

The Diaries of Quentin Unger

The exploration of friendship among soldiers in times of war is a topic of increasing interest to historians. This is not surprising since traditional male enclaves such as the battlefield, pubs and fraternities form male subcultures that provide opportunities to create intimate ties among men¹. Comradeship in the lives of soldiers has unique aspects worthy of exploration. Two somewhat opposite tensions emerge: (1) becoming a soldier results in loss of individuality and moral sensitivity, and friendship is resistant to that situation; (2) becoming a soldier is a hallmark of comradeship, and distinctive forms of friendship result². The first tension, which is resistance to friendship, no doubt comes about from the frequent loss of life during combat³. The second factor where friendships develop and flourish in times of war comes about in several steps. First, there is exposure to shared danger. Second, there is the confraternity of having been exposed to that extreme experience. Third, these exposures result in an air of equality and ultimately comradeship among soldiers⁴. The confluence of these tensions can be observed by exploring the World War Two combat life of American soldier Quentin Unger.

¹ Elizabeth Pleck and Joseph Pleck, *The American Man* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980), 13.

² Samuel Clark, "Under the Mountain; Basic Training, Individuality, and Comradeship," *Res Publica*, 19 (2013) 67-79.

³ Samuel Clark, page 71-72.

⁴ Samuel Clark, page 75.

Quentin Richard Xavier Francis Unger was born in Brooklyn, New York on March 11, 1919 to Theodore Richard Unger and Elizabeth Seubert Unger⁵. He would grow up to be one of the millions of young American men to serve their country during the Second World War. This paper has two primary purposes; the first is to retell the story of Quentin's experience as a soldier in the US Army during the Second World War based on primary source research and analysis through the Hofstra University Special Collections Center. The second purpose of this paper is to display the fact that during military service unique and often unlikely friendships develop through shared service, mutual respect, and unity through a common cause. To accomplish these goals I will be utilizing events from Quentin's military service in World War Two, described in his diary. [Provide exact box number here] I will also be utilizing a variety of other sources which demonstrate the unique bonds of friendship in the military.

Unlike many of his peers, Quentin's military service actually began before The United States entered the war. Quentin joined the National Guard in early 1941 at the age of 21. He joined enticed by a program where the Army promised to pay him a salary equal to the salary of his last job, which in Quentin's case was \$105 per month working at the Pilgrim State Hospital in Brentwood, New York. Quentin was soon transferred from the 14th New York National Guard to the 187th Field Artillery Regiment and quickly began to rise through the ranks. Quentin's unit was stationed at Ft. Ethan Allen in Winooski, Vermont which on April 1, 1941 became the 771st Tank Battalion. By December 1941, Quentin had achieved the rank of 1st Sergeant. On July 1, 1942 he began attending the Officer Candidate School (OCS) of the US Army Chemical Corps at

⁵ A History of 'D' Company in World War II 1943-1945 (From the Diary of Quentin R. Unger), Transcribed by Christopher Unger Jan/Feb 2008, Supplemental Interviewing/editing Christopher Unger and Timothy Unger Feb/Mar 2008, 3.

Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland⁶. He had been selected for this due to his excellent service record and because he had attended college at Ohio University as a biology major for two years, during which he studied chemistry⁷. Quentin graduated OCS ranked 25th out of 1100 officer candidates and was given the rank of Second Lieutenant. After becoming an officer, 2nd Lt. Unger was assigned to the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion stationed at Ft. Bliss in Texas on November 14, 1942. Quentin was placed in D Company, Second Platoon, in the squad of 2nd Lt. Fred Quarantillo, who was only two weeks his senior and would become one of Quentin's closest friends⁸.

It is in Quentin's friendship with Fred that one begins to discover his character. Their interactions imply a sense of trust between the two officers. They are often sarcastic with one another and in one instance; Quentin is shown to be familiar with Fred's habits and way of operating such that he knows to "nag" him to write a letter to his significant other, Mary, when he receives a letter from her⁹. However, in examining the relationship between these two men one does not often see outright expressions of emotion and caring, a trait very indicative of the society these men lived in¹⁰. Most of the instances where their friendship can be seen are displayed through implications and subtext found in Quentin's diary. There are many examples of friendships like this, showing a sort of unspoken code amongst men of this time period, regarding the way that men are supposed to interact with one another. Sarcasm and casual insults, meant to amuse more than to offend, are the staples of these types of friendships. An excellent example of this type of behavior as well as the sincere care that soldiers have for one

⁶ Quentin R. Unger Diary, page 3.

⁷ Quentin was never able to properly complete college as he dropped out to get a job to help support his family during the Great Depression.

⁸ Fred would even end up being the best man at Quentin's wedding after the war.

⁹ Quentin R. Unger Diary, May 3, 1944.

¹⁰ Barbra Caine, *Friendship: A History* (London: Equinox Pub., 2009) Page 309-310.

another's well-being can be seen in the well-known book *Band of Brothers* by Stephen E. Ambrose. One particular telling passage in the book relates to a group of soldiers in the 101st Airborne Division during Operation Market Garden, in September of 1944 in Holland. In the passage, one soldier, Lt. Buck Compton receives a wound to the posterior while he and his comrades are under heavy enemy fire. The passage reads as follows:

He [Compton] looked at the five men gathered around him. "Take off," Compton ordered. "Let the Germans take care of me." He was a big man, and the fire was so intense that the troopers were tempted to do just that. But Malarkey, Guarneri, and Joe Toye pulled a door off a farm outbuilding and laid Compton face down on it. Then they skidded him up the roadside ditch to one of the retreating British tanks and loaded him, face down, onto the back end.

The bullet that hit Compton had gone into the right cheek of his buttocks, out, into the left cheek, and out. Lipton looked at him and couldn't help laughing. "You're the only guy I ever saw in my whole life that got hit with one bullet and got four holes," he told Compton.

Compton growled, "If I could get off this tank, I'd kill you."¹¹

The relaxed and joking manner in which these soldiers interact, even during combat, shows a level of comfort and trust with one another. This attitude is even seen among male friends today to an extent, but according to the society of the 1940s the best place for such behavior is on the battlefield as it relieves the stress of combat to some extent.

This type of behavior is very linked to the commonly held conceptions of masculinity and male to male friendships during this time period¹². Ideas of aggression, strength and an emphasis on not showing too much emotion (aside from perhaps anger), were tied to ideas of masculinity. Additionally, these masculine ideas are amplified tenfold by the fact that these men are

¹¹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) 205.

¹² Barbra Caine, pages 304-305.

performing what is traditionally considered one of the most masculine tasks of all time, waging war. This manner of expressing friendship between men is rooted in the desire to not appear to be homosexual. By the 1920s western society was becoming more sexually aware, in part due to the work of intellectuals such as Sigmund Freud. Ideas of subconscious sexual desire and the emotionally close nature of friendships before the 1920s gave rise to the concept that men who were too emotionally connected to one another were actually homosexual. As such the nature of male to male friendships began to become less emotional. Men were expected to keep their emotions to themselves to a large degree or risk being perceived as “too feminine” and therefore homosexual. This was due in large part to the fact that female to female friendships were starting to emphasize emotional closeness during this time period¹³. Any form of serious emotional closeness in male to male friendships needed to occur in specific acceptable circumstances and in specific settings¹⁴. As Barbara Caine, in her book *Friendship a History* observes, “Generally, though, close male friendships could only be celebrated and idealized in contexts that provided some way of explaining their intensity while safeguarding the participants’ heterosexual masculinity.”¹⁵ The most ideal of these “celebrated and idealized” settings is war. In fact, starting during the First World War, the camaraderie of soldiers was considered by many to be the ultimate form of male to male friendship¹⁶. This view of military friendships is summed up rather well in another passage from Barbra Caine’s book, *Friendship a History*, which states, “The comradeship of armies was an improvement upon the lives of men at home, and those singing its

¹³ Barbra Caine, page 304.

¹⁴ Barbra Caine, page 305.

¹⁵ Barbra Caine, page 303.

¹⁶ Barbra Caine, page 306

praises tended to see it as both dissolving peacetime arguments and class conflicts into fellowship and providing a model for post-war societies.”¹⁷

Despite the idealization of camaraderie of soldiers, in the context of modern warfare, friendships could be difficult to maintain and difficult to initiate. The fact that a person you were cracking jokes with one minute could be killed mere moments later, caused many to be hesitant to make friends at all, which could itself cause problems. Those who could not make any friends at all were often seen as “loners” and these “loners” are often disliked by those around them due to their inability or unwillingness to make friends¹⁸. These “loners” were often unable or unwilling to bond with their comrades at all which made their ability to cooperate with one another more difficult. This could end up affecting their unit’s performance in the field and could even result in casualties that could have been avoided. These “loners” however, were often not incapable of forming bonds of friendship. The “loners” were often soldiers who had made friends with their comrades in the past, only for them to later be killed in combat. This resulted in many becoming jaded, cynical, and often unwilling to make new emotional connections to others for fear of losing their new friends in combat.

Making friends could be even more difficult for new arrivals and replacements. New soldiers were often shown contempt by their more experienced comrades. These new soldiers were often not aware of the many unspoken rules of conduct that soldiers in the field develop for themselves. In many cases these unspoken rules contradicted official military regulations as well as what these soldiers were taught in basic training. For replacements in particular, the fact that their job is to literally take the place of someone who has been relieved of their duty, often due to

¹⁷ Barbra Caine, page 306.

¹⁸ Barbra Caine, page 309.

being wounded or killed, could result in those who were friends with the soldier being replaced to have great disdain for his replacement. New soldiers needed to earn the respect of their comrades to find their place in their unit and they needed to learn and follow the unofficial rules that everyone but they seems to know and often will not teach them directly. Despite this, men such as Quentin and Fred persisted and made many friends. They came together through shared experiences, developed unspoken and unwritten codes of conduct, supported each other on and off the battlefield, and when needed they mourned the loss of those who laid down their lives for them.

Quentin and his unit remained at Ft. Bliss until February 1943, when they were sent to New York City to prepare to be sent overseas. 2nd Lt. Unger and his unit left New York Harbor on April 29, 1943 onboard the S.S. Orizaba bound for North Africa. Quentin would not return to the United States until September 9, 1945¹⁹. April 29, 1943 also marks the first entry in a diary that Quentin kept until his return to the United States in September of 1945. In 2008 Quentin's sons, Timothy and Christopher Unger, transcribed the contents of their father's diary and added additional information gathered from interviews with their father. This transcribed diary was entitled A History of 'D' Company in Combat 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion World War II 1943-1945 (From the Diary of Quentin R. Unger) and would become the primary source of inspiration and information for this paper.

The 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion arrived in North Africa on May 11, 1943 long after Axis forces had been driven out. The unit made landfall in Algeria but spent most of its time in North Africa in Tunisia²⁰. As such, the Battalion's job in North Africa was to prepare for the

¹⁹ Quentin R. Unger Diary, page 3.

²⁰ Quentin R. Unger Diary, page 4.

upcoming invasion of Sicily, codenamed Operation Husky. The Battalion's time in North Africa provides the first example of friendship expressed through mutual respect. On June 26, 1943 2nd Lt. Unger got into a heated argument with the commanding officer of D Company, Captain Harry Raysor. Cpt. Raysor had only been allowing officers to share in any of the Company's ration of liquor, which Quentin believed was unfair. Quentin became so infuriated by this he almost requested a transfer, but decided against doing so as he did not wish to leave his unit. Quentin's advocating on behalf of the non-commissioned officers and enlisted men in his unit showed Quentin's respect for and compassion towards the men serving under his command. Additionally his decision to not transfer to a different unit, despite his anger with Captain Raysor, shows that he has a connection to the people in his unit²¹.

The Third Chemical Mortar Battalion saw combat for the first time in the invasion of Sicily on July 10, 1943. The unit arrived the day after the initial amphibious assault and did not suffer any serious casualties during the Sicilian Campaign²². The campaign was rather short, only lasting until August 17, 1943 and resulted in the withdrawal of Axis forces from the Island of Sicily. Despite the brevity of the campaign, the fighting was intense. 2nd Lt. Unger's diary entries for the days his unit saw combat during the Sicilian Campaign show his relief at the fact that his unit did not suffer any major casualties, once again showing that he cared about the wellbeing of his fellow soldiers. This is also displayed by the fact that on the day after Axis forces finished withdrawing from Sicily, Quentin visited a wounded man from his unit in the

²¹ The Army eventually changed their policy in relation to alcohol rationing. Each individual soldier would receive his own personal alcohol ration to do with as he pleased rather than each unit receiving a set amount to be distributed as the commanding officer saw fit.

²² A few men were lightly wounded but none of the men from the Battalion died or were wounded to the extent that they were permanently put out of action.

field hospital, who he only refers to as “the kid” in his diary²³. However Quentin did end up suffering one major personal loss during the Sicilian Campaign. On August 3, 1943 Quentin’s father, Theodore Richard Unger, died of stomach cancer. His diary entry on that day does not say much, although he does say that he was disheartened by the news of his father’s death. This, once again shows how Quentin behaved as a man in his position was expected to behave by society at this point in history, showing as little emotion as possible even in the extremely private context of a journal entry. Although, in a way, one could consider his lack of things to say to be indicative of his emotional pain in that he did not know what to say other than that he was sad. This is also a reflection on his character at the time. Much of the information regarding Quentin’s feelings during the times later on in his service where men he is serving with died, come from passages added by Timothy and Christopher Unger based on interviews they did with their father long after the war was over. His post-war commentary shows insights into the mind of a man who has had many years to think about his past and has become more willing to say how he really felt during these moments of loss. He is a man who, despite how his society told him to feel and react to such tragedy, does feel sorrow both during the time of the loss and years later. Yet despite the hardship, Quentin’s post-war commentary shows that he is proud of his service, he is proud of the men he served with, and even decades later he still respects the men he served with, especially those who had laid down their lives for him and the rest of their comrades.

Quentin’s unit stayed in Sicily for a while after the fighting on the island had ceased. They were tasked with destroying unused and unexploded enemy ordinance in Sicily. This lasted until September 28, 1943 when they were redeployed to the Italian mainland. Although the

²³ Quentin R. Unger Diary, August 18, 1944.

Kingdom of Italy had officially surrendered to the Allied Powers on September 8, 1943. Nazi Germany would not allow the Allies to gain a foothold on the peninsula. The Germans took over the city of Rome, Italy's capital, and installed a pro-Nazi puppet government headed by Benito Mussolini who had been removed from power as part of the peace deal with the Allied Powers. The fighting on the Peninsula would last until final Germany's surrender in 1945. The 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion would suffer its first real casualties in Italy and would see combat like they had never seen before²⁴. The mountainous and hilly conditions of the Italian peninsula proved to be a challenge for the attacking allied troops. Quentin's unit, being a mortar unit, would be called upon to fire in support of Allied infantry units attacking heavily entrenched and dug in Axis defensive positions. The difficult terrain made the moving of heavy artillery and armored vehicles incredibly difficult, meaning that the more lighter and mobile mortar units, such as the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, would often have to be the primary source of support fire for Allied forces in many engagements. The Axis forces, as they were fighting a defensive battle, did not have as much of a problem with the lack of mobility for their forces and their entrenched defensive positions were often well equipped with heavy weapons like howitzers, mortars, machine guns, and rocket artillery²⁵. These fortress-like defensive positions would often be easily able to outgun the attacking Allied troops, making the fire support from the mortar units such as the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion essential for victory to be achieved. As such, the soldiers of the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion were worked to exhaustion and on several occasions almost ran out of essential supplies like food, water, and ammunition.

²⁴ Quentin R. Unger Diary, January 12, 1944.

²⁵ The rocket artillery is mentioned specifically in the diary to be Nebelwerfers, multi-barreled rocket launchers nicknamed "Screaming/Moaning Mimis and were especially terrifying due to their distinct sound.

Quentin's diary reflected the exhausted state of the unit and the often demoralizing effect on the soldiers the exhaustion created. For Quentin and his unit, this would last until March 30, 1944 when the unit was taken off the frontline for two weeks. However, before this moment of respite the unit suffered many casualties. The unit's worst day of the campaign occurred on January 12, 1944 when a group of 12 German Messerschmitt Bf-109 fighter planes bombed the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion's position, including the Battalion Headquarters. The German aircraft had been alerted by the fact that several of the unit's officers had parked their jeeps close together near the building that the battalion was using to house its headquarters²⁶. Col. Edgar Stark, Capt. Henry Waehli, Capt. Henry Raysor, Lt. Berwyn Brown, Lt. Bob Arnold, Lt. George Arner, and 8 enlisted men (non-officers) were killed by the German airstrike. The remaining men in the unit, as Quentin put it, "worked like bastards" to dig the survivors out of the wreckage of the destroyed building. Col. Stark's death hit the men of Quentin's company especially hard, as he had previously promised to buy 1000 acres of land in Colorado and then give an acre of that land to each man in the company to do with as he pleased.

The sorrow felt by the unit over the loss of so many of their comrades was reflected in Quentin's diary entry for that day, during which he gave one of the only overt displays of emotion that was not added as part of his post-war commentary. Quentin begins the entry with the phrase, "It pains me to write this day" before going on to recount the terrible events of that day and list the names of his comrades who were killed. There is no other point in the diary that we see such a visceral emotional reaction from Quentin. However a post-war addition made to a later entry dated October 23, 1944 provides us with some more insight into Quentin's psyche and feelings during these moments of loss. The entry mentions the death of another of Quentin's

²⁶ Quentin R. Unger Diary, January 12, 1944.

comrades, one Lt. Paultz. The post-war additional commentary discusses how Quentin, as an officer, had to write letters to the families of the soldiers in his unit that were killed in action informing them of the death of their son/husband/brother/etc. He mentions how writing to Lt. Paultz's wife was especially difficult due to the fact that he was close to Lt. Paultz, despite the fact that he had written similar letters "a dozen times" in the past. The loss of friends and comrades in war becomes common, but still remains difficult to cope with even after one has experienced it many times before.

Quentin's unit would remain in Italy until September of 1944, when it was transferred to Southern France²⁷. Combat in Southern France was radically different than combat in Italy. The terrain in Southern France was far more open than in Italy and Allied forces advanced longer distances and more often than they had in Italy. Regardless of the increased mobility, mortar units like the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion still played a very important role, supporting attacks on enemy positions, helping defend against enemy counter-attacks, and laying down smoke screens in order to provide cover for advancing friendly units. This is how combat for Quentin's unit would look like for the remainder of the conflict as they proceeded to fight their way through France, Belgium, Luxemburg, and into Germany itself. As the war progressed the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion found itself acting in support of many other units, including several Free French colonial (Moroccan and Algerian) divisions, and the all Japanese-American 442nd Regimental combat team²⁸.

Despite the ethnic divide between these soldiers and the white members of Quentin's unit, Quentin speaks rather highly of these soldiers in his post-war additions to his diary. During

²⁷ Quentin R. Unger Diary, page 4.

²⁸ Quentin R. Unger Diary, page 4-5.

the Italian campaign, Quentin was frequently invited to celebratory events held by the officers of the French colonial units and describes their interactions as being rather amicable. In fact, one of the medals awarded to Quentin by the end of the war was the French Croix de Guerre²⁹. This demonstrates the amazing ability that shared military service has to be able to bring together men who under normal circumstances would never have met one another, let alone end up fighting side by side with one another. The incredibly high levels of diversity soldiers experience is also discussed in *Friendship a History* in a passage that states, “One of the things men remembered about war was the great diversity of people with whom they associated; in armies, men met men they would never have met in civilian life and, if the bonds they forged survived the war itself, those friendships were often extended in returned serviceman’s organizations or less formal associations.” The passage goes on to discuss how shared service often served to break down societal boundaries and prejudices, “While those bonds did not automatically span entrenched divisions, especially in the racially segregated American forces³⁰, the possibility of association, as well as the fact of wartime service, began to erode some very strong prejudices.”³¹ As the passage stated, the shared service of soldiers of different backgrounds did not erode the societal divides between them overnight, but it planted the seeds of societal change in the future³².

²⁹ Quentin R. Unger Diary, page 5.

³⁰ The US military was not the only racially segregated military at the time; the militaries of most western nations were to one extent or another, racially segregated. Also just because the US military was racially segregated, does not mean that there was no way of soldiers of different races interacting or working together, as the nature of large-scale warfare, especially modern warfare, requires many different units to work together during combat. As such an all-white unit, such as the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, can end up fighting alongside units like the all Japanese-American 442nd Combat Battalion and even French colonial units from Algeria and Morocco.

³¹ Barbra Caine, page 308.

³² The US military actually officially desegregated in 1948, which one could argue was a result of this breakdown of prejudices through shared service in the military.

Quentin would go on to serve with the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion until the war ended in 1945. Before the unit was formally deactivated in 1946, the men of the 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion suffered a total of 228 casualties. These casualties were composed of 46 men killed in action (KIA), 6 men who died due to wounds sustained on the battlefield, 2 men missing in action (MIA), and 174 men wounded in action. The men of the unit collectively received 615 decorations; including 228 purple hearts, 179 Croix de Guerre, 94 Bronze Stars for Service, 37 Bronze Stars for Valor, 3 Bronze Stars with Oak Leaf Cluster, 4 Soldiers Medals, 3 Army Commendations, and 2 Distinguished Service Crosses³³. The description of the gallantry and bravery of these men presented in Quentin's diary shows that these men more than deserved the awards they received for their service. The preservation of Quentin's diary by his sons honors not only Quentin, but all those who served with him. Quentin would eventually become company commander of D Company in 1945, shortly before the end of the war. He later returned home to marry his sweetheart, Olga, and have three children, to whom he dedicated the publishing of his diary.

The amazing ability of these brave men to overcome their own personal differences in order to work together to fight in the name of liberty against a common foe shows the value of friendships made through shared military service and shows that, "At the height of combat action; men don't fight for abstract ideals like love of country, apple pie, or motherhood. They fight and die for each other."³⁴

³³ Quentin R. Unger Diary, pages 5.

³⁴ Mark Mardon, "Love, War and Remembrance," Nation, 257(1) (July 5, 1993) 8.

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