

Couch, Paul

## Local Men in Army Field Service Have Reunion On Battlefront

JUN 24 1944

A happy reunion of four Bethlehem young men took place recently somewhere in Italy, and word and picture of the occasion was received by Mrs. William Johnstone of the Saucon Valley from her son, George Holton. The young man's letter gives a vivid word-picture of war in the Italian Theatre.

Learning that T-Sgt. Paul Couch, son of Mrs. F. F. Couch, of 30 West Market St., grandson of Mrs. Paul deSchweinitz and the late Bishop deSchweinitz, was with the Army nearby, young Holton in his work with the American Field Service, met T. Sgt. Couch. Later when James Gerhardt, son of Mr. and Mrs. R. B. Gerhardt of 31 East Market Street and Oliver Barres Jr., son of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Barres of 942 Linden Street, both of whom are with the AFS as ambulance drivers, arrived at the same

he stated, but the fact that the ship was Bethlehem built "helped some!" He told, too, of his dugout or fox-hole on the beach, covered with a shutter from a wrecked house at Anzio which made an "excellent roof and would hold up a good layer of dirt on top."

"Shells landed in the area around my dug-out," he wrote, "and at times the dirt on the roof would spray down on me and my bed. Several times it rained and made our lives in those holes in the ground quite miserable: I spent hours catching the water dripping through the roof in my helmet and mess tins in order to try to keep my bed and kit as dry as possible."

"The Germans occasionally would shell the place with a special long range gun; troops affectionately called this gun 'Anzio Archie.' About half our AFS cars were at various forward posts and these would bring the casualties back to the medical area where patients would be treated and held for evacuation by sea."

He told of one of his fellow workers who was shot down by a Messerschmitt, when a bunch of them appeared in the sky as he was unloading wounded from his ambulance and of the difficulty the doctors had in saving his life. Holton stated that the AFS was doing a fine job, that many were wounded and a number suffered from shell-shock—"slightly bomb happy," he called it. Every ambulance and AFS car has had a good spraying of holes from bomb and shell fragments; concussions of explosions knocked out many windows and wind shields and four cars in his unit had been completely wrecked, he said.

"The beachhead always looks like a real war," Holton wrote. "Everyone is either down in his dug-out or rushing around at his job. There is an almost constant smoke screen over the place that adds to the effect. It's not a pleasant feeling being confined to such a small area, all of which can be covered by enemy shell fire."

"Jerry is on one side and your back is to the sea; there's no way of getting 'away from it all.'"

After his return from the Anzio beachhead, he states that he had a few days leave, so went to Naples where "I was fortunate to be when Vesuvius had the biggest eruption in over 70 years. For days it was quite a sight, especially at night, when all the red lava and fire came shooting out and running down the mountainside."

"I got a few pictures of the weird slow moving lava streams and of the lava shooting up in the air. One good thing about lava coming at you and not shrapnel is that you are able to see the lava nad jump out of the way! (That is, if you're quick. We went right up to the edge of the crater at first, but several days later, Vesuvius really blew its 'lid' and sprinkled the surrounding farms and villages. If it doesn't take a war to make these poor people miserable and homeless it's got to be a volcano."

Similar interesting letters have been received by the mothers of the other three young men in the group.

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