

UNDER ENEMY FIRE!

How faith in God upheld him through eighteen months at the Front in four major battles, is told by one of our young men. At home on a short furlough he gives the following vivid account of his experiences as an ambulance driver.

"I FEEL that it is just a miracle that I am alive today. Many times I wondered, when out on the battlefields, if I would ever be back again. But I would think of the many who were praying for me, and God would drop a promise into my heart and I knew He would see me through. Many times driving an ambulance, under enemy fire, or in a foxhole —when the shells were falling — God would bless me; and I knew that back on the home front they were praying for me, and I would praise God for a people who could really pray and get an answer—although thousands of miles away.

"I was inducted into the Army March 25, 1941; but I thank God that for six years previous to that time I had the privilege of knowing what God could do in one's life. I shall never forget the feeling I had when I entered Fort Lewis, Washington, for training. Some of the buildings were stone and some wood, but they all looked cold and dreary.

"After 18 months of training in different camps, I was ordered to a port of embarkation. And before leaving I received a 3-day pass and was at home in Medford, Oregon, for three days. That was in September, 1942. Those were the last Gospel meetings I had; but God put something in my soul that carried me through.

Going Across

"After reaching the port of embarkation we knew we were getting ready to go across: we did not know when or where. Finally we loaded on the ships and started across the ocean. That was a day I shall never forget. It was hard to leave the United States and leave our friends and God's people behind. Our convoy was the largest that had ever sailed the 'Atlantic — something like 850 ships. There were several thousand men on the troopship.

"I believe every one of those boys was praying. Their hearts were heavy. Many of them were saying good-by to their homeland and their homes for the last time. Many of them are lying over there, buried on those foreign soils. They gave their lives that we might have freedom—most of all, freedom to worship God.

Escaped Submarines

"All the way across, our convoy took a zigzag course to escape submarine detection; and we were strongly protected by airplanes. It seemed that God protected our convoy — not a ship was lost going over. We did not know where we were going to land until three days before we reached our destination; the officers then told us it was to be Fedala, French Morocco, in North Africa. They said they did not know what to expect, or how it would be, but that we should be prepared for the worst.

"The enemy expected us to land at Dakar, a little farther south, and had a pack of submarines waiting for us there. I believe God directed those submarines to the wrong place. If we had landed in Dakar perhaps much of our convoy would have been sunk, and even the landing might have been a failure.

Landing in Africa

"On those landings, they call it 'D-Day and H-Hour.' That would make D-Day November 8, and H-Hour 5: 30 a. m. The boat I was in went in on the first wave. Just before we reached the shore, a big enemy searchlight was turned on our boats; then they opened up on us with machine-gun fire from both shores

in the harbor. Their spotlight was turned directly on the boat I was in. Tracer bullets from machine guns were going through the air and were rapidly drawing closer.

"The tracer bullets are chemically treated so they show red when in the air, and one can see where the bullets are going. It looked, every minute, as if our boat would be demolished and every one of us killed! But right then God stepped in. The searchlight suddenly went out! Many of us knew it was the hand of God which caused that light to be shot out at the very moment the bullets were just about to hit us.

"The bullets went wild after the light went out. We began our landing. There is a very strange feeling that comes over one when he steps out into the dark upon enemy territory. You do not know what to expect. You run up the shore with a feeling, that the enemy is all around you. You feel it is time to do some praying. You realize you need God.

The First Battle

"This was our first battle and everyone was just a little confused. They were running from one place to another. Locations were strange. The battle began to grow in intensity. They used machine guns and artillery on us; and then they began strafing us with airplanes. I did not talk with a boy who didn't pray during that battle. Few expected to come out of it alive. Many of them did not. "I remember as I went up that beach I could see the people of God back here praying for me. I just looked up to God and told Him I was going to trust Him, whatever came. Right there God promised me that I would come back. He dropped that promise down in my heart as though He came down and spoke to me that I was going through that battle and coming back to the United States again.

"About the third night after we had made the landing one of our boats was sunk by a submarine. The next night two more boats were sunk by submarines. We had to watch those boats sink. Later on we received the casualties — the men from those boats who were burned and wounded. Many of them did not live to reach land.

Wounded Men Bombed

"We had taken over a big hotel for a hospital. It was really pitiful to see those men —some of them burned beyond recognition —hundreds and hundreds of them. One of the boats caught fire after it was hit and the men dove overboard right into the burning oil and of course they were severely burned. Some of them had lost arms and legs in battle.

"I shall never forget our first casualty. He was hit by a bomb down on the beach. He ran all the way from the beach to our aid station with his arm practically blown off, and he was also hit in the head and leg. He dropped down as he reached the aid station and said, 'Pray for me that God will help me; I do not want to die; I have a family to go back to.' We did pray for him right there. I do not know how far-reaching those prayers were; but it was an encouragement to know they called on God when the need came.

Finds Friend

"I was in Morocco about a month and a half when I learned that my friend N— T—from Portland was near there. I was looking for him when I received a note from him saying he was at Casablanca, about forty miles from me. At my first opportunity I started in search of him, going from place to place. Then some- one told me where his outfit was. At last I found him, and I walked in on him along toward evening, just as he was going through the line to wash _his mess kit.

"I walked up to him and called his name. N— just dropped his kit and we threw our arms about each other. It was indeed a happy meeting in that foreign land. It made us feel mighty good to be together. We had a grand time comparing experiences and talking about the friends back home. We would often take our Bibles and read and have a prayer meeting.

More Training

"Later our outfit was called to move up to Tunisia. On the way we stopped for more training. There is one thing in the life of a soldier which compares with that of a Christian: he never reaches the place where he does not need more training and does not need to work toward perfection or he will be dishonorably discharged.

'In his second letter to Timothy, Paul the Apostle wrote to Timothy from a Roman prison where he was under the guard of soldiers. He told Timothy to 'endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' He said: 'No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath Chosen him to be a soldier.'

Invasion of Sicily

"From Tunisia we again went into training for the invasion of Sicily. We knew, from the type of training, that we were to make an amphibious landing. Great masses of equipment and boats were made ready in the harbor. The Germans said it would be impossible to invade Sicily — it was so well fortified. As we moved out into the Mediterranean, many of the boys were downhearted. They did not joke. Many of them had the feeling it would be our last battle. Many took out their little Testaments and read them. Some of them came to talk with me about God; and I thank God I could tell them of God's salvation.

"Then after we were on the Mediterranean a day or so, one of the greatest storms in the history of the Mediterranean came up. The sea began rolling until the waves were from twenty to forty feet high. It looked as if our great convoy of 3000 or more ships would be dashed to pieces as those waves struck. To make a landing in that terrific storm was next to impossible.

A Mighty Miracle

"Then a mighty miracle was performed. About midnight of the night that we were scheduled to make our landing those waves began to go down. I know it was the hand of God that calmed those waves. Then another thing happened which proved to be a real miracle and showed that God knew what He was doing. About midnight all the searchlights on the shore turned on and swept back and forth across the water lighting up our invasion force as if it were daylight. It looked to us as if the enemy could see every ship.

"We thought all their great shore batteries would be opened on us. But those rolling waves were the very thing that saved us. The rays of light hit those waves and were deflected so that those on shore could not see one of the boats out there. The thing we had worried about turned out to be God's plan to save us; and he worked it out His own way.

Battle of Palermo

"Our first objective was Palermo, about 180 miles from our landing. We were fighting mostly Italians there. The Italians gave up very easily. They were tired of the war; they had been through years and years of it. The people of Sicily and of Italy have suffered more than anyone could ever tell. They have been driven from their homes; they have been bombed and strafed and shelled, and have gone through all kinds of privation. Many have had their homes caved in and many of them have been killed.

"I have thought of our own nation here. I believe it is only the hand of God that has spared us these things. Many times the boys over there would say: 'I am so thankful this is not happening to my country.' I believe God honors the fact that we do reverence Him. But there is much corruption right here in our own land; and many have turned from God. There is the beer and the whiskey and all those things; and it is a stench in the nostrils of God. God hates those things. Sooner or later God may let the same thing come upon us unless our nation is cleaned up.

Landed in Italy

"We had about thirty-seven days of action in Sicily. After a rest period, word came we were to go to Italy. We made our landing at Salerno. The Germans were still shelling the beaches, and were close enough to shell the beach with their artillery fire. The artillery shells range all the way from an inch and a half to sixteen inches in size, the big ones weighing up to three hundred pounds. Most of them explode like a bomb. Many of our men were killed or wounded from the shell fragments. At last the enemy gave up his hold on the beach and we went on through almost to Cassino when we were stopped short by the Germans. It was there our real battle started.

In Enemy Territory

"On one occasion as we went to get some wounded men we met some of our stretcher-bearers coming back. I asked them where the wounded men were. They directed us to the 'first house on the right.' It was dark and we were close to the German lines. We thought it was the house along the road; so we went around the bridge that had been blown up and then back to the road, and then on to the first house on the right.

"We waited there for about twenty minutes and did not see a sign of anyone. I began to wonder if I was in the wrong place. My assistant driver got out and looked around and came back and said: 'I do not know if there is anyone there or not; but I am afraid to go over there.' I said: 'Maybe we have gone in the wrong direction.' We drove back and found we had taken the wrong road and had driven behind the enemy lines.

"A day or two later one of the Germans who was captured, in replying to a guard, said: 'You know where we were! You were up there the other night with that ambulance!' We had been in enemy territory, and I do not know why they did not capture us, except that God spared us.

"The Germans always mine their roads and it was nothing less than a miracle that we did not hit one of those mines. The mines contain a large charge of powder. If they are set off they blow a vehicle all to pieces. I truly believe it was the hand of God that saved us that day.

"A night or two later we went up into the hills again in answer to another call to come and get some wounded men. We followed a trail going back into the hills. I pulled up into a field and began gathering up my patients. I gave one of them blood plasma and was going after more wounded when there was a terrific explosion right behind us. A jeep had hit a mine, killing two men and wounding many more. We had just come over that same road!

"We found there were mines all over that field, and we had to drive back out of there. I kept sending up a prayer as I drove back through there, and God guided me so that we did not hit a mine. A night later I went into that place again. I just started to turn around when the Germans heard me. They opened up their batteries, and shells were dropping thick and fast. When they let up a little I drove on where I was supposed to pick up my first patients. We put them into a ditch to protect them from flying fragments. Twice shells landed where I would have been in a moment — and I would surely have been killed had not the hand of God protected me and brought me safely out.

The Anzio Beachhead

"Later in the fall we started preparing to make a landing on Anzio Beach. We were expecting strong opposition; but the Germans had been caught unawares and we landed with very few casualties. However, it took only a day or two for them to bring troops in; they soon had a strong ring around us, and started shelling us. I think it was considered the hottest spot in military history up to that time. Thousands and thousands were killed and many thousands more were wounded. At one time our leaders thought we were going to have to evacuate, or be driven from the beachhead.

"The battle lasted about four months. We had to live in dugouts — the only safe places. Shells dropped

and the shell fragments flew in all directions, but the enemy had to get a direct hit on a dugout in order to kill or wound. The dugouts had timbers over them and then dirt, and they afforded good protection from enemy fire. I was driving ambulance much of the time and was out on the road. When one is driving he does not have the protection of a dugout.

Wounded by Shell Fragment

"On March 6 of this year I was hit by a shell fragment while on the Anzio Beach. The doctor who treated me said it was a miracle that I was not killed.

"The piece of shell that struck me hit my helmet first, and that slowed it down and kept it from going deeper into my neck. As it was, it only injured a nerve and within a short time I was out of the hospital and back on duty. We were shelled and bombed right in the hospital.

Started Home

"On the 11th of May I left the Anzio Beachhead and started on my way home. I was taken to Naples where I was put in the replacement depot. I was there about three weeks. While there we had to wait for ship space to bring us home; and from time to time they called off a list of names of those who would be going home. I went up several times to listen for my name. Finally my name was among the list called to go home.

"I thought that is much like it will be when the Lord comes. There will be some people ready, and have their names on the list who will go up to meet the Lord. Some will fail to have their names on the list, and they will be left behind.

Remembers Boys Over There

"Now my thoughts turn to the many boys over there. I have seen many of them who were brought up in homes of infidelity, homes where parents ridiculed and discounted the Word of God, and God's name was not revered; and I have heard them say they wished they could pray. Here are some words of a poem that was found on the body of a young man who was killed in action:

**Look, God, I have never spoken to You,
But now I want to say, "How do You do."
You see, God, they told me You didn't exist.
And like a fool, I believed all this.**

**Last night from a shell hole I saw Your sky;
I figured right then they had told me a lie.
Had I taken the time to see things You made,
I'd have known they weren't calling a spade
a spade.**

**I wonder, God, if You'd shake my hand;
Somehow I feel that You will understand.
Funny I had to come to this hellish place,
Before I had time to see Your face.**

**Well, I guess there isn't much more to say,
But I'm sure glad, God, I met You today.
I guess the "Zero hour" will soon be here,
But I'm not afraid since I know You're near!**

**The Signal! Well, God, I'll have to go;
I like You lots, this I want You to know.**

**Look now, this will be a horrible fight;
Who knows, I may come to Your house tonight.**

**Though I wasn't friendly to You before,
I wonder, God, if You'd wait at Your door.
Look, I'm crying! Me! Shedding tears!
I wish I had known You these many years.**

**Well, I have to go now, God, Goodby;
Strange, since I met You, I'm not afraid to die.**

"The writer of that poem was brought up in a home of infidelity — but he found something. One night in an old foxhole, gazing up in the sky, he realized there was a true and living God. He realized those infidel teachings were not any comfort to him out there. He realized there was a God up there Who was saying: 'Give Me your heart.' And that night he cried unto God — and God met him. '

"I believe many of those young men who are out. on these bloody battlefields are seeing the glory of God in the heavens, and are crying out to Him in time, and God is saving them when they turn to Him; and I believe we will meet them in Glory.

"I want to say to you, those boys need your prayers! They need God — every one of them! And as I go back it will be wonderful to know that here in the United States of America there are people holding up my hands before God in prayer." — J. W.