

Werner, Richard J
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Charlemagne Discovery Recounted

(Continued from Page 1)

Werner became a chemical warfare officer attached to Base Hospital 46, and in the capacity of "gas officer" he was available for duty in France any time there was an exposure to the poison gas weapon.

"I'm sure the only reason I achieved this status," he laughs now, "is that as a graduate in chemistry I knew that when there was a gas attack it would be only one of three gases involved: phosgene, mustard, chlorine. We had no equipment, really, but all of the weapon gases were heavier than air, you get on the windward or upper side of them and you are absolutely safe."

What Werner did was get down on his belly, really, crawl to a shellhole where the gas would settle, grab a handful (literally), bring it up to his nose.

"By the time it got there it would be sufficiently diffused so the little you would smell would not hurt," Werner said. "Anybody who has had elementary chemistry would know what mustard smells like. Phosgene has no odor, so if the smell wasn't that of the mustard it had to be chlorine. To get rid of the gas in an area we would swish blankets from the upper or windward side, diffuse it, get it to roll off."

Werner got involved with the French sector around Verdun as a gas officer. And from the French he received his first major decoration: the Croix de Guerre with Palm.

The French officer who gave him the award made a big name for himself

in World War II and later, but at that time he was just Captain Charles de Gaulle.

In the peace years between the two world wars, Werner acquired in the field of education a knowledge of people, events and administration that Charlemagne himself, who was the first to develop the notion of a united Europe, might have used.

A tireless administrator, Charlemagne is credited (by Sir Kenneth Clark) with organizing the lands he conquered "beyond the capacities of a semi-barbarous age."

Well, Werner was president of Hartnell College when World War II broke out, a widely respected administrator.

He deprecates the way he got back into the U.S. Army.

"Oh, I encouraged many students to enlist, and I got commissions for 14 members of my faculty. I suppose I got so good at getting commissions I got one for myself as a major. "But, seriously, the army authorities felt there were certain talents they required, including that of an educator with military experience acquired, preferably, in Germany, someone who could go in as a civilian administrator and de-Nazify the educational system of Germany."

Yep, it happened to Werner as to other specialists. When he had completed a course at the University of Virginia and had made plans to get the de-Nazification job done, he was told he was going to Italy, instead.

Werner was sent to North Africa to train for the Italian invasion, was among those who landed at the Salerno beachhead, then assumed charge of civil affairs in the Fifth Army area.

It was in Italy that Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by Pope Leo III in November in the year 800 in Rome.

Werner, of course, would have laughed at the notion that in Italy he was taking some big first steps toward a certain salt mine and priceless relics in Germany.

"In my sector it was my duty to see that the army got from the civilians everything necessary for the successful fighting of the war," Werner recalls. "In return, the army supplied them with needed medication for hospitals, food for orphans, transportation essential for the normal continuation of life."

Salerno was the first big city taken, and Werner went with a case of "C" rations to visit the Bishop of Salerno. Food was always welcome, and the bishop and he became good friends.

"The Bishop asked me for the privilege of showing me his cathedral. One of the most exalting experiences I have ever had came after I had been taken to the basement of the Salerno Cathedral. We knelt at a sarcophagus and the priest said solemnly: "You are now kneeling before the tomb of St. Matthew."

Werner paused in his narrative, then said to this reporter: "I tell you,

Bill, it does something to you when you realize where you are kneeling . . ."

The Fifth Army swept on. Werner became military governor of Naples Province. Typhus broke out, there were 292 civilian deaths one night. But the medical profession had discovered DDT was the material to use to kill infectious lice, and a planeload was sent to Italy.

"My problem was to dust the people with this stuff and to convince them it wasn't dangerous," Werner said. "Cardinal Oscalaci of Naples agreed to go into the municipal square with the governor, the mayor and me, and we invited the people to see us get dusted with DDT."

"Well, in three weeks we had the incidence of typhus practically down. The greatest difficulty we had was convincing the people that if one spray was good, two were not better. We sprayed hair, all hair, where the lice would be, so we could check for repeaters and we did."

The Italian government awarded Werner the Order of the Crown of Italy, Commander Degree.

But now the invasion of France was being prepared and he was sent to England, an administrator with experience in dealing with the enemy, to train with the troops for the Normandy invasion.

And on D-day plus 6, Werner was heading for what would eventually be an unforgettable moment in a salt mine in conquered Germany.

Town Listens To Wedding

HOT SPRINGS, Ark. (AP) — "Doll Baby" and "Oddjobber" didn't want a private wedding ceremony. They invited the entire town of Hot Springs, population 36,000, to listen in

Residents with citizens band radios had the opportunity to hear the proceedings Friday night on channel 15 as Pam Caver and Tom Fuller took wedding vows from Justice of the Peace John B. Sims Jr.

