

The following article is from the June 26, 1945 edition of the "Lorraine Cross" the 79th Division's bi-weekly newspaper. It has been copied "as is" except for the formatting (column width, indentations and spacing). At least two of the names are misspelled. William Shadell should be spelled Shadel, and Lee R. Chappnell should be Chappell. Also, the author mixes up Chappell's name with that of his hometown, Travis, TX.

[Off topic, but interesting to note, is that the correspondent, William Shadel, later became a CBS News anchor and was the first host of *Face The Nation*. He also moderated the third Nixon-Kennedy debate in 1960.]

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SPRINGFIELD '03 OR GARAND M-1? DIVISION SNIPERS IN HAGENAU VOTED DECISIVELY FOR GUN THAT "HITS THEM WHERE IT HURTS"

(The following research was prepared last January for William Shadell, war correspondent representing the Columbia Broadcasting System and the magazine, "American Rifleman". Men quoted in the research were interviewed at that time at "Snipers Roost," in Hagenau.)

by T/4 Sam B. Lyons

Sniping as an accepted, continuing mode of warfare has enjoyed little if any popularity with line company soldiers of the 79th Infantry Division. Soldier testimony on the subject ranges widely, but there is near-unanimity on these basic objections: 1) Sniping is a German-Japanese standby. 2) It is the trademark of an army in retreat. 3) Ninety-plus percent of its effectiveness is psychological (except, of course, for the guy who gets sniped). 4) The elements of fair play and good sportsmanship are completely lacking.

In his precipitate retreat across France, the enemy did much to encourage this antipathy. His snipers were second only to his mines and booby traps in nuisance value. Given a gun, extra ammunition and iron rations, they were planted with calculated cunning in the path of the Allied advance. Some of them waited patiently for two or three days before opening fire, then exercised scrupulous care in choosing their targets. Large groups of moving vehicles were rarely fired on, for there were stragglers and "isolationists" to provide targets aplenty. Snipers turned up at crossroads, in the middle of quartermaster and service units, in field hospitals, in church steeples and attics. One killed two helpers in a graves registration depot before he in turn was spotted.

Change In Policy

In the early days of the Normandy campaign, captured snipers confessed that they had accepted the assignments because their superiors stressed that they had nothing to fear in the event of capture.

"I was told to fire until my ammunition gave out, and then give myself up," one PW testified. "Our group was reminded repeatedly that the Americans do not torture or shoot their prisoners."

True, Americans do not torture or shoot their prisoners. But Americans could and did cut down on the number of sniper-prisoners. It is not known whether news of this change in policy reached the kraut brass. It is known that enemy sniping declined sharply after the policy became operative.

On the Seventh U.S. Army's Alsatian front, where both sides were alternately on the defensive, the art of sniping – and it is an art – reached a new and active high within the Division. In Hagenau, line company doughs found sniping a pleasant and profitable means of killing time and krauts. The Springfield '03 rifle, with telescopic sights, became increasingly evident. Originally issued on the basis of three rifles per infantry company, some companies boasted of as many as eight, the surplus having been obtained from those men who still swore by the M-1 as the unbeatable, all-purpose rifle.

M-1 The Best?

And the great majority of men interviewed, snipers included, swore by the M-1. Objections to the Springfield were many and varied: “Too clumsy.” “I don't like the single shot – it's too hard to reload in a hurry.” “The 'scope is too loose – it wiggles after the least little handling.” “The 'scope frosts up (clouds) in this climate. You get ready to squeeze one off, and all of a sudden you're looking through a tube of fog.”

Lack of familiarity was another frequently heard complaint: Only two of those interviewed could recall formal training with the Springfield. One said his training stopped after three classes – “just when we were getting interested.” The other said his unit had been given a couple of lectures and firing sessions in England, “but the guy who lectured knew very little about it.” A company commander summed up the unspoken sentiment of several men:

“The '03 is designed for the soldier who genuinely loves his rifle. It requires a hell of a lot of painstaking care that the average soldier just doesn't feel inclined to give it. He knows that the M-1, with an occasional so-so cleaning, can take a terrific beating and still deliver in the clutches. That's all he demands of a rifle. I've only had one lad in my company who really appreciated the '03. He looked like a bum – wouldn't wash his face once in six weeks without a direct order to do so. But he worked over that Springfield two and three hours a day, every day. And it paid off: I've seen him drop a jerry at almost 900 yards with one quick shot. Me? I vote for the M-1.”

He Likes The '03

One advocate of the '03 was S/Sgt Leo W. Marshall, of Montezuma, Indiana, a squad leader:

“I've been potting at krauts as they run across an intersection. I'm shooting over the sill of a ground-floor window, using it as a rest, and I estimate the range at a little under 900 yards. Jerries running across this intersection are usually in sight three or four seconds. That's not very long, but I'm pretty well zeroed in and I've been getting my quota. It took me about a day and a half of steady firing to get zeroed, and by that time I became used to the scope. Here in the city, where we're shooting down narrow streets flanked by connecting houses, windage isn't a factor. The jeries themselves help out a lot. Say five of them start legging across that intersection, and I open up. Instead of keeping on, they'll stop and mill around and then go back where they came from. All I do is sit tight. And in a couple of minutes the squareheads try again. One group did that yesterday, and I bagged two of them.”

Sgt Theodore Duncan, of North Redondo Beach, Calif., another squad leader, condemned the Springfield's single-shot aspect. "It's too hard to reload," he declared. "Lots of time you just spin or stagger jerry with your first shot. By the time you're ready to shoot again, he's under cover. With an M-1 you can have another slug in him before he knows what the score is."

PFC Lee R. Chappnell, of Travis, Texas, was another M-1 man. He was holed up in a second-story window overlooking an intersection some 800 yards away. He'd zeroed his M-1 by the simple expedient of lining it up with tracers on a signpost at the intersection. The krauts had not spotted his hideout, and he had an excellent field of fire: Potential targets left a basement about 25 yards below the intersection and, believing themselves under cover, hugged houses and store fronts until they reached the corner. Then they started running. Travis, using the sill as a rest, was picking them up in his sights as they left the basement, and firing when they reached the intersection. His windage estimates were "strictly Kentucky," and they seemed adequate. In his first session from this particular spot, he chalked up one "certain" and one "probable". He didn't like to visit the same spot too frequently, because kraut observers were prone to augment suspicions with action. Two of his previous hideouts, a school building and a church steeple, were riddled by heavy mortar and .88 fire soon after he vacated them.

"The '03 might be a better gun if a fellow had time to sit down and get the hang of it," Travis said thoughtfully. "But up to 800 yards an M-1 is hard to beat. And for anything less than 300 yards, the carbine gets my call."

Wait 'Til He Stops

T/Sgt Raymond Rj. McElhaney, platoon leader and ex-forest ranger from Hydetown, Pa., was dubbed "King of Sniper's Roost" by his platoon. McElhaney conceded that the '03 is a "shooters rifle," but his favorite is the M-1. His post commanded a snow-covered field, separating a block of suburban houses from similar blocks occupied by krauts. Targets were rare, and most of those were in snow-camouflage suits. But he managed to bag two with the M-1, at five and six hundred yards, and another with the '03, the last a beautifully executed shot at something under 850 yards. His commanding officer, 1/Lt F. D. Miller, of Racine, Wisconsin, who witnessed the shot, testified that "the kraut never knew what hit him. He just crumpled up and stayed there until his buddies came out after dark and picked him up."

Uncontested claimants of the local sniping jackpot were sharpshooters of Company "K", 313th Infantry. They were dug in on a seemingly quiet front one morning when a single file of krauts started across a road fronting the company area. Receiving permission to fire, a rifleman dropped the leader. The rest of the kraut line retreated. A Whermacht medic, waving a king-sized Red Cross flag, rushed to the fallen man, wagged his head dolefully, and dragged the casualty to the protection of a heavily wooded ditch. Minutes later this little routine was reenacted. Then a third time. Before the morning was over, M-1 operators were matching, odd man out, for targets. And before the methodical square-heads decided that enough was enough, the sweating medic had evacuated 18 (official count) casualties.

Years after this war, however, men of Company "F" 315th Infantry, will argue that while sniping is a pleasant pastime, no sniper will ever equal the rifleman afield – the man who can peel off a snapshot that counts when the chips are down. Best of several cases in point occurred last November, when the Division was pounding through the Foret de Parroy, last great natural barrier in its dash to the Saverne

Pass entrance to Alsace. Fox Company was holding a ridge deep in enemy territory when Sgt Frank M. Keyes, of Knobel, Ark., on outpost, spotted a jerry, two American prisoners in tow, heading rapidly for the enemy line. The range, later paced off, was just under 250 yards. The jerry, with admirable caution, kept his prisoners between himself and the American line. Keyes didn't hesitate. Resting his M-1 on a log, he drew a bead and squeezed one off. The kraut staggered. A second shot dropped him for good. His prisoners, off at the crack of the first shot, reached the line and safety in nothing flat. Take it from them: Longer shots will be registered in this man's war. But they won't come any better.

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