

## 1945 June 11-17

### The Guitar That Played Sweet Music

Thousands of soldiers trained at nearby Camp McCoy during World War II. With hundreds of local young men stationed in far-flung places during the war, there had to be an effect on the dating scene. Numerous relationships and marriages resulted from soldiers at Camp McCoy visiting and otherwise coming in contact with local women.

The relationship between Phyllis Hohmann of Onalaska and a 2nd Infantry Division soldier from Oklahoma named Glen Kellar had a special twist. Before Kellar shipped overseas, Hohmann gave him a guitar. The guitar was shared by the men in Kellar's company. As related in the following newspaper article, Hohmann got back both the guitar and her man. Phyllis Hohmann and Glen Kellar were married on June 8, 1945.<sup>1</sup>

Kellar's [2nd Infantry Division](#) dated from November 1917 in the First World War. In World War II, they trained at Camp McCoy before being shipped to the European Theater of Operations in October 1943. The division landed in France on June 8, 1944, two days after the D-Day invasion of Normandy, and then endured 303 days of combat, suffering almost 26,000 casualties from all causes. Kellar's 2nd [Engineer Combat Battalion](#) provided construction and demolition services to the three infantry regiments that were the core of the division, as well as for other supporting units.<sup>2</sup> Kellar was a member of the Headquarters and Service Company (H & S) of the battalion.<sup>3</sup>

The 2nd Infantry Division's "Indianhead" insignia patch was well-known in La Crosse County because of its time spent at Camp McCoy.



(Medals of America)

## Worn Guitar, Covered With Printing, Chronicles Enjoyable Moments, Tragedies Of Group Of 18 Soldiers Fighting Nazis

Eighteen men, a guitar, and the battle of Elsenborn—form a saga of World War II which had its final chapter written in Onalaska.

The guitar, well-worn with constant playing while in the company of soldiers overseas, would have a long story to tell, filled with many stirring adventures, if it could only talk. Of the 18 men, only 10 are now alive, and Elsenborn was another in the string of Allied victories over the Germans.

It all began when Sgt. Glen Kellar met Phyllis Hohmann, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roscoe Hohmann, Onalaska, while he was stationed at Camp McCoy with the Second Division. When Kellar left for overseas duty in October, 1943, Phyllis gave him a guitar that he and the men of H and S Company in the Second Engineers Battalion adopted and kept with them all the way from Canada to the Rhine river.

### Three Men Could Play

Only three men of the company could strum the guitar, Robert E. Graham, Arkansas; Bobby Hunter, New Orleans; and Charles Dacus, Ohio. In the evenings, "Deep In the Heart of Texas" and many other well-loved and familiar songs would be strummed on the guitar and the men in the company sang and found relaxation.

Before the battle of Elsenborn which caused a tragic rift in the group of 18 men, they already had traveled many miles together. Their journey had included Canada, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, France, Normandy, Brittany, Omaha Beach, St. Laurent, Treviso, Formigny, Le Molay, Cerisy La Foret, Hill 192 at St. Lo, St. Germaine D'Elle, St. Germaine D'Elle, Vire, Torgny, Survire, St. Jean's De Beasant, Tinchbray, Falaise Gap, Brest, Plongastel Penn. Gennes, Landerneau, Pyrotegnic de St. Nicholas, Paris, Belgium, St. Vith, Schenberg, Verviers, Krincht, Bergenbach, Walliesiefen, and Orlais.

It was on Dec. 19, 1944, that the men of H and S company were together in a building during the battle for Elsenborn. A bomb struck, killing eight and wounding three of the men, including Kellar. The other seven were uninjured. Two days were spent in salvaging the wreckage, but one man's body still was not discovered.

### Eight Men Were Killed

Those killed were Thomas E. Eley, St. Paul; Tom Wonerly, Okla.; Ray Conatsen, Pennsylvania; Richard L. Colby, Detroit; Daniel Eley, Pennsylvania; Toby Cooley, (name not known); James Bull, New York; Bobby Hunter, Texas. Besides Kellar, Ralph Strong, Kansas, and Charles Dacus, Ohio, were wounded and sent back to hospital.

Only two officers and four enlisted men remained of the company and kept on the journey into Germany, hitting Bulding, Wirtzsheldt, Gemund, Schlieden, Hofen, Bad-Neuenah, Roer and Erf rivers, and the Rhine river. They were Lieut. Earl Locke, Colorado; Lieut.



**Complete Story Of 18 Men**, a guitar and the battle of Elsenborn is printed on the back of this guitar which Mr. and Mrs. Glen Kellar reminisce over now that he is home from overseas duty and has received a discharge. The guitar was given Kellar and the men of H and S company of the Second Engineers battalion formerly stationed at Camp McCoy by Mrs. Kellar, who was Phyllis Hohmann, Onalaska before her marriage on June 8. —Tribune Photo

Henry Hartman, Texas; James Blackwell, Ill.; Odell Francis, Colorado; Clarence Martzall and Byron Williams, Pennsylvania.

Finally Lieut. Locke mailed the guitar back to Onalaska. During its overseas travels, three new sets of strings had been used. The keyboard had lost most of its paint from continual playing.

One of the men painted the complete list of places and names of the men on the back of the guitar, which form the entire story of their World War II adventures.

Phyllis and Sgt. Kellar were married in La Crosse on June 8. He received a medical discharge on May 12, although he had accumulated 85 points and would have

been eligible for release on the point system. Kellar was in combat for 75 days, during which time he had seven days of relief.

Mr. and Mrs. Kellar plan to live in Borden, Tex., after their honeymoon. Kellar will be employed by the Phillips Petrol company. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Bert Kellar, R. 2, Nowata, Okla.

Music had its place in the war. For soldiers far from home, it provided a peaceful interlude from the horrors of war and perhaps a reminder or memory of home and the people awaiting their return. For a young woman from Onalaska, and a young soldier from Oklahoma, one special guitar played sweet music indeed.

Jeff Rand  
Adult Services Librarian  
La Crosse Public Library  
jrand@lacrosselibrary.org

#### Sources & Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> "Worn Guitar, Covered With Printing, Chronicles Enjoyable Moments, Tragedies Of Group Of 18 Soldiers Fighting Nazis," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 June 17, page 4.

<sup>2</sup> "Order of Battle of the US Army-WW II-ETO, 2d Infantry Division," *U.S. Army Center of Military History*, accessed 2020 June 20, <https://history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/2ID-eto.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> "Service Company," *Go For Broke National Education Center*, accessed 2020 June 20, [http://www.goforbroke.org/learn/history/military\\_units/service.php](http://www.goforbroke.org/learn/history/military_units/service.php).