

Red Cross Man Makes 8 Jumps With Paratroops

By HAL BOYLE

WITH AMERICAN PARATROOPS IN BELGIUM, Jan. 21 (Delayed)—(A) — Everybody recognized the big spectacled fellow in the front seat as his jeep crawled through the snow past a line of plodding paratroopers.

"Hey, Dave, I am hunting for a toothbrush," one called.

"Hi yuh, Dave, where our doughnut girls?"

"I need some chewin' tobacco."

And at each greeting Big Dave T. De Varona grinned and waved—and the paratroop boys knew that if anybody in the American Army could get up that toothbrush, chewing tobacco—and doughnut girls—Big Dave would.

Dave, Red Cross Field Director for the 517th Parachute Combat Team, is something of a battlefield anomaly. The Army wouldn't take him—so he has adopted as much of the Army as he can.

Back in 1938 he was a star tackle on the "thunder team" of the University of California Golden Bears. But when he tried to enlist after Pearl Harbor the Army, Navy and Marines all turned him down. He had a million-dollar build—and ten cent eyes. Examining physicians took one look at his thick-lensed glasses and shook their heads.

But selling life insurance palled for the six foot, two inch, 195-pound former football star. Dave took a job with the Red Cross and spent 21 months in the cold country up Alaska way. He made landings on both Attu and Kiska.

After six months at home in San

Diego, Calif., Dave was assigned to a parachute unit in Rome. He is the only Red Cross field director ever to jump in combat.

"I have made eight jumps, altogether," he said. "When they got ready for the jump in Southern France last Summer I tagged along too.

"It was a perfect jump we had. I figured if I landed like a piece of raw bacon—completely relaxed—I would be all right. Instead of landing in our jump zone we came down right on the hill which was our objective. That turned out lucky for us. Later we found the area where we had planned to land full of mines and lined with 55-gallon gasoline drums which the Germans were ready to set on fire with machine-gun tracer bullets and roast us alive."

Dave rates high with the men because he moves right up into battle with them. Keeping them supplied with toothbrushes, shaving needs and extra cigarettes takes up most of his time but isn't as interesting as the work he does helping them solve family problems and personal difficulties.

"These kids are younger than men in normal infantry units and have different problems," he said. "They are like college kids with an extra dose of patriotism. They have all the morale in the world.

"They worry chiefly over their girls back home or some trouble in the family."

Dave, who is only 28, and a paratrooper at heart, wouldn't trade his job with "the boys with the big pockets" for any other type of outfit in the world.

"Nobody would fight the way they do just for that extra fifty bucks a month they get," he said. "They are all volunteers—that makes big difference.

"They've done in three what it took the Marines 175 to do—built up a real fighting condition that means something



(AP WIREphoto)

DELIVERED THE GOODS BY CHUTE. Dave DeVarona (right), Red Cross field director for the 517th parachute combat team, holds parachute he used for leap into France to supply men with toothbrushes, tobacco, etc. With him is Alf Thompson, field supervisor.

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