

Iron

Volume LI

Public Relations Officer Reveals Alwyn D. Conger As Unsung Hero of War

One of the unsung heroes of World War II, First Lieutenant Alwyn D. Conger, husband of Mrs. Marjorie Mae Young Conger, of Cedar City, returned to the United States Tuesday aboard the Queen Mary, after compiling a record of heroism in the European theatre of war that reads like fiction thriller.

Nothing had been heard in Cedar City of Conger's accomplishment until a Public Relations Officer forwarded the history of Conger's activities to the Record. That history shows that the young hero has the following decorations: Five campaign stars on his ETO ribbon, the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star Award with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Silver Star Award with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Distinguished Service Cross, and two Battlefield Promotions, one from Corporal to Second Lieutenant, and one to First Lieutenant.

Serving as a Forward Observer with the Field Artillery, one of the most hazardous assignments in battle from the invasion of Normandy to the end of European war, Conger continued to stay "up front" for days and even weeks without relief.

The Public Relations Officer in his report to us, stated that "The men who worked under Lt. Conger say that he always took the greatest risks himself, never requiring that another man proceed him into a house or up a hill where the enemy might be lurking. When things got hot, he always directed his men to cover and carried on his duties alone. When proceeding through country where there was danger of an ambush, he invariably walked alone a hundred yards or so in front of his troop, containing his men back, rather than endangering the lives of his men."

His Commanding Officer had the following to say about him: "He has been constantly in the front lines and has been subjected to



Alwyn D. Conger

the enemy positions and has made it possible for our infantry to advance and seize its assigned objectives. At all times he has maintained his stability under extreme pressure and under fire and has on several occasions when an officer was needed taken charge of an Infantry Platoon or Company and fought with them as an Infantryman. On numerous occasions he has captured and killed many enemy soldiers single handedly. To my mind he is an outstanding officer with a stout heart, the courage of a lion and as brave as they come."

Conger served with the famed 30th Division, fighting through the hedge rows of Normandy, across the Vire Canal, into St. Lo, stopped the Germans at Mortain, marched on through Evreux across the Seine and into Belgium. By this time his many exploits and daring accomplishments had become known throughout his Division and he had been given a promotion from Corporal direct to Second Lieutenant.

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(Continued from page one)

which is given for "leadership and bravery on the field of battle." At this time he also received a Bronze Star Award for having on August 25, 1944 voluntarily and alone, penetrated the enemy lines over a mile and a half to bring back wounded comrades.

The 30th Division drove on, cracked the famed Siegfried line at Ubach and Alsdorf, Germany, and then swung south to close the much heard of "Aachen Gap". Then the Division was called from its position on the Roer River to meet the German counter drive into Belgium. All this time Conger remained at the front, and was awarded the Silver Star for his action against SS Panzer Divisions at Malmédy-Stavelot, Belgium, the citation reading as follows: "Lt. Conger was adjusting artillery fire on a large column of enemy infantry when suddenly an enemy concentration of heavy mortar fire fell on his observation post. In spite of the extreme danger from shells which were striking all around him, he continued to make his adjustment of fire which was so accurate that approximately 250 of the enemy were killed and several hundred wounded and the enemy gave up its plan of attack, withdrawing to the rear.

When this campaign was ended, his Division was immediately taken back to their original position on the Roer, in preparation for the crossing of the river. When the jumpoff came, the 30th led the assault and carried the attack on to the banks of the Rhine. For his part in this campaign Lt. Conger was awarded an Oak Leaf Cluster to his Silver Star.

The next big job of his Division was with the 9th Army in crossing the Rhine in the Northern Sector, after which they participated in the drive across northern Germany to the banks of the Elbe River. During this drive of many weeks, Conger remained constantly at the front, continually busting out strong points of resistance with artillery fire, and constantly exposing himself and risking his life in order to do so. For his action during this campaign he received the Distinguished Service Cross, the citation reading as follows:

enemy fire, crawled to a house about 100 yards to the flank of the Infantry's advance, and there securing some concealment and observation, although still drawing enemy fire on the house, he brought such withering fire upon the enemy guns that they were silenced and the enemy personnel who were not killed and wounded withdrew to some nearby woods. Then our Infantry was allowed to proceed forward without molestation from this guns which had so successfully and quickly silenced through the efforts of Lt. Conger.

Lt. Conger then stayed at this Observation Post to cover the advance of the Infantry across the open terrain and after it had passed he proceeded down the road in the same direction. Just before he reached a body of woods, he and his Forward Observation Party received withering machine gun fire from an enemy machine gun nest. He immediately stopped his Jeep directed his party into the road ditches and directed that they fire on the machine gun nest while he crawled out under its fire to a vantage point where with a Tommy Gun he soon silenced the machine gun nest, killing the remaining Germans who were manning the machine gun. After this incident Lt. Conger and his Party proceeded down the road, but as they came to a cross road they again received heavy machine gun and small arms fire. The Lt. directed his party to a place of safety and went back down the road to where some 105 mm self-propelled armored artillery guns were moving up. He prevailed upon the Battery Executive to lend him one of these self-propelled weapons in order to silence the enemy and open the road so that he could catch up with the Infantry unit which he was supporting. Lt. Conger proceeded to lead the self-propelled gun back to the point where he had been fired upon, by walking out in front of same. With utter disregard for his own life and safety Lt. Conger stopped the gun and standing upright marked the targets with his Tommy Gun to indicate to the operators of the gun where to place their fire. As he so marked each target he again drew heavy machine gun fire, but disregarded this fire until he had in turn marked

famous Magdeburg Cathedral. He was struck by 20 mm shell fragments, but refused to leave his position, remaining at his post and adjusting fire upon the gun which continued to fire at him. For his part in this he received an Oak Leaf Cluster to his Bronze Star.

This citation reads as follows: "Finding that it was impossible to complete his mission of adjusting preparation fires on the City of Magdeburg, from our front lines, Conger voluntarily proceeded to a point a mile in front of the Infantry lines and with his crew of two men, battled with a German patrol for possession of a house which would provide him with the necessary observation. After killing a number of the enemy, the patrol retired and Lt. Conger took possession of the Post. In spite of continuous attempts by the enemy to dislodge him from this advantageous position, with artillery fire, mortar fire and machine guns, Lt. Conger and his crew remained at the position for three days and two night until the attack by our Infantry brought our front lines up to his position. During these

1

"While accompanying an Infantry company as an Artillery Forward Observer on the afternoon of March 28, 1945, and while advancing at the head of lead elements the point received heavy enemy fire from dug-in 20 mm Anti Aircraft guns, twelve in number, and three 75 mm Tank Destroyer guns which pinned down this officer and the advancing infantry. Lt. Conger, without regard for his own safety and thinking only of his duty at the time, crawled from his concealed place in the road ditch and from that point, while still drawing heavy

2

each target for the operators and they had silenced the enemy guns. As the self-propelled gun continued to fire, the enemy displayed a white flag and Lt. Conger went forward capturing 31 German soldiers and found eleven others who had been killed."

The Division was then called upon to swing south along the banks of the Elbe to take the strongly-defended town of Magdeburg. After bitter street fighting, the city was taken. It was here that Conger was wounded while maintain-

France
27 July 1945

Dear Sir:

Please consider this a personal letter. My work as a Public Relations Officer requires that I interview many of our returning soldiers, but today I truly met one of the unsung heroes of this war. His record is so full and so interesting that I truly do not feel capable of writing a brief news story for your paper. I do not feel that I could do justice, either to your readers or to the subject himself. I am, therefore, passing my notes on to you, trusting that you will rewrite as you see fit.

1st Lt. Al Conger is an officer in the Field Artillery of the 30th Infantry Division. His wife and four children reside in your city. (Mrs. Marjorie Mae Conger, 443 West 1st North St., Cedar City, Utah).

My interview with Lt. Conger was rather unsatisfactory. He practically refused to talk about himself when he learned who I was. But the facts which I have written up on attached sheets were taken from official records in his personal file and were verified by his many comrades who hold his heroic actions in such high esteem.

In reading my notes you will find that Lt. Conger constantly volunteered for the most dangerous missions and accomplished them without regard for his own life or safety. I have not been able to write up every account of his deeds. It would take a long book to do that. However, I believe that I have been able to furnish you with material enough for a good story in your paper. If pictures are desired, I have been told that you may obtain same from his wife at the above address, who even has pictures of him being decorated.

I trust that you will understand my plight in not feeling qualified to abbreviate this story and hope that you will be able to rewrite the facts given in a manner which will be interesting to your readers.

Sincerely yours,


Capt., SC, PRO

In 1942, 1st Lt. Al Conger, tiring of his inactive part in our War, while working on an "exempted" job at Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, voluntarily entered the Army. He was assigned to the 30th Infantry Division, then at Camp Blanding, Florida. After many months of training in February 1944 his organization sailed for England. At this time Lt. Conger was a Corporal in a Field Artillery Battery.

In June 1944 the 30th Infantry Division was one of the units which disembarked in the early stages of the fighting in Normandy. At this time Conger was still a Corporal.

In all Field Artillery units, there are a few men who go forward with the Infantry assault waves, to adjust and control the artillery support. This, according to the Infantrymen themselves and others with whom I have talked, is the most dangerous work of the entire battle, since it requires that when the Infantry has been "pinned down" by machine guns, tanks, or other direct fire, the Artillery Forward Observer must proceed to some high point (an attic in a house, a high hill, or even climb a tree) where it is possible to observe the enemy guns which are holding the advance and then to remain in that position for the time necessary to adjust artillery fire upon that point and neutralize the enemy. Upon reaching France, Cpl. Conger voluntarily requested that he be assigned to such work and continued at this work daily throughout the entire eleven months that his outfit was in combat.

During the advance through the hedgerows of Normandy^{we} continually forged ahead with the Infantry assault waves, lending them the artillery support which they so badly needed. The 30th Infantry Division led the assault across the Vire River and Vire Canal, near St. Lo, then continued on through with the attack which led to the capture of St. Lo and the breakthrough out of the hedgerow country into open country where the tanks could be used. The 30th Division was then called upon to hold the line at Mortain, France, where the Germans were trying desperately to drive a wedge between the 1st and 3rd Armies in an effort to stop the advances being made. During nearly a week of hand to hand fighting this one division alone held secure against at least four picked German Divisions, forcing the enemy into complete retreat. During this time Cpl Conger fearlessly remained at the front, through the thick of all the action, many times actually meeting the foe in hand to hand combat with knife, pistol and even bare hands. Many stories are told of his faithfulness to duty during this period, remaining night and day without sleep on his observation post, fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Infantry and continually adjusting artillery which knocked out tanks and broke up large scale attacks, even in the face of enemy fire when it was necessary to expose himself in order to observe the target. At one time it was necessary for him to stand up on top of a hedgerow in order to observe two enemy tanks which were firing upon the Infantry near his position. During the adjustment of his artillery, one of the tanks fired at him, the 88mm shell bursting so close to him that the blast actually tore the shirt off his back and knocked him down. In a few seconds, as soon as his head cleared a little, Conger returned to his position and proceeded with the artillery adjustment which eliminated both tanks. During this time, Conger repeatedly refused to be relieved for a much needed rest, explaining that his job was up there and that he wanted to stay.

After the defeat of the Germans at Mortain, the 30th Division continued on north to take the city of Evreux, France, then crossed the Seine River, swept through northern France in one of the most spectacular drives this war has produced and was the first Division to enter Belgium. During all this Conger and his crew of one driver and one radio man kept their jeep right up front with the "point" and quickly knocked out points of resistance as they were reached, in order that this swift advance might continue. At such times, the Infantry, The Tanks and all others took cover from the enemy fire, but it was Lt. Conger's to remain in the open where

he could observe the enemy and neutralize their positions with artillery fire. Then his Division swept quickly across Belgium, taking the famous Fort Eben Emaal in their stride. The 30th Division was again the first Division to enter Holland, first taking Maastricht then Heerlen, Holland.

By this time, Cpl. Conger's many exploits and daring accomplishments had become known throughout his Division and he had been given a promotion from Corporal direct to 2nd Lt. in the Field Artillery. A "battlefield promotion", which is given for "leadership and bravery on the field of battle". At this time he also received a Bronze Star Award for having on August 25, 1944 voluntarily and alone, penetrated the enemy lines over a mile and a half to bring back wounded comrades. (see attached citation)

The 30th Division drove on, cracked the famous Siegfried Line at ~~Ubach~~ Ubach and Alsdorf, Germany, just north of Aachen - and then swung south to close the much heard of "Aachen Gap", ~~breaking through~~ which enabled the capture of that city. Conger was still remaining at the front voluntarily, refusing relief and saying that he didn't need any rest since he was "having so much fun". Normally, other men doing this same work were allowed 48 hrs at the front and then 48 hrs back in some rest camp to quiet their nerves and enable them to return again.

When the German counter-offensive took place in December, 1944 into Belgium, a division which would "stick" and which could stop the onward rushing German war-machine, was badly needed. The 30th Division was selected and rushed from their position on the edge of the Roer River near Duren, to meet the enemy in the vicinity of Malmedy-Stavelot, Belgium. There they met the 1st SS Panzer Division and when the smoke cleared, the 1st SSS Panzer Division ceased to exist. Conger was again in the midst of this action, receiving the Silver Star Award for his part this time. (see attached citation). The Division then led the attack to force the Germans back again into Germany and although the fighting was taking place in hip-deep snow and sub-zero temperatures, Conger again voluntarily remained at the front throughout the five long weeks of this campaign, refusing relief and insisting that his job was "up there".

When this campaign was ended, his Division was immediately taken back up to their original position on the Roer River and preparations completed for the crossing of that river. When the jump-off came, the 30th led the assault and carried the attack on to the banks of the Rhine in record time. For his part in this campaign, Lt. Conger was awarded an Oak Leaf Cluster to his ~~Bronze~~ Silver Star (see attached citation).

The next big job for his division followed almost immediately. They were chosen to spearhead the large-scale crossing of the Rhine River in the Northern Sector of the 9th Army. Lt. Conger crossed with one of the first Assault Waves in the boats. Then, after two days of rough fighting, the 30th Division teamed up with an Armored outfit and led the drive across northern Germany to the banks of the Elbe River, crushing all kinds of resistance before them and stopping at the banks of the Elbe only because of orders to do so. During this drive of many weeks, Conger remained constantly at the front, with the first elements of tanks, continually blasting out strongpoints of resistance with artillery fire, and constantly exposing himself and risking his life in order to do so. For his actions during this campaign he received the Distinguished Service Cross. (see attached citation).

Then the Division was called upon to swing south along the banks of the Elbe to take the strongly-defended town of Magdeburg, Germany. After bitter street fighting, the city was taken. It was here that Conger was wounded while

maintaining an Observation Post in the famous Magdeburg Cathedral. He was struck by 20 mm shell fragments, but refused to leave his position, remaining at his post and adjusting fire upon the gun which continued to fire at him.

For his part in this last phase of the War he received an Oak Leaf Cluster to his ~~Silver~~
BRONZE Star. (see citation attached).

When hostilities ceased Lt. Conger was assigned to Counter-Intelligence duties in Germany, which, according to his superiors, he performed in the same superior manner which he been doing his fighting. He tracked down and arrested many Nazi high officials, War Criminals and other "wanted" persons.

In compiling the above data you will find that 1st Lt. Conger has the following decorations:

- Five campaign stars on his ETO ribbon
- Purple Heart Award
- Bronze Star Award with Oak Leaf Cluster
- Silver Star Award with Oak Leaf Cluster
- Distinguished Service Cross
- Two Battlefield Promotions, (one from Corporal to 2nd Lt and one to 1st Lt.)

The men who worked under him say that he always took the greater risks himself, never requiring that another man proceed him into a house or up a hill where the enemy might be lurking. When things got hot, he always directed his men to cover and carried on his duties alone. When proceeding through country where there was danger of an ambush, he invariably walked alone, a hundred yards or so in front of his jeep containing his crew, preferring to take the risks, rather than endangering the lives of his men.

The following is quoted from his Commanding Officer: "He has been constantly in the front lines and has been subjected to withering enemy artillery fire, mortar fire and small arms fire, but at all times he has effectively placed the fire of his battalion on the enemy positions and has made it possible for our infantry to advance and seize its assigned objectives. At all times he has maintained his stability under extreme pressure and under fire and has on several occasions when an officer was needed taken charge of an Infantry platoon or Company and fought with them as an Infantryman. On numerous occasions he has captured and killed many enemy soldiers single handedly. To my mind he is an outstanding officer with a stout heart, the courage of a lion and as brave as they come".

1st Lt. Conger's only comment when confronted with this marvelous record was: "Well, I guess maybe I had more to fight for. Yousee, I have a wife and some fine children back there in the States and most of the fellows are single."

And now, the war has finished here, but Lt. Conger has volunteered to go on and do his part towards helping to finish up the rest of it in the Pacific. He will soon be on his way.

CITATIONS

AWARD OF THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

Second Lieutenant (then Corporal) Alwyn D. Conger, O887446, 113th Field Artillery Battalion, United States Army, is awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious conduct on 18 August 1944, in France. While Lt. Conger was serving as a forward observer with an artillery battalion, it was learned that two officers had been injured about a mile and half out beyond the forward outpost lines. He alone set out to find the injured men and render whatever aid was necessary. Despite the dangers of enemy patrols and enemy fire, he went to the injured comrades and removed them to the rear. The outstanding courage and loyalty to the wounded comrades displayed by Lt. Conger, reflect high credit on himself and the Armed Forces.

AWARD OF THE BRONZE STAR OAK LEAF CLUSTER

While in command of an Artillery Forward Observation Party on April 14, 1945 in the vicinity of Magdeburg, Germany, 1st Lt. Alwyn D. Conger, O887446, 113th Field Artillery Battalion, United States Army, found that it was impossible to complete his mission of adjusting preparation fires on the City of Magdeburg, from our front lines. He voluntarily proceeded to a point a mile in front of the Infantry lines and with his crew of two men, battled with a German patrol for possession of a house which would provide him with the necessary observation. After killing a number of the enemy, the patrol retired and Lt. Conger took possession of the Observation Post. In spite of continuous attempts by the enemy to dislodge him from this advantageous position, with artillery fire, mortar fire and machine guns, Lt. Conger and his crew remained at the position for three days and two nights until the attack by our Infantry brought our front lines up to his position. During these days he successfully adjusted artillery fire on strong points and fortifications in and surrounding the city of Magdeburg, causing their destruction and enabling our Infantry to more easily take the city when they attacked. Lt. Conger's cool courage, technical knowledge and stubborn faithfulness to his duty were a great credit to himself and in keeping with the traditions of the military service.

AWARD OF THE SILVER STAR

First Lieutenant Alwyn D. Conger, O887446, Field Artillery, 113th Field Artillery Battalion, United States Army, is awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action on 25 December 1944, in Belgium. Lt. Conger was adjusting artillery fire on a large column of enemy infantry when suddenly an enemy concentration of heavy mortar fire fell on his observation post. In spite of the extreme danger from shells which were striking all around him, Lt. Conger continued to make his adjustment of fire which was so accurate that approximately two hundred and fifty of the enemy were killed and several hundred wounded and the enemy gave up its plan of attack, withdrawing to the rear.

AWARD OF THE SILVER STAR OAK LEAF CLUSTER

First Lieutenant Alwyn D. Conger, O887446, Field Artillery, 113th Field Artillery Battalion, United States Army is hereby awarded the Oak Leaf Cluster to wear with the Silver Star, for gallantry in action on 21 February 1945 in Germany. Lt. Conger remained at his observation post despite constant enemy shelling in an effort to locate enemy artillery positions. The information which he relayed to his own unit enabled them to neutralize the enemy positions. His staunch courage and disregard for his own safety in remaining at his post even though large caliber shells were actually striking the building in which he was located, reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces.

AWARD OF THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS

First Lieutenant Alwyn D. Conger, 0887446, 113th Field Artillery Battalion, United States Army, is hereby awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry and extreme bravery in action in Germany on 26 March 1945. While accompanying an Infantry company as an Artillery Forward Observer on the afternoon of 26 March 1945 and while advancing at the head of the lead elements with the Infantry Commander, the point received heavy enemy fire from dug-in 20 mm Anti Aircraft guns, twelve in number, and three 75 mm Tank Destroyer guns which pinned down this officer and the advancing infantry. Lt. Conger, without regard for his own safety and thinking only of his duty at the time, crawled from his concealed place in the road ditch and from that point, while still drawing heavy enemy fire, crawled to a house about 100 yards to the flank of the Infantry's advance, and there securing some concealment and observation, although still drawing enemy fire on the house, he brought such withering fire upon the enemy guns that they were silenced and the enemy personnel who were not killed and wounded withdrew to some nearby woods. Then our Infantry was allowed to proceed forward without molestation from these guns which had been so successfully and quickly silenced through the efforts of Lt. Conger, who without any regard for his own life and safety crawled to an observation post under heavy enemy fire and accomplished his mission of allowing the Infantry to advance. Lt. Conger then stayed at this Observation Post to cover the advance of the Infantry across the open terrain and after it had passed he got his transportation and proceeded down the road over the same route and in the same direction that the Infantry had gone. Just before he reached a body of woods, he and his Forward Observation Party received withering machine gun fire from an enemy machine gun nest. He immediately stopped his jeep, directed his party into the road ditches to a place of safety and directed that they fire on the machine gun nest while he crawled out under its fire to a vantage point where with a Tommy Gun he soon silenced the machine gun nest, killing the remaining Germans who were manning the machine gun. After this incident Lt. Conger and his Party proceeded down the road along the advance of the Infantry, but as they came to a cross road they again received heavy machine gun fire and small arms fire. The Lt. directed his party and jeep to a place of safety in some nearby woods and went back down the road to where some 105 mm self-propelled armored artillery guns were moving up. He prevailed upon the Battery Executive to lend him one of these self-propelled weapons in order to silence the enemy and open the road so that he could catch up with the Infantry unit which he was supporting. Lt. Conger proceeded to lead the self-propelled gun back to the point where he had been fired upon, by walking out in front of same. With utter disregard for his own life and safety Lt. Conger stopped the self-propelled gun and standing upright marked the targets with his Tommy Gun to indicate to the operators of the self-propelled gun where to place their fire. As he so marked each target he again drew heavy machine gun fire, but disregarded this fire until he had in turn marked each target for the operators and they had silenced the enemy guns with their 105 mm. As the self-propelled gun continued to fire, the enemy displayed a white flag and Lt. Conger went forward capturing 31 German soldiers and found eleven others who had been killed. Lt. Conger then continued on to catch up with his Infantry unit. Through Lt. Conger's unsurpassed courage, bravery, devotion to duty, leadership, initiative, judgement and common sense displayed on these occasions on this day, he inspired those about him and those familiar with the facts and is a great inspiration to those who may read of his deeds.