

An Interview with 1st Lieutenant Frederick J. Kraics who fought in the Italian Campaign during WW II

Introduction

During World War II, Winston Churchill called Italy the “soft underbelly of Europe”. Therefore, it was chosen as the first place the United States and England chose to directly attack the Axis Powers in Europe. The Allies invaded Sicily and then landed at Salerno on the Italian mainland. From there they fought their way up the Italian Peninsula for the next year and a half until they reached the Brenner Pass in the Alpine mountains bordering Germany.

That strategy accomplished two things. It eliminated much of the Italian Army when Italy formally surrendered in September of 1943. But more importantly, and what most people do not realize is that 25 German Divisions were diverted from other fronts and used to defend Italy. Imagine what 25 more divisions could have done to stop the Normandy Invasion or change the outcome of the battles in Russia?

Frederick J. Kraics was a 1st Lieutenant from the 88th Blue Devil Division. He was in charge of a 36 man machine gun platoon during that long fight up the Italian peninsula to the alpine mountains bordering Germany. This is his story.

Where were you born and raised?

My father and mother were both born in a Hungarian village called Bardhaza. They emigrated separately to America in 1905, met in Greenpoint, Brooklyn and married in 1909. I was born on October 14, 1921 in Brooklyn but grew up in a small Long Island town in New York State called Ronkonkoma. The name Ronkonkoma meant “boundary fishing place” in the Algonquin Indian language. It was Long Island’s largest fresh water lake. I was the youngest of 5 children in our family. My parents had two girls and three boys.



*May 1942, Front Row Seated – Mary and Fritz Kraics
Back Row – Elizabeth, Michael, Mary, Matthew and Frederick Kraics*

I had to leave high school in my junior year to help my family pay bills during the depression. After working in a low paying job making pocket books for \$6 a week, I eventually landed a better paying job working for Grumman Aircraft at \$20 dollars a week. Grumman was expanding its capacity for making airplanes and needed good help.

How did you get into the army?

Joe Kirk was an official at the local draft board and a family friend. In the spring of 1942, Joe approached my father with a question. He told him that he would need to draft one of his boys. Which one should he take? Since I was the only boy not married, my father chose me to be drafted first.



Frederick J. Kraics, May 1942, just before being drafted

In June, 1942 I got my draft notice. On July 20, 1942 I reported to Fort Jay on Governor's Island in New York City for a physical. After passing that physical I was inducted into the Enlisted Reserve Corp of the Army that same day and was sent to Camp Upton in Brookhaven, Long Island, New York.

At Camp Upton we were given a series of tests to see if we had certain aptitudes. The Army used these tests to determine where to place each recruit. After testing was completed, we were shipped to an army post in the Cookson Hills of Oklahoma. We traveled by train from Camp Upton via the great lakes all the way to newly created Fort Gruber.

I was assigned to H Company in the 2nd Battalion of the 351st Regiment in the 88th Division. We were the first all draftee division in the Army. I had an aptitude for mechanics having worked at Grumman Aircraft, so they assigned me to a heavy weapons company as a machine gunner and sent me off to basic training.



*Private Kraics at Camp Gruber in 1942
Notice the 88th Division Cloverleaf shoulder patch*

What was army camp life like at Fort Gruber?

Discipline and conditioning were the first order of business at Fort Gruber. One of my first encounters with discipline was learned the hard way. One day three of us started to talk back to a Sergeant while we were standing at attention. The Sergeant reported us to the officer in charge and he promptly cured us of our discipline problem.

The officer made us dig a hole 6 foot wide by 6 foot long and 6 foot deep using small army shovels issued during World War II. It took all day to dig this large hole in the hard-pan dirt of Oklahoma. When we were finished, the officer lit up a cigarette, smoked it, flicked the butt into the hole and told us to cover it up. We learned our lesson in discipline the hard way that day and learned to keep quiet while in ranks after that.

Our training included becoming proficient in handling and maintaining all forms of weapons in our company. We were trained in the use of rifles, machine guns and mortars.



A Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) is being held in the left hand picture and an M-1 Garand Rifle on the ground in the right hand picture

The most complicated of the weapons we learned to use was the machine gun. We were given old World War One Browning 30 caliber water-cooled machine guns for training purposes. The first time we began to field strip a machine gun we had to clean cosmoline from each part of the gun. Cosmoline was used as a protective coating to prevent the guns metal parts from rusting.

After a while I could take apart a machine gun and put it back together without even looking. To further test us, they made each machine gunner take apart and put back together a machine gun blindfolded. They also made us do it at night to simulate wartime conditions.

Only two of us were able to take our machine-guns apart without seeing and correctly identify each piece of the gun. Because of that accomplishment I was promoted to Corporal in January 1943.



This is what a Browning 30 caliber water cooled machine-gun looked like

After Camp Gruber where did you go?

I went on extended maneuvers near Shreveport, Louisiana from June 28th until August 22nd, 1943. The last big test was a forced march of 42 miles in 60 hours. I made it and was now physically ready to be sent to war. I thought I was going to be assigned to the Pacific theater after training in the swamps of Louisiana.



The "Chow Line" - Army food served outdoors



What camp life really looked like when everyone got up in the morning.

However, after the Louisiana maneuvers I was assigned in August 1943 to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio Texas for further training. In October 1943 my division was sent to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia and each of us was given a 10-day furlough before being shipped overseas. I used this time to visit my family and get married to my sweetheart back home, Helen McMahon.



October 16, 1943 wedding picture. We only had a two day honeymoon at the Patchogue Hotel because it took so long by train to get there and back to camp.

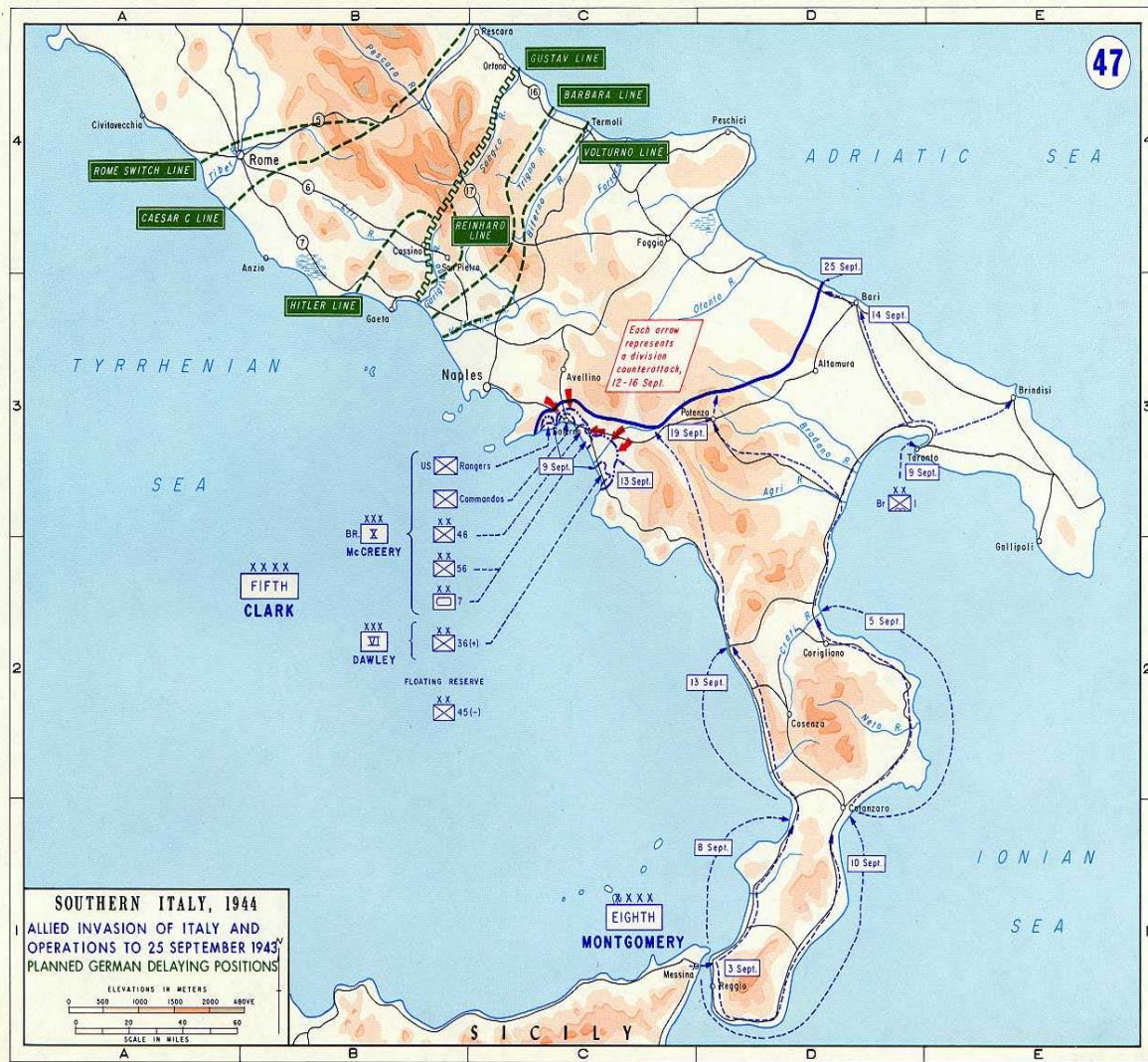
At the end of my furlough I returned to camp. It was around this time that I was promoted to Sergeant. On November 12, 1943 at Newport News, near Norfolk Virginia I embarked on a liberty ship. It was headed to North Africa. I was relieved that I was not going to be sent to the Pacific as I originally thought. My ship joined a convoy and as we crossed the ocean we encountered rough weather which made me appreciate dry land even better.

There were over 200 ships in the convoy. Liberty Ships were converted to troop transports and were packed with 600 soldiers in each ship. Sleeping arrangements stacked soldiers as many as 5 high inside the ship. It was rumored that only 2 ships were lost from that convoy. I was told that the ships lost were only supply ships sailing at the back of the convoy and did not contain any troops. The official Army records only reported that we did not lose any soldiers to enemy activity. So I never knew if the rumor of supply ship sinkings was really true or just a rumor.

On December 4, 1943 I landed at the city of Oran in Algeria and was assigned to the 2nd Corps of the Fifth Army commanded by Mark Clark. For the next few months I received army and special ranger training in the Sahara Desert and Atlas mountains. Then, on February 2, 1944 I embarked on a British ship and was transported to Naples, Italy. From Naples I marched to Minturno in the Liri Valley. Our battalion was then sent to the Cassino battlefield on the northern end of the American sector of the Gustav Line while the rest of the 88th Division remained closer to the coast.

What was it like fighting in Italy?

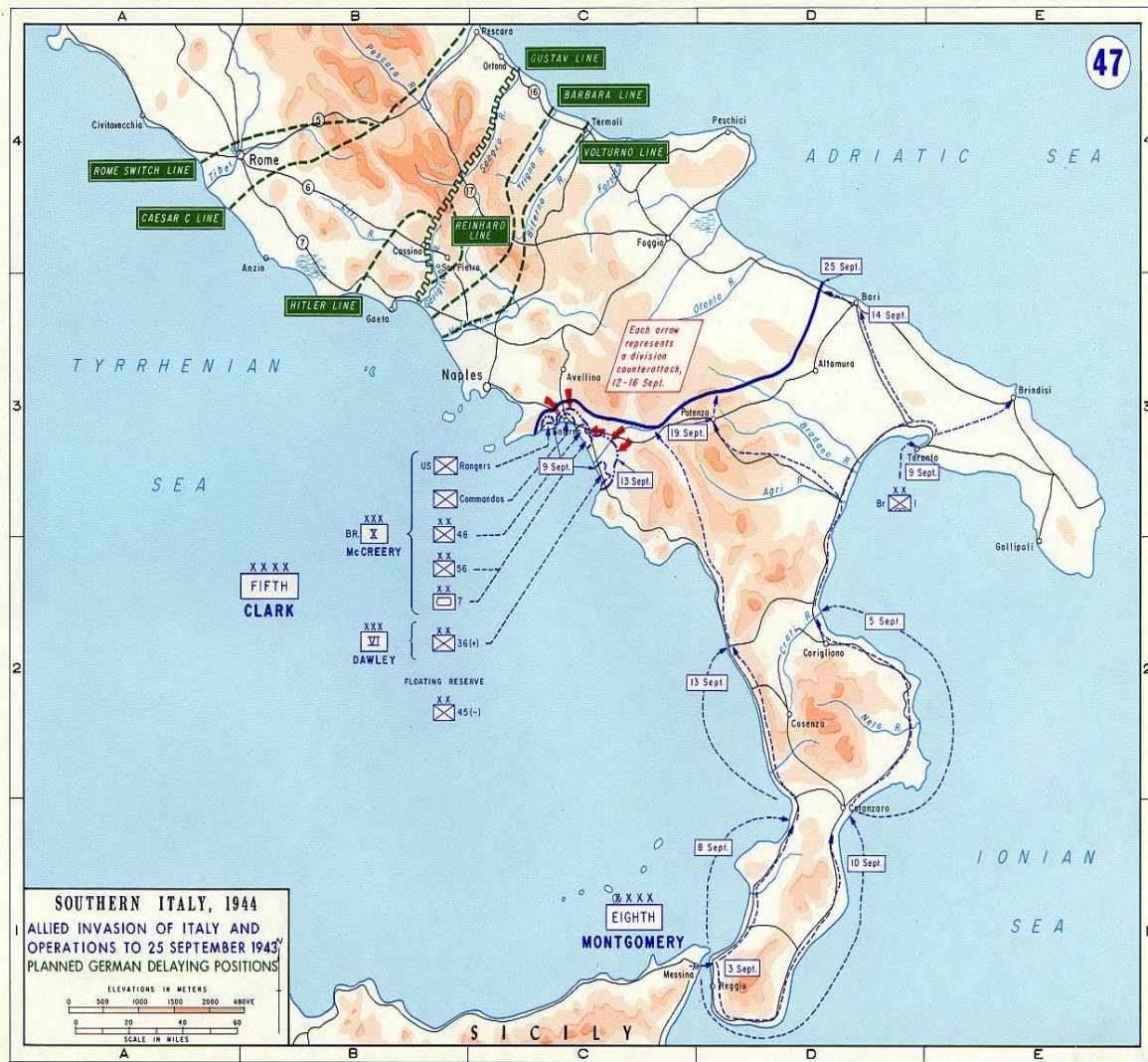
The Germans were always fighting on the defensive behind fixed fortifications. Their leader, Field Marshall Albert Kesserling was a defensive specialist who maximized the advantages of fighting on the defensive in Italy's mountainous terrain. The Germans constructed bands of heavily fortified defensive lines across Italy to stop the allies from advancing up the Italian Peninsula. Attacking and penetrating these lines was very difficult and very bloody.



In southern Italy multiple defensive lines blocked the Allies. They had to fight through the Volturmo, Barbara, Reinhard, Gustav, Hitler, Caesar and Rome Switch lines.

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SIDEBAR

How did the 88th Division get its nickname “Blue Devils”?

In World War I the 88th division was known as the “Cloverleaf Division” because of its blue 4-leaf clover shoulder-patch emblem. However, in World War II it earned another name. German army troops who fought against the 88th Division and were captured, commented that the soldiers of the 88th were no gentlemen and fought like devils. The 88th fought so aggressively against some of the best trained and equipped units of the Wehrmacht that they were called “Blue Devils” by the Germans. Even Axis Sally referred to them as the “Blue Devils” on her radio program. And this was only after 3 months of fighting.

And what was the significance of naming the 88th Division the “Blue Devils” ? One of the most elite combat branches of the German Army was the Fallschirmjäger which were German Paratroopers. They were called “Green Devils” because of their aggressive fighting spirit and their distinctive green uniforms. Since the 88th Division demonstrated that same aggressive fighting spirit and their shoulder patch emblem was blue, they were nicknamed “Blue Devils”. Therefore, when Axis Sally referred to them as the “Blue Devils” on her radio program, it was one of the highest compliments she and German Army could bestow upon the 88th Division.

The “Blue Devil” reputation did not come cheaply. The 88th “Blue Devil” division spent 344 days in combat, from February 1944 until May 1945. This 14-month period was one of the longest stretches of sustained combat for any U.S. division during the entire war.

During World War II the 88th division started with a total complement of 14,261 soldiers. During the Italian Campaign, the division’s total casualties were 11,285 during its 14 months in combat. That’s an 80% casualty rate.

The 351st was known as the “Spearhead Regiment” within the 88th Division and our casualty rate was also very high. By the end of the war in 1945, in my outfit, Company H of the 2nd Battalion of the 351st regiment we had only 5 men remaining from the original group of 156 soldiers who came over from the United States in 1943.

Tell us what the 88th Division did to attack the Gustave Line?

I arrived at Cassino in February 1944. I remember that to get to the front line we had to march through “purple heart valley”. Because the Germans held the high ground they could immediately spot any troop movement. Therefore, each soldier was told to stay at least 50 yards behind the soldier in front of him, advance in spurts and seek cover whenever not advancing. If spotted, the Germans would even fire artillery shells at only one person.

At the end of our time at Cassino, another outfit called the French Goums from the Corps Expeditionnaire Francais relieved us on the front lines. They were fierce fighters who spread terror wherever they went. When they arrived, they lit camp-fires that first night. No one could understand why they could do that when our outfit was strictly forbidden to do the same thing because of the artillery shelling. I understood the next morning when I heard loud yelling and screams coming from foxholes in the German front lines. The fires were just a diversion to get the Germans to think they were still in their camp and to let down their guard.

Normally two Germans would inhabit a foxhole. The French Goums, being excellent trackers, stalkers and knife wielders, snuck up during the night and slit the throats of only one man in a German foxhole. The next morning, as the remaining man in the foxhole woke up; he became hysterical knowing that it could have just as easily been him that had his throat slit. Many times as these fighters roamed the battlefield at night they would first lightly touch the helmet of the person they were stalking. If there was a dip in the back of the helmet then they knew it was a German helmet and their knife would do its work swiftly.

After that my battalion marched back closer to the coastline to rejoin the rest of the 88th Division and be in position for the start of the final offensive to breach the Gustav Line. That offensive started on May 11, 1944. We captured the town of Santa Maria Infante and were one of the divisions, which broke through the Gustav Line.



This statue was the only thing not destroyed in the town of Santa Maria Infante.



To drive the Germans out of Santa Maria Infante, the town had to be destroyed.



This is the most widely known terrain feature on the entire battlefield.

What happened next after you broke through the Gustave Line?

We continued our advance and broke through the Hitler Line on May 23, 1944 and kept on advancing to Rome. We also easily broke through the Caesar Line and the Rome Switch defensive lines

On June 3, 1944 I was leading a long-range reconnaissance patrol when we entered the outskirts of the city of Rome. We were on a road leading into the heart of the city when we heard German tanks coming down that road. We hid in the furrows of a near-by garden field until they passed. Without heavy weapons we withdrew rather than engage the enemy because we only had machine guns and this was only a recon patrol.

The next day, June 4, 1944 other outfits in the US Army were credited with the official honor of entering Rome to liberate it. At least 7 groups have been acknowledged as entering Rome on June 4th. But I know we were there first on June 3rd, 1944 with our reconnaissance patrol.

What happened after Rome was liberated?

We began advancing up the Italian Peninsula through the so-called spine of Italy, the Apennine Mountains. Mountain fighting was hard work. We always seemed to be advancing up-hill. The Germans had the advantage of looking down at us and being able to call in artillery fire anytime we moved. As we got to the top of each mountain or hill the Germans would retreat to a prepared position on the next hill. Each time they had the entire landscape already zeroed in for artillery fire.

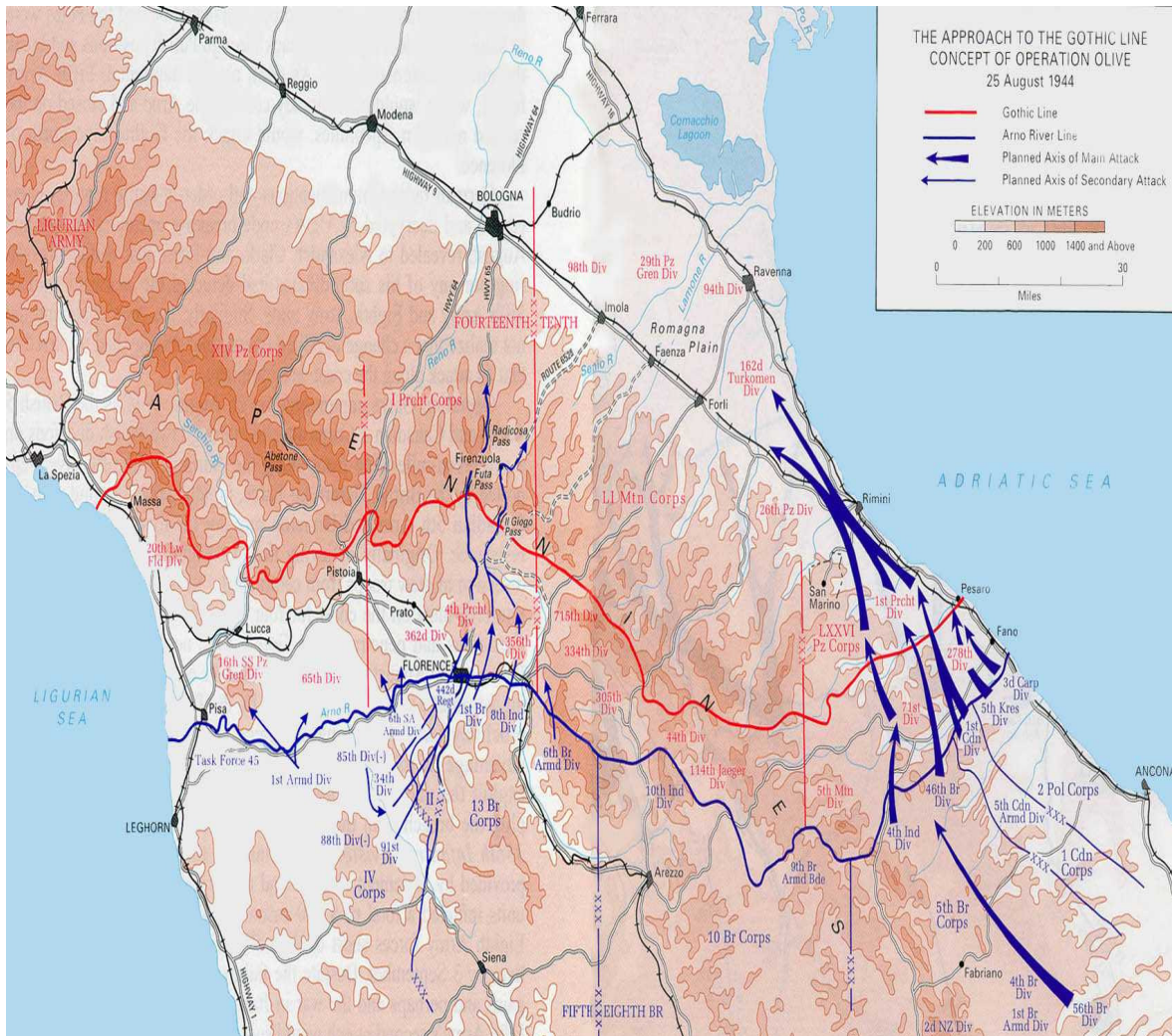
We were on patrol duty just about every night to reconnoiter the ground ahead and to scout out where the Germans had positioned their troops. It seemed that every foot of ground was contested. Knowing the terrain, the Germans would prepare ambushes every chance they could.

On July 14, 1944, while on night patrol I ran into an ambush. I was walking on a narrow road (more like a trail than a road) up the side of a mountain when tracer bullets began flying by me. At that point my reflexes took over and I instinctively dove off the trail away from the bullets and into what was a very deep ditch on the side of that trail. Just then I heard the sound of artillery right in front of me. The Germans must have had an 88-millimeter cannon aimed down that road because I could hear the unmistakable sound of an 88, a whoosh and then a loud thump when it hit. I was lucky that they started firing a machine gun with tracer bullets first that night. If they hadn't, I surely would have been killed. By the time you hear the sound of an 88mm artillery round it has already passed by you.

That jump into the ditch injured my chest. I had damaged my ribs when I jumped, so they took me to the 94th Evacuation Hospital. The doctors took X-rays, taped me up and I was able to report back to duty a few weeks later on August 16, 1944. I still have the Western Union Telegrams the army sent to my wife informing her of my injury and subsequent return to duty.

How long did it take to fight through the Gothic Line?

We first had to fight through the Arno River Line before we even got to the Gothic Line. The Gothic Line Winter Offensive began on September 10, 1944 and continued until early 1945. This was the hardest fighting of the war for our outfit because the Gothic Line was a defensive belt of fortifications that seemed to be on every mountain slope in the northern Apennine mountain range.



In northern Italy two main defense lines were constructed. The blue line was the Arno River Line and the red line was the Gothic Line. One of the small blue arrows shows where the Gothic Line was breached by the 88th Division.

We were continually on the offensive. Even in the winter I lived outside in foxholes I dug for myself whenever I could. When it rained, the foxhole would fill with water and I would use my helmet to bail water out of my “bedroom”. When it snowed I used blankets to cover myself and keep the snow out.

Sometimes I was lucky and was able to stay in buildings in a captured town.



Pictured above is the type of clothing Sergeant Kraics wore in the winter of 1944

Because we were always advancing, supplying us was a logistical nightmare. In the rough terrain the only way to supply us was by pack mules. I know the American army was fully mechanized with tanks and supplied by trucks and jeeps. Perhaps in other places they were but we got our food and ammo by pack mule on the front line most of the time. During our mountain fighting, we never saw a tank. The terrain we were in was not suitable for tank warfare.

One time, the Germans counterattacked and surrounded our battalion. We could not be supplied by jeep, pack mule or parachute airdrops. We took ammunition from our dead comrades and were forced to eat our pack mules for food. I highly recommend that if you ever get the chance to taste mule meat do not do it. It was awful. To this day I cannot eat lamb because it reminds me of mule meat. Arrrrugh! It was at this time that I was promoted via a battlefield commission from Sergeant to 2nd Lieutenant.

What happened after you broke through the Apennine Mountains?

After we broke through the Gothic Line in the Apennine Mountains we entered the Po Valley. Marching into the valley from the mountains I was amazed at the sight of what looked like hundreds of American tanks on the valley floor. I was very glad to have all this armored support to help push back the Germans. But my joy lasted only a short while. I quickly learned that the presence of tanks drew artillery fire. So I stayed as far away from them as I could.

You were decorated for bravery a number of times. Tell us what happened?

In total, I received the Bronze Star and 3 Oak Leaf Clusters. Rather than awarding the same medal over and over again the Army adds Oak Leaf Clusters. Each oak leaf represents another medal for bravery. For my actions at Santa Maria Infante a Bronze Star was awarded to me. But the next award of an Oak Leaf Cluster was the one I was most proud of. My mission was to provide covering fire for the Po River crossing near the town of Ostiglia. But let me tell you what happened in the words of Brigadier General J.C. Fry from his citation awarding me another bronze star;

“During the crossing of the Po River, our (2nd) battalion came under heavy 20 mm (cannon) and machine gun fire from the enemy. Lieutenant Kraics was instructed to move his platoon forward, place his guns in position and bring fire on the enemy position on the opposite bank of the river. Lieutenant Kraics without regard for his own safety led his platoon, in the face of heavy fire to an exposed position on the bank. The speed with which effective fire was brought on the enemy position and fine display of leadership on the part of Lieutenant Kraics was a credit and inspiration to his platoon.”

This effort was captured on film and published in a magazine.



This was the picture that appeared in Yank Magazine. 2nd Lieutenant Kraics appears in the foreground and his platoon of four 30 caliber machine guns is lined up on his left hand side. Only one gun is shown.

What happened after crossing the Po River?

Once we were past the Po River we raced to the Alpine mountain border with Germany. By May 4, 1945 we were able to link-up with other American Infantry Divisions at the Brenner Pass. At that point all fighting ceased and the war on the Italian Front was over. On June 29, 1945 I was given a battlefield commission from 2nd to 1st Lieutenant for my contribution in assisting the amphibious crossing of the Po River. After that I transferred to another outfit which was scheduled to be one of the first units being shipped back to the United States. I had more than enough points to qualify to go home.

I was discharged from the Enlisted Reserve Corps (drafted army) and the next day I re-enlisted into the Regular United States Army and was assigned to the 100th Chemical Mortar Battalion (CMB). The 100th CMB was a specialized unit. Their ultimate mission was to stop a breakthrough if the Germans used outlawed mustard or nerve gasses. Most people do not know that the Allies had huge stockpiles of mustard, phosgene and nerve gasses. These stockpiles were used as a deterrent to prevent Germany from using its own stockpile of these weapons. The strategy worked because neither side used gas during the war.

During the summer I was guarding prisoners of war at a camp near Brescia, Italy. We used to patrol the camp perimeter by jeep.



*1st Lieutenant Kraics patrolling prisoner of war camp perimeter near Brescia.
Notice barbed wire perimeter behind the woman in the background.*

However, they replaced our jeeps with horses. While on horseback I ran into a low hanging telephone line, fell off my horse and badly fractured my wrist.

I remained in Italy waiting until a ship was available to take me home. This allowed me enough time to do some sightseeing in northern Italy.



Sightseeing at San Marco Square in Venice, Italy. From left to right is Jim Maxwell, Snake Russell, Frederick Kraics, Bill Labay and a soldier in white pants who just joined us when the picture was taken.



1st Lieutenant Kraics sightseeing at Lake Maggiore in Italy near the Swiss border

I returned to the United States on October 12, 1945 aboard a liberty ship which was converted to carry troops instead of cargo. I sailed from Naples, Italy to Boston, Massachusetts and then traveled by railroad to Fort Dix, New Jersey. On October 17, 1945 I was discharged from the Regular US Army at Fort Dix. I then traveled by train to Ronkonkoma, NY and a huge welcoming home party.

Because of my badly fractured wrist I received an army pension of \$2 a month after the war. Eventually two bones in my wrist died and I had to have them surgically removed after the war.

What decorations were you awarded while in the Army?

I was awarded the following medals & citations during my service in World War II;

The Bronze Star with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters
National Battlefield Commissioned Officer Medal of Valor
European American Middle Eastern Campaign Ribbon with 4 Battle Stars
Combat Infantryman Badge
Rifleman's Badge for an Enlisted Man
Rifleman's Badge for an Officer
Marksmanship Medal for Rifle
Marksmanship Medal for Machine Gun
Good Conduct Medal
Presidential Unit Citation for the Battle of Mount Capello
French Croix de Guerre

Were you going to be drafted into the army again for the Korean War?

Yes. I received notice to report for active duty in the Korean War. However, since I was receiving a monthly pension from the army I was exempted from serving in that war.

How do you feel now about being a "Blue Devil Machine Gunner"?

It was an honor and privilege to serve my country during the Second World War. My service in Italy was one of the highlights of my life. I came away from that experience with a deep appreciation of the sacrifice America must make to preserve it's freedom.

I also got to add Italian to the three languages I already knew which were English, Hungarian and German.

Post Script

In 1945 Frederick returned home to his wife Helen. When he got home he and his wife built their own house at 355 Woodlawn Avenue in Ronkonkoma, New York and took over his father's water well drilling business. He had two sons, 7 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.

After retiring from well drilling in 1983, he began competing in the Senior Olympic Games. He has won over 100 gold, silver and bronze medals competing in race-walking, swimming, shot put and discus events. He won the New York State race-walking championship three times and twice in North Carolina where he now resides in a town called Spot, on the Currituck Peninsular of North Carolina. (No kidding, the town is really called Spot) After having a knee replaced, at 82 years of age he competed in the Currituck Senior Olympic Games in Elizabeth City, North Carolina in 2004 and won a gold medal in the 100-yard dash.

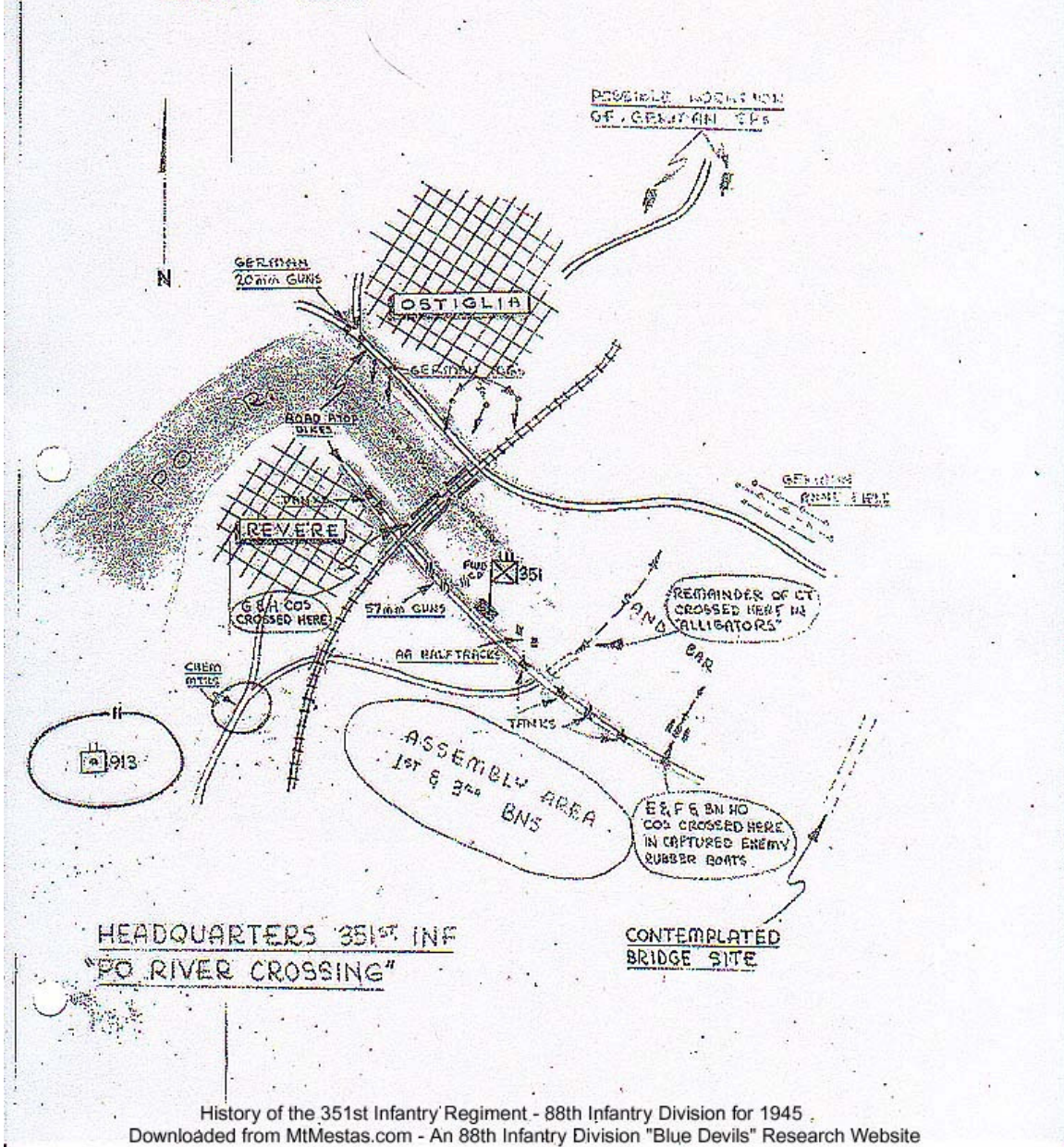


Frederick J. Kraics and his wife Helen in 2005 at Spot, North Carolina

First time contributor Frederick J. Kraics III lives in Manhattan, New York with his wife Barbara. His father, Frederick J, Kraics will be 86 in October 2007 and lives in Spot, North Carolina.

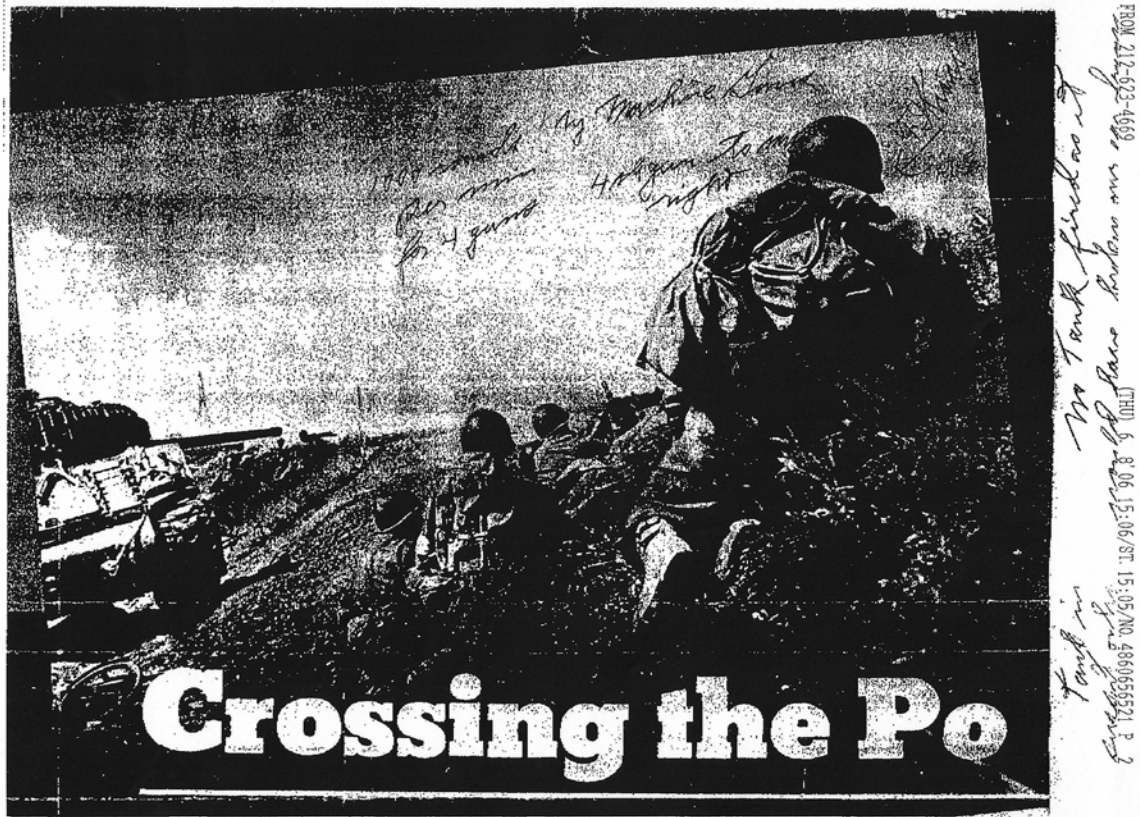
For further reading see, History of the 351st Infantry Regiment, 88th Infantry Division, National Archives original manuscript edited by C. W. Walters, 1976 and "We Were There From Gruber To The Brenner Pass". The latter was compiled by Headquarters Staff of the 88th Division in 1947. From Gruber to the Brenner Pass can also be found on the internet at www.ItalyWW2/Division88

SCHEMATIC SKETCH
TO ACCOMPANY NARRATIVE HISTORY
APRIL 1945

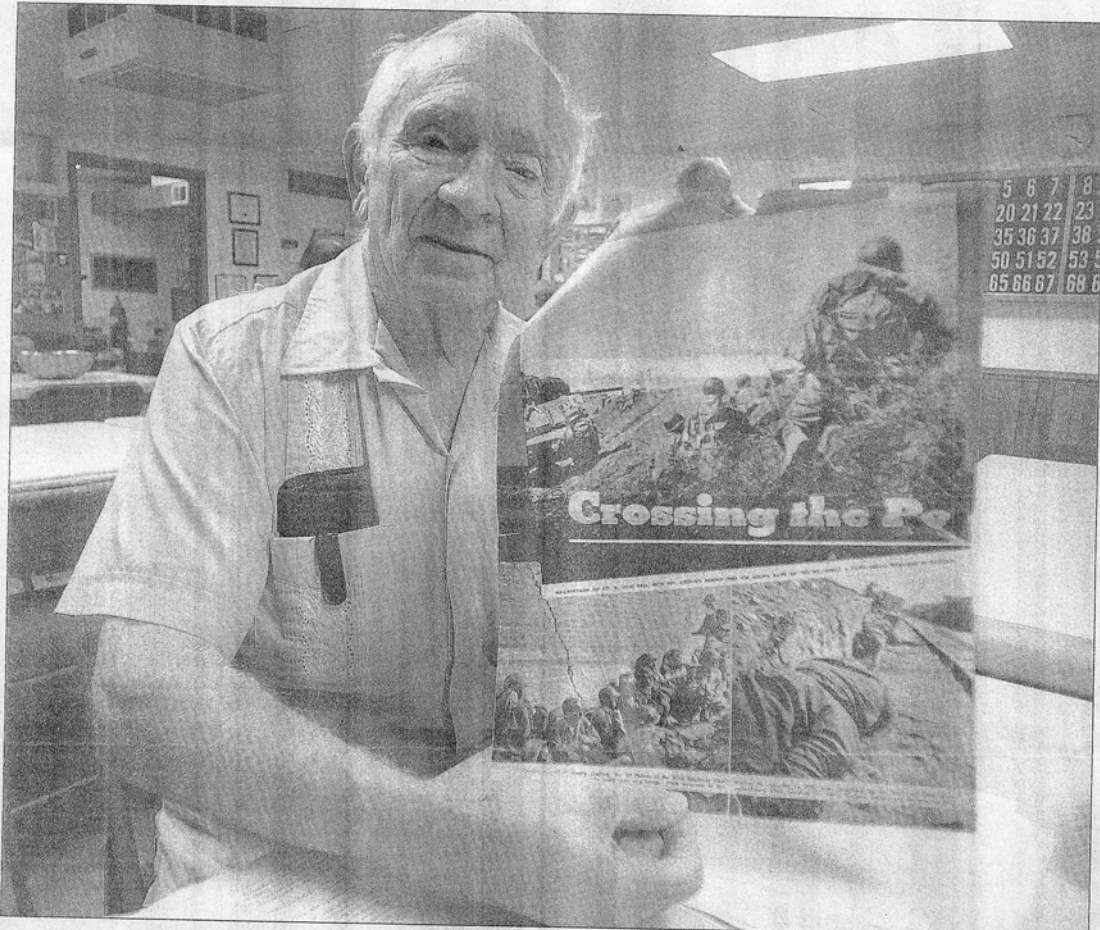


History of the 351st Infantry Regiment - 88th Infantry Division for 1945
 Downloaded from MtMestas.com - An 88th Infantry Division "Blue Devils" Research Website

LT. Kraics positioned his machine gun platoon behind company E and F's crossing of the Po River in the Spring of 1944.



Actual battle picture of PO River Crossing. LT. Kraics is on the right hand side of the picture directing his machine gun platoons guns in sweeping the enemy positions. He was promoted for bravery in this battle.



Eighty-two-year-old Fred Kraics of Powells Point holds an old magazine containing a picture of him and his platoon crossing a

river in Italy. Kraics served as a machine-gunner and was awarded four Bronze Stars during the war.

DREW C. WILSON/THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

WWII: Local events to honor veterans

During the campaign, 2,469 men in that unit were killed, according to Kraics.

Kraics, originally from New York, earned a battlefield commission and was awarded four Bronze Stars,

At one point during this two-year campaign, a captain mistakenly wrote to Kraics' wife that he had been killed. The mistake was corrected within a couple of weeks.

two for his unit's accomplishments and two for his own bravery. There were 156 men in his company at the start of the Italian campaign. With transfers and casualties, Kraics said, he was one of five left from the original group.

At one point during this two-year campaign, a captain mistakenly wrote to Kraics' wife that he had been killed. The mistake was corrected within a couple of weeks, he said.

Another time, an officer told him to crawl around a bend in the trail to make sure

there were no enemies waiting. When he eased around the bend, he came face-to-face with a German soldier. But the soldier was dead, left there with his eyes open as a decoy, he said.

While crossing the Po River, the unit ran into heavy enemy fire. Kraics' machine-gunners were supposed to keep the enemy pinned down while riflemen crossed the river. Bullets were whizzing as Kraics had his men ready the machine guns for firing before going to the top of a ridge, where they would be exposed to the enemy.

The machine-gunners continuously fired 1,000 rounds a minute while soldiers ran up and down the ridge bringing more ammunition to keep the firing going.

"We had to stay up there," Kraics said. "You got your friends out there. Those guns were red hot and smoking like crazy."

Kraics, 82, was in a machine-gun company in the 88th Infantry Division as it battled from Naples, Italy, to Austria in 1944 and 1945.

■ Reach Jeffrey Hampton at (252) 338-0159 or jeff.hampton@pilotonline.com.



Private Kraics in casual attire at Camp Gruber in Oklahoma, 1942.



Private Kraics saluting in front of his barracks at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, 1942.



Lieutenant Kraics and a fellow GI at the Swiss border. They are standing on the Italian side of the bridge. Across that bridge is Switzerland. Notice the Swiss cross on the building beyond the bridge.



88th Division was on maneuvers in Louisiana in 1943. This is what an army camp really looked like.



More pictures of the devastated town of Santa Maria Infante.



More pictures of the devastated town of Santa Maria Infante.



PHOTO ASSOCIATION
"Hot Dog" Shea, Blue Devil Hero No. 1, squints at the Garand which won him the Medal of Honor.

24

↑ me
Cellar Barn

The Blue Devils Stumped the Experts

By SID FEDER

Military wise guys said the all-draftee 88th Division would never see combat. But it wasn't long in Italy before both American and German professionals were applauding these original "apprentice sad sacks."

WHEN the raw draftees who composed the 88th Infantry Division began to gather on a dusty Oklahoma plateau in the summer of 1942—green "apprentice sad sacks" who didn't know a muzzle from a trigger—certain military wiseheims took one look and shuddered. "This outfit," they said, "will never get overseas."

Exactly one year, seven months and eighteen days later, the 88th Division Blue Devils were holding down a 10,000-yard battle sector on the bitter Italian front—the first all-draftee division overseas and in combat.

When the 88th, now a well-drilled unit, arrived in Africa en route, there were still some die-hards.

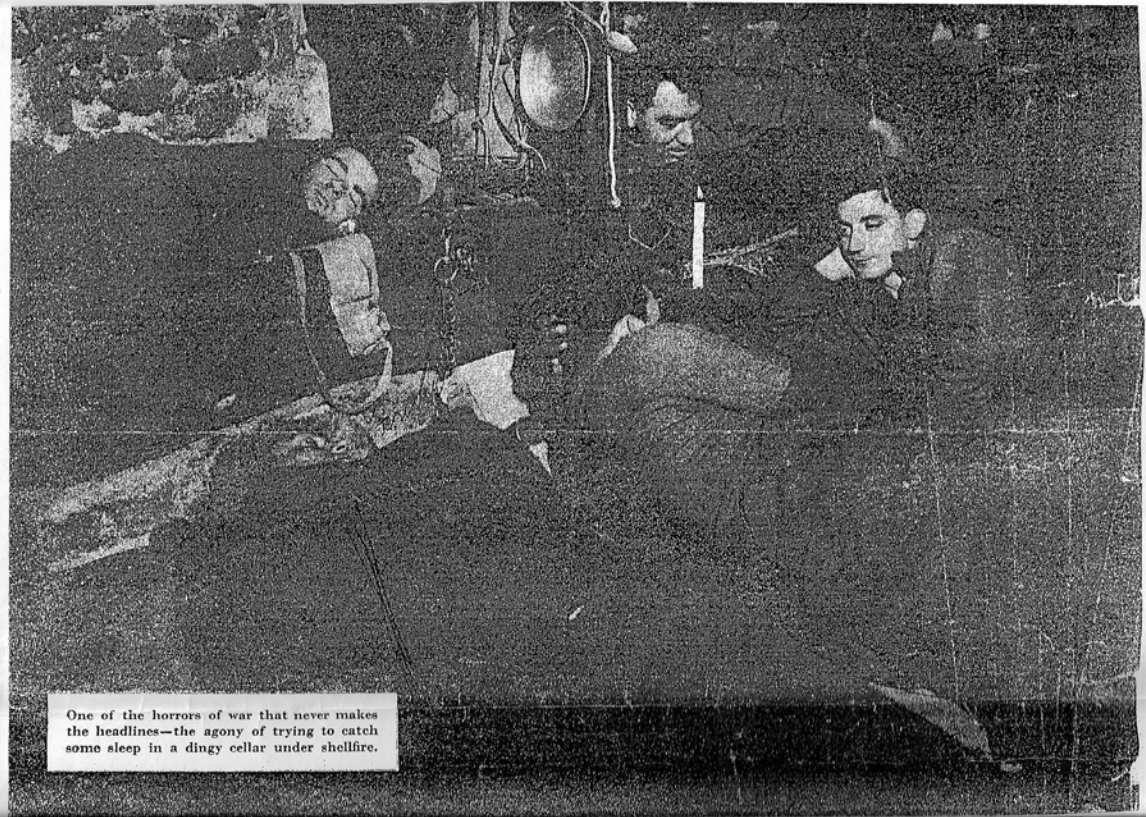
"This outfit," they sneered, "will never see action. We'll stay here and police up."

Six months and fourteen days later, the 88th led the liberating forces into Rome, after smashing 109 air-line miles in thirty-one days—actually 350 miles up and down the man-eating mountains.

Axis Sally, one of Jerry's top propaganda broadcasters, gave the Blue Devils their nickname—blue for the color of their four-leaf-clover shoulder patches, formed by crossed eights; devils for the way they fought.

"You Blue Devils," she wailed on the air one night during the rush for Rome, "are bloodthirsty cutthroats. You don't fight like gentlemen."

Magazine article and picture of LT. Kraics in Italy, 1944.



Sergeant Kraics is asleep in the bottom left hand corner of the picture. The picture was taken in a cellar barn in Italy during 1944.

ANCE, PATCHOGUE, N. Y., THURSDAY, MAY 3, 1945

Kraics Is Promoted To 2d Lieut. in Field

As the result of a recent battle field promotion in Italy, Frederick J. Kraics today is a second lieutenant, in command of the company in which he started as a buck private nearly three years ago.

Lieutenant Kraics, husband of Mrs. Helen McMahon Kraics of Central Islip and son of Mr. and Mrs. Fritz Kraics of Locust avenue, Ronkonkoma, was inducted at Fort Jay, N. Y., on July 6, 1942. He was assigned to Company H of the 351st infantry, 88th division, with which he trained at Camp Gruber, Okla. and in Louisiana and at Fort Sam Houston, Tex. He left for overseas on November

12, 1943, arriving in Africa three weeks later. He left for Italy on February 2, 1944.

He participated in the Rome-Arno river campaign, the breaking of the Gustav, Hitler and Gothic lines and in the fall of Rome, as well as in the battle of Cassino and at the Anzio beachhead.

Meanwhile, he had been promoted through the ranks to sergeant, staff sergeant, then technical sergeant, a rating he held until March 14, when he was given an honorable discharge as an enlisted man, and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. In the latter capacity, he was placed in command of his old company, H.

He holds the marksmanship medal for rifle and machine gun, a bronze battle star, an Europe, Africa, Middle East theatre ribbon, good conduct ribbon and the combat infantryman's badge.

Commissioned In Field



Second Lieut. Frederick J. Kraics of Central Islip, formerly of Ronkonkoma, who was made an officer recently while campaigning in Italy; held the rank of technical sergeant.

Employed in Dept. 7, Plant 1, before entering the armed forces, Frederick J. Kraics has been awarded a combat commission as second lieutenant, one of the greatest honors that can be bestowed on a soldier. He formerly held the grade of technical sergeant and had served on the Fifth Army front in Italy as a member of the 351st "Spearhead" regiment of the 88th "Blue Devil" division.

Kraics was recommended for a commission by Lt. Col. Franklin P. Miller of Carmel, Calif., regimental commander, who said that "his character and devotion to duty have been excellent. He has proven that he is able to cope with situations involving great responsibilities."

As a platoon sergeant, Kraics crawled almost 400 yards over terrain exposed to enemy observation and under constant enemy shelling to get litter-bearers and medical aid for wounded soldiers in his platoon who were in need of immediate attention.

Kraics entered the armed forces in July, 1942. He wears the combat Infantryman Badge, the Good Conduct Medal and the European Theater Ribbon with a battle star.

ENLISTED RECORD OF

Kraics Frederick J. 32400392 T/Sgt
 (Last name) (First name) (Middle initial) (Army serial number) (Grade)

Born in Greenpoint, in the State of New York
~~XXXXXX~~ Inducted 6 July, 1942, at Fort Jay, New York
 When enlisted or inducted he was twenty years of age and by occupation
 a stock clerk
 He had brown eyes, brown hair, ruddy complexion,
 and was five feet nine inches in height.
 Completed two years, eight months, eight days service for longevity pay.
 Prior service: None

Noncommissioned officer Technical Sergeant, SQ #60, Hq 351st Inf., dated 24 June 1944
 Military qualifications: Rifle M-1, Course A, SS 172 29 Sept/43; HMG .30 SS 174 10 Oct 1942
 Army specialty Platoon Sergeant 605
 Attendance at _____
 (Name of noncommissioned officers' or special service school)

Battles, engagements, skirmishes, expeditions Rome-Arno Campaign 6 Feb 1944 to 14 March 1944
 Participated in breaking of Gustav, Hitler and Gothic lines and fall of Rome.
 Decorations, service medals, citations EAME Theatre Ribbon, Good Conduct Ribbon, Combat Inf Badge
 Wounds received in service None Battle Star Rome-Arno Campaign
 Date and result of smallpox vaccination 21 July 42 Immune; 30 Sept 43 Immune; 7 November 44 Immune
 Date of completion of all typhoid-paratyphoid vaccinations 7 Aug 42 Course Comp; 21 Oct 43 Stim; 7 Nov 44
 Date and result of diphtheria immunity test (Schick) TYPHUS 5 Nov 43 Course Comp; 15 Jan 45 Stim dose
 Date of other vaccinations (specify vaccine used) Tetanus Toxioid 14 Oct 42 Course Comp; 30 Sept 43 Stim dose.
 Physical condition when discharged Good Married or single Married
 Honorably discharged by reason of to accept apmt as 2nd Lt per par 8 SQ 70, Hq Fifth Army dtd 11
 Character Excellent EBTS Periods of active duty: 20 July 42 to 14 March 1945 Mar
 Remarks No time lost under AW 107; Not entitled to travel pay; accepted for service at
Fort Jay, N.Y. 6 July 42. Trfd to ERC 6 July 42. Rptd for AD at Camp Upton, N.Y. 20 July
Left U.S. 12 November 1943 Arrived in Africa 4 December 1943; Left Africa 2 February
1944 Arrived in Italy 6 February 1944.



17 Mar 45 Signature of soldier
 APO 88 % PM., N.Y.
 Paid in Full Nothing
 No Deposits.
J. I. CASTERLINE
 J. I. CASTERLINE, Maj. F. D.
 Finance Officer

Frederick J. Kraics
 FREDERICK J. KRAICS,
 T/Sgt 351st Infantry
Robert D. Brown
 ROBERT D. BROWN,
~~XXXXXX~~ Capt., 351st Inf.
 Adjutant

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ENLISTED RECORD

- ¹ Enter date of induction only in case of trainees inducted under Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 (Bull. 25, W. D., 1940); in all other cases enter date of enlistment. Eliminate word not applicable.
- ² For each enlistment give company, regiment, or arm or service with inclusive dates of service, grade, cause of discharge, number of days lost under AW 107 (if none, so state), and number of days retained and cause of retention in service for convenience of the Government, if any.
- ³ Enter qualifications in arms, horsemanship, etc. Show the qualification, date thereof; and number, date, and source of order announcing same.
- ⁴ See paragraph 12, AR 40-210.
- ⁵ If discharged prior to expiration of service, give number, date, and source of order or full description of authority therefor.
- ⁶ Enter periods of active duty of enlisted men of the Regular Army Reserve and the Enlisted Reserve Corps and dates of induction into Federal Service in the cases of members of the National Guard.
- ⁷ In all cases of men who are entitled to receive Certificates of Service under AR 345-500, enter here appointments and ratings held and all other items of special proficiency or merit other than those shown above.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE

- AR 345-470.
 Insert name; as, "John J. Doe," in center of form.
 Insert Army serial number, grade, company, regiment, or arm or service; as "1620302"; "Corporal, Company A, 1st Infantry"; "Sergeant, Quartermaster Corps."
 The name and grade of the officer signing the certificate will be typewritten or printed below the signature.

CORRECTED COPY

CORRECTED COPY

HEADQUARTERS FIFTH ARMY
APO 464 US ARMY


AG 210.1-AP

11 March 1945

SUBJECT: Combat Appointment. A 02001712
THROUGH: Commanding General, 88th Infantry Division,
APO 88, US Army.
TO: T/Sgt Frederick J. Kraics, 32400392,
351st Infantry.

1. By direction of the President and pursuant to authority delegated to this headquarters under the provisions of letter, The Adjutant General's Office, 29 December 1944, file AG PR-A-A 210.1 (27 December 1944) subject: "Authority to Make Appointments", you, having clearly demonstrated your fitness for commissioned grade through outstanding performance in actual combat, are hereby temporarily appointed and commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Army of the United States, effective this date. Your serial number is shown after A above.
2. This commission will continue in force during the pleasure of the President of the United States for the time being, and for the duration of the war and six months thereafter unless sooner terminated.
3. This letter should be retained by you as evidence of your appointment as no commissions will be issued during the period of the war,

BY COMMAND OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL TRUSCOTT:


M. F. GRANT
Colonel, AGD
Adjutant General

Currituck's WW II veterans to be honored

Ceremony to be held
at county memorial park

By **BRENDA KLEMAN**
Staff Writer

A national memorial honoring World War II veterans will be dedicated May 29 in Washington D.C., but for those unable to travel to the nation's capital, the national American Legion has asked local posts to have their own community ceremonies.

American Legion Post 288 in Coinjock has scheduled a ceremony to honor Currituck WW II heroes at the county's new

Veterans Memorial Park on May 29, starting at 11 a.m.

Bob Kohler, who is involved in organizing the event, said a recognition ceremony will take place at the park and then the veterans will be invited back to the American Legion to have lunch and watch the national memorial dedication on television.

It's estimated the nation is losing about 1,100 World War II veterans a day. Most of the now living veterans are either in their 80s or 90s, and some like Fred Kraics of Spot say they're glad there's going to be a ceremony in Currituck, because Washington D.C. is

too far away.

Kraics, now 82, was sent to Italy in 1944 as a private in the U.S. Army. In the two years he spent there, he rose to the rank of First Lieutenant and received four bronze stars. At the end of the war, of the 156 men that were originally in his (division) only five were left. ~~PLATOON~~

"The rest were killed, captured or injured," he said.

The Currituck veteran engaged in battles and saw things that he will never forget. Not only was life difficult for those fighting on foreign soils, but also for the loved ones left behind anxiously awaiting their safe return. Kraics' wife, Helen, then a new bride, was mistakenly told her husband was killed — only to find out a few weeks later it

was a mistake.

Last year, Currituck dedicated its own Veterans' Memorial Park, and Kohler said it's a perfect place to honor the county's veterans on the national day of recognition. He said local officials will take part in the ceremony, and World War II veterans will be recognized and given a certificate. County Commissioner Eldon Miller, who is also a World War II veteran, will dedicate the park's Liberty Tree.

"It will be a day for remembering, honoring and thanking those who fought to keep the world free," Kohler said.

Any World War II veteran who wants to attend the ceremony, or a relative who wants their veteran family member recognized, can call Kohler at 232-8723, or e-mail him at bobkohler@mchsi.com.



Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

FREDERICK J. KRAIGS

52400592, TECHNICAL SERGEANT, COMPANY "H" 551ST INFANTRY

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to his country.

Given at BARBERINO, ITALY
Date FOURTEEN MARCH 1945

9 of us were discharged in this town. All are discharged in the States

RECORDED

OCT 4 1945

R. FORD HUGHES
Clerk of Suffolk County

F. P. Miller
F. P. MILLER,
Lt. Col., F.A.
Commanding.

W. D., A. G. O. Form No. 55
January 22, 1943

2nd Lieutenant Kraigs was discharged from the enlisted army. The next day he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant and re-enlisted in the Regular United States Army.

