

28 March 1946

Saturday Evening Post,  
2216 - 6th St., N.W.,  
Washington, D.C.

Gentlemen:

In the March 16 issue of the Saturday Evening Post there appeared, on page 26, an article describing the actions of the 29th Infantry Division in Europe written by one Stanley Frank.

In connection with this article I feel that I have a duty to perform - a duty that is not only distasteful to me, personally, but one that I owe the living and dead of my old command - the 134th Infantry - and the 35th Infantry Division.

This article contains several half truths and misstatement of facts which I am not constrained to allow to go unchallenged. For instance, on page 26, the author states that "although it was a National Guard outfit with no previous combat experience", and goes on to state that they were picked to attack with the 1st and 4th Regular Divisions, he does not see fit to know that the 4th Regular Division, also, had no previous combat experience. Also, on page 26, the author states that "when the Division (29th) was reactivated on February 3, 1941, a stream of executives left the banks, insurance companies and public utilities of Baltimore, to take their commissions". This statement, as well as the rest of the paragraph, shows a deplorable lack of knowledge of true facts of the permanent status of the National Guard in the overall military organization of the Nation. The 29th Infantry Division, of which the Infantry regiments mentioned were a part, has been actively a part of the National Guard component of the military establishment of the United States since the first World War. A great many of the senior officers of all of the regiments served in combat with the 29th Division in the first World War, and continued actively with these regiments throughout the period between the two wars. The inference that this was a "stream of Reserve Officers going to duty for the first time on the outbreak of war" is to be regretted, and will, most certainly, be resented by those fine officers of the National Guard who contributed much of their spare time in learning the profession of arms during the interlude between wars.

The half truth which I desire to particularly protest is contained in the author's statement relative to the capture of St. Lo. On page 26, is the statement that "the 29th captured St. Lo, pulling the cork that spilled the 1st and 3rd Armies across France". Also, on page 111,



is the statement "He (Cota) organized a flying task force of 600 men and 17 vehicles, and confounded the Krauts who were expecting a flanking attack, by barging down the main road into the town". The facts are these. On the night of July 13-14, the 134th Infantry relieved elements of the 115th Regiment of the 29th Division from their positions, approximately 4200 yards North of the City of St. Lo. This Regiment had, prior to their relief, mounted at least two separate attacks against the German position to their front, neither of which had been successful. On the morning of July 15th, at 0515, the 134th Infantry launched an attack against Hill 122, and the high ground directly North of St. Lo, and by noon had advanced and captured Hill 122 - had advanced by nightfall a total of 2300 metres. On July 17th, at 0430, the attack was resumed which, by nightfall, put the Regiment in possession of all the high ground directly to the North of St. Lo, and completely dominated St. Lo. The night of July 17-18, and the morning of July 18, the Regiment had patrols in the City of St. Lo, and it was obvious that the Germans had withdrawn from the City itself, due to our domination of the commanding terrain. We did not occupy the City of St. Lo because, in my estimation due to its being situated somewhat as in a saucer, it would not be worth the casualties necessary for its occupancy. However, sometime during the morning of July 18th, I received a call from the XIX Corps, under whom we were then operating, informing me substantially as follows: "That the Commanding General XIX Corps desired the formal occupation of St. Lo to be made by the 29th Division because of their fine combat record, and the fact that they had landed on the Beach with St. Lo as their primary objective". I readily assented to this, and covered with my own troops the procession of "17 vehicles and 600 men" who entered the City through our lines into St. Lo without opposition. On July 19, after this "token" operation, my Regiment took over the defense of the City of St. Lo, and an area approximately 2,000 yards to the East, on which mission we remained until we attacked South - out of the City of St. Lo - at 1500 on July 27. The Regiment suffered in the St. Lo action (184 killed, 949 wounded and 147 missing) a total of 1,280 of all ranks out of a total strength of 3,000.

I am entirely familiar with the fact that your idea in publishing these divisional histories is a desire to do honor to some great fighting outfits. When you describe the 29th Infantry Division as a "fighting outfit" you are entirely correct.

I have talked about this "grab all the glory" type of publicity with officers of the 29th Division before, and I find that they are unhappy about the methods which have been used. Primarily, the fault of most distorted battle information is caused by some senior officers attempting to fatten themselves at the trough of publicity. This practice is viewed with contempt by all Regular, National Guard and Reserve Officers who have the welfare of their commands at heart, and this factor is the prompting motive impelling me to ask that the record be clarified and historical accuracy be preserved. I am inclosing copies of official documents to substantiate the statements contained in this letter.

I do not desire that you publish this correspondence. I am writing this, and furnishing the necessary proof to you, merely in the desire that in the future you will, in accepting articles from careless and irresponsible writers, have the statements of fact checked for accuracy before they are published.

I appreciate, entirely, your position in this matter and I am sure you will accept this letter in the spirit in which it is intended.

Sincerely yours,

BUTLER B. MILTONBERGER,  
Major General,  
Chief, National Guard Bureau.

Incls.

THE SATURDAY  
EVENING**POST**

FOUNDED BY

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March 29, 1946

Major General Butler B. Miltonberger  
Chief, National Guard Bureau  
War Department  
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear General Miltonberger:

Thank you for your letter of the twenty-eighth. We accept it in the spirit in which it was written and we are grateful to you for it. Whenever anybody takes the trouble to tell us what he likes or does not like about material in The Post, or to correct what he considers inaccurate information, he does us a service and pays us a compliment.

I do not want to devote this letter to advertising my own professional proficiency, but I ought to offer some authority for saying what I intend to say. I was both a lieutenant colonel in public relations, at General Eisenhower's headquarters and in Washington, and also later a war correspondent in this war. I am in hearty agreement with you about the "grab all the glory" business. I would not agree with you altogether about writing off correspondents as careless in general, unless I could be shown specific evidence that they were careless in specific cases. In this case, while I am not qualified to judge, it would appear that you are right about some of Stanley Frank's inaccuracies, but I am not at all sure that the inaccuracies are Frank's fault. This is because, both in the field and here in the office, I have tried in every way possible to get accurate information, but have failed repeatedly simply because the source of that information, sometimes the senior officers you mention, just didn't provide accurate information. We submit articles on divisions to the War Department for all the checking we can get, but you and I both know that official sources for policy reasons, out of consideration for our allies, etc., etc., just do not always disgorge the real facts.

I could cite a half dozen cases in which official half truths or omissions or policy evasions have constituted definite misstatements of fact. But to do so would scarcely serve any constructive purpose just now.

I have sent your letter to Mr. Frank without any comment except that he send me a copy of his reply to you. Your letter will, of course, be kept confidential and I want to repeat I am grateful for it. As in the past, we shall continue to try to avoid inaccuracy, but I know very well we shall not succeed 100%, for the reasons I have suggested.

Sincerely,

*Martin Sommers*  
Martin Sommers



STANLEY FRANK  
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NEW YORK 28, N. Y.

April 1, 1946.

Maj. Gen. Butler B. Miltonberger  
Chief, National Guard Bureau  
War Department  
Washington 25, D.C.

My dear General:

The editors of the SATURDAY EVENING POST have asked me to reply to your letter of March 28th regarding my recent article on the 29th Division.

Please believe that it was not my, or the POST'S, intention to detract from the significant and valiant achievements of the 134th Regiment, the 35th Division or, for that matter, any outfit in the Army. The exigencies of space manifestly make it impossible to mention specifically all the units that participated in one battle of one campaign. The purpose of focusing attention on the 29th was not to represent it as the division that won the war or even the Battle of Normandy, but to present it as one of many typical divisions that performed a tough job well and to give the general public a characteristic frame of a broad picture into which any division could well fit.

Your criticism of the facts as I presented them cannot be countered, of course, with a general statement. In several releases, the War Department specifically credits the 29th Division with the capture of St. Lo. The official booklet on the 29th, in the War Department series, says on Page 3: "Task Force C charged into St. Lo July 18, seizing the city by nightfall after rugged-house-to-house fighting. Brig. Gen. Norman D. Cota, task force commander, was wounded in the action."

I was at 1st Army headquarters on the night of July 18 when General Bradley himself, I believe, announced the fall of St. Lo and credited the 29th Division with its capture. The following morning, a Wednesday, I tried to enter St. Lo with Lt. Tucker Irvin, PRO of the 29th, and was forced to turn back on the outskirts by intense artillery fire. I do not question for an instant that the 134th Regiment was in the city at that time, but I did see, at 29th Div. headquarters, the location of one of its units, a company, marked on the map. If I remember correctly, it was in a mausoleum in a cemetery inside the city. I also have in my possession a letter from Maj. Gen. Charles H. Corlett, commanding the XIX Corps, to Maj. Gen. Gerhardt, of the 29th, which opens: "The capture of St. Lo climaxes an operation which began 6 June

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1944 on the Normandy beachhead and carried the 29th Infantry Division deep into enemy territory" etc. The letter was dated 19 July 1944.

Apart from official documents and Gen. Cota's Task Force -- which, possibly, was more dramatic than effective -- I know from personal experience that the 1st and 2d. Battalions of the 116th Regiment, then commanded by Maj. Sidney Bingham and Maj. Tom Howie, jumped off on the attack on St. Lo July 11, 1944, and were in action continuously until the night of July 17. Officers of the 116th, with whom I spoke in Baltimore before writing the article, claimed that the pressure these two battalions exerted on the Germans made their position in St. Lo untenable. They are proud of their regiment, as proud as you are of the 134th, and it is entirely fitting that both regiments should feel their contributions to the victory at St. Lo were outstanding. Which they were, of course. Such an attitude makes for first-rate morale in the Army, but it is pretty rough at times on a writer trying to do a thoroughly impartial and objective job.

I feel that I cannot let your charges of carelessness and irresponsibility against me go unchallenged. I worked hard on the article; I checked my information with official War Department statements. As an unbiased observer, it would seem to me that there was no great miscarriage of justice in accrediting the 29th -- as the War Department does -- with the formal capture of St. Lo. The 29th Division fought longer, and suffered more casualties, at St. Lo than any other unit in the 1st Army.

I'm afraid you misinterpreted my purpose in mentioning the civilian backgrounds of the National Guard officers in the 29th. I wanted to show, as you believe so firmly, that the National Guard was a vital and vigorous organization in the nation's military program.

I have not received any letters of resentment on this score, such as you express, from these officers. The 29th Division Association in Washington did express, however, its appreciation of the article.

Sincerely,

*Stanley Frank*

5 April 1946.

Mr. Stanley Frank,  
1150 - Fifth Ave.,  
New York 28, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Frank:

I am very appreciative of your prompt reply to my letter to the Editors of the Saturday Evening Post, concerning my disagreement with an article published by them, and written by you.

In your reply you repeat certain statements of an historical nature in which I violently disagree. I am certain that you have been entirely honest throughout but that your information has been obtained from official reports and records which were highly colored by certain publicity-seeking individuals.

War Department records, as you know, are based on "after action reports" of the units involved and these "after action reports", sometimes, do not reflect entirely the true state of affairs.

I feel sure that there is no point gained in continuing a controversy of this nature, but I had long since made up my mind that upon every occasion actions describing the St. Lo battle, which did not reflect the true picture, would receive a challenge from me. I, of course, refrain from publicly commenting on the wounding of General Cota, nor would I publicly comment on the degrading spectacle of policing the body up from the battlefield, allegedly being that of a battalion commander, in carrying it in to place on a church for publicity purposes. I am sure you can realize how disgusted most of us are with that sort of publicity.

I expect that you are, also, aware that the regimental commander of the 116th Infantry was relieved from his command, after the battle of St. Lo, presumably for unsatisfactory performance. I am sure that you, being on the ground, are also aware that we were temporarily attached to the First Army and

XIX Corps for this action and, therefore, we were in the general classification of stepchildren. However, it is hard to dismiss the various citations and official recognitions we received for the capture of the City of St. Lo.

Finally, I want to assure you again, Mr. Frank, that I appreciate your very courteous answer and I, also, appreciate the fact that your article was based on official records made available to you and, too, that you were entirely honest in your reporting of these official records. As far as I am concerned, the controversy is dropped, for I believe I have accomplished my purpose in calling attention to the statements with which I disagreed.

I would enjoy, very much, talking with you should you ever come to Washington. I am sure we would have a most educational and delightful conversation.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

BUTLER B. MILTONBERGER  
Major General  
Chief, National Guard Bureau.