

Sniper Exterminator



This is a story about T/Sgt. Kwiatek whose main interest in life is killing Germans. Three brothers and an unreasoning hatred of Nazis. To date, Kwiatek has notched up 22 enemy snipers to his credit, but he still has a long way to go, he says.

By Sgt. WALTER PETERS
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NORMANDY—"It's a beautiful country," said T/Sgt. Frank Kwiatek, of Philadelphia, heavy weapons platoon leader. "Only trouble is it's wonderful for snipers. From now on in we don't call anybody by rank—it's the first name, from the Old Man down. Snipers may be nearby, and they like to pick off the leaders."

We passed a reserve company where some of the men were taking baths with the aid of their helmets; others were writing letters or cleaning their weapons. We edged our way through a break in the hedges and walked through a field until another gap in the green rows appeared. "All those openings were made by machine gun fire," said Kwiatek.

As we moved along toward the front lines, Kwiatek kept shifting his eyes from trees to hedges and from hedges to trees, like a hunter in search of wild game.

"I got one right in that tree last week," he said. "I guess we have cleaned them all up right now but you can never tell. I'm not taking any chances with them."

We passed through more hedges. Up ahead were a number of men behind machine guns. Others, in foxholes, looked up as we neared the front. Kwiatek sat down, pulled out his knife and began cutting a notch in his rifle. "I might as well do this while I have time," he said.

There were 21 notches in the weapon, and he was making the 22nd.

"Three more to go and I'll have settled a promise I made when they killed my brother Ted. Then I'll kill twenty-five more for my brother Jerry. After that I'm going to kill as many Germans as I can because I hate the whole Nazi system."

Kwiatek was in Northern Ireland with his outfit when Ted, 21, gunner in a tank was killed in Sicily.

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Kwiatek swore before the men in his platoon that he'd get 25 Germans to avenge his brother's death. Several weeks later, the sergeant's 19-year-old brother Jerry was fatally wounded in Italy, and once more he made a pledge that he'd kill another 25 Nazis in retribution.

During his first four weeks in France Kwiatek erased 22 Germans, 20 with his Remington and two with hand grenades. The embattled sergeant has probably disposed of "another dozen" with a Tommygun, but he doesn't count them, explaining: "When I kill a German I like to look right into his eyes. I like to see them drop. When they drop I can almost see a picture of my brothers smiling at me. And I'm particularly happy to shoot snipers because they're so sneaky."

Of the 22 notches, 19 represent snipers.

Sergeant Kwiatek shot his first four Germans on June 10th when his outfit was prevented by snipers from proceeding over a crossroad near Cerisy La Foret. After a number of Americans were slain and injured, the CO asked for volunteers to eliminate the sniper. Kwiatek stepped forward. He prowled through the woods until he came to within 25 yards of one sniper's rear. The Nazi was in position behind a road marker. The platoon sergeant had the German in his gunsight, when he suddenly saw another sniper in a tree about fifty yards to his right. So he picked off the tree-sitter first and then "exterminated the one behind the marker."

THAT sniper in the tree taught Kwiatek one important lesson. "From then on I decided I was going to watch every tree, every bush, and every hedge," he said. A few minutes later the Americans passed the crossroad with Kwiatek trailing behind his platoon to give rear protection. "I saw the hedges moving slightly," Kwiatek said. "It was a little windy that day, but the wind was blowing from the other direction, so I became suspicious. I tiptoed toward the hedges and saw a German. 'Hey!' I yelled, and when the German faced me with rifle ready in his hands I let go. He keeled over backwards. He was gone, just another dead German. I later saw that he had been a captain in a German paratroop corps."

Still later that day, Kwiatek's outfit was marching through the streets of a town when bullets began splashing the center of the road. Kwiatek investigated while the rest of the men took cover. He spotted a German helmet sticking out of the chimney of a house. "Get me a bazooka," he told one of his men.

Kwiatek prides himself on being "a scientific sniper-hunter." To kill snipers, he said, you must use your head "but that doesn't mean that you can stick your head over the hedges where the square-heads can take Coney Island pot-shots at you." He said, "I always tell my men to keep their heads down. But sometimes the fellows forget and when they do—well, I can't tell them anything any more. It's too late."

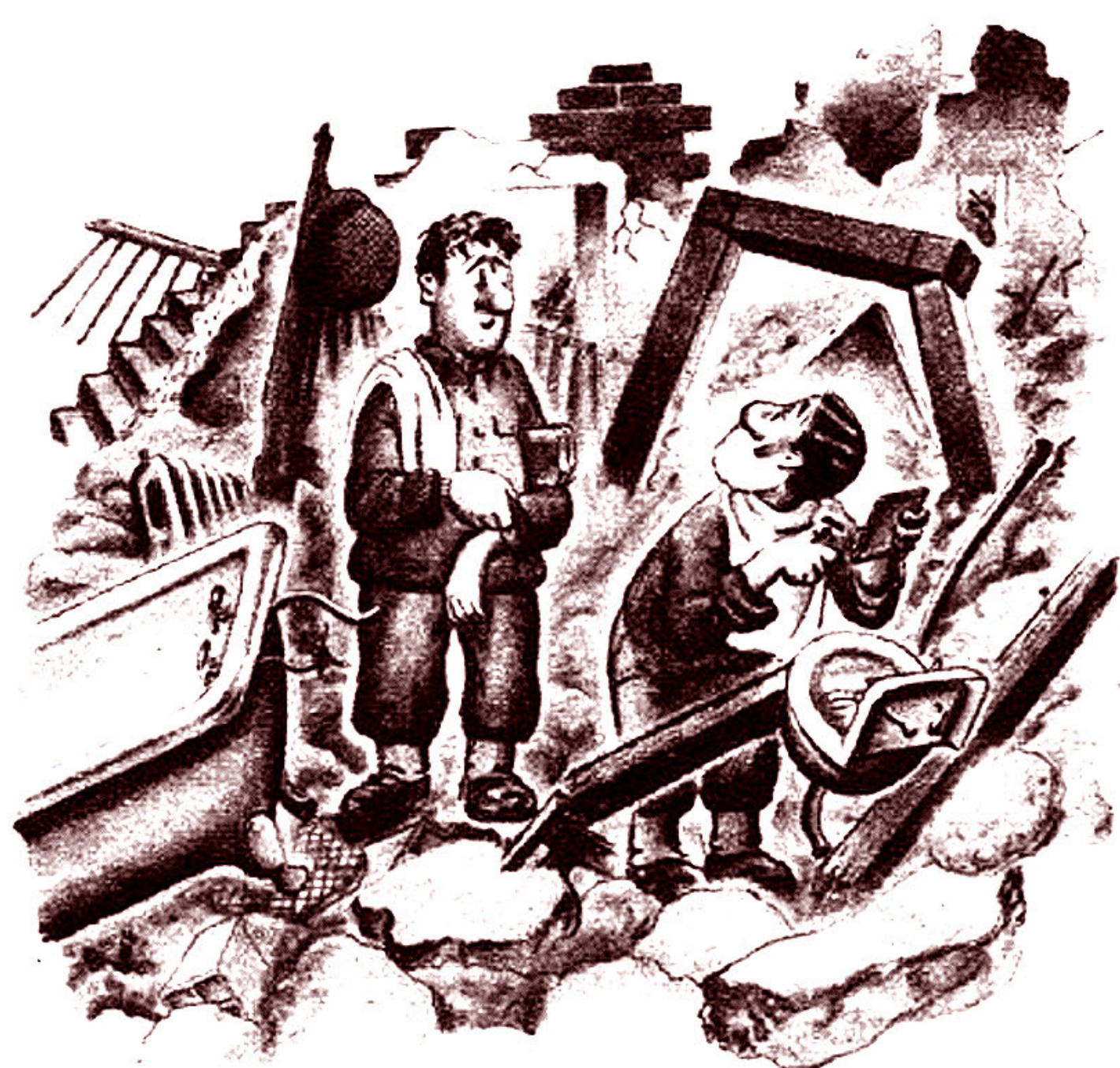
HE told me of the time a few days earlier when one of his men stuck his head above the hedges and took a shot. "The sniper got him square through the head, and his brains splattered all over my face," Kwiatek said. "I was never so sick in my life. Anyway, Rogers (Pfc. Floyd Rogers, from Rising Sun, Tex.) and myself decided we were going to get that sniper. I told Rogers to take the dead man's helmet and hold it up over the hedge, after I gave him the signal. Well, I walked away about forty yards and then motioned Rogers to lift the helmet. Then I watched. As soon as the helmet went up the squarehead began shooting and gave away his position. I signalled Rogers to raise the helmet again from another position. When he did, I saw the Hun's helmet come up from behind a tree, then his shoulders. I let him have it. All it took was one shot. Those bastards don't give you more than one shot. He's dead all right. I watched for two days and his body was still there. Then in the morning we found the body had been removed from the tree."

Kwiatek, at 46 the oldest enlisted man in his outfit, has been in the Army 27 years. He spent nineteen months as a machine gunner in France during the last war. He's been in the same platoon since 1924 and became leader in 1940. His daughter is a captain with the Army nurses in Italy. His men

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call him "Hardtack Murphy," a name he used while fighting as a welterweight in the Army during the early '30's.

"He's a damn good platoon leader," said Pfc. James W. Justus, 19, of Key West, Fla. "The only trouble is he wants to finish off the war by himself. Every time I see him he's looking up into a tree. I think he's going to be a very sad man when the war's over and there's no more snipers to kill."



"THE WATER HOT?"

—Pvt. Tom Flannery