



Sunday Press Photo by Ed Hitzel

"We called him 'old man,' but never to his face"

Patton Rescuer Is Proud Man

By EDWARD HITZEL
Sunday Press

BRIGANTINE — The man who saved Patton's life in World War I sat in his kitchen. Birds chirped outside.

"I had no fear until it was over," remembers Joseph Angelo, now 81. "Then I realized what I had done and I thought I was crazy." He pauses. "I'm not kidding you."

What would history books say were it not for Angelo? A longer World War II? More sons who didn't come home?

"It would have been a different story in World War II," Angelo agreed. "We would have lost a lot more men."

He was 22 years old when it happened, a member of the 311th infantry's "Suicide Club" when he dressed Patton's wounds and carried him three hours to a passing car. Out of 303 men, only two were still alive after the battle that morning — Angelo and the man he called a "waramatic."

"He was one of the finest officers a man would want to serve under," Angelo said. "He wouldn't send you where he wouldn't go himself. I remember on one drive he was sitting with a rifle on a tank cussin' because he couldn't find a German to shoot at."

The story is told by history books — a story young generations, cruising in air-conditioned cars and hiking in peaceful forests, would find hard to imagine.

"It was a natural thing, you know," says Angelo, a short, thin, white-haired man whose hearing has been affected by time. "It was in the line of duty."

Sept. 26, 1918, was the day. Angelo's summer home is filled with memorabilia of the date. He has a gold watch from Patton's wife, an autographed picture from Patton's son and the Distinguished Service Cross.

"This medal can't be given to just anybody," he

(Continued on Page A14)



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Jerseyan Saved Patton's Life

The Day Angelo Made History

(Continued from Page A1)

explained. "Only those on the battlefield. There's the Medal of Honor. The ex-president's wife got it for planting trees. They tried to give this one (Distinguished Service Cross) to the guys going to the moon, but they couldn't do it. They had to give them the medal under it."

Sept. 26, 1918, was foggy, the first day of the battle of the Argonne at Hill 78 in Cheppy, France. Patton told his orderly, Angelo, to remain with the tank at a crossroad while the rest of the tank division moved up the hill.

"A short time later, German patrols began firing on me and I returned the fire. Patton appeared at the top of the hill. The machine gun fire became heavier."

Patton attempted to round up infantrymen who lost their officers and at the same time remove the tanks from the mud. The battle was fierce, however, and everyone but Patton was killed. Patton went back down the hill to Angelo.

"The two of us tried to advance on the Germans, but after we had gone about 20 yards Col. Patton was hit in the thigh with a German rifle bullet."

Angelo, who then weighed 105 pounds, carried the 170-pound commanding officer on his shoulders to a shell hole where he bandaged the major.

"I ripped his pants where the bullet went in with a trench knife," Angelo said. "He said, 'Joe. I think I'm bleedin'. I'm all wet.' I put my hand under his leg. I put my fingers in the hole and he was bleeding badly. I could fit four of my fingers in the hole where the bullet came out."

"I took my first aid kit and he said, 'You're not allowed to use it.' You see, each man's first aid kit was for him. If I used mine for him, then I wouldn't have one. I told him, 'you need it and you're going to get it.' He asked how big the hole was. I said it's a small hole, but it was about four inches across. It was about an inch from his rectum."

While shells flew by, Angelo stayed with Patton except when Patton twice ordered him to take commands to passing tanks. Patton released two pigeons, which would fly to the base and alert Americans that help was needed.

After two hours, things quieted down enough for Angelo to half drag, half carry Patton three miles to the camp.

"He kept saying, 'We're not going to make it,' and I kept telling him, 'Yes, we will. We're going to make it.' There were moments when I wondered.

"He'd say, 'You're killing yourself,' and I'd say don't worry about me. I'm going to get you to a hospital."

That all happened before the time of nuclear warheads and anti-ballistic missiles, but it has not been forgotten.

Angelo, a retired painter for RCA, has an invitation to go to Texas, where Gen. Patton's son is stationed. "Hell, I don't have the money to go there. He wants to give me an Army day."

Among the memorabilia in the Angelo home are a scrapbook, history books, pictures, a gold watch from

Patton's mother and a note from Patton's wife.

"My little girls and I want you to know that we appreciate your faithfulness to Col. Patton on the day he was wounded," wrote Patton's young wife in 1918. "Beatrice is seven and Ruth Ellen three and they fully realize what your service to Col. Patton meant — staying by him and helping him when he was hurt."

"I do too, and thank you with all my heart." The letter is signed Beatrice Ayers Patton.

"She got killed riding a horse," related Angelo. "She got her neck broken, the same as her husband and her sister got her neck broke too."

The watch, a Tiffany, still runs. "Joseph Angelo, D.S.C.," is inscribed on the back. "From Mrs. George S. Patton Jr., in grateful remembrance of the Argonne, Sept. 26, 1918."

Patton's mother also sent a gold bullet with a pearl in front "as a reminder of the bullet that went through the old man's leg."

"Yes," Angelo said. "We called him 'old man,' but never to his face."

The picture from Patton's son acknowledges Angelo's contribution to his birth. George V was born after World War I. "In memory of Cheppy, France," the picture says. "I wouldn't be standing here if it weren't for you."

Angelo's heroics resulted in a few later ironies, one in Washington in 1931, where he led marchers from Camden to ask for veterans' bonuses.

Patton's Army was called in to arrest the protesters who erected a shantytown, resulting in an unscheduled meeting between the old friends.

"Damn you," Patton told Angelo. "You're always in trouble."

Another unusual meeting occurred in the more recent past when Angelo was introduced to Robert S. Thompson, the man who drove a jeep involved in an auto accident that killed Patton.

Thompson and Angelo, born in the same block in Camden, were asked to shake hands for a photographer.

"I wouldn't do it," Angelo said. "I didn't see where it was an honor to shake hands with him, do you?"

"I did ask him how it happened. It was in a fog, he said. It was foggy." Angelo did agree to be photographed with Thompson lighting his cigarette.

Angelo was a private first class when he got out of the Army. The rank didn't change much "because I got busted a couple of times — for drinking — I was a hotshot on booze."

Patton wanted Angelo to be his aide, but Angelo didn't want to stay in the Army.

"I wish I had stayed in the Army, but I wanted to come home," he explained.

Angelo tried to enlist in World War II, but was rejected. "They told me I was too old, the bastards."

Now Angelo spends most of his time fishing, and remembering.