

SYNOPSIS

PLATOON INTERNATIONAL

by

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This is the true story of an American platoon consisting of an officer and twenty-four enlisted men in France during World War II. Such a unit normally operated from three to five miles ahead of a regiment until making initial contact with the enemy. In this case, the farthest distance was 145 miles from the nearest American troops, across a major river over which all bridges had been destroyed. In that position, the platoon negotiated one of the largest surrenders to such a small unit in the midst of a war throughout the history of warfare.

The acquisition of several selected European personnel (French, Belgian, Polish), with linguistic abilities and contacts augmented a special Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon belonging to a regiment of the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division in WWII. These individuals, though not fully acknowledged by higher headquarters, accompanied the platoon throughout France and Luxembourg without remuneration, enabled this small unit to perform some gargantuan feats and led the local populace to dub it Platoon International. The organic platoon was also unique; twenty-four soldiers coming from eleven different States and speaking twelve European languages, but trained as a unit beginning with their entry into military service.

In late August 1944, less than three months after D-Day, the platoon finds itself defending a forty-five mile long strip along the Loire River from Orleans to Blois in Central France. The mission is to help protect the flank of General Patton's Third U.S. Army prior to the liberation of Paris. Suddenly, the German forces occupying the south bank of the river disappear. The platoon, now assisted by the French underground, crosses the river, and for three weeks patrols an area of 4,000 square miles in the land of chateaux and wine.

Meanwhile, a German army in southwestern France is ordered to move back to Germany as fast as possible in order to defend the Siegfried Line (West Wall) defenses along the German-French border. Crossing France, it moves directly through the area patrolled by Platoon International! Upon learning that the German columns cannot communicate with the High Command in Berlin, the platoon passes false information to the Germans through the French police and British Special Forces. In the midst of watching and counting thousands of enemy troops pass through the area, the platoon is called upon to help protect a chateau containing several hundred hidden art treasures from the Louvre Museum in Paris, including the Venus de Milo and the Nike (Winged Victory). By coincidence, the chateau had been the residence of Tallyrand, French foreign minister

who aided the American colonies during the Revolutionary War.

The attempt on Hitler's life in Berlin on 20 July 1945 has had a resounding effect upon the German General staff. This, coupled with the landing of the U.S. Seventh Army in southern France from Italy, discourages many of the German Wehrmacht officers. The false but plausible information issued by the platoon further demoralizes the German leaders in this part of France. The platoon, operating 100 miles into No-Man's-Land, and with all of the bridges across the Loire behind it destroyed, receives information that some of the Germans may surrender if certain conditions are met. One of the conditions is for the Allies to provide two battalions to attack the head of the German column. This would furnish the Germans with a reason to surrender. A twenty-four hour round trip by Jeep to the regimental headquarters provides the platoon leader with little assurance of assistance. Finally, a show of force by fighter aircraft is arranged to appear at the time the two opposing parties meet on an old Roman bridge in a desolate location.

On the American side are the lieutenant, a Belgian pseudo-lieutenant, a British major. A pile of burning hay in a road junction is their means of communication with the aircraft. They are astounded when they are joined by a German major General and his staff. The platoon, assuming it is about to capture a force of 5000, is shocked to discover that there are 20,000 troops in the General's command, among them some of the most elite of Hitler's forces.

After convincing the higher American headquarters that the Germans actually exist and that the surrender has been accomplished, the platoon must plan and secure the move of the entire armed force a distance of eighty miles north to the Loire river through sometimes hostile French elements.

In the midst of this hectic period, a horde of international news, radio and film personnel arrive on the scene from Paris, which has recently been liberated. This occurs before the bulk of the German troops have been informed that the surrender has been negotiated and shortly before the German forces run out of food. After many breathtaking incidents, such as obtaining food for 20,000 men, hay and grain for 2000 horses, exchanging hostages, and having clashes with the communist faction of the French underground, the platoon finally arrives at the river a week later with its charges.

There is a formal surrender to please the German general and the press, and the entire force is turned over to the Ninth U.S. Army, a recent arrival from the United States. This leads General Simpson, commander of Ninth Army to comment, "By God, I'm in Europe a week and I have more prisoners-of-war than Georgie Patton has had since Normandy!" The total number of troops is 19,956 and among

the equipment are 400 trucks, 1000 wagons, 2000 horses, 4000 machine guns, armored cars, artillery pieces, etc. In the race for publicity, cameras, pistols and other loot by newly arrived officers, the platoon is nearly forgotten. I, the platoon leader, am invited to Paris to relate the incident for the International Press. The time allotted in which to do so is limited to four minutes.

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