

Oh Yes, It Was A Gas

By A. Edward Pierce, A/56

It is an incident that I remember exceedingly well, although it happened on the reservation at Camp Campbell back in early 1943, seventy-four long years ago when times were certainly different for all of us. At the time, I was a proud private in Headquarters Battery of the 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion which was an integral part of the 12th Armored Division. Except for cadre members, everyone was quite new, only having arrived at Camp Campbell in very late October or early November of 1942. At the time, the 12th Armored Division had just been formed and it was made up almost entirely of new recruits, fresh from lives that totally differed from the military.



The new recruits in many cases were out in trivial ways to short-circuit or circumvent procedures or systems that were long-established by the military hierarchy, made up of men who had long preceded them. Permit me to write here and now that their efforts met with very little success. The old saying is that there is a right way, a wrong way, and the army way!

Now, it is time to move along with the narrative. The battalion was taken by army trucks to a location on the reservation. Here we were to engage in a field problem that was to be part of our basic training. Before departing, each man was issued two cans of C-rations. The dress for the operation was our fatigue uniform, field jacket, helmet liner, and gas mask. Since we were not carrying our Musette bags, most men chose to put the issued C-rations in their field jacket pockets, which was a bit cumbersome. Believing to be much more sage than the others, I decided to stow my rations in the gas mask pouch where there was ample room for them and they decidedly would be out of the way. This arrangement worked very well for me for a rather long period of time, and until

such time as I heard Sergeant Bill West shout in a very loud voice, "GAS!" I was deterred in removing my gas mask from the pouch and properly installing it in the prescribed manner because the C-rations were a decided obstruction. The result was my eyes were flooded with tear gas prior to my getting the gas mask properly in place. To say that I was taught and learned a valuable lesson that day is spot on. It also brought to mind that a word that is spelled identically can carry two different sounds and two entirely different meanings. For example, the word "tear" can be a droplet of moisture from one's eye when the word is used as a common noun or it can mean to rip or to move very quickly when used as a verb.

Obviously this is why Sergeants Bill West and Walter A. Emeola, when we encountered it in training, at the top of their lungs, shouted "tear gas, tear ass!" Here endeth the epistle for the day.

Addendum: While we carried newer style gas masks (than the kidney-shaped one I am wearing in the photo) overseas with us in our duffel bags, never once were they removed. We never wore the masks in combat situations or otherwise.