

# Washburn during the war years

## - The Boys at War - 16

Leonard W. Anderson was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Anderson of Washburn. He entered the Army in August 1942 and was trained as a medical administration officer. He was sent overseas in August 1944, serving with an ambulance company in France and Germany. He returned to the United States in January 1946. In a letter to the Times in May 1945 he described the headlong rush of the Yanks from the Rhine to the Elbe, of taking so many prisoners they couldn't be counted, and of the fine work done by the men in his outfit.

"Things have really happened in the past two months over here. On the last days of February our company participated in the drive from southern Holland, across the Roer [river] and up to the Rhine. We were with the 8th Armored Division then and we really went 'hell-bent-for-election' to reach the Rhine. After we landed there, we left for the 8th and my platoon joined in with the 84th Infantry Division, the 'Railsplitters' as they are commonly known. We sat in Krefeld, Germany, for the next four weeks awaiting further action east of the Rhine. Our chance came on Easter Sunday when we crossed



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the Rhine at Wesel and in the next twelve days we moved over 250 miles east until we came to the west banks of the Elbe, where we have stopped to await the arrival of the Russians. It was an advance that I know will never be forgotten in military annals or in my lifetime. We didn't have time to do anything at all except move, set up our station, care for a few wounded and then move on to new areas the next day. We didn't stay in any spot longer than 24 hours and many times we moved too far ahead of where we should have been. Consequently we got in on the strafing, bombing, shelling and rocketing, but we got through with only one

real casualty which was from a strafe job.

"As for prisoners, I once had only two but at the last time I remembered about them I was well over the 50 mark and then I quit counting. It got so bad after a few days of the advance that we'd tell them to get going down the road to the rear and let those behind us take them in to the stockades. They would come by the hundreds and it was really funny to see some 50 Krauts, in full battle dress marching down the road to the rear with no one guarding them nor paying much attention. We had no trouble with them to speak of until we came to where we are now. More on that later, though.

"Our run wasn't without its cost and I lost two ambulances out of ten and three men out of 28. Two of the men are in hospitals and the third is a prisoner of war, we hope. There was a small pocket of resistance to our rear that took a bit of force to clear out, but what they did with my man I couldn't say. I may be bragging a bit when I say that we have done a wonderful job over here, but I must say that all the credit must go to my men, men who have gone steady for days without rest. I'll

let the people back in the states bicker about whether a man is black or white, Protestant or Jew, but over here I'll let a man's work speak for him. Like one man said, "What you are doing is making so much noise that I can't hear what you're saying." So I say, too.

"The lights are on again in England, so the program says. It will be a wonderful day when I can walk down old Bayfield Street and not be stumbling in the darkness or drive on Highway 13 with headlights full ablaze instead of a little pinpoint of light which is only used so that another vehicle won't run into you. Oh, Well, that day will come soon but in the meantime I have brushed up on my blackout driving enough to have not hit anything yet. Sometimes I think that's because the other men are the good drivers and they miss me rather than I miss them. Oh well, what's the difference as long as we don't meet when we shouldn't.

"Must stop for it's time for midnight lunch and then I must be off to bed for I have another big day ahead of me, but then I came over here to work, so why should I kick. Greet all the friends back there in Washburn."