



Reverend Leonard F. Todd

1.

CHAPLAIN

Recalling good times and bad with the 382d



BY
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Volunteering for the army was no big deal for Reverend Leonard F. Todd. Sunday after Sunday through the summer of '42 he had noticed that more young men were disappearing from his congregation going into the service. Aside from that, the pastor of the United Church of Christ in Jerseyville, Illinois simply felt patriotic.

"If they can go, then I can go, too," he thought when he made up his mind and sent in his application to the Chief of Chaplains.

To begin with, there was one month of officer's training at Harvard University; then came his first and only assignment - 96th Infantry Division, 382d Regiment. Reporting to Camp Adair, Oregon, in early January, 1943, (1st Lieutenant) Chaplain Todd found a lot of men already there. He was about as green as any of the GIs, just a little older and, perhaps, more experienced.

Todd trained right along with the men. "Everything that they did, I did, because I wanted to know - including the handling of a rifle. You see, I had to have a rifle for self protection, if nothing else. I figured that we were going to fight a war and we were going to win." he said.

Through months of basic training, advanced training, maneuvers, amphibious training and moving up and down the West Coast, Chaplain Todd got to know the men and to become known by them. He spent most of his time with the line companies, a practice

which he continued in combat, even after Colonel Dill said that he wanted a live chaplain, not a dead one. The idea was to be on the business end of things.

At Leyte the chaplain landed in the assault wave. Recalling the first night in the swamps, he said, "I didn't think that I could dig a hole in water to lay in in a rice paddy, but it was the easiest place to live at the time. We were getting overhead fire and there were snipers in the trees too. When my message runner and I had finished digging, the water was up to our belts."

"Then we noticed our artillery observer (I believe his name was Arzino) had been too busy to dig in, so I yelled at him, 'Come stay with us. Jump in here.' He did. We didn't sleep all night, scared to death - but we made it," Todd said.

Any Japanese banzai attack had a way of sticking in the memories of DEADEYES. One of Chaplain Todd's experiences with that fearsome tactic was remembered because a baby was born that night right in the midst of the battle - to a Filipino woman who had remained with her family in their hut in the jungle.

"The next morning the dad came out holding his side as if he had been shot. He couldn't speak English, so he tried to use signs when we went up to him. Our medical officer, Captain Christensen, who examined him, could not find anything wrong.

Finally, we were able to make out what he was saying, 'baby, baby', but not that plain," Todd recalled.

"We found the new baby in the hut. He was alive and well. Several of us had D rations from which we broke off pieces of food and gave to the dad. Instead of eating, he gave the chocolate to the mother - so that she would have milk to give to her baby - so that he could live. Then we put the family on a weasel and sent them back to the beach," he said.

Tabontabon was an infamous place which cost the 382d a lot of men. Todd was there, in the thick of the fight, then helping to pinpoint Japanese positions on Colonel Dill's map for the bombardment at the finish of the battle.

Later, according to Chaplain Todd, there was a second battle at Tabontabon which did not attract much attention. It happened when he took a special detail to recover bodies that had been buried in a private cemetery.

"Lo and behold, there were some Japs left. We had to fight another battle - a small one, but we got 'em and we got our bodies," he said.

Finally General MacArthur declared the island secure on Christmas Day, 1944, but that did not stop the Japanese and the fighting went on.

On that special day Chaplain Todd started out early to reach as many units as possible, to serve communion. The going was tough; there were places where his jeep could not make it because of the mud, then he went afoot.

During a service with the Third Battalion, up in the mountains, they would fight awhile, then worship awhile, but he finally got all of them served.

At the end of the day, Todd was driving along a trail on his way back to regimental headquarters when Major Nowlin spotted him and called out: "We want communion, too, on Christmas Day, Chaplain." Chaplain Todd answered, "Major, you have it." So communion was served to the Service Company, the thirteenth one that day.

While any DEADEYE lives, the night of March 31, 1945 will be remembered. It was the night before the landing on Okinawa, Easter Sunday.

Chaplain Todd sized up the mood of the troops on his ship. "Can we make one more landing? Stay alive? Sure, we were old battle men - the scare was partly gone, a lot of it was out by that time, but we looked at each other and didn't say much," was the way he described it.

"Communion was scheduled in the galley on that last night, after we finished eating. The men wanted it - getting ready for the next morning - not knowing how long they

they might live. The ship's captain hesitated and hesitated, because there would be too many men in one close area."

"Then he gave us permission. We went ahead, down there where the garbage, water and vomit was about six inches deep," Chaplain Todd said. "Everybody was served."

Two months of battle on Okinawa took away many of the men who had made the trip to the beaches. No relief or replacements were in sight for the line companies which were mostly down to skeleton strength. It looked as if there was still a long way to go.

One day in the middle of the campaign on Okinawa, two old friends were sitting on the edge of a foxhole taking a break and sunning themselves. Their voices were low as they passed the time of day.

For a moment the regimental commander and the chaplain eyed each other. Both men hesitated to put their thoughts into words, mindful of the wretched situation in which they found themselves. The good old dependable 382d was just about fought out and the men were close to exhaustion. There was no doubt about that - every man knew it and so did the top officers, all too well.

Chaplain Leonard Todd spoke to Colonel Macy Dill: "Colonel, how long can these men stand to see the warm blood run on this cold ground?" Colonel Dill understood the cryptic question. He did not answer immediately, then he said wearily, "Chaplain, you know more about that than I do."

They were talking about the fate of the 96th in general and of the 382d in particular. As usual, the colonel was much interested in the opinion of the chaplain. Because the pair had hit it off right from the start, they had often before discussed the physical and spiritual condition of the troops. Plainly, the fighting spirit was not now at the same peak that had enabled the regiment to come so far so successfully; endless wounding and dying had had a bad effect on morale.

Shortly after that incident, Chaplain Todd recalled, he and all of the other chaplains and medical officers were called to headquarters for a short meeting with Colonel Dill. The principal topic dealt with the handling of stragglers; too many soldiers were wandering away from their front line companies and the problem had increased noticeably recently. "There will be no more coming back from the lines. That sort of thing is all over," the colonel declared.

His listeners did not ask how they were supposed to carry out the order. They left and went back to work.

According to Chaplain Todd, the first soldier whom he encountered regarding the matter did not have any teeth in his mouth; he had had false teeth, but did not have them in. He said: "Chaplain, I'm going back - my teeth, I lost them."

"No, you're not going back! There is no going back! Who is going to fight this war? We need everyone - a lot of men were killed yesterday and many more the day before. We don't have any replacements - there isn't anyone to take your place." Chaplain Todd told him. "No, you can't go back."

"What happened to that ration that you are supposed to have - your C ration?" the chaplain asked. The soldier pulled out the ration cans, but argued, "I can't eat - I'll fall over - I'll get weak."

"I talked to him like a Dutch uncle," Chaplain Todd went on. "We got out those old hard cookies. Pretty soon we had a fire going and water on to boil in a canteen cup. He dunked one of the cookies, unknowingly. Then he was chewing and I was chewing - we got some more - he began to eat. After he got some food in his belly, he automatically forgot about going back."

While the chaplain and the soldier talked, they noticed a group of men passing by going in the wrong direction. The toothless man jumped up and hailed them. "There's no going back." he said. He stopped them.

"It was that sort of thing that stopped the running away," Chaplain Todd said. "Yes, sir, that stopped it."

Replacements did come eventually. Within another month the battle had been won. Chaplain Todd was elevated to Division Chaplain just before the war ended. Then he came back home to Lula and the two boys.

NOTE

Reverend Todd's 41-year career in the ministry came to an end in 1974. His retirement address is: 4421 Thadway Drive, Alton, Illinois 62002, a new housing development on the edge of a quiet woods.

This man who found an undreamed of way for doing his job as chaplain while living an odyssey in brotherly love kept few souvenirs of the war. One of them is a Japanese bayonet which he is shown examining in his living room in the first picture. Another is a picture of himself and a native boy with his water buffalo.



Todd says that he came upon the boy near the village of Dogowa, since disappeared. "I was on my way back with a message from a battle where the men were dug in and holding on, needing artillery and mortar support, but with communications out." he recalls.

The chaplain still keeps a well-worn notebook full of names and addresses of DEADEYES with whom he exchanges letters and cards.

Besides those mementos, there is a whole raft of stories which he greatly enjoys telling.