in close proximity of my influential grandfather was instrumental in forming strong values."<sup>17</sup> He continued:

"...I would visit with him almost every day during vacation and on Saturday[s] and Sundays. He taught me more about the importance of being completely honest and compassionate to underprivileged people than anyone else. The main thing he seemed to try to instill in me, besides honesty, was the importance of never lying and never doing anything to blemish my good name."<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, Francis' older brother Ernest was counseled by his grandfather many times too. He also tried to teach Francis the importance of being a good and honest person.

When Francis turned eighteen he began to attend Delgado College where he took fine arts classes. During that time he produced a series of sketches of the French Quarter and plantation homes. He tried to sell some of his original drawings in the Vieux Carre and was very successful at it. He said: "I sold [the drawings] at a gift shop on Royal Street. With this money I was able to purchase an automobile, even during the great depression."<sup>19</sup> Besides making money by selling his original drawings, Francis was looking for a regular job. His brother Alvin worked as an assistant purchasing agent for Pan Am Petroleum Company in New Orleans. He helped Francis get him his first job. It was at one of the company's service stations located on the corner of St. Andrew and St. Charles Avenue. Francis recalled: "I was a helper in a service station and I worked the night shift, so I was able to go to school during the day. I worked until 11:00 p.m. every night."<sup>20</sup>

After his first job at the Pan Am Petroleum Company, Francis went to work for a Family Finance Company in New Orleans. He worked there as a sales person. He called on people who took loans with the company. After just six months, Francis was promoted by a manager to a new position. He started to work as an in-house loan officer. He handled clients who came in to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 28.

make loans. When the company opened a new office in the Kresse building on Canal Street, Francis was promoted again. Now, he was put in charge of the new managing loan office. He stayed in that position until he was called to active duty with the Louisiana National Guard on January 11, 1941.<sup>21</sup>

The person who had the biggest effect on Francis' life was his wife, Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg. Francis met Dorothy through his best friend, Walt Guilbeau. Francis and Walt were both members of the New Orleans Athletic Club. The club held dances every Saturday night. One evening, Walt had a date with Dorothy McGuire but did not have a car. So he asked Francis if he minded to join him on a double date and provide the transportation for all of them. Francis, who was lucky enough to have a car, thanks to his drawing talents, agreed. That night he accompanied his best friend Walter with Dorothy and Celie, a friend of Walter's younger sister, to a dance. During the first dance, Francis and Dorothy just could not keep their eyes off each other. Francis recalled: "The next and all the following dances that evening I danced with Dorothy. Walter and Celie just sat and watched."<sup>22</sup>

When they met that evening, Francis was twenty years old and Dorothy was three years younger than he was.<sup>23</sup> She was attending McDonogh High School on Esplanade Avenue. They both were very busy, Francis at the loan office and Dorothy at school where she was in charge of the school's newspaper as the editor-in-chief. But their busy lives did not keep them from dating. Francis began to picking Dorothy up at the school and drove her home in his car. Their relationship was getting very serious. Dorothy kept a diary where she wrote: "Another hard day of school. Francis met me after school and we went to the park. We came home and he left at 5:30. ½ hr.[hour] late! Oh! Oh! I think he thinks he loves me."<sup>24</sup> When Francis first met Dorothy, he was very timid. After he realized that Dorothy was in love with him too, it changed him completely. He remembered: "After meeting her and falling hopelessly in love with her, she really had more to do with what I accomplished than anyone else..."<sup>25</sup> Dorothy helped turn Francis around from being a very shy young man to becoming a man of accomplishment. They both had a common interest in horse back riding. That was their first activity together on the beginning of the year 1935. On January 4, Dorothy wrote in her diary: "...I'm going horseback

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>23</sup> Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg was born on September 1, 1917.

<sup>24</sup> February 5, 1935, Diary, Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 33.

ridding tomorrow...”<sup>26</sup> They both had a passion for horses. For this reason, Francis joined the Louisiana National Guard when he was just 18 years old. He said: “...because it [the unit] was a cavalry outfit and I liked to ride horses.”<sup>27</sup>

While they were dating, Dorothy was able to accomplish things in her life. In June 1936, she graduated from high school.<sup>28</sup> She also got a new job at the regional office of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation on North Liberty Street in New Orleans.<sup>29</sup> This Fox office was responsible for the distribution of the Fox movies in the entire South. Dorothy kept working for the Fox Company during the war until 1945 when Francis returned home from the European battlefields. She left the company only once, for a brief vacation in 1941. She applied for a leave of absence to be able to go with Francis to Camp Hulen, Texas. He was stationed there for about eleven months in 1941/1942 before he was deployed to Europe. Dorothy then returned to New Orleans and went back to work for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation.

On September 1, 1936, Dorothy wrote in her diary: “My birthday! 19 years old... I feel ancient. I’ve accomplished quite a lot this year, Allen, a job, good time.”<sup>30</sup> Dorothy was right. She did accomplish a lot for her age but the biggest accomplishment of her life was yet to come. She and Francis began seriously talking about their future marriage. More than three weeks after her birthday, Dorothy noted in her diary: “Went out with Francis. He cannot understand why I am so reluctant to accept his proposal to live with his mother when we get married.”<sup>31</sup> However, Dorothy finally gave in to his proposal, and after their wedding moved with Francis into his mother’s home. Francis recalled: “I lived on Palmyra [Street] with my mother, even after I got married, until the age of 26.”<sup>32</sup> During the Great Depression it was not unusual for young couples to live with their parents after getting married.

The greatest event of Francis’ and Dorothy’s life was their marriage. The *Times-Picayune* announced their engagement as follows:

“Mr. and Mrs. Clement Charles McGuire announced the engagement of their daughter Miss Dorothy Mae McGuire, to Mr. Francis Carroll

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<sup>26</sup> January 4, 1935, Diary, Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> *Allen Commercial Review*, June 1, 1936, Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothy’s Diary, September 1, 1936, Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>31</sup> Dorothy’s Diary, September 23, 1936, Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 27.

Grevemberg, son of Mrs. Ouita Marie Jumonville de Villiers Grevemberg and Mr. Francis B. Grevemberg, the wedding to take place the latter part of October.”<sup>33</sup>

They were betrothed to each other at the St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church on Canal Street in New Orleans. They were married at ten o’clock in the morning on October 27, 1937,<sup>34</sup> The *Sunday Item-Tribune*, in its Society Section, published their wedding picture with the following text:

“Claiming attention Wednesday morning was the wedding of MR. and MRS. FRANCIS CARROLL GREVEMBERG, shown leaving St. Anthony’s church following the ceremony. She is former Miss Dorothy Mae McGuire, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Clement Charles McGuire.”<sup>35</sup>

Francis and Dorothy married each other three years after they first met at the dance in the New Orleans Athletic Club. They moved in to live with Francis’ mother on Palmyra Street for the next three years. In 1940, they bought their own first house on Louis XIV Street in a new subdivision of Lakeview near Lake Pontchartrain. Latter on, when Francis was serving with the Louisiana National Guard and was sent overseas, Dorothy’s parents moved in to live with her during the war years.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *The Times-Picayune*, September 26, 1937.

<sup>34</sup> The Wedding Card, Dorothy McGuire Grevemberg Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>35</sup> *The Sunday Item-Tribune*, October 31, 1937.

<sup>36</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 30.



## Francis and the Louisiana National Guard

Francis Carroll Grevemberg began his military career as a private in the Louisiana National Guard on July 10, 1932<sup>37</sup> and was quickly promoted through all non-commissioned ranks. He joined the 108<sup>th</sup> “Lighthorse” Cavalry at the age of eighteen noting: “[I] loved to ride and was very fond of horses.”<sup>38</sup> Francis was taught for the very first time to ride a horse named Pat. He rode Pat in the monthly drills. Francis remembered that, “[Pat] was very lively and responded to me very well...I would bring him lump sugar as often as I could, which he seemed to love.”<sup>39</sup> From time to time, someone beat Francis to Pat for the drill. The horse acted unpredictably with others and for this reason, they asked Francis to swap the horse with them. Finally, as Francis described it: “He [Pat] really became my horse.”<sup>40</sup>

After the reorganization of the National Guard right after World War I, the 108<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was assigned to the States of Louisiana and Georgia. The State of Louisiana organized the majority of the regiment’s units which had a great number of ranking officers. Among them was James E. Edmonds, who had become the commander of the 108<sup>th</sup> on November 10, 1923.<sup>41</sup> The regiment completed its reorganization in 1929. During that time it consisted of the headquarters troop, a machinegun troop, three squadrons of two troops each, a medical detachment, and a band. Almost all units were located in Louisiana except the machinegun troops A and B of the First Squadron, which stayed in Georgia.

The 108<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was formally part of the 54<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade, 22<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division. It consisted of four regiments and two machinegun squadrons from seven different states. Until 1929, the 108<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was reassigned to the 55<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division. This assignment was uniting the cavalry units of the National Guard in the Second and Third Army areas consisting of the following states: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. In 1939, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division was reorganized again, now including the States of Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin in place of North Carolina and Texas. The 23<sup>rd</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Statement of Service, Promotions Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>38</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 35.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Evans J. Casso, *Louisiana Legacy: A History of the State National Guard* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1976), 165.

Division did not become operational until 1940 when Washington staff promoted Brigadier General Edmonds to the rank of Major General.

Francis Grevemberg promotions also came quickly after he enlisted in the 108<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. He remembered: “I was promoted to the grade of corporal three months after I joined and ‘buck’ sergeant six months later.”<sup>42</sup> The 108<sup>th</sup> Cavalry as a unit attended sixteen summer encampments and joined with other components of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division. Sgt. Francis Grevemberg evidently attended at least one of the summer camps. There is a picture of him and the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron of the 108<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment of the Louisiana National Guard, taken in July 1934 at Oglethorpe, Georgia, at the age of twenty.<sup>43</sup>

During the time when the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division became officially operational, Major General Edmonds picked Sgt. Grevemberg to serve in his Headquarters. Francis recalled: “The commanding general [Major General Edmonds] had his selection of any personnel that he wanted, and I was one of those he selected to be in his Headquarters Troops.”<sup>44</sup>

On October 6, 1940, the 108<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, including the Headquarters Company of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division, ended their service as “Cavalry.” They were converted to the 105<sup>th</sup> Separate Battalion Coastal Artillery (Antiaircraft).<sup>45</sup> The Headquarters and the Headquarters Troop became Headquarters and Headquarters Battery and provided personnel to Batteries A and B.

In December 1940, the 108<sup>th</sup> Regiment was activated for federal service into the United States Army. It was converted from a “cavalry unit” to the “105<sup>th</sup> Separate Coastal Artillery (Antiaircraft) Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Frederick H. Fox.”<sup>46</sup> Francis Grevemberg was promoted again, this time to the commissioned rank of 2nd Lieutenant. Beginning of 1941, the newly formed 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ordered for training to Texas. There is a picture of Francis Grevemberg with a text reading:

“Here I am at Camp Hulen, Texas, as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in 1941, eleven months before Pearl Harbor. I was 2nd Lt. in the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Battery “C” of the Anti-Aircraft. We were armed with 40mm cannons and 50 caliber machine guns, all anti-aircraft weapons. I was executive officer of Battery “C.”...”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 35.

<sup>43</sup> Pictures Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 35.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 165 f.

<sup>47</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 36.

Francis continues:

“We were an automatic weapons battalion and went to Camp Hulen, Texas, for our initial training on January 6, 1941... We stayed at Camp Hulen for about eleven months and were sent to Camp Young, California, for advanced training, where we were able to fire our guns, and we received our full complement of men, guns and trucks...”<sup>48</sup>

Prior to his desert training in California, Lieutenant Grevemberg was sent to the Coast Artillery School in Fort Monroe, Virginia. By attending the school, Francis not only became an artillery student but also a hero of sorts. On May 21, 1941, Grevemberg rescued two enlisted men from drowning in the Chesapeake Bay. The incident occurred not far from the old Virginia fort. Grevemberg heard two men calling for a help. Both men were carried away by swift currents. Grevemberg disregarding his own safety immediately swam to give the men his personal assistance. Even though Grevemberg was pulled underwater after he reached both men, he was able to tow them to shallow waters. There he received assistance in pulling both men to safety on shore. Lt. Grevemberg showed considerable courage, reflecting a great credit upon himself and his military service. Grevemberg was awarded the Soldiers Medal for Heroism which he received on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1941 at a brigade review.<sup>49</sup>

In his only letter sent from Fort Monroe to his wife Dorothy, Francis did not mention anything about this incident. In one of the earliest letters to his wife preserved, he wrote:

“Precious Love, I received your birthday card and it was beautiful... I am only existing to study and attend school at present... I haven't been called in yet on the hard exam we took on Tues. and it is supposed to be one of the hardest. Maj. Richardson our Battalion Executive officer [is] a Tulane graduate attorney of about 20 yrs. ago. He said 20 but I was thinking it should be longer because he is 47 yrs. old. Well he failed the course that my class completed our first week up here. The Gen. called him in and talked with him and he will continue his studies. Mjr. [Major] Jim is one of the finest men I have ever met... Precious Heart I adore you. Francis.”<sup>50</sup>

Upon his return from the Group XIX, Coastal Artillery School in Fort Monroe, Virginia, Lt. Grevemberg received his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant on November 20, 1941, at

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>49</sup> Promotions Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Dorothy, June 5, 1941, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

Camp Hulen, Texas.<sup>51</sup> After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion was split apart. The Battery A, commanded by Captain Fred A. Wulff, Jr., and Battery B, commanded by Captain John Barkley, departed in January 1942 for California.<sup>52</sup> Both batteries were ordered to the Pacific Theater of Operations to protect the approaches to New Zealand and Australia. Through the war both batteries served only in the Pacific. Battery A was stationed at Canton Island, and Battery B at Christmas Island.

When Batteries A and B were shipped to the Pacific, the Battalion's Commanding Officer, Colonel Frederick H. Fox selected Grevemberg to train some 350 new enlistees who joined the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Camp Hulen, Texas. Grevemberg remembered:

“The rookies [fresh enlistees] were from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and few from Nebraska, South Carolina, Kentucky, and Illinois. These men were all very well educated, a higher type of man that had been receiving through the draft. Most of them were draftees.”<sup>53</sup>

After thirteen weeks of basic training of the enlistees, Batteries C and D of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion were ready for their departure for an advanced training at the Desert Training Center in Indio, California. The battalion's move from Texas to California brought monotony to the troops'. Nothing really happened on the way to California, except that the train was pulled over several times to let the regular passenger trains pass by. It took them several days to get to California. There, at Camp Young, the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion was redesignated as the 105<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery Battalion (AA) (AW)<sup>54</sup> and increased in size. Lieutenant Grevemberg remembered:

“[On May 14, 1942] I was promoted to the rank of captain, commanding Battery “C” of the 105<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Artillery Weapons Battalion, consisting of 180 enlisted men and five commissioned officers. There we trained with the First Infantry Division commanded by Major General Terry Allen in the Mojave Desert in California.”<sup>55</sup>

Captain Grevemberg's Battery “C” proved to do its assignments well and on schedule during the entire encampment in California. One time, all four of the firing batteries of the 105<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Promotions Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 152.

<sup>53</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 166.

<sup>55</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 37.

Battalion were taken into the desert. The California desert was full of “unfriendly” creatures such as scorpions, rattlesnakes, large spiders, and black widows. The men were out for many days, and Captain Grevemberg kept track of every move they made by making a chart and using his compass. He recalled:

”So, when headquarters told us to return to camp, “C” battery was the first to get out of the desert. On our arrival, General Patton and Colonel Fox were at the entrance of the camp. I rode in a big reconn car, and while passing them, I stood up and gave them a big salute.”<sup>56</sup>

Capitan Grevemberg’s men were able to clean all trucks and guns, bathe and dress, and were on their way to town for the weekend before the other three batteries returned from the desert. The very next day, Captain Grevemberg took his wife Dorothy, who had come to California for a visit, to Earl’s restaurant in Hollywood to celebrate his 28<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>57</sup>

Francis and Dorothy Grevemberg in Hollywood, California, June 4, 1942



Source: FCG Papers, with kind permission from the Louisiana and Special Collections, UNO Library.

Francis’ own words perfectly described his feelings about their stay in California:

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

“The sad thing about Camp Young is that we never had a chance to fire our guns. We had eight 40mm guns and eight 50 cal. machine guns per firing battery while there. We received fabulous desert training. It was tough, tough.”<sup>58</sup>

After they finished the desert training, the men of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion were ready for another move across the States. In the late summer of 1942, the men of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion left Camp Young for Indian Town Gap in Pennsylvania. It was a similarly uneventful journey like the earlier one to California. Taking all the heavy equipment along, it took them fourteen days to get back to the East Coast, because they had to pull over several times and let the regular trains pass by. Captain Grevemberg described their journey in his first typed letter to Dorothy penned “somewhere in Iowa on the Troop Trains”:

“Darling Love: I will probably make a mess of my first type[d] letter but it is impossible to write on this fast moving rough train. We left Indio at 5:00 AM after waiting 12 hours for the railroad to make up the train. So far the trip has been rather dull, but our kitchen has been putting out very good meals. I have also been buying ice cream, soft drinks, chicken and many other niceties for my men with the extra ration money furnished for this trip...I stayed up until 4:45 AM this morning to see Kansas City, but saw mostly stock and railroad yards, a very disappointing experience. We had oil burning engines until we left Oklahoma, but we will have coal all the way in and the cinders are coming in by the bushel. The men guarding the guns on the flat cars look like negroes when they finished their tour of duty. People along the route have been very nice to our men, giving them magazines, candy, ice cream cups, matches, cigarettes, chewing gums and playing cards...Precious love I hope you had a nice trip home and were not too blue about the whole thing. Just remember that other people are having to put [up] with the same thing or worse and we are just as brave as they are...Darling if there is a possible chance I will send for you to come to New York. Please think of me my heart I love you completely. Francis.”<sup>59</sup>

En route to Pennsylvania Captain Grevemberg’s days were filled with taking care of his men and a deep longing for his wife. These personal stories of separation from loved ones are common to the soldiers of the era. They had to prove their manhood through many personal hardships and tribulations.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Letter to Dorothy, July 31, 1942, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

## Scotland and England

In August of 1942<sup>60</sup>, the men of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion together with the First Infantry Division left Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. They took trains to the Port of Brooklyn in New York where they boarded ships for overseas shipment. Captain Grevemberg's battalion boarded the *U.S.S. Argentina*, a 37,000 ton ship running between New York City and Bermuda in peacetime. Approximately 7,000 men were on board the ship, including about 975 men from the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>61</sup>

After the troops embarked on these ships, two naval vessels escorted them to Nova Scotia in Canada. There they joined a convoy of sixty-six vessels. The 15,000 men of the First Infantry Division were the only combat personnel in that convoy. The infamous German U-boat wolf packs sank six supply ships in the convoy during the entire crossing of the Atlantic. Grevemberg remembered the way: "We took the most northern route, and we saw a few icebergs and zigzagged, and it took us fourteen days to get to a little Scottish port about fifteen miles from Glasgow."<sup>62</sup> During the voyage, the headquarters of the First Infantry Division gave the troops some useful advice about England and how the soldiers should act toward the British people:

"You will find the English people polite, friendly and helpful... We are proud to have as allies these people who stood single-handed [sic] against the enemy in 1940... and who have held out alone for two years since then. The measures of our mutual success is going to depend a lot on the measure of our cooperation. So with this in mind, avoid doing things which might lead to needless ill-feeling... Don't compare their country in a disparaging way with ours. Don't mock or sneer at manners, dress or prejudices just because they happen to be different from ours."<sup>63</sup>

Brigadier General Terry Allen, commander of the First Infantry division, not only understood his soldiers with in his message but was also wise to remind the troops that:

"We are good, but let's not sound off about it. These people have been in the fight for three years. We have not seen action yet. Until we have, any

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<sup>60</sup> Louisiana Department of Military Affairs, *Louisiana National Guard: The 105th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion (AW) (SP)*, p.9

<sup>61</sup> Grevemberg, *My War*, 42.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> James S. Wheeler, *The Big Red One: America's Legendary 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division from World War I to Desert Storm* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 139.

big talk about how good we are or what we are going to do would sound pretty second-rate.”<sup>64</sup>

The local people crowded to the piers while the soldier disembarked from the ships. The crowds were made mostly of girls, women and elderly men. Grevemberg recalled: “They cheered us yelling; thank God the yanks have come; thank God the yanks have come to save us.”<sup>65</sup> Grevemberg lined up the Battery “C” in a column of four and marched his soldiers to the dock. They were lined up in a square there and were waiting for an approaching British military band. After the band arrived to the dock, it started to play “The Star Spangled Banner.” Grevemberg called his soldiers to “Attention” and “Present Arms.” Then he made an about face and saluted. What he experienced during that moment, he described in his own words:

“Little chills started at my ankles, coming up my legs, then through my body, then my arms, neck and head. Tears ran down my face. I realized that I was proud to be an American soldier in Great Britain, here to save the British from the Germans. Also, I was filled with pride to know that I was in command of a fine, second to none, battery of outstanding American soldiers...”<sup>66</sup>

When the band finished the American national anthem, Grevemberg called “Order Arms” and looked at his men. They too all had tears in their eyes just like him. After the parade was over, Grevemberg called “At Ease” and let his five lieutenants take their platoons to the local barracks.

The very next day, the soldiers of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion, like the troops of the First Infantry Division, boarded the trains and headed to Tidworth.<sup>67</sup> The trains were pulled over on sidetracks several times to let regular passenger trains pass by just like in the United States. Along the way, there were people hanging out of the windows and standing in front of their houses yelling: “Welcome Yanks, Thank God you have come to save us” and waiving to the troops with small American flags.<sup>68</sup> At one of the stops, Grevemberg came up to a man who was standing alone

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<sup>64</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 139.

<sup>65</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 139.

<sup>68</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 43.



and asked him whether all American soldiers receive such warm welcomes from the British people. This man replied:

“Information had been broadcast on radio that the American First Infantry Division would be arriving[...] You know, the Germans almost annihilated the British Army at Dunkirk, and we haven’t had a chance to rebuild our Army up to where it needs to be. We expect the Germans to land here at any time, and frankly, we really don’t have an Army yet to combat them. By sending combat troops, we know that the Americans are going to save us. Hitler will probably not invade us now!”<sup>69</sup>

Grevemberg got his answer from this Englishmen which he never forgot in his life. After six long hours of journey, the troop trains arrived to their final destinations in Tidworth near London. The First Infantry Division stayed at barracks in Tidworth.<sup>70</sup> Grevemberg and his men were accommodated in a camp in Pennings near Tidworth.<sup>71</sup> When the soldiers entered the camp they were not satisfied with their facilities.

Long wooden platforms with holes in them and buckets underneath served as latrines. It accommodated approximately sixty men at the same time. A covered truck had to come every day to empty these buckets. In another location, the British set up a long line of cold water spigots. Above it was a small mirror for the men to use for their daily hygiene. The soldiers had to use their “field kitchens” to prepare their meals. They had to use their mess kits for the food, which was prepared by the battery cooks.

The first day at Pennings, Captain Grevemberg as the battery commander established a policy for use of the field kitchens and mess kits. The enlisted men would line up first, then the non-commissioned officers, then the lieutenants and the battery commander as the very last one. The next day, during the first breakfast, one of Grevemberg’s new 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants walked to the front of the line, filled his mess kit and walked away. Grevemberg was watching him and went after him right away. He approached him right before he started to eat and told him: “Don’t you dare put that in your mouth. If you do, you will be court marshaled [martialled] for disobeying my orders.”<sup>72</sup> He continued:

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<sup>69</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 139.

<sup>71</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 45.

”Maybe you were day dreaming or not paying attention. But, today you will definitely feel the effects of my policy...Don’t you even eat one mouthful or take a sip of coffee until I return with my food. Is that clear?” He said, “yes, sir.”<sup>73</sup>

Grevemberg made his lieutenant stand while he was talking to him. After a while, Grevemberg returned to him with his hot breakfast. Now, the 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant could finally start to eat. But he could not because his food had gotten cold. Grevemberg ordered him to eat and drink everything from his mess kit, so he would never do it again.

A deadly accident occurred just three weeks after the battalion arrived in England. Five of Grevemberg’s men, among them two from Bogalusa, Louisiana<sup>74</sup>, wanted to visit London and decided to catch a ride. From their camp, it was only about fourteen miles to London. Grevemberg described to Dorothy what happened in his first letter to her from overseas:

“Precious...I haven’t had time to write lately because we have been very busy. We move to a different camp and are much more comfortable not having to sleep in tents. On top of this move we had a very unfortunate mishapening in our battery. My 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. [Sergeant Mitchell] was killed in a motor accident last Sat. Five of my men hitch hiked a ride with a laundry truck and had only ridden about 10 miles when the truck started to sway on a wet road the driver put on the brake, the truck spun around throwing my 5 men & 3 British soldiers out, [Sgt.]Mitchell hit a three [tree] on the fly directly in the center of his back...He was conscious within 30 min. and remained so for 2 hrs. before he died. The other 4 men are still in the hospital and are getting along very well. The three Britishers [Brits] were also unlucky. One was killed instantly and the other two were badly hurt.”<sup>75</sup>

According to Grevemberg, among the other soldiers who were injured in that accident were Sergeant Tiney Saracina, Grevemberg’s motor sergeant, and another soldier.<sup>76</sup> The unit participated at Sergeant Mitchell’s funeral. It was very impressive ceremony. Grevemberg described it in the same letter as follows:

“I took all of the Bogalusa, La. men from the Battalion 38 in all 60 miles yesterday for Mitchells [Mitchell’s] burial...I gave him a full military funeral with the firing squad and all the trimmings. I surely hated to have to notify his

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Sgt. Mitchell and Sgt. Bass.

<sup>75</sup> Letter to Dorothy , September 9, 1942, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>76</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 45.

wife and especially to tell her his body won't be shipped home until the war [ends]...please my precious don't worry about me I won't do any hitch hiking...My precious heart I love and adore you with all my heart & soul, you are the only one and always will be. Our love is really 'a true love' and no other phrase could describe it better. Please think about me often and continue to love me completely...and please write often. I adore you. Francis."<sup>77</sup>

Grevemberg let the battery clerk type the letter for him which he addressed to Sergeant Mitchell's family. In the letter, Grevemberg described all the people who admired Sgt. Mitchell, including him and Colonel Fox.<sup>78</sup> After the war in 1949, Mitchell's body was returned to his hometown in Bogalusa, Louisiana. After the funeral in England, Grevemberg replaced Sgt. Mitchell with Sgt. Hillery Moran<sup>79</sup>, who became his first sergeant and did a great job for the battery.

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<sup>77</sup> Letter to Dorothy, September 9, 1942, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>78</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 45.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

## Training for North Africa

After the troops of the First Infantry Division arrived to Great Britain, General Terry Allen thought that he would have “as much as another year to prepare the division for the invasion of Western Europe.”<sup>80</sup> While his troops were crossing the Atlantic, including the men of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the priorities for Allied planning had changed due to the critical situation on the battlefields in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Over the summer of 1942, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel began a counter attack with his “Africa Korps.” He was able to drive General Bernard Montgomery and his British Eighth Army out of Libya and captured the port of Tobruk in Libya. Now, he and his German troops became a serious threat to the British positions in Egypt. For all the American troops in Great Britain, including the First Infantry Division, the invasion of “Western Europe” lost its top priority.

Under those circumstances, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill convinced President F.D. Roosevelt to commit American troops to the North African battleground as soon as possible. On August 13, 1942,<sup>81</sup> while the First Infantry Division was settling in at the Tidworth Barracks, the Combined Chief of Staff of the United States and Great Britain approved the invasion of North Africa. The battle plan for the North African invasion was prepared by the Allied planners in London and consisted of three simultaneous amphibious assaults: 1) The “Western Task Force,” arriving from the United States, was to strike near Casablanca in French Morocco. Its primary mission was to secure the “Straits of Gibraltar” and to neutralize the French Navy units in Morocco. 2) The “Central Task Force” was to land near the city of Oran in Algeria. The main target was the seizure of the port of Oran, secure communications lines to the west and east, and finally join the British First Army and drive to Tunisia. 3) The mission of the “Eastern Task Force” was to land in Algiers.<sup>82</sup>

While the military planners worked on the issues related to the first combined Allied operation in North Africa, the assault units participated in the intensive training of amphibious landings. The First Infantry Division had three regimental combat teams and they all conducted their training at the Combined Operations Training Center near Rosneath, Scotland, in

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<sup>80</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 139.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

September 1942.<sup>83</sup> The training was supervised by Brigadier Generals Teddy Roosevelt and Cliff Andrus. General Terry Allen was preparing the division's plan in London. The regimental commanders mainly focused on the quick unloading of landing craft after they reached the shore.

In England and Scotland, the men of the 105<sup>th</sup> AA Battalion carried on the antiaircraft training and then participated in the amphibious assault landing in North Africa.<sup>84</sup> Grevemberg's unit received full complements of 40mm Bofors guns, 50 caliber machine guns, M-5 directors, 2 and ½ ton trucks, generators, and other equipment for their training in Great Britain. Grevemberg remembered:

“No battery was ever able to fire their guns until we got to England. British aircraft would tow cloth sleeves for us to fire at. The firing range was on a beach in Scotland on the North Sea. We did much better hitting the sleeve when someone painted a black German swastika on the sleeve. We fired for several days and became quite proficient at it.”<sup>85</sup>

The men of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion were not firing the “big guns” only. All officers and enlisted men were required to fire their M-1 basic rifles for record before going into the combat. The “record shooting” was held at a firing range near their encampment in Pennings by Tidworth.<sup>86</sup> Grevemberg described the shooting exercises to Dorothy:

“Precious, I haven't been able to write for the past few days because we worked every night & Sat. & Sun. The Battalion has been firing the rifle for record for the past week and the officers fired Sunday. I was in charge of all firing and had a big job on my hands because when they fire for record there are many records that have to be kept.( the W.D. [War Department] presents medals for this type of firing. I was very lucky when I fired and came out on top of the Battalion with score of 215 out of a possible 235. A Sgt. was second with 213 and Maj. Barkley was third with 212. The Maj. was fairly gripped because he has always been considered in a class by himself participated in many National Rifle Matches and having in most cases always finished near the top...I just had to tell you about it, because I didn't think the day would ever come to have me considered the best rifleman in the Battalion, especially with the Major

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>84</sup> Louisiana Department, *Louisiana National Guard*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Document 12-A, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

still a member. My precious everything is still the same and there is really no cause for you to worry...”<sup>87</sup>

Grevemberg couldn't believe that he qualified in the shooting as an “expert riflemen” from the entire 982 men of his battalion. What surprised him the most was that he beat Major John Barkley, the battalion's executive officer. Major Barkley was the “real expert” to him, because he had competed for years as a member of the “Louisiana Team” at the National Rifle Championships in Camp Perry.<sup>88</sup> Major Barkley not only taught Grevemberg to shoot, but was a true “shooting expert” to him.

As Grevemberg was preparing for battle, his emotions burst out as he continued to write letters home to his wife. His missive was full of bathos:

“Precious please think about me always and instead of 11:00 AM everyday, make it 12:00 noon until 12:30 and I will be thinking of you from 6:00 to 6:30 P.M. which will be the same time. I love you and adore you with my whole heart and soul. You are still the most beautiful girl in the world, my one and only dream girl as always. Yet one and only and don't let anyone try to tell you differently. You will always have my heart with you, technically yes I have one, but actually, it is with you every moment of the day. I adore you and miss you so much that I actually feel as though I can't go another moment without you. Not for passion sake only, but for the sweet adorable companionship you have always given me. There is just no one this wide world over or anywhere else (if there is such a place) that could possibly take your place...Please write often because I do need your letters, so much. I adore you my love Francis.”<sup>89</sup>

Grevemberg relied upon his wife's devotion to keep his spirit high. In a V-Mail, Grevemberg insists that he needed his wife's letter for his emotional stability:

“Dear Precious: Please write often as possible, my love I need your letters terribly...My love I would give anything to be with you on the 27<sup>th</sup> but remember I will be thinking of you and loving you with all my heart. I don't have any idea what's going on at home. It's too bad I didn't keep my radio. Please write more often, and think of me always. I love you Francis.”<sup>90</sup>

On the day of his wife's birthday, on September 27, Grevemberg saw his participation in war. His anxiety about the approaching battlefield spilled over into his letters to his wife.

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<sup>87</sup> Letter to Dorothy, September 15, 1942, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>88</sup> Document 12-A, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>89</sup> Letter to Dorothy, September 15, 1942, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>90</sup> V-Mail to Dorothy, October 10, 1942, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

## Landing in North Africa: Operation Torch

In late September, the Allied planners finished their preparations for Operation Torch. On October 10, 1942, General Terry Allen and his staff completed their tactical plan for the First Infantry Division, published as the Division's "Field Order One."<sup>91</sup> The troops finished their intensive training in Great Britain for the first Allied offensive. They were to embark in less than a month and sail for North Africa.

The vessels carrying the First Infantry Division as part of the Central Task Force departed from Scotland on October 26, 1942.<sup>92</sup> The convoy headed in the southwestern direction into the Atlantic and then turned east through the Straits of Gibraltar. Close to midnight on November 6, the convoy entered the Mediterranean. The following evening the Central Task Force anchored off the beaches west and east of the port of Oran.<sup>93</sup> Major General Lloyd R. Fredendall's II Corps was in charge of the landing. The combat teams of the First Infantry Division planned to land west and east of Oran in the early morning hours of November 8.<sup>94</sup>

The men of the 105<sup>th</sup> Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion were part of the amphibious assault landing of the Central Task Force. Their mission was to protect the landing beaches for the First Infantry Division at Arzew and Les Andalouses.<sup>95</sup> Grevemberg's Battery "C" was ordered to board *The Monarch of Bermuda*,<sup>96</sup> a 35,000 ton passenger ship running between New York City and Bermuda in peacetime.

On October 27, 1942, *The Monarch of Bermuda* departed with the troops to join the Allied convoy heading to the shores of Algeria.<sup>97</sup> Grevemberg recalled: "We were on our way to a particular destination. Few knew what it would be. It turned out to be Les Andalouse[s] beach, west of Oran, North Africa."<sup>98</sup> As part one of the combat teams of the First Infantry Division, Grevemberg and his men were to land 20 kilometers west of Oran under the command of

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<sup>91</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 141.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>95</sup> Louisiana Department, *Louisiana National Guard*, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 47.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to Dorothy, July 21, 1943, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>98</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 47.

General Teddy Roosevelt, the assistant division commander in the First Infantry Division.<sup>99</sup> Grevemberg remembered:

“We had other ships, LSTs for our guns, and we loaded two 40mm guns with their trucks, and two 50 caliber machine guns and their trucks in a landing craft. I had all eight of the 40mm gun crews and the eight machine gun crews with their guns, and the communication section on one small landing craft. This landing craft also included others who were to land before dawn D-Day. I also learned that we were to be part of the ‘18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Combat Team,’ which was comprised of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Infantry Division, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, and other small units like ours. This team was commanded by none other than Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.”<sup>100</sup>

Grevemberg was accompanied by his first sergeant and the eight gun sergeants aboard the British ship. His plan was to bring all of them to the officer’s lounge and take a look on the detailed map of the area where they were expected to land. Grevemberg wanted to take this opportunity and locate the best possible spots for their guns and the gun crews. Before they entered the lounge, Grevemberg talked to one of the regimental commanders, who refused to let Grevemberg and his men in unless he provided the required security clearance.

First, Grevemberg was disappointed at this rebuff then he came up with the idea to draw a map only showing the position of their guns. By doing so he would not have to brief each of the gun sergeants. Grevemberg went back and explained his plan to the same regimental commander, who had refused his original plan. Finally, he agreed to let him into the lounge but told Grevemberg that he will have to show his map to General Roosevelt.<sup>101</sup>

Grevemberg went to the officer’s lounge alone and took a very good look at the map. He was able to locate vantage grounds for his crews and their guns. He drew the map in a special way which would be useless to anyone else. After that, he went to show the map personally to General Roosevelt. The General said: “It is very well done. Are you an artist?”<sup>102</sup> Grevemberg replied that he took drawing lessons when he was younger, but did not want to become an artist. General replied: “Well, you did a very good job. You can take it and use it with your men.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 143.

<sup>100</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 47.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 49.



Just before the midnight on November 7, the 18<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team of the First Infantry Division assigned to the beach at Les Andalouses started to load its landing craft. At about 23:45, the first wave of boats with the soldiers from the First Infantry Division began their six mile run to the Algerian shore. It took them over an hour before they reached the Les Andalouses beaches. Since it became clear that the beach was undefended, the second wave of landing crafts departed to the shore. By 05:00, 2,670 men from the First Infantry Division with thirty-three vehicles were on shore.<sup>104</sup>

The time for the amphibious landing, (called H-hour), for Battery “C” was on November 8, 1942 at 05:00.<sup>105</sup> Grevemberg remembered his first D-Day as follow:

“D-Day arrived, so we went down the side of the ship on the huge rope ladder with the ‘First Infantry Division’s men’ before sunrise, and we were there on the beach when our guns and the crews arrived. We had all eight guns and their crews in position with a telephone ‘hot loop,’ and radio communications to each gun crew connected to my central location headquarters before dawn. We were in perfect ready position for providing triple A protection.”<sup>106</sup>

Grevemberg’s headquarters was established in the center of the beach. It was located in a one story building and had about ten square feet. His command post was on top of a flat roof which had a trap door and a ladder accessing the back of the structure. There were almost 300 yards of telephone communication lines in place. Radios were placed in the east and west of the most distanced gun positions just in the case the landlines would be destroyed during an attack.

The first day of the landings went smoothly. Grevemberg saw action in the bay at Les Andalouses and by the Algerian coast. During the landings near Oran, the French did not realize that aboard the convoy ships were American troops. Their artillery started to fire at the *Monarch of Bermuda* because they thought that they were British soldiers. Grevemberg recalled:

“The *Bermuda* was hit several times, killing two of our six American nurses. Another tragedy took place between a Dutch ship and a light French cruiser. The French waited in the main harbor of Oran for the Dutch ship to dock. The French cruiser, which was docked just on the other side, opened up with all of its guns on the Dutch ship, and it sank

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<sup>104</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 144.

<sup>105</sup> Document 12-A, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>106</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 49.

immediately. There were over 1,000 American Rangers getting ready to disembark from the Dutch ship. They were all killed! The Dutch ship captain refused to fly the American flag.”<sup>107</sup>

General Charles de Gaulle had promised President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill that the French would not oppose the American troops during the landings in North Africa. But the planners of the invasion believed that the French would probably fight the British because the Royal Navy sank many of the French Navy vessels before the Germans could use them for an invasion of Great Britain in 1940.<sup>108</sup>

On D-Day plus two, the gun crew from the eastern outpost informed Grevemberg’s headquarters that a Spitfire was coming to the beach. When the British plane was crossing the beach, it began to spray it with gunfire. Grevemberg told his men not to fire at it because it was an Allied plane and it seemed to him that the plane was flying in such a hurry. He recalled: “I was not sure what was going on. I told the gun batteries that if he came back to shoot him down. He did come back and started to strafe [the beach], so they shot him down.”<sup>109</sup>

The pilot was able to land his plane on a field close to the beach. Grevemberg went right after him and asked: “You jackass, why did you strafe the beach?” The pilot replied: “You looked like Germans to me.”<sup>110</sup> After the incident, Grevemberg took the British pilot to an intelligence office of the First Infantry Division. Later on, this intelligence officer told Grevemberg that the pilot was actually a German. He studied at a college in Britain and therefore he spoke “perfect English with a British accent.”<sup>111</sup>

Grevemberg described another story from the same day:

“I was standing in my station on the little building roof when I saw an officer coming to the beach in a small boat driven by another man. I went down to the beach and met the officer, a full colonel. It was Colonel Harriman, the AAA officer of Second Corps, General Omar Bradley’s Command. He was in charge of all the AAA in North Africa and Tunisia. Just as I greeted him, one of the men from our number one gun section arrived at the beach and told me that their 40mm gun had jammed with a live shell in the breach. He asked me whether I knew how to correct this

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 140.

<sup>109</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 50.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

problem and would I come help. I said, 'Surely' and Colonel Harriman asked if he could come along. I answered in the affirmative!"<sup>112</sup>

After they all had arrived to the gun post, Grevemberg went to the gun and got the blocked live shell out of it. At the gun, Harriman was impressed by Grevemberg's ability and quick action. He applauded him at the spot and later wrote him a letter which was countersigned by Col. Fox, the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion's Commander.<sup>113</sup> Before Harriman left, he asked Grevemberg if he still had the map which he used for his battery landing. Grevemberg said:

"Evidently, he [Col. Harriman] had heard about it from General Roosevelt, who must have been impressed with it up at Second Corps Headquarters. I gave it to Colonel Harriman. I found out all of the 'big shots' at Second Corps Headquarters had seen it and learned how we landed our battery."<sup>114</sup>

On D-Day plus three, the primary mission of the Battery "C" of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the antiaircraft protection of the landings on the Les Andalouses beach, had ended. Grevemberg recalled: "The war there was over, and I was moving 'C' Battery to La Senia airport [five miles south from Oran], next to the French Legion Headquarters."<sup>115</sup>

La Senia airfield was one of the two most important airfields in the vicinity of Oran.<sup>116</sup> The second one was at Tafaraoui. Both airfields were priority targets in the tactical plan of the XII United States Army Air Force for the Operation Torch.<sup>117</sup> Besides these two airfields, the XII Air Force selected other possible landing grounds such as Oggaz, Fleurus, Saint-Denis-du-Sig, and Lourmel.<sup>118</sup>

The original plan called for an airborne drop by the 60<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group over the airfields in La Senia and Tafaraoui.<sup>119</sup> There were approximately fifty-five French Dewoitine 520's fighter planes and forty obsolescent bombers in that area. The majority of these French war

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 51.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate, eds., *The Army Air Force in World War II*, vol. II: *Europe, Torch to Pointblank August 1942 to December 1943* (Washington, D. C.: New Imprint by the Office of Air Force History, 1983), 56.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

planes were based at La Senia airfield.<sup>120</sup> The mission of the American paratroopers was to destroy the French aircraft, secure the paved runway at Tafaraoui, and hold both airfields until reinforcement would arrive from the invasion beaches.<sup>121</sup>

After securing the field at Tafaraoui by landing force, the American Spitfires awaiting their time in Gibraltar, about 230 miles west from Oran, would fly in after a call from the air task force commander who was present on board of the headquarters ship of the Central Task Force.<sup>122</sup> The United States Army Air Force (USAAF) troops arriving on D-Day in the Oran area and their subsequent convoys had a mission to prepare the airfields for reception of additional air units which would fly in directly from Great Britain.<sup>123</sup> The Allied war was closing in on the continent controlled by the Axis powers.

On November 7, the first American airborne operation in World War II had begun.<sup>124</sup> A total of 556 paratroopers from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 509<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel Edson D. Raff boarded C-47 transport planes on the southwest coast of England in Cornwall.<sup>125</sup> At 22:00, the first C-47 aircrafts took off for their mission in Oran from two airfields in Predannack and St. Eval.<sup>126</sup> Their final destination was 1,100 miles away in the south and the planes were scheduled to fly non-stop by inexperienced pilots and navigators for nine hours at an altitude of 10,000 feet.<sup>127</sup>

Almost everything went wrong after the paratroopers took off from Cornwall. The formations of C-47s were disintegrating due to bad weather over the Bay of Biscay. Many airplanes proceeded individually across the airspace of neutral Spain and over the Mediterranean.<sup>128</sup> The planes had two aids to help them find their direction to Oran. Unfortunately, both had failed. The first navigation aid on board of the invasion fleet near Oran provided a radio signal to the approaching planes on 460 kilocycles instead of 440 kilocycles.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 87.

<sup>125</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 87-88.

<sup>126</sup> Craven/Cate, eds., *The Army Air Force in World War II*, 71.

<sup>127</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 88.

<sup>128</sup> Craven/Cate, eds., *The Army Air Force in World War II*, 71.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

The second one, the secret radio called “Rebecca” also located near Oran was destroyed by its operator after the airplanes did not arrive on time to their final destination.<sup>130</sup>

After sunrise on November 8, the daylight revealed that the American paratroopers were scattered across the western part of Mediterranean.<sup>131</sup> From the original formation of thirty-nine C-47s, one aircraft landed at the British airfield in Gibraltar, two at Fez in French Morocco, and four others landed in Spanish Morocco, and only three planes reached La Senia airfield.<sup>132</sup> They were greeted there not only by French antiaircraft fire<sup>133</sup> but also by French Dewoitine fighter planes that were not as friendly to the troop carriers as had been forecast.<sup>134</sup>

Only a dozen of the C-47s made it safely to the Oran area, they landed with their paratroopers or dropped them on the western fringe of a dry lake called Sebokra d’Oran near Lourmel, stretching for twenty miles south from the Algerian coast.<sup>135</sup> Col. Raff’s plane, followed by another nine C-47s, approached the lake around 08:00 and spotted an armored column getting near to the paratroopers on the ground.<sup>136</sup> Col. Raff ordered his men to jump and the paratroopers descended behind the tanks.

On the ground, the paratroopers realized that the armor columns belonged to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division which landed near Cap Figalo.<sup>137</sup> The American tanks were on the way to the airfields that the men from the 509<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment failed to secure. The French Dewoitine fighter planes strafed the paratroopers on the ground near the lake and killed five and wounded another fifteen soldiers.<sup>138</sup> The majority of the paratroopers who survived the first airborne operation in North Africa arrived at the Tafaraoui airfield by trucks in the morning hours of the next day.<sup>139</sup>

On D-Day at 15:20, Brig. Gen. James H. Doolittle, the commanding general of the Twelfth Air Force, arrived at Gibraltar’s airfield and ordered Col. John R. Hawkins to take off with his American Spitfires of the 31<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group for Tafaraoui.<sup>140</sup> The fighter pilots were

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 90.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Craven/Cate, eds., *The Army Air Force in World War II*, 71.

<sup>135</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 90.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Craven/Cate, eds., *The Army Air Force in World War II*, 72.

briefed that the air control tower in Tafaraoui will be in American hands. On the way to Oran, the two Spitfire squadrons tried to contact the tower with no success. At 17:00, the American Spitfires arrived to Tafaraoui airfield. After Hawkins observed the airfield, he found a safe section of the landing strip and led his squadrons in for the landings. Several pilots recognized the French artillery gun positions at the field and strafed them immediately. There were four French Dewoitine fighter planes doing an acrobatic maneuver called “lazy eight” above the airfield while the American Spitfires approached the field; they were accidentally mistaken by the American pilots for the Allied Hurricane fighter planes.<sup>141</sup> While the last four American Spitfires were getting ready to land, the French Dewoitine fighter planes began to attack them. The French pilots shot down one American Spitfire but lost three of their own planes.<sup>142</sup>

The next day in the morning, the French air force made their last attempt to strike the Americans at Tafaraoui field. A French bomber plane dropped a single bomb on the airfield and damaged only one American transport plane.<sup>143</sup> Due to the lack of radio equipment, the patrolling Spitfires from the 31<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group let the French bomber escape.<sup>144</sup> By noon, the rest of the French airplanes left La Senia airfield for safety to Morocco.<sup>145</sup>

The 31<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group played an important role in the battle of Oran. After dawn on November 9, three American Spitfires flew a reconnaissance mission to the south from the airfield. They spotted a large enemy force moving up from Sidi Bel Abbes.<sup>146</sup> The American Spitfires continuously attacked the enemy’s column for almost five hours and later discovered that they have been strafing the famous French Foreign Legion.<sup>147</sup> The same day in the afternoon, the commanding general of the XII Air Force arrived from Gibraltar in a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber escorted by American Spitfires from the 52<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group.<sup>148</sup> That day a total of seventeen missions were flown.<sup>149</sup>

While the USAAF planes gained success in the Algerian sky, the American invasion troops made progress on the ground. At St. Cloud, the First Infantry Division began to bypass the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

French obstacles. Meanwhile the division's 18<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team was immobilized on the higher ground west of Mers el Kebir known as Djebel Murdjadj.<sup>150</sup> The American armor from the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division bypassed Misserrhin in the west by rerouting its column through the edge of the dry lake of Sebkra.<sup>151</sup> Finally, by this maneuver and assistance of attacking American Spitfires the defense of La Senia broke down.<sup>152</sup>

The battle for Oran lasted until November 10 and the American pilots now operating from airfield in Tafaraoui continued to play a vital role in it. After the battle was over, the American Squadrons counted their losses. The 31<sup>st</sup> Fighter Group lost one Spitfire in combat, four from the ground fire, and two while they were taxiing.<sup>153</sup> The 52<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group lost six aircraft because they run out of gas on their way from Gibraltar; the 60<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group had only twenty cargo planes for immediate use.<sup>154</sup> The Algerian sky over Oran area was secured for the reinforcements and the next campaign in the east.

Roughly two weeks later, after the La Senia airfield was secured and protected by Grevemberg's Battery "C", two machine gun platoons from his 105<sup>th</sup> Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion were organized and air-lifted to Tunisia to take up positions at "Faid Pass" and "Thelepte Airport,"<sup>155</sup> the most advanced airfield that time. During the same time, Battery "C" received orders to follow one of the machine gun platoons. Grevemberg remembered:

"When I got orders to move our battery to the most forward airport in Tunisia, we had to make a forced march. We traveled all night and most of the next day, arriving about 1600 hours later (4:00 p.m.). When we got there the gun crews, which had preceded us, had dug in their 40mm's. So, we placed our guns in the same locations. We had our guns in position when we were attacked by six German ME-109 planes. We shot down two of them. They came in as the bright sun was gong [going] down, and they were hard to see. Guess who was there to witness all of this? Colonel Harriman and his second assistant, Major Smiley, who inspected all AA batteries in Tunisia and North Africa during the entire war there."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Louisiana Department, *Louisiana National Guard*, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 51-52.

While parts of the Battery “C” and “D” were moving into Tunisia, the rest of the 105<sup>th</sup> Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion’s units stayed in the Oran area. On December 10, 1942, the remaining units of the battalion left Oran and moved around the Algerian coast to protect the airports and docks of Bougie, Djidjelli, and Phillipeville.<sup>157</sup>

In Tunisia, Grevemberg and his unit defended frontline airfield at Thelepte. The field was located less than twenty miles southwest from Kasserine Pass<sup>158</sup> and belonged to the most valuable airfields in the Tunisian battle zone.<sup>159</sup> Compared to the other airfields in Tunisia, Thelepte had couple of advantages. It was a large and dry field situated in the flatland between the Western Dorsal and the “wet” mountain interior.<sup>160</sup> The only disadvantage of this field was that it did not have a warning device, no radar.<sup>161</sup> The French gendarmes warned the base anytime when they saw an aircraft flying by. However, they did not distinguish between Allied or enemy planes. In late December, the antiaircraft defense at Thelepte comprised of four 50 caliber machine guns and four 40mm Bofors guns.<sup>162</sup>

The *Luftwaffe* made almost daily attacks on the Thelepte airstrip defended by Grevemberg’s guns. One of the *Luftwaffe*’s tactics was to attack out of the sun at sunrise<sup>163</sup>, and the other tactic was to attack out of the sunset. The *Luftwaffe* used Ju 87 Stuka dive bombers, Me 109 and Fw 190 fighter planes for the attacks.<sup>164</sup> In every attack on the airfield, the *Luftwaffe* tried to change tactics. One time the airplanes would enter the targeting area from the same direction and next time from a different one. The Stukas flew low and used their machine guns to pit the field or they dropped heavy bombs which they carried under their wings. Grevemberg explained:

“The Stuka was a slow plane, carried a 500 pound bomb and flew at about 200 m.p.h., and about 275 m.p.h. in a dive. So, we were able to shoot down a great number, and we never did have a bomb drop on us or our artillery battalion. They strafed when diving toward us and only injured a few men in all those months.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 152.

<sup>158</sup> Col. E. Paul Semmens, *The Hammer of Hell* (No publisher, Fort Bliss, Texas, 1990), 27.

<sup>159</sup> Craven/Cate, eds., *The Army Air Force in World War II*, 132.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Semmens, *The Hammer of Hell*, 27.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 54.



The German fighter planes protected the Stukas by strafing the antiaircraft artillery posts and also by flying in protective “air caps.”<sup>166</sup> The fighter planes often joined the dive bombers in the final part of the air strike.

By February 1943, the *Luftwaffe* dive bomber pilots realized that they were paying a heavy price for their predictable air strike tactics. During the “perpendicular” dive, the Stukas’ speed could reach only about 200 mph, and the 40mm Bofors guns were able to engage any aircraft flying up to 300 mph.<sup>167</sup> By doing so, the artillerymen of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion discovered that they were able to stop the dive bombing attack of the Stukas.

In January 1943, only one battery of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion remained at Phillipeville in Algeria; the rest of the battalion’s units were transferred to protect the Tunisian airfields at Telergma, Youks-les-Bains, and Thelepte.<sup>168</sup> The *Luftwaffe*’s increased activity at Thelepte brought the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion together. The united battalion stayed there almost until the middle of February 1943 when the Germans began to advance along the Gafsa-Feriana road. This German offensive caused the evacuation of the airfield.<sup>169</sup>

The 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion was assigned again to the First Infantry Division as its antiaircraft protection at the Feriana and Kasserine Pass areas.<sup>170</sup> Some parts of the battalion also managed antiaircraft protection for the Ninth Infantry Division in the vicinity of the very important Kasserine Pass and at Sidi-bou-Zid, until the German attacks on Gafsa.<sup>171</sup> During this critical time, Grevemberg’s Battery “C” was assigned to protect one of the field artillery battalions from the First Infantry Division at El Guettar. Grevemberg remembered:

“Battery ‘C’ was overrun at El Guettar, Tunisia by German Tiger and Panzer tanks. I ordered our men to remove the breach blocks from each 40mm gun, black plates from each 50 caliber machine gun, distributor caps from all the vehicles. They were all small enough to put in a uniform pocket. We had dug in the guns all night, and their barrels were not able to depress for us to fire at the tanks. So Colonel Barkley instructed me to get

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<sup>166</sup> Semmens, *The Hammer of Hell*, 27.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>168</sup> Louisiana Department, *Louisiana National Guard*, 10.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 152.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

the men out of there. The battery was in the normal role of defending the 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion of the First Infantry Division. The trucks were parked in waddies, dried up rivers, and this too was the way the men were able to get out. The waddie ran around the side of the last hill before the big plain where the guns and tanks were located.”<sup>172</sup>

The very next day, the First Infantry Division, including the Battery “C”, was able to counterattack against the 10<sup>th</sup> German Panzer Division.<sup>173</sup> For their performance on the battlefield, General George S. Patton awarded Grevemberg and his men the following citation:

“During the period 19 March to 23 March 1943, while located in the vicinity of El Guettar, Tunisia, North Africa, your unit definitely destroyed 14 and probably destroyed 9 enemy aircraft. During the morning of 23 March, positions of Battery ‘C’ and 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Battery ‘A’, were overrun by enemy tanks. Before abandoning their positions as ordered, your men removed vital parts of their guns, rendering them useless to the enemy. On 24 March, all equipment except some motor vehicles was recovered and units resumed functioning.”<sup>174</sup>

On the copy of the original citation, Grevemberg himself scratched the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Battery “A” and wrote above it: “NOT TRUE.” He also typed underneath it: “Battery ‘C’ was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for this battle and was the only antiaircraft unit, during the World [War] II (in the European and the Pacific Theaters of the war) [which received it].”<sup>175</sup> The Presidential Unit Citation is also confirmed in *Louisiana Legacy: A History of the State National Guard*.<sup>176</sup>

In March, the Allied fighter planes finally gained the superiority over the Tunesian battlefields and the Germans’ situation began to be hopeless.<sup>177</sup> The Allies also reduced the survivability rate of attacking German Stuka dive bombers.<sup>178</sup> The situation on the ground now resulted in calling in for more Allied air support.<sup>179</sup> The *Luftwaffe*’s bombers were directed to

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<sup>172</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 52.

<sup>173</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 153.

<sup>174</sup> Document 12-C, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 153.

<sup>177</sup> Williamson Murray, *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe 1933-1945* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1983), 162.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

continue their attacks on Allied controlled ports.<sup>180</sup> This radical change of *Luftwaffe's* strategy eased the Allied troubles in supplying their front troops and also increased German air losses.<sup>181</sup> By end of March, the air and naval Allied attacks on enemy convoys disrupted the last German supply movements to North Africa. During April and first week of May, the *Luftwaffe* lost a total of 177 aircraft.<sup>182</sup> For the *Luftwaffe*, the impact of the Tunisian campaign was costly. From November 1942 to May 1943, the Germans lost a total of 2,422 aircraft, which constituted 40.5 percent of their total air force in the Mediterranean as of November 10, 1942.<sup>183</sup>

During the Tunesian Campaign, the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion's batteries were most often used to protect the field artillery battalions of the First Infantry Division against the German air attacks. The Battery "C" spent majority of the time protecting the 105mm guns of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Battalion. Grevemberg recalled:

"If we had not been there, they [the guns] would have been wiped out because German Stuka dive bombers would attack them several times each day. The Germans had air superiority for most of the Tunisian campaign and without the AAA protection, the [field] artillery would have been wiped out...The bad thing about Tunisia was the lack of AAA being needed. When the First Division was pulled out of the line, the Third Division would be put in their places and after a while the Third Division would be pulled from the line and the Ninth Division would replace them. The 105<sup>th</sup> AAA Battalion would stay in position and fight with each replacement division without being relieved. After the First Division was back up to strength, they would return to the line. It was always good to see our friends."<sup>184</sup>

On May 7, 1943, the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arrived at Bizerte.<sup>185</sup> There, the division and other units of the II Corps secured the city and the heavily damaged port. Simultaneously, the American 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division was advancing east to the Tunisian coast and the British First Army was approaching Tunis, the capital city of Tunisia. Six days later, the war in North Africa ended when the Allies captured a pocket of about 285,000 German and Italian soldiers all of which went into prison camps.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 54.

<sup>185</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 212.

<sup>186</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 54.

At the end of the Tunisian Campaign, the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion was located near Bizerte with the Third Infantry Division which had replaced the First infantry Division there.<sup>187</sup> On May 13, 1943, the First Infantry Division was transferred back to Oran in Algeria,<sup>188</sup> where it had begun the North African campaign. The Division was getting ready for another amphibious operation called “Husky” - the invasion of Sicily. The 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion soon followed their “old friends” to Oran where they were attached to the First Infantry Division again. There, the Battalion was re-equipped with self propelled guns prior to “Operation Husky”.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 152-153.

<sup>188</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 212.

<sup>189</sup> Casso, *Louisiana Legacy*, 153.

## **Invasion of Sicily: Operation Husky**

Since the beginning of the North African Campaign, Captain Grevemberg was very well recognized by Col. J. E. Harriman, the AAA officer of the II Corps, for the superior job he did as the commander of Battery “C” of the 105<sup>th</sup> Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion. Not only that Harriman personally witnessed Grevemberg in action during the landings at Les Andalouses beach near Oran, Algeria, but he also inspected the gun positions of his Battery “C” at the Thelepte airfield in Tunisia. It was after this inspection; when Captain Grevemberg received from Col. Harriman a personal commendation, which reads:

“On November 22, 1942 I inspected the gun positions of your unit and was pleased by their condition. The positions had been in prepared in a superior manner, the materiel was in an excellent condition and the men presented an alert appearance. The results of this inspection, together with a superior state of training and readiness observed by me on November 9, 1942 at Les Andalouses Beach and the prompt manner in which you carried out oral orders issued for a tactical move indicated that your organization has received very careful and thorough training. I wish to commend you for the superior manner in which you have performed your duties as Battery Commander.”<sup>190</sup>

As Grevemberg reflected latter, “This [commendation] caused me to get the Ass.[Assistant] officer post when Col. Harriman was made a Brig. Gen. and returned to the States and Col. Kruger [a West Point class mate of Eisenhower] took over as II Corps AA officer on that general staff.”<sup>191</sup> During the final days of war in North Africa, Major Smiley, Col. Harriman’s second assistant, arrived to the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s Headquarters, where Captain Grevemberg served as an Operation Officer (S-3).<sup>192</sup> Major Smiley carried an order with him and had a very important question to ask. Captain Grevemberg recalled:

“He [Major Smiley] asked me if I would like to take his place on the Second Corps staff...Smiley, would be promoted to a lieutenant colonel and the first assistant, and I would be the second assistant in his place, and

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<sup>190</sup> Document 12-B, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Bibliographical Sketch, Box Official Papers, FCG Papers.

I would be promoted to major. I told him I would be honored to be put on the staff of General Omar Bradley's Second Corps.”<sup>193</sup>

After Captain Grevemberg accepted Harriman's order, he and Major Smiley went together to notify Colonel Barkley, the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion's commander. Barkley also approved the order and Captain Grevemberg was immediately transferred to the II Corps Headquarters.<sup>194</sup> His next mission would be to participate in Operation Husky. It was the largest amphibious operation of World War II with seven Allied divisions in the assault wave.”<sup>195</sup>

Operation Husky was scheduled for the early morning hours on July 10, 1943.<sup>196</sup> It engaged of two separate task forces. The first one, the Eastern Task Force, consisted of the British Eighth Army. Its objective was the invasion of the south-eastern part of the Sicilian coast.<sup>197</sup> The second one, the Western Task Force, was comprised of units of the American Seventh Army and was to land along a seventy-mile long area in the Gulf of Gela.<sup>198</sup>

The main American landings had to take place at Licata, Gela, and Scoglitti. On the left wing, Major General Lucian Truscott's 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division was to land in the port of Licata. He had to operate independently and protect the invasion flank against the Axis forces in western Sicily.<sup>199</sup> Soon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division had to land and protect the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division against the German 15<sup>th</sup> Panzergrenadier Division's counterattack.<sup>200</sup>

General Bradley and his II Corps had to assault the Gulf of Gela in the middle. His objective was a landing stripe of the coast from Gela to Scoglitti. The First Infantry Division with the Rangers had to size Gela and move inland to capture the airfield at Ponte Olivo for the American paratroopers.<sup>201</sup> On the right wing, the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had to land between Scoglitti and Comiso and eventually linked up with the British Eighth Army.<sup>202</sup>

The Allied amphibious forces were to be supported by an airborne task force of the British 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division and American 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. The target of the British

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<sup>193</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 53.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1942* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 55.

<sup>196</sup> Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 142.

<sup>197</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 145.

<sup>198</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 150.

<sup>199</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 228.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 78.

<sup>202</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 228.

“Red Devils” in the early hours of July 10 was the Ponte Grande Bridge over the Anapo River south of Syracuse.<sup>203</sup> By seizing this bridge, the British paratroopers would block the enemy’s attempt to interfere with the British landing troops. The “All Americans” were to be dropped at midnight on July 9. Their objective was to secure the higher ground near Gela and block the enemy’s possible approach to town and landing beaches from the northeastern direction.<sup>204</sup>

A couple of days prior to the launching of Operation Husky, Captain Grevemberg was told by his new superior Colonel Kruger at the II Corps Headquarters that he was assigned for a special task on the D-Day landing in Sicily. Grevemberg wrote:

“I was told by Col. Kruger that he had recommended that he, Major. General Omar Bradley, II Corps C.G. [Commanding General] selected me to take all of the corps enlisted personnel in ‘D’ Day to find the site [for the Headquarters] that had been selected on the map and to set up the tents which were numbered on a map layout.”<sup>205</sup>

Capt. Grevemberg was just curious and asked Kruger why he was selected for this job. Kruger answered him as follows:

“Since the new detachment C.O. [Commanding Officer] had just arrived from the U.S. I told the General [Bradley] that I thought it wise to send in a combat veteran officer. I told him of your extensive combat experience and that I had selected you as my second asst. [assistant].”<sup>206</sup>

About four days after the meeting with Kruger, Captain Grevemberg boarded a Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) with his 147 enlisted men from the II Corps Headquarters in the port of Algiers in Algeria. He was the only commissioned officer on board. He recalled: “We cruised all around the Mediterranean Sea for 9 days and landed without incident the 10<sup>th</sup> day.”<sup>207</sup>

Captain Grevemberg and his men from the II Corps headquarters were on board of one of many LCIs and other vessels of the “Western Task Force” which joined the other invasion convoys near the North African coast. On July 8, 1943, the main convoys from Algeria and Tunisia were departing from their ports of embarkation to join the task force.<sup>208</sup> The invasion

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<sup>203</sup> D’Este, *Bitter Victory*, 148.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>205</sup> Document 13-B, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 58.

troops learned their final destination along the way. Aboard the *U.S.S. Ancon*, the commander of the Oran convoy announced: “We are sailing to Sicily.”<sup>209</sup>

En route to Sicily, George S. Patton, the commanding general of the Seventh Army, issued Order No. 1 in which he advised the commanders of his invasion troops: “Attack both by day and night to the limit of human endurance and then continue to attack.”<sup>210</sup> For his troops, Patton wrote a message which was read across the invasion flotilla:

“When we land we will meet German and Italian soldiers whom it is our honor and privilege to attack and destroy... The glory of American arms, the honor of our country, the future of the whole world rests in your individual hands. See to it that you are worthy of this great trust. God is with us. We shall win.”<sup>211</sup>

On July 9, 1943, all vessels of the Western Task Force had its rendezvous east of Malta.<sup>212</sup> The American convoys then turned to the north and were approaching the Island of Sicily. At the evening of the same day they arrived in the Gulf of Gela. Before midnight, the invasion flotilla anchored just 5 miles offshore from Gela.<sup>213</sup> “Operation Husky” was ready to begin.

Captain Grevemberg landed in Sicily on July 10, 1943 at 08:00.<sup>214</sup> He described the landing of his second D-Day in the Mediterranean as follow:

“I had the job of taking the II Corps Hqrs. [Headquarters] enlisted personnel to the pre-selected site on the beachhead. We landed from an LCI (222 strong) carrying [carrying] M-1 rifles, me too, typewriters small boxes of various items, etc. After we landed I proceeded up the main, black-topped road from the beach, with the men staggered on either side of the road, we had traveled about 2 miles, and hadn’t seen any of our troops, and since we were walking up-hill we could see the ships including the Battleship *Alabama* which was firing its 16” guns over our heads. I noticed that they seemed to be landing about 100 yrd. [yards] in front of us and I thought I could hear artillery firing back. I dispersed all but my two sgts. [sergeants] (one who could speak Italian) back in the woods and instructed them to wait for us and to be alert and ready to defend themselves from behind trees. I told them things didn’t look good. We went in the direction of the sounds, through the woods and saw a

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>213</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 229.

<sup>214</sup> Document 13-B, Box Letters, FCG Papers.



German 88mm Battery firing at the ships. This was the target of the *Alabama*.”<sup>215</sup>

After Captain Grevemberg discovered the German artillery battery and realized that the area of the Headquarters site was not secured yet, he made a decision to take his men and return with them to the beach where they landed that morning. He wrote:

“We had traveled about ¼ mile when a Colonel, walking alone towards us, asked me if we had seen any of his 180<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regt. (45<sup>th</sup> Div.) personnel and I told him I didn’t believe any of our troops were out there. He said that [it] was ridiculous and after telling him about the 88mm battery, etc. He told me I didn’t know what I was talking about and left in a huff... He was captured and spent the balance of the war as P.O.W. [Prisoner of War]”<sup>216</sup>

Grevemberg remembered what exactly the Colonel said to him when he stopped to question about the whole situation on the beaches at Gela:

“I halted the men and he said, Captain, didn’t you forget something? I said don’t think I did, Sir. He said, isn’t a Captain supposed to salute a full Colonel? I said, in combat, we do not salute. This would be the best way for you to get killed. He said I never heard of that.”<sup>217</sup>

The Colonel might not know about the rule of giving the salute in combat. But it is evident that he just wanted to give Captain Grevemberg a hard time because most of the regular Army officers did not respect National Guard officers at that time. The 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was one of the eighteen National Guard divisions which were “federalized” on the beginning of the war.<sup>218</sup> What a surprise it would have been for the colonel if he knew that Captain Grevemberg was actually a National Guard officer too.

After the incident with the Colonel, Captain Grevemberg continued to lead his men back toward the landing beach. There, he talked to an engineer lieutenant who had been working with his company on the beach since dawn. Captain Grevemberg asked him if he had not seen any infantry or artillery personnel. The lieutenant’s answer was negative so Captain Grevemberg continued to search for another officer. He called:

“I have found a Naval Liason officer who had a radio contact with the ship on which Gen. Bradley had an off-shore Hqrs. [Headquarters] and relayed

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<sup>215</sup> Bronze Star Letter, Box Official Papers, FCG Papers.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 56.

<sup>218</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 38.

my message that I was positive the 180<sup>th</sup> Inf. Reg. hadn't landed here and that we couldn't get to the designated II Corps Hqrs. site."<sup>219</sup>

The ship with the General on board was *U.S.S. Ancon*. It was Admiral Alan R. Kirk's flagship, and General Bradley moved his II Corps Headquarters there on July 4, 1943.<sup>220</sup> On board of the *U.S.S. Ancon*, the message from Captain Grevemberg was confirmed and the reserve regiment from the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was sent to the beach approximately six hours later.<sup>221</sup> Captain Grevemberg continued to describe the situation:

"I corralled every man I could find and assigned sectors to officers to cover, in a ditch which paralleled the beach about 200 yards from the water. Before the Infantry Reg. landed we had light German contact on our improvised defense and small weapons fire was sporadic until the Inf. Reg. took over and moved through."<sup>222</sup>

The 180<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was one of the three regiments of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division that landed in Sicily. The 45<sup>th</sup> Division, also known as the "Thunderbirds", was commanded by Gen. Troy Middleton and its objective was to seize the village of Scoglitti.<sup>223</sup> On D-Day, two of the 45<sup>th</sup> Division's regiments landed at the assigned beaches and the third one landed in complete disorder far in the west.<sup>224</sup> The 180<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment probably was the third misplaced regiment for which Captain Grevemberg was waiting for on the beach, and whom he gave a report about to the *U.S.S. Ancon*.

In late afternoon of D-Day, the commanding general of the II Corps landed on the same beach as Captain Grevemberg with the personnel of the Headquarters' Detachment. Grevemberg remembered:

"General Bradley came ashore about 5:00 p.m. and the situation had not improved. I told him I was sorry I did not have his headquarters ready. He said the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry [180<sup>th</sup> Infantry] landed on the wrong beach again. He said the American 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne would drop some men in a little while."<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Bronze Star Letter, Official Papers Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>220</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 220.

<sup>221</sup> Bronze Star Letter, Official Papers Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 264.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>225</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 56.

The 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division did not yet have combat experience. On June 8, 1943 the entire division sailed directly from the United States to participate in Operation Husky.<sup>226</sup> The nineteen ship convoy carrying the 21,000 troops of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division stopped for a week in Oran, Algeria.<sup>227</sup> There, the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the First Infantry Division participated together in the training for the amphibious operation in Sicily.<sup>228</sup>

The practice landings demonstrated that majority of the landing craft were managed by inexperienced seamen because the units landed in the wrong places and frequently many miles from their objectives.<sup>229</sup> General Bradley was deeply concerned what effect this poor performance would have once in real action.<sup>230</sup> He was rightly worried. The two wrong landings of the 180<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on D-Day of Operation Husky proved how badly trained the crews of the landing crafts were. And the worst was yet to come.

Before midnight of July 9, 1943, the first paratroopers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division dropped into Sicily.<sup>231</sup> More than three thousand men from four airborne battalions jumped into the dark night. Their objective was to secure the main road junctions to Gela<sup>232</sup> and protect the landing beaches against enemy attack. Most of the men did not know what their destination was when they took off from North African airport. They were told about the Sicily objective just moments before taking off from Tunisia.<sup>233</sup>

The first night airborne operation in history was to be a fiasco. It started with the midnight drops on July 9. The pilots of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Troop Carrier Wing<sup>234</sup> transporting the paratroopers on board of the C-47 Dakotas were poorly trained. They had practiced for daylight operations only and did not have any experience with night drops. They scattered their precious cargo all over the southern part of Sicily. The pilots entirely missed the proper Drop Zones in the Gela area, located behind the First Infantry Division's landing beaches.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 37.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 155.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>232</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 75.

<sup>233</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 239.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>235</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 231.

The rest of the paratroopers from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division were to be dropped over the Gela-Licata area during the evening on D-Day.<sup>236</sup> In the morning before leaving Admiral Hewitt's flagship *U.S.S. Monrovia*, General George S. Patton drafted a notification regarding the airborne drops to his four divisions. He added to it the following important sentence: "It is essential that all subordinate units be cautioned not to fire on these friendly planes."<sup>237</sup>

All units of the Seventh Army, especially the 1<sup>st</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, were alerted that in the evening 144 cargo airplanes will be approaching and flying over their positions from an eastern direction.<sup>238</sup> At 20:00, the First Infantry Division's Operations Officer (G-3) issued an order for all division units: "Not to fire on planes unless they commit a hostile act."<sup>239</sup> The first C-47s flew over the First Division's landing beach sectors at 22:40 and safely dropped their paratroopers.<sup>240</sup> When the second wave of the cargo airplanes approached disaster happened:

"Within the space of minutes, it seemed as though every Allied antiaircraft gun in the beachhead and offshore was blasting planes out of the sky...Control over Army and Navy antiaircraft gunners vanished ...Some paratroopers were killed in the planes before they had a chance to get out. Other paratroopers were hit in their chutes while descending. A few were even shot on the ground after they landed. It seems that each succeeding serial received heavier fire than those preceding it."<sup>241</sup>

A horrified Captain Grevemberg observed this tragedy on the beach in the landing sector of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. He remembered:

"It was getting dark. The Navy, at that time, had a JU 88 bomber over them, and it was being fired at. Our paratroopers followed the German plane and the Navy thought they were Germans, and the fleet fired on the paratroopers and many paratroopers were killed."<sup>242</sup>

Captain Grevemberg continued to describe in details what he and General Bradley witnessed that evening:

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<sup>236</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 152.

<sup>237</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 107.

<sup>238</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 236.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 56.

“I was standing with Gen. Bradley about 25 yards off the beach... The General said, look how well we can observe the U.S. marking on both wings of the DC-3 [C-47] transports. They are flying about 600 ft. high. I told him it was probably because of the intense cloud of smoke hanging over all of our ships. I said, the firing has been intense since the German bomber departed and their firing has been continuous. I asked him to observe that we can barely see our ships which are firing but way over to our left; the non navy vessels can be seen quite clearly. He nodded his head in agreement. We, all who were observing this calamity, were in shock since our paratroopers were falling from the aircraft with their clothing on fire and before it was over we had seen, about 100 or more, hit the ground and, naturally they died on impact. We also observed one DC-3 explode and four of five crash on impact.”<sup>243</sup>

There are several explanations why this tragedy happened during the Invasion of Sicily. First, from the beginning of the operation, the German Luftwaffe regularly attacked the Allied ships and landing beaches.<sup>244</sup> Second, less than an hour before the airplanes with the paratroopers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Division arrived, the German bombers struck very hard against the ships of the invasion flotilla.<sup>245</sup> Finally, the smoke coming out of the enemy guns on the island and also from the friendly naval vessels caused condition of invisibility over the beachhead and the drop zones near the Sicilian coast.<sup>246</sup>

The second drop of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in Sicily was a fiasco. From a total of 144 planes transporting the paratroopers to the landing zones near Gela, twenty-three aircrafts were completely lost due to both friendly and enemy fire; another thirty seven planes were badly damaged.<sup>247</sup> This second Sicilian wave of the American paratroopers is considered as one of “the worst friendly fire episodes in modern warfare.”<sup>248</sup>

On July 16, Colonel James M. Gavin, the commander of the 505<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, reported that from a total of 5,300 paratroopers participating in “Operation Husky” only 3,900 survived the airborne operation.<sup>249</sup>

After securing the beachhead, the American troops were able to begin their successful offensive in western Sicily. On July 21, Palermo, the capital city of Sicily, fell into American

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<sup>243</sup> Document 13-B, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>244</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 237.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>246</sup> Carlo D’Este, *Fatal Decision: Anzio and the Battle for Rome*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 24.

<sup>247</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 109.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 110.

hands.<sup>250</sup> The victorious troops of the II Corps were greeted in Palermo by thousand of happy Sicilians. After a long period of silence in the evening of the same day, Captain Grevemberg wrote his wife his first letter from Sicily:

“My Own Precious Love: Precious I guess you know by now that I am in Sicily. Everything is going along fine so please don’t worry... I hope you have received all the money orders I have sent...Please save as much as possible because remember it is for our future happiness... We will be apart one year on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Somehow the 27<sup>th</sup> is the day of the month for things to happen to me, married on the 27<sup>th</sup> left you on the 27<sup>th</sup>, sailed from England to invade Africa on the 27<sup>th</sup>, my Sgt. was killed 15 feet from me on the 27<sup>th</sup>, boarded the ship to invade Sicily on the 27<sup>th</sup>, and was transferred to II Corps on the 27<sup>th</sup>. I was also made Bn. S-3 of the 105<sup>th</sup> on the 27<sup>th</sup> now maybe I will be recommended for promotion on the 27<sup>th</sup>. (I hope) I guess many other things have happened to me on the 27<sup>th</sup> that I didn’t remember, but it is really funny how the 27<sup>th</sup> has been my day for almost everything important...I didn’t miss not having had a Coca-Cola in over a year, malted milks, ice cream, sodas, steaks, cakes, pies, etc. What I really missed my precious is the very spark of my life, you. Sometime the longing for you is so terrific that I feel as though I can’t stand it any longer. My own Darling, actually you are my everything ... I adore you completely my love and you will always be my one and only sweetheart. Please think of me half as much as I do of you. Goodnight my precious. I love you Francis.”<sup>251</sup>

In North Africa, Captain Grevemberg had been so involved in the military campaign and in the combat situations that he did not have much time to express his feelings in his war letters to his wife. That quickly changed in Sicily, where he found more time to write Dorothy about his daily life as a soldier and opened his heart to her with his personal concerns. They had been separated for one year and he was thinking about everything important that happened to him since. He felt very lonesome and was reassuring her in his first letter from Sicily how important she was to him as his beacon in life during his stress on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, the “Battle for Sicily” continued. After the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reached the northern coast of Sicily on July 23, the Commanding General of the Seventh Army George S. Patton ordered his II Corps’ troops to begin another offensive, this time toward the Sicilian city

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<sup>250</sup> D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, 26.

<sup>251</sup> Letter to Dorothy, July 21, 1943, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

of Messina.<sup>252</sup> On July 28, General Patton addressed General Middleton, the commander of the 45<sup>th</sup> “Thunderbirds Division”: “This is a horse race, in which the prestige of the U.S. Army is at stake. We must take Messina before the British.”<sup>253</sup>

American troops advanced to Messina from two directions. From the west, General Lucian Truscott’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, relieving the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, was approaching the city on the highway running along the coast.<sup>254</sup> From the southern direction, General Terry Allen’s First Infantry division advanced on the main highway leading to Messina right after securing the city of Enna.<sup>255</sup>

During the advance to Messina, Captain Grevemberg received a letter from Dorothy at the II Corps Headquarters, which had a great influence on his future thoughts and personal feelings. He replied to his wife as follows:

“Precious I miss you terribly and am just as homesick as ever...without you precious and without your love I truly wouldn’t exist. Precious please always value our love above everything else and let nothing disturb it in any way. Our love is too faithful, strong, true and understanding to lose. Not many couples in this world are as perfectly mated as we therefore we should do everything possible to preserve this treasure. We must realize that temporary satisfaction of desires that are actually intended for each other can do nothing but break the actual faith and trust that we now possess. Once it is broken or lost the whole foundation of our great love will crumble. Precious please tell me more about your situation in the office. Is he still the reformed saint that he came back as, or is he back at his old tricks? Please, honestly let me know what is going on. Precious if he makes the slightest wrong move, quit immediately because we don’t need your salary that bad...My promotion papers were approved yesterday by Gen. Bradley...Promotions over here are much harder to get than in the states and ones qualifications over here must be superior, men with excellent ratings are not considered for promotion. The increase in pay counting everything will be about \$ 100.00 per month. Precious I will still send you as much as possible. Precious please give me some kind of account of what you are doing with the money, not that I don’t have confidence in your judgment or ability to handle it, but because I would like to know just how we stand financially. I would like to be kept posted instead of surprised when I return...Precious I am so interested because on this opportunity of saving now hinges our future happiness. I definitely don’t want you to work after I return that will be a thing of the past and you can concentrate on being my precious wife completely...Precious, please write as often as possible, your letters are actually treasured. Give my love to all

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>253</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 143.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

& Happy Birthday again I Adore you completely Heart, body & soul. I love you Francis.”<sup>256</sup>

The contrast could not be starker emerging from his letter about what could be called *Grevemberg's two lives*: on the one hand the putative hen-pecked husband is worried about a potential rival back home that might wreck his marriage; on the other hand the ambitious officer is focused as always on his military career and worries about the slow pace of promotions. Promotions, as we learn from this letter, also came with financial benefits. More pay improved his situation back home. He could pay back his mortgage more quickly and embark on a better life after the war and thereby secure the happiness of his marriage.

Finally, on August 16, the First Infantry Division's advance patrols met the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division troops on the coastal highway west of Messina.<sup>257</sup> During the night, the men from General Truscott's Division entered the city just moments before the escaping German troops boarded the last ferry to the Italian mainland.

The next day, in the morning at 08:00, an Italian Colonel offered the surrender of the remaining Italian troops to the commanding general of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division General Truscott.<sup>258</sup> Two hours latter, General Patton was leading an American convoy into the city of Messina.<sup>259</sup> General Patton, at last, won his race for Messina over the British and the Sicilian Campaign ended after thirty-eight days of tough fighting. “Operation Husky” was accomplished and Captain Grevemberg had to get ready for his next invasion landing.

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<sup>256</sup> Letter to Dorothy, August 11, 1943, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>257</sup> Wheeler, *The Big Red One*, 258.

<sup>258</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 519.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.



## Invasion of Italy: Operation Avalanche

Since August of 1943, the Allies have made tentative approaches to Marshal Pietro Badoglio's government regarding the unconditional surrender of Italy.<sup>260</sup> The Italian government really did not have other options but was afraid of the German reaction. The Allies were convinced that the unconditional surrender was necessary in order to enlist Italy's service against the Germans because Italy had a lot to offer - a navy, a big army, and an air force. The Axis military force in Italy was a real threat to the smaller forces of the Allies. There were approximately thirty-five enemy divisions in Italy outnumbering the Allied troops.<sup>261</sup> The Allies made a compromise with the Italian Government: "the proclamation of the Italian capitulation would coincide with the Salerno landing."<sup>262</sup>

While the Allied planners were working on the final plans for the invasion of Italy, Captain Grevemberg again sent a letter to his wife, talking about the progress of the war and his enormous desire for her:

"My own Darling: Precious I received your V-letter of July 29<sup>th</sup> and realized that you are mainly responsible for whatever success I might attain, because in me burns a terrible strong desire to have my precious proud of the man to whom she has given her all. Every success attained is actually yours because it is your inspiration, your confidence and your undying love and devotion that gives me the determination to be successful, without you my precious this determination would be negligible. As you have already heard Sicily is now ours completely and we are all wondering, what next? This was actually war in the mountains...and exceptionally suitable defensive terrain. Sometimes I wonder how we managed to take certain places or how anyone could for that matter...Precious I am very well and safe but miss you unbearably...[I] am living in hope of holding you in my arms again forever and ever in the not too distance future. Give my love to all and always love me completely as I do you. I Love you Francis."<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Carlo D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean: Major Battles and Campaigns* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1990), 80.

<sup>261</sup> D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 33.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Letter to Dorothy, August 19, 1943, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

As became his custom, Grevemberg turned from the heat of the battlefield to gain emotional comfort by communicating with his wife.

The Salerno landings were carried out by two Allied corps of the Fifth Army commanded by Lieutenant General Mark Clark with a total strength of 55,000 assault troops.<sup>264</sup> On the left, the British X Corps was to land with two infantry divisions and advance towards Naples.<sup>265</sup> On the right was the U. S. VI Corps commanded by Major General Ernst J. Dawley<sup>266</sup>, which would land only the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Texas National Guard) commanded by Major General Fred L. Walker.<sup>267</sup> Parts of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were assigned as a floating reserve for the VI Corps.<sup>268</sup>

Operation Avalanche began in the early hours of September 9.<sup>269</sup> Captain Grevemberg recalled his third D-Day as follows:

“I was an advisor to the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade on D-Day near Salerno, Italy, the worst D-Day in which I was involved. We almost got knocked off the beach. I was an observer. If it were not for the purple heart boxes, also known as AAA half-track, or coffin boxes, we would not have survived. This vehicle was a combination of a large mounted 40mm gun on a half-track vehicle intended to function as a tank destroyer. This vehicle was sometimes effective against tanks, but more useful as mobile artillery. About ten lined up on the beach, and when the German infantry came up, they were mowed down by the gunners in these AAA half-tracks. I had nothing to do with this. Someone else coordinated this assault on the Germans. That is how we got through it.”<sup>270</sup>

The invasion beaches of Salerno were heavily defended by the German 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division<sup>271</sup>, which used every weapon available for stopping the Allied advance to the beachhead. Among the first American troops receiving a tremendous baptism of fire was also the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade to which Captain Grevemberg was assigned on the D-Day as an advisor. At 03:00, the first troops of the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade came ashore near the ancient site of Paestum.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 199.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> D’Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 86.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>268</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 199.

<sup>269</sup> D’Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 92.

<sup>270</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 57.

<sup>271</sup> D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, 39.

<sup>272</sup> The Officers and Enlisted men of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade: *Two Years on Foreign Soil: 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade May 1943-May 1945* (No place of publication, 1945), 7.

Despite the enemy fire from the air and ground, the brigade was able to establish its gun position on shore and use its fire power against the enemy's air attack.<sup>273</sup>

The landing beaches were rapidly changed into death traps.<sup>274</sup> The landing crafts transporting the American assault troops were constantly under enemy fire from machine guns, mortars, antitank guns, antiaircraft guns, German tanks firing from further inland, and especially from the deadly Germans 88mm guns at the beachhead.<sup>275</sup>

Many soldiers never made it to the landing beaches because many landing craft were directly hit on the way to the shore. Other landing craft exploded after they hit enemy mines placed in the Gulf of Salerno, or were destroyed by attacking *Luftwaffe* fighter planes. The amphibious operation quickly turned into chaos, when the correct landing beaches were missed and the troops, supplies, and vehicles were dropped on shore in a sporadic and haphazard manner.<sup>276</sup>

Even though the Germans were outnumbered by the Allied troops, they had the advantage of controlling the higher ground and thereby the beach exits. By doing so, they threatened to drive the Allies back into the waters in the Gulf of Salerno.<sup>277</sup> The result of the clever German tactics was that the battle for the Salerno beachhead never became a single coordinated Allied operation since the three landing forces had to fight their own battles.<sup>278</sup>

General Clark, the commanding general of the Fifth Army, ordered the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to launch a rescue mission. On September 12, two regimental combat teams of the "All Americans" were dropped into the Salerno beachhead just before midnight.<sup>279</sup> In the battle for Salerno, the presence of the American paratroopers was a key factor. Their night drop became "the most successful Allied airborne operation of the entire war."<sup>280</sup> The next day it became clear that the Allied troops could not be forced back into the sea. The German counter attack failed and the German hope for victory at Salerno vanished.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 94.

<sup>275</sup> D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 39.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 95.

<sup>278</sup> D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 41.

<sup>279</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 229.

<sup>280</sup> D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 41.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

The same day, Captain Grevemberg was back at the II Corps Headquarters in Sicily and wrote to his wife another letter of deep longing:

“My Own Darling: Precious heart I received your letter of Aug. 13<sup>th</sup> today... Oh my precious if I could have only been with you for your vacation. I would be satisfied to hold gorgeous you in my arms again. [It] would be the realization of my greatest ambition. You stated that you no longer possess sex appeal or the desire for sex but I definitely know better. I know the meaning of sex appeal and you definitely have it... Just wait until I return and you will wonder how or why you ever made the statement that you have lost all passionate desires. I definitely haven't but it doesn't bother me except when I concentrate on beautiful you heart, body and soul... I am very much pleased to learn that E.V.L. is definitely not up to his old tricks, please keep it that way my love... I am feeling fine and am getting very good food at present. I have an exceptionally good sun tan and am definitely taking good care of myself. I wish my promotion would hurry, it should be here any day. I found one reason why it has been delayed. It did not leave 7<sup>th</sup> Army Hqrs. [Headquarters.] until Aug. 28<sup>th</sup> and it should take not longer than 20 days to come back to me after making the various channels at Higher Hqrs. I will write a V-mail as soon as I do receive it... Precious how is the garden coming along? Is it meeting your expectations? Are the various plants growing healthily? What else have you bought for the house? What did you buy for yourself for your birthday present from me?... Precious I love you completely and am always thinking of you and missing you beyond bearing. I adore you. Francis”<sup>282</sup>

The impatience of the young officer for his promotion that was due blended with the desperate desire for his wife.

Just four days later Grevemberg received his promotion and shared the great news with his wife in a V-mail as promised:

“My Own Darling: You have probably already noticed the change of rank. It came in this morning... I am quite thrilled to be called Major and to be wearing the appropriate insignia... It took such a long time because of the various activities that are taking place over here at this time. Everything is going along fine so please don't worry. I still adore you completely and always will. Give my love to everyone and please write often. I haven't received the leaves yet but probably will soon. Please always love me completely. I love you Francis.”<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Letter to Dorothy, September 13, 1943, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>283</sup> Letter to Dorothy, September 17, 1943, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

The news was also announced in the *Times-Picayune* with Grevemberg's picture and the following text:

“ADVANCE IN RANK – Francis Carroll Grevemberg, whose wife, the former Miss McGuire, resides at 6610 Louis XIV street, has been promoted from captain to major in the army coast artillery anti-aircraft forces serving in Sicily. He is the son of Mrs. Oneida J. Grevemberg, 1408 First street, and Frank B. Grevemberg of Baton Rouge.”<sup>284</sup>

In this way the home front was informed about the success of its native sons on the distant fields of battle.

During the fall of 1943, Major Grevemberg attended together with his superior Colonel Kruger a meeting at the Fifth Army Headquarters. There the top ranking officers, including the officers from the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division<sup>285</sup>, discussed the crossing of the Venefro River. Major Grevemberg recalled the meeting as follows:

“We were going to have to cross the Venefro River and construct a pontoon bridge, which they thought should be able to handle an M15 AAA half-track gun, which was top-heavy. All of the VI Corps, II Corps, and Division ranking officers were in the meeting. I asked the number of the bridge and was told the number of the bridge. However, I informed the officers at the meeting that I tried to cross a gun, M-15 half-track of that type, over that same type bridge in Sicily and the gun toppled over into the river. I insisted that this bridge would not take an M15 gun. And the G3 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army, a full colonel, said I was wrong. He said he would send this gun over this bridge. I stood up and said the bridge wouldn't take that gun since it was top-heavy and I recounted the incident that occurred in Sicily. He asked my branch and I told him AA artillery. He did it anyway...”<sup>286</sup>

The day of the crossing, Colonel Kruger and Major Grevemberg went to see the M15 half-track in action. Grevemberg remembered: “When the half-truck got in the middle of the [pontoon] bridge it topped over and knocked the bridge out.”<sup>287</sup> It did exactly what Grevemberg had predicted at the meeting. The same day, Brigadier General Aaron Bradshaw, the

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<sup>284</sup> *The Times-Picayune*, September 30, 1943.

<sup>285</sup> Document 14, Box Letters, FCG Papers.

<sup>286</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 57.

<sup>287</sup> Document 14, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

Commanding General of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade, who was also present at the Fifth Army meeting, witnessed what happened on the Venefro River.<sup>288</sup>

After this incident, General Bradshaw called Colonel Kruger to the II Corps Headquarters and requested to meet with Major Grevemberg. Grevemberg remembered:

“I went to meet with General Bradshaw of the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps, and he kept me on a loan basis, to help plan for Anzio. We went over all logistics of landing an AAA force on the Anzio beachhead, even selecting gun position on the map. I asked where his operations officer was, and General Bradshaw replied, ‘I’m getting rid of him.’ He said, ‘You are going to be my operations officer.’ I said, ‘Not me, General. Colonel Kruger has me to be rotated to the States. I have to see my wife. I miss her terribly, and I have been in combat sixteen months. He said, ‘That does not mean a thing. *The war comes first* [emphasis added].”<sup>289</sup>

Grevemberg recalled what followed after his meeting with General Bradshaw. He wrote: “The next day I received orders to report for duty with the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade. I reported on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1944 and as part of the advance party I landed D-Day Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>.”<sup>290</sup> Grevemberg’s private life had to play second fiddle to the progress of the war.

Before his transfer, Grevemberg wrote to his wife:

“My Own precious Darling: Today I received your letter Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> and must say I was terribly surprised. You have definitely misunderstood my letters. I have implicit trust and faith in you and your ability to handle our financial matters. I will say that your letter hurt me deeply because you above all always seem to understand me and you above all should know me better than that...I asked for the balance etc on the home mainly because I had the thought of paying everything on the home until it is completely paid for thereby possibly saving one or two thousand dollars that we will actually have to pay if we continue paying for it so slowly. If you don’t want me to take any interest in our future then I won’t and you can do whatever you wish. Actually I wouldn’t care if you would spend every penny of the money foolishly because it doesn’t mean a thing to me at present but I am determined to be the sole breadwinner of our household when this war is over and that you will not have to work one minute after I return...I say that I have spent a very minimum on myself

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<sup>288</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 57.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>290</sup> Document 14, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

since I have been overseas but I want you to realize that I don't throw my money away like the average officer or enlisted man over here. Actually there is nothing to buy except things that I am not interested in at present. (Coniac [sic], wine and women)...I am sending you everything I possibly can mainly because I have complete trust in you and complete faith in your ability to handle it properly...several days ago Army Hqrs.[Headquarters] called Col. Kruger and requested that he release me to become S-3 (operation officer) of a certain AAA Brigade which would also carry a promotion to Lt. Col. He asked me if I would like to take the position and I naturally said yes...I told him I didn't care about the promotion but I wanted to be in position where I could do the most good and possibly speed my return to civilian life...I have no ambitions in the army when the war is over...I never intend to argue or fuss with you again because you and you alone are my very life, I adore you completely and always will in this life and the next...Please, please, always return my love completely... I adore you completely cross my heart. Francis"<sup>291</sup>

Grevemberg once again mixes his satisfaction over professional advancement with his persistent angst over matters back home.

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<sup>291</sup> Letter to Dorothy, January 10, 1944, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

## Landing at Anzio: Operation Shingle

During the early hours of January 22, 1944, the Allied Task Force 81 commanded by Admiral Frank J. Lowry and transporting the allied troops of the VI Corps, arrived at the coast of Anzio-Nettuno area.<sup>292</sup> The landing at Anzio was called “Operation Shingle”. Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, the Commanding General of the VI Corps, later wrote in his diary: “We achieved what is certainly one of the most complete surprises in history. The Germans were caught off base and there was practically no opposition to the landing.”<sup>293</sup>

Major Grevemberg similar to General Lucas described his feelings about the landing in Anzio. He recalled: “We landed on the beach at Anzio, my 4<sup>th</sup> ‘D’ Day, before dawn and caught them [the Germans] surprised! Most were still asleep. Of the five D-Days I had, this was, by far, the easiest. But later, it turned into the worst mistake we could have made.”<sup>294</sup>

The only major problem the Allies were facing was the landing speed of their troops and equipment. In the landing sector of the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps north of Anzio, the soft sand beaches halted many vehicles.<sup>295</sup> The British also had to clear a large amount of floating mines off the coast. By the afternoon, in the American landing sector, the Port of Anzio was secured and ready for awaiting LSTs to unload their cargo.<sup>296</sup> By the end of the Anzio D-Day, there were 27,000 American and 9,000 British troops along with 3,000 vehicles ashore in the Anzio beachhead.<sup>297</sup> The total casualties were thirteen killed, ninety-seven wounded, and forty-four missing.<sup>298</sup> Unfortunately, one of the captured Allied soldiers carried with him a copy of the entire plan of “Operation Shingle”.<sup>299</sup>

The VI Corps had secured all of its objectives within the first day of the landings. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division gained control over seven miles of the Anzio-Albano road and also seized the bridges over the Mussolini Canal.<sup>300</sup> The bridges were very important for securing the right flank of the Anzio beachhead. Along the Moletta River in the British sector, only a single brigade

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<sup>292</sup> D’Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 134.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 58.

<sup>295</sup> D’Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 135.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 363.

<sup>298</sup> D’Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 135.

<sup>299</sup> D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, 123.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 123-124.



from the 1<sup>st</sup> British Infantry Division held the left flank of the beachhead.<sup>301</sup> The rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was held back by General Lucas as the VI Corps reserve force.

Within two days of Operation Shingle, the VI Corps expanded the Anzio beachhead to seven miles inland, which ran from the Mussolini Canal to the Moletta River. Colonel William O. Darby's Rangers, together with paratroopers from the 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment commanded by Colonel Rueben H. Tucker, reinforced the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division and secured the left flank by taking a strong position along the vital Mussolini Canal and its western tributary area.<sup>302</sup>

On D-Day, the Germans had less than a thousand troops around the Anzio-Nettuno area.<sup>303</sup> By end of the first day, the Germans moved an additional 20,000 men<sup>304</sup> to the vicinity of Anzio. On D-Day plus seven days, the total German force the Allies faced was nearly 70,000 troops.<sup>305</sup> It was just a matter of time when the Germans would use this powerful force for a counterattack to push the Allied troops back into the sea.

The Allied forces planned an offensive against the German troops on January 30-31 but failed.<sup>306</sup> During the second week of February, the German counteroffensive began and the VI Corps troops were forced to play a defensive role. Major Grevemberg remembered the day of the German counterattack as follows:

“On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 10 German divisions attacked us. Our field artillery was very effective and did so much. We fired our 90mm AA guns in a field artillery capacity, and our timed fuse air-burst broke up troop concentration. Our very high muzzle velocity 90mm guns would get the shells there before they could see or hear them coming. We had B-17 bombers dropping bombs, flying low about 1,000 feet. The Germans were en masse, like 1917 style. These bombs did a lot to disrupt the German advance. I got permission to use our 90mm as field artillery... We had 90mm guns dug in and used air bursts - fifteen to twenty feet over all of the advancing Germans. Each gun could be fired at a rate of about twelve rounds per minute, and we were firing at a rate of six rounds per minute. We had four battalions with 64 90mm guns, and we would fire all of them

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<sup>301</sup> D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 136.

<sup>302</sup> D'Este, *Fatal Decision*, 124.

<sup>303</sup> D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 134.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 147.

simultaneously. God only knows how many we killed, but many were killed. These guns played a great part in saving our beachhead.”<sup>307</sup>

On the morning of 16 February, the critical phase of the battle for Anzio began.<sup>308</sup> The skies over the Anzio battlefield were filled with a heavy smoke, clouds and dust from the German massive artillery barrage. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division and the 715<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division led the second massive German attack called “Operation Fishfang” on the Allied positions in the Anzio beachhead.<sup>309</sup> The next day, the Germans continued to attack the VI Corps positions with a total of fourteen battalions with no consideration for casualties. That day, B-17 and B-24 bombers flew in direct support of the Allied army ground forces.<sup>310</sup> Major Grevemberg remembered:

“On the 17<sup>th</sup> day of February with six [German] divisions, we did the same thing [as on the February 6], and the [Army] Air Force did the same thing. The center of our front where our divisions met the British - the Germans pushed two miles in and our troops met tough opposition from the Germans for a moment, but the Germans quit. That was fortunate for us. They would [have] wiped us out.”<sup>311</sup>

The losses of the Operation Fishfang were high on both sides: the Germans counted 5,389 killed, wounded and missing; and the Allies had total of 3,496 casualties.<sup>312</sup> After his capture, one of the German prisoners said that “the slaughter at Anzio was worse than anything he had experienced, including Russia.”<sup>313</sup>

After “Operation Fishfang”, General Lucas as the Commanding General of the VI Corps was dismissed from his post by General Sir Harold Alexander, the Allied Commander of Ground Forces in Italy. Gen. Alexander was displeased with Lucas’ leadership and believed that he was just too tired.<sup>314</sup> On February 22, General Lucian K. Truscott, the commanding general of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, officially replaced Lucas as commander of the VI Corps.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 59.

<sup>308</sup> D’Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 152.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>310</sup> D’Este, *Fatal Decision*, 234.

<sup>311</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 59.

<sup>312</sup> D’Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean*, 154.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

Six days latter, Major Grevemberg described his feeling to his wife:

“My Own Darling: Yesterday I received two more delicious letters from you...I’m so rushed, busy making a million decisions...*If censorship regulations permitted* [emphasis added] I could write for hours about what is taking place here at presents this is my world until I retire at night then until I drift of into sleep I am always there with you and many nights I dream of being there with you in your arms so contented in your embrace. Maybe I should tell you I am in the Anzio Beachhead...our position here is strong and there is nothing to worry about and know that we are permitted to tell that we are here. I would prefer to tell you myself because, I’ve never hidden anything from you and never intend to. I’m sure you won’t worry if I honestly assure you that our position here is OK. I wish I could tell you of the details of the place but that’s impossible. I have been here since the beginning and am very familiar with the situation so please don’t worry my heart and remember that all these months of combat have definitely taught me how to take care of myself...Look back for Life Magazine of Nov. Dec. or Jan. and read the article on L.S.T.’s Then picture the number of landings that must be made in the Pacific. These boats land the assault force and receive a terrible amount of punishment. It was the only assignment that I was praying Al and Don wouldn’t receive. Don’t for God’s sake tell Mother or sister about this. Honestly precious please thank God Don didn’t become assigned to one of those and I will say again I know because I’ve seen...My precious never let the thought enter your mind about my trust and faith in you to handle our financial matters. You are my very life and everything you think, everything you say, everything you plan influences me completely and I want your complete trust and faith to be worthy of this thrust and faith in my eternal ambition. Please promise me that you will no longer entertain the idea of joining some branch of the service. My precious I want you to stay home where I know you will be when I return. If I can manage to come home I want you to be there and not over here or in the Pacific. Please promise me you won’t because if you do I will become valueless over here through worry. I adore you completely as ever and am only existing until you are in my arms again. Give my love to all. I adore you Francis”<sup>316</sup>

In his letter he gives his wife an inkling about the nature of amphibious warfare; yet he is worried as usual, this time about his wife signing up in the armed forces herself.

For his outstanding service in Italy from January 25 to June 5, 1944, Grevemberg was later awarded the Legion of Merit. The citation reads:

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<sup>316</sup> Letter to Dorothy, February 28, 1944, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

”Lieutenant Colonel Grevemberg, as Plans and Training Officer, 35<sup>th</sup> Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade, demonstrated enthusiastic leadership, and unusual foresight in planning and supervising the antiaircraft defense of the Anzio beachhead and preparation of these forces for the break-through and drive to Rome. Through his superior tactical knowledge and experience he originated and put into effect forward area barrages to protect Infantry troops from the enemy aerial attack during the hours of darkness. Also through liaison with Field Artillery units he developed a system of counter-battery field artillery to protect antiaircraft installations from the enemy artillery during air attacks. In preparation for the break-through to Rome he planned the antiaircraft portion of the attack in such a way as to lend additional support to Field Artillery fire and to insure adequate antiaircraft protection during the rapid advance. Entered service from New Orleans, Louisiana.”<sup>317</sup>

Grevemberg is cited as a Lieutenant Colonel because he received his second battlefield promotion on May 7, 1944 in the Anzio beachhead.<sup>318</sup> He was very proud particularly about one suggestion of his, namely ”My idea to get two smoke detector companies up to Anzio was probably the most important because it saved lives immediately.”<sup>319</sup>

When General Bradshaw obtained the first company, they were able to use it for protection of the ships off shore and also for those ships which were unloading their cargo at the docks. During the daylight hours, they used a light haze through which they could observe the enemy’s aircraft.

Grevemberg continued: “I wasn’t able to sell the General on the idea of covering the entire beachhead with the second company to protect everything from horizontal vision, including most of our line infantry units.”<sup>320</sup> What really sold the idea to General Bradshaw was the fact that he could see through the light smoke vertically and also that the light smoke prevented him from observing objects two to three hundred feet away.<sup>321</sup>

After his personal experience, General Bradshaw wanted to introduce Grevemberg’s idea to the VI Corps. Major Grevemberg wrote:

“He [General Bradshaw] brought me down to VI Corps Hqrs.  
[Headquarters] immediately sought a conference with the Corps

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<sup>317</sup> Document 17 A-B, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>318</sup> Certificate of Promotion, Official Papers Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>319</sup> Document 17 A-B, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

Commanding General, MG [Major General] Lucian Truscott and his staff and he had presented it to them. He assured them it didn't obstruct our antiaircraft gunners' vision and Gen. Truscott immediately told his operation officer to get a smoke company up to the beach as soon as possible. You might ask, how did I know so much about smoke since I had no training along those lines? When at II Corps I spent several days (and nights) with the British First Army when they were trying to cross the Venefro River in an effort to dislodge the Germans from the Abby [sic] on the Mount Cassino. I noticed that when they used smoke pots to obscure their troops crossing the river I saw that I could easily see our aircraft and vertical vision was 20/20. This smoke screen covering the entire beach area proved to be exceptionally effective and prevented the Germans from being able to pick off individual targets as they had done since we first arrived on the beach. I am [more] proud of the fact that I engineered this procedure than anything I accomplished during my entire military career."<sup>322</sup>

Major Grevemberg's prolonged experience on the battlefields of North Africa and Italy had given him the wherewithal to be a tactical innovator, next to applying his vast experience as an antiaircraft artillery operator. It was this type of professional growth that impressed his superiors again and again that contributed so much to the grinding yet successful advance of Allied citizen soldiers against the well-dug in Nazi Wehrmacht.

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

## Invasion of Southern France: Operation Dragoon

On June 11, 1944, the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade was relieved from the defense line above Rome for planning of the Allied amphibious operation in the Southern France.<sup>323</sup> The 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade spent three weeks on the beach near a small town called Santa Marinella, situated approximately fifty miles north of Rome.<sup>324</sup> There the Brigade was re-equipped and trained for the forthcoming operation. For the first time since the Salerno landing, the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade was able to spend some free time for adequate recreation. There were plenty of passes to Rome, long drives to Naples, and the staging area at Bagnoli.<sup>325</sup>

By the beginning of August, the final plans were completed for Operation Dragoon.<sup>326</sup> Every effort was made to make the landings of the Allied troops in Southern France successful. Since the antiaircraft artillery proved to be so valuable during the Italian campaign, the planners properly anchored it in this new venture. Now under the command of the Seventh American Army but still operating with VI Corps, the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade was charged with providing AAA defense for the landing, setting up ashore as quickly as possible defenses on the beaches until relieved, and moving inland with the advancing troops.<sup>327</sup> To be able to accomplish its mission, the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade was given some of the most experience units from the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, practically all units which were under the Brigade's command in the Anzio beachhead.<sup>328</sup>

Finally, the day of the deployment came and the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade together with other antiaircraft artillery units embarked with the invasion ships in the port of Naples. Their uneventful journey to the shores of Southern France began.<sup>329</sup> On August 15, 1945 at 08:00, the first wave of assault troops landed at the beaches of Southern France.<sup>330</sup> Among them were men from the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade who once again fought under the command of General Lucian Truscott, now the commanding general of the VI Corps.

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<sup>323</sup> 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade, *Two Years on Foreign Soil*, 9.

<sup>324</sup> Francis C. Grevemberg: "Activities of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade," *The Coastal Artillery Journal*, vol. 90, no.3 (May-June 1947): 5

<sup>325</sup> Grevemberg, "Activities of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade," 5.

<sup>326</sup> 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade, *Two Years on Foreign Soil*, 9.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Grevemberg, "Activities of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade," 5.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

The VI Corps' mission was to establish and secure the beachhead, rapidly advance inland and connect with the American airborne task forces to secure the coastal airfields. The assault plan of Operation Dragoon employed three infantry divisions. On the left flank, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was to land and secure the coastal strip from Cape Cavalaire to the Cape of St. Tropez.<sup>331</sup> In the middle, the 45<sup>th</sup> "Thunderbirds" Division was to assault the center of the landing area from Cape St. Tropez to Point Alexandre.<sup>332</sup> On the right flank, the 36<sup>th</sup> Texas National Guard Division was to attack and advance from Point Alexandre to the Agay Region.<sup>333</sup>

The Allied assault on the southern coast of France was a big surprise for the Germans and a great success for the Allied troops. On end of D-Day, all combat elements of the VI Corps landed as planned and were advancing inland. By midnight, 2,041 German prisoners had been taken and Allied casualties were minimal due to only scattered enemy resistance.<sup>334</sup>

Lt. Col. Grevemberg recalled his fifth and last D-Day in the Mediterranean:

"My fifth and last 'D' Day was Southern France where we landed at the Toulon-Cannes area and [met] very little resistance. The Germans thought we were to land closer to northern Italy and had their main force deployed there. The Germans retreated so fast we had a hard time keeping up with them but when we reached the German border the resistance was severe. During the landings and on the way to Germany we captured 230,000 Germans and we were told that they were all being sent to the United States, which broke our hearts."<sup>335</sup>

Five days after the landing, Grevemberg wrote his first letter from France to Dorothy:

"My Dear Precious: I am permitted to tell you that I'm in Southern France. Everything is moving along rapidly now. Our trip over was uneventful and the initial landings were only lightly opposed. Yes I think the 'square heads' [Germans] are just about finished and won't last very much longer. When you heard the news of our landings here I imagine you more positive. I was taking part in them. This country is truly beautiful and reminds me very much of Southern California. Almost all the homes here are in beautiful settings and are of the large modernistic type are well built (mostly cement) well kept and more like the U.S. than any I've seen so far. One surprising thing over here is the number of trees and pine trees

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>335</sup> Photo of Francis & Dorothy with text, Pictures Box, FCG Papers.

at that. If it wasn't so hilly it would look like La. [Louisiana]. Precious I'm very busy, working along fast but safe & sound with just a slight cold now. I adore you Francis"<sup>336</sup>

With the stress of the battlefield abating, Grevemberg finally finds more time to write letters to his wife.

After their landing in Southern France, the troops of the VI Corps rapidly advanced with great speed more inland and up the Rhone Valley.<sup>337</sup> In the fall of 1944, the troops were halted to regroup before their advance through the Vosges Mountains.<sup>338</sup> For centuries, the Vosges Mountains were considered by any army as impregnable. Now, the American troops of the VI Corps were getting ready to cross them. The campaign for the Vosges Mountains was inaugurated around September 21.<sup>339</sup>

Prior that Lt. Col. Grevemberg had received after a long period of time a not very pleasant letter from Dorothy. He replied:

"Dear Dorothy: Today I received my first mail since I left the staging area in Italy and I'm so upset that actually I'm shaking and feel as though I should cry my eyes out but then that would do no good...I didn't tell you but after I received one of your letters some time ago telling me that Billy was returning I had a dream and the dream affected me so much that I was in a daze for several days. I know how much he always tried to get next to you and through that he would have a better chance after returning home as a dashing pilot...I'm positive he is the one you have [made] reference to... I know how hard it must be for you to always be alone but you knew that I simply cannot endure the very thought and I was positive you had finally convinced yourself that I was the one man for you and your childish flirtations were a thing of the past. As I told you not too long ago – I would not tolerate anymore of that because I'm just not capable of doing so anymore. I told you that I loved you so completely that I couldn't possibly bear the thought of someone even looking at you...Billy surely did do a good job of selling you on the idea that my chances to come out of this war were very slim (the dirty little rat)...This past 2 years has been a terrible experience for me in many ways but mainly because my very heart body and soul was thousands of miles away from me...Precious don't ever let anyone try to convince you that I will not return and most of all that I will not remain yours completely forever and ever...I want you to promise me this - one week after you receive this letter I want you

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<sup>336</sup> Letter to Dorothy, August 20, 1944, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>337</sup> Grevemberg, "Activities of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade," 6.

<sup>338</sup> 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade: *Two Years on Foreign Soil*, 10.

<sup>339</sup> Grevemberg, "Activities of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade," 7.



to quit your job. Immediately after you read it I want you to notify ELV that you will leave. That will give him one week's notice. If the notice is immature to him I want you to quit immediately. I want you to do this more then I have ever wanted you to do anything before and I will not take no as an answer...Precious you must realize the importance of my position and remember that I am dealing with men's lives...I hope you realize just what your 'flirtation' has done to me...Everyone has been asking me what is the matter...They say I look bad and have a distant expression in my eyes like I'm staring into space...(the Col.) said 'what is the matter with you this morning?' I answered - to be perfectly frank my morale is lower now then it has ever been in my life and I don't give a dam about this war my position or anything over here, all I can think of now is going back home to my wife '? He said-'if your mails affect you that way we will have to keep it all from you in the future.' He said -'My God the war is almost over and you have to luck up and stick it out, we all want to go home that's the prime thought of everyone over here.' So you can see I get no sympathy here because we're all in the same boat. I will repeat again that I am serious about your job and want you to send me airmail as soon as you do quit. If you don't decide to quit then send me an airmail saying so and then you will not have to worry about having me return because then I definitely won't but will volunteer for every dangerous assignment I can obtain until--- [death]. Don't tell him why you are quitting (but if you do) but you can tell him that I've been trying to have you do it and that I'm planning on returning soon and definitely do not want you working when I return and that I want you to quit immediately so you can relax and rest until I return. I love you completely, heart, body, and soul, you are my whole life my very existence and I think you truly love me the same way but if not I will learn in sufficient time and a divorce will not be necessary to free you of me. I love and adore you completely but am brokenhearted and all mixed up. Francis<sup>340</sup>

Grevemberg became emotionally disturbed to the point of paranoia about the thought of his wife's infidelity. Clearly, unceasing battlefield stress was taking its toll on the man. As usual he wanted to micromanage his wife from a distance of thousands of miles.

The 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade under the command of General James R. Townsend participated in the drive through the Vosges Mountains. Over the VI Corps' sector, the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade during the Vosges offensive engaged thirty-two enemy aircraft which resulted in six destroyed and two probably destroyed with no damage to the Corps's installation or its troops.<sup>341</sup> The Brigade continued to provide protection for all elements of the Corps and was using the M-15 and M-16 self-propelled guns on half-tracks as infantry support weapons. They used their 90mm guns as

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<sup>340</sup> Letter to Dorothy, September 5, 1944, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>341</sup> Grevemberg, "Activities of the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade," 7.

the integral part of the Corps field artillery fire power.<sup>342</sup> During the sixty days of the Vosges offensive ending November 24, the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade's heavy battalions fired 25,086 rounds on 1,300 ground targets and the daily average was twenty-one missions.<sup>343</sup>

During the heavy fighting in the Vosges Mountains, Lt. Col. Grevemberg received a very important answer for what he had been waiting for so long - he expressed his relief about this news in a letter to Dorothy:

“My Own Precious: Today I received your letters...Precious I'm so sorry I misunderstood your letter (the bad one)...I know full well you are not like those girls about whom you wrote. I know you have been completely faithful to me my heart and I know that you would never deceive me. One thing I don't regret about my letter and that is, because of it you are no longer working at Fox or anywhere and naturally I feel much better because I know now that you can do as you desire and mainly you will not have to take orders from a few nincompoops who didn't mean anything to you except a weekly salary... Above all, please don't feel guilty about not being the breadwinner of the family, that's my responsibility and you are now where I've wanted you since we were first married – in the home – that's where you belong. ..I can imagine how disappointed you were about my Christmas leave-so was I, but I don't think it will be very long after Christmas and I'll be home on a 30 days leave so please don't lose faith in it...I'm so pleased that you were happy over the citation because everything I do is a result of my desire to have you take pride in me-your husband and as a result the credit is actually all yours because without you and your implicit love-I am nothing believe me my heart, this is actually true. However, my success has really kept me from you because I've been kept here only because I couldn't be spared for the time required to accomplish the leave. I'm sure I will get one though not too long after Christmas. The Gen.[General] has promised me and he is not a man to go back on his word-I know...Oh my precious adorable heart, I love you so completely and miss you so much that this separation is actually unbearable...I adore you my own precious heart, body, and soul. I am yours completely as ever. I love you Francis.”<sup>344</sup>

His success as an officer continued to compare with the uncertainties over his relationship with his wife. The endless separation from her was a continuous challenge for his

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Letter to Dorothy, November 2, 1944, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

emotional stability and at the times impacted his job performance as we have seen in the previous letters.

Grevemberg wrote to his wife about the proposed citation from General James R. Townsend for the award of the *Croix de Guerre* which reads:

“Francis C. Grevemberg, Lt. Colonel, CAC. Operations Officer, Headquarters, 35<sup>th</sup> Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade, for distinguish service to the Government of France from 15 July 1944 to 15 October 1944. Through his own indefatigable efforts, intelligent foresight and superior tactical and technical knowledge, Lt. Colonel Grevemberg formulated the detailed plans for and supervised the landing of approximately 10,000 Antiaircraft Artillery troops, which comprised all of the troops of this type that participated in the landings in Southern France. This difficult and complicated task he skillfully put into operation in such a way to obtain the maximum efficiency of all subordinate units of the Antiaircraft Artillery command. As the advance progressed, Lt. Colonel Grevemberg superbly deployed the Antiaircraft Artillery units so as to consistently and continually defeat all efforts to the German air force directed at advancing American combat troops as well as French civilians and villages in the zone of advance. He installed an enemy aircraft warning services for the protection of French civilians and was thereby instrumental in warning many civilians, who were through necessity in the battle area. When the First French Army landed in Southern France, Lt. Colonel Grevemberg re-disposed his Antiaircraft batteries to provide better protection for the French Army’s landing beaches, and by so doing met and repelled enemy air attacks directed at the beaches, resulting in no casualties or damage being sustained by the French Army. Entered military service from New Orleans, Louisiana.”<sup>345</sup>

By the end of November, the VI Corps fought its way through the main part of the German defenses in the Vosges Mountains to the Colmar plain, where the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade was ordered to the north.<sup>346</sup> There, elements of the VI Corps attacked through the eastern Alsace against the famous Siegfried Line and some elements of the Corps were able to penetrate behind the German border.<sup>347</sup> Yet the German surprise counteroffensive in the Ardennes prevented the troops of the VI Corps to continue their rapid advance. Instead, the troops had to withdraw from

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<sup>345</sup> Document 20 A-B, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>346</sup> 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade: *Two Years on Foreign Soil*, 10.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

their advance to a more defensive position. On January 2, 1945, the 35<sup>th</sup> AAA Brigade was forced to withdraw for the very first time in its history from Chateau de Walbourg in Alsace.<sup>348</sup>

During this crucial time, Lt. Col. Grevemberg had his wife on his mind. He could not wait to be with her again and expressed his feelings in his last letter from the European battlefield:

“My Heart: I’ve been so so busy that actually I haven’t had time to write but don’t be alarmed because everything is OK and going according to plan. Today I received your cute little card – precious actually I’m every bit that lonesome too and I’m sure it won’t be long and I will be on my way home for a 30 day leave if nothing else- at least that will be better then nothing don’t you think? ...Yesterday I sent you a box of perfume...I’m enclosing a copy of ‘Beachhead News’ which was founded on the Anzio Beachhead you should also get a special copy along with the perfume. This will probably give you an idea of what we do over here especially the AA copy. I have [not] heard any more news about the French decoration but I do know that it was submitted however I’m not concerned about it – if it comes thru fine, but if not I won’t lose anything. My one and only ambition my love is to be in your loving arms again, nothing else matters believe me my heart if I could just have you in my arms again-even here I would be in complete heaven...as a matter of fact no happiness what –so-ever is attainable by me without you sharing everything with me completely. Precious I love you completely heart body and soul as always you are my one desire my whole reason for existence. I love you Francis”<sup>349</sup>

While his battlefield stress was subsiding the longing for his wife and return home was increasing.

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>349</sup> Letter to Dorothy, January 7, 1944, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

## Lt. Col. Grevemberg's Return Home

On beginning of February 1945, at last Lt. Col. Grevemberg's biggest dream came true. On February, 4, he was leaving the European Theater of Operations from Paris.<sup>350</sup> Two days later after a long flight, Lt. Col. Grevemberg arrived in New York, where he purchased a railroad ticket from his own money and boarded a train to his hometown. The journey from New York on the East Coast to New Orleans in the Deep South took him two days by train. Finally, after two and half years overseas and in combat he met his wife. Francis and Dorothy spent twelve days together in the Crescent City before they boarded another train together on February 20, which took them to Fort Bliss in Texas<sup>351</sup>, his next assignment. Lt. Col. Grevemberg remembered:

"I finally came home to attend a special school and Dorothy and I went to Fort Bliss together where I was to attend a special school on a new type arty. [artillery] shell radar fuse and take back the info. [information] to my brigade personnel. However, I became ill with 106 [degree] fever the first day of school and was sent to the base hospital where I remained for 16 days. By the time the doctors released me the war had ended in Europe. I was scheduled to go to the Pacific but the war ended there too. Glory be!"<sup>352</sup>

Lt. Col. Grevemberg stayed at the Williams Beaumont General Hospital in El Paso, Texas, until March 19.<sup>353</sup> That day he got permission to leave Fort Bliss to go back home to New Orleans for one month sick leave.<sup>354</sup> After his return to Fort Bliss, Texas, Col. Grevemberg served as an assistant operations officer (G-3) at the AAA Headquarters there until August 28.<sup>355</sup> On the beginning of fall, Lt. Col. Grevemberg received a letter from Major General G. Ralph Meyers dated August 31, 1945:

"Dear [Lt.] Colonel Grevemberg, on the occasion of your return to civilian life, I extend to you the grateful appreciation of the Antiaircraft Artillery and the Army of the United States, for the services rendered by you while on active duty. All the time of your entry on active duty, our armed forces

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<sup>350</sup> Voucher for Reimbursement of Official Travel Expenses, Official Papers Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Photo of Francis & Dorothy with text below, Pictures Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>353</sup> Special Orders March 19, 1945, Official Papers Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> World War II Service Record, Official Papers Box, FCG Papers.

were small and our equipment was scarce and inadequate. Our well prepared enemies were able to obtain initial success on all fronts. We were faced with the task of creating a well equipped striking force of overwhelming strength as quickly as possible. Our success in this task is evidenced by our recent victories. We regret losing you, but it is only fair, since the mission has been successfully accomplished, that you be permitted to return to your civil occupation without further delay. Your contribution to the successful accomplishment of our mission should be a source of deep personal satisfaction and is sincerely appreciated by the Antiaircraft Command. I extend to you're my personal wishes for health, happiness, and success in your future undertakings. Sincerely G. Ralph Meyer Major General, USA Commanding.”<sup>356</sup>

Lt. Col. Grevemberg did not want to stay in the regular Army after the World War II was over. He wrote:

“General Meyers ...had offered me a permanent rank of Major if I would agree to stay in the regular Army. I refused that offer and told him that I was positive that I could do better financially and for my wife and hopefully my children.”<sup>357</sup>

After his release from the military service, Francis Grevemberg went back to work for Community Finances<sup>358</sup>, he had worked before the war. He entered the civilian workforce again on the second floor of the S. H. Kresse building in New Orleans. In 1947, Francis and Dorothy sold their house at Louis XIV Street in Lakeview for a down payment. The same year, they purchased the Miramar Hotel in Pass Christian in Mississippi and moved there.<sup>359</sup> They owned the hotel for about two years and sold it. Than they moved back to Lakeview and purchased a new house.

In 1949, Dorothy gave a birth to twin sons named Francis and Carroll.<sup>360</sup> Francis’ lifetime dream about a happy family life with his wife and children came true. He had endured five amphibious landings to enjoy these days: “D-Day North Africa, the entire Tunisian Campaign, D-Day Sicily, D-Day Italy, D-Day Anzio Beachhead, D-Day Southern France, five D-Days total. 2 1/2 years in combat, lucky to be here!”<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Document 22-B, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Grevemberg, *My Wars*, 61.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>361</sup> Document 12-D, Letters Box, FCG Papers.

Lt. Col. Grevemberg passed away at the age of ninety-four on November 24, 2008, in Conyers, Georgia. He had been living there with his wife Dorothy since the Hurricane Katrina strike New Orleans in 2005. His wife reputedly still lives with one of their sons in Georgia. Their second son lives in New Orleans.

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## **Vita**

Robert Janous was born on December 23, 1976, in Prague, Czech Republic. In 1995, he came to study as an exchange student for the first time to the USA. He graduated from Littlerock High School, Littlerock, California in June 1996 with a high school diploma. Then he returned back to Prague where he finished his high school studies and graduated from Gymnazium Nad Stolou in May 1997. Upon finishing his high school education, he was accepted by the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague where he majored in Contemporary History. In 2004, he came to study for one semester as an exchange student at the University of New Orleans. Upon his return to Prague, he received his M. A. in History at Charles University in December 2007. During the fall of 2007, he decided to apply to the Graduate School of the University of New Orleans and pursue another M. A. in Military History. In May 2010, he received his second Master of Arts in History from the University of New Orleans. He is married to Marketa Janousova, and they currently reside and study in New Orleans, Louisiana.