

WHEN THE FIGHTING STOPPED  
THE MEN IN A UNIT OF  
COMBAT ENGINEERS  
ACTING LIKE THEMSELVES.

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With the Assistance of John Cornacchio

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## INTRODUCTION

The Germans were retreating so fast the infantry had no need for us to clear the way of obstructions to their progress.

Thus our Combat Engineer Battalion was merely tagging along - few duties and much griping over the little things we wouldn't have noticed while we were actively fighting.

So we would look for ways we'd better this damned Army.

Our company cooks chose to hire German housewives to take over our kitchen - and for once we men had no gripes about the food. They did wonders with army supplies. Abruptly it stopped. That God-damned Lieutenant who supervises the kitchen was a stickler for S.O.P. Halstead, a belligerent young soldier said to me: "If we had a newspaper we could tell the army what we think of it - and that Lieutenant especially." "Maybe we can," I said. The captain, a damned good man and no stickler for discipline, said, "Go ahead - but don't put anything in it that isn't true - and the Lieutenant was only obeying orders from on high."

Halstead, in anticipation of permission, had his eye on a mimeograph machine in an abandoned office near our quarters, and we moved it to a more convenient place. Our plans were for Halstead to be production man - acquire the needed paper and ink - and run the machine and circulate the papers. I was anxious to get to writing - the men were a wonderful group and I saw a lot to report. Cornacchio, our mail clerk, agreed to type for us.

We had barely gotten going when Halstead, who had written a signed editorial on "speeding trucks", was killed by one. After that Cornacchio and I got out the paper. The "press" acted up but Cornacchio kept on patiently, and we got out the paper by squandering endless sheets of "liberated" paper.

I had detached duty. Getting out a paper was all I had to do. I lived as a free man. I had no orders to obey. It was a ball - and the men brought their gripes to me. "Put that in your paper, Silvette." Sometimes I explained that they were on false ground - and I couldn't. Often, I could. They delighted in the nonchalant, disrespectful way I treated the officers. We all

did it, but to do it openly in print gave them a kick. Only our Captain would have tolerated what I did. Long after the war I showed my paper to a General I was thrown with: "I'd have hung you!" he said.

Then it happened: the Captain was transferred to Headquarters. One of the platoon lieutenants took over. He killed my paper.

I had one last hope. At H.Q. I asked the Captain if he was coming back. He didn't know. "Why?" he asked. "Lt. Lay has killed my paper - but I'll hold on to the mimeograph machine if you are coming back." "You know the Army better than to expect me to know that," he said. Then he added, "The Battalion Colonel is talking about a Battalion paper. Would you like to do that?" Of course I jumped at that.

The Colonel didn't ask me my qualifications - only what did I print it on. "A stolen machine," I said. "Have a requisition drawn up for it," he said. And then the restriction I expected: he wanted the right to censor my copy. Better than nothing I thought, and agreed.

Sure enough the copy Cornacchio typed always came back blue pencilled - not bits but whole items. But many got by. I began to enjoy blasting away at the army full force, which concerned Cornacchio, who hesitated to type something I had written because "He'll blue pencil that." I explained he had to read it before he could X it out.

The paper ended when I learned the Colonel was picking out men he did not like to fill the call for Engineers to be shipped straight from the ETO to the Pacific. "I want to see the Colonel," I told the Sergeant Major at H.Q. "Colonel," I said, "My paper had been taking the side of the men. It gave them a chance to let off steam. Now they're getting out of hand, so I am going to present the Army's side." "About time," he said.

I waited a week, arranged for my allotted furlough to England, and at H.Q. gave the news to the Colonel. With me away, who did he want to run the paper? "Nobody!" he said.

That is the history of the "Bee Stinger" and its successor "Chains and Pains". It was a lark - and the men got a little break - besides the pleasure of sometimes seeing their names in print.