

Desert Humor

During these hectic combat days, there were a great many details assigned to the men of the 98th. Some of these details had nicknames or an alias, but the following detail was appropriately named.

This incident occurred during the days of the Libyan campaign while we were based near Tobruk. The camp was situated out in the desert and when nature called, latrines were set out in the “Blue” several yards apart.

These latrines were constructed of a steel “petrel” drum, buried in the sand with an old fashioned “one holer” to sit on and were affectionately called “Desert Lilies”. When these “Lilies” became filled to capacity, it was necessary to bury them and move to more fertile pastures.

On this particular day, Friday, February 4, 1943, (it should have been Friday, the 13th), the armament section of the 344th Squadron was alerted to carry out this mission. The first “Lily” was buried according to Army regulations.

Someone (name unknown, but no doubt one of the boys who had his head exposed to the hot desert sun too long) had a brainstorm and came up with the idea of giving the “lilies” a first class military funeral.

The boys lined up, military-like, to the platoon leader’s sharp commands – “attention – right shoulder arms” (with picks and shovels) – “forward march” (singing an appropriate song for the momentous occasion, until they approached the next “Lily”).

The platoon members were assigned different duties – some dug the hole, others carried the “casket” (pardon me, the can) – taps blown, flowers, (yes, nature lovers actually found beautiful flowers in the desert), were lain on the grave. Deacon Pummel delivered the address with appropriate words and the firing squad, with picks and shovels, did their job with no casualties.

After each “Lily” was buried and covered, the procession moved to the next “Lily” where the firing squad stood at “Present Arms” a Lá Militaire.

Major Carmack and his adjutant, roaring with laughter, were watching this historical ceremony. The Major sent the orderly room clerks to Group Headquarters to try and locate a movie camera. By the time they found one, the fast-working armament boys had completed their task and reported back to “sack time”. The Major could not persuade the boys to re-enact the scene, as there was no section in the Articles of War that pertained to this particular type of warfare. Incidentally there was no citation for this either – only mission accomplished – enemy obliterated.