

# War Tales

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"SIGABA" MACHINE, 15TH PANZER ARMY, 3103RD SIGNAL SERVICE  
BATTALION, BUCHENWALD, COMPANY C, WARMACHT  
**2nd Lt. U.S. Cleveland involved in WW II's  
biggest hoax**

*In U. S. Army, World War II on March 3, 2014 at 1:38 am*



*2nd Lt. U.S. Cleveland was a key part of the most elaborate hoax ever attempted by Allied forces during World War II. This picture of him was taken in Fort Knox, Ky. in 1941. Photo provided.*

The 24-year-old Punta Gorda, Fla. lieutenant and his men in Company C, 3103rd Signal Service Battalion sent hundreds of secret coded messages that fooled the Germans. They became part of the nonexistent 1st U.S. Army Group, known in the military as FUSAG. Allied commanders hoped the Germans would believe FUSAG was the main strike force that would invade Europe along the French coast at Calais during the summer of 1944.

Cleveland's unit's primary job was to work day and night sending encrypted, shortwave Morse Code messages the Germans would intercept.

He said the **fake army** was the brainchild of Allied military planners. It would be commanded by Gen. George S. Patton, the flamboyant U.S. tank commander, as far as the enemy knew. Patton had recently been relieved of his command for slapping a couple of shell shocked soldiers he maintained were "bugging out" on their duties at the front.

Thousands of Allied troops worked for months to maintain the ruse that included inflatable tanks and artillery pieces positioned at strategic spots so Luftwaffe pilots would see them and report their presence to the Wehrmacht, German army, headquarters. The primary goal of the elaborate charade: Keep the German 15th Panzer Army at Calais out of action while the real D-Day Invasion got underway, on June 6, 1944, further up the coast at Normandy.

It worked beyond Allied military command's wildest dreams. The 15th Panzer Army, arguably the best mechanized infantry unit the enemy had, according to Cleveland, stayed put until late July. By that time it was too late for Axis Forces.

The massive Allied invasion of Western Europe was well under way by the time the Germans woke up. It would culminate with the defeat of the Nazi regime in Berlin 11 months later.

When Cleveland and his men were sending phony messages about the huge American Army that didn't exist from bases around England, Ireland and Scotland they didn't have a clue what was really going on. However, the men of Company C began to wonder when they accidentally came upon some inflatable tanks in a restricted area they weren't supposed to be in one day while driving around in a Jeep.

"The way the Army works they tell you only what you need to know," he said 60 years later while sitting at his cluttered dining room table. "All we knew was we were sending secret Morse Code messages from a specific area at a certain time."

What they heard by way of the military grapevine was that the whole project had something to do with creating an imaginary Allied Army. The script, he said, was written by Hollywood screenwriters. The daily messages they were sending were contained in an eight-inch thick book no one in his unit ever saw.

Things started getting serious about six weeks before D-Day when his unit was sent to Ipswich, along the East Coast of England.

"I had 30 radio operators, a cook and a cook's helper and there we were in Ipswich broadcasting phony messages around the clock," Cleveland explained. "Just before the Normandy invasion began at 10 p.m. June 5, 1944 we got orders to shut down and maintain radio silence."

Two weeks later his unit was back in Ipswich broadcasting once more. It was more of the same, Allied commanders wanted the Germans to think the phony 1st U.S. Army Group was on the move. He and his men were still trying to keep the 15th Panzer Army tied down. It worked just as well the second time around.

When Cleveland finally reached the real fighting on the continent it was a month or two after the Normandy Invasion had taken place. His outfit was attached to the leading elements of Gen. Courtney Hodges' 1st Army at Verdun. It was their job to relay real messages to Allied Headquarters at Versailles near Paris.

"About the time the Battle of the Bulge came along the 1st Army was near Verviers, Belgium," he recalled. "One morning about 4:30 several of us left 1st Army Headquarters in a jeep and a truck and headed back to Verdun. We drove through St. Vith and Bastogne, Belgium during the first day of the battle and knew nothing about it."



*Spreading untruths: Members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps Company-C, 3103rd Battalion are pictured with their guidon. They helped Allied Forces turn the phony 1st U.S. Army Group into reality for the Germans during World War II*



By this time Cleveland's Signal Corps soldiers were using the ultra secret Allied "Sigaba" machine." It was very similar to the German's "Enigma Machine" used by the enemy to send secret messages.

"It was about the size of a portable typewriter. We kept in t an 18-by-18-inch safe carried in the back of one of our Army trucks," he said. "Every time you pressed a key a wheel would rotate. It was impossible to break the code."

By VE-Day, war's end in Europe, Cleveland and his unit were in Kassel, Germany.

Shortly after they arrived there they heard about Buchenwald, the infamous German concentration camp where thousands of people were killed by the Nazi regime. Since it was close by, and they didn't have anything better to do, his men decided to check it out.

"Allied Commanders were letting American forces see firsthand what the Germans had done," Cleveland said. "We went in and looked around. We couldn't believe our eyes. The smell was something else. The whole place was sickening."

As his unit was leaving to return to the States, he was appointed battalion supply officer. It was his responsibility to collect the unit's equipment, account for it and turn it in.

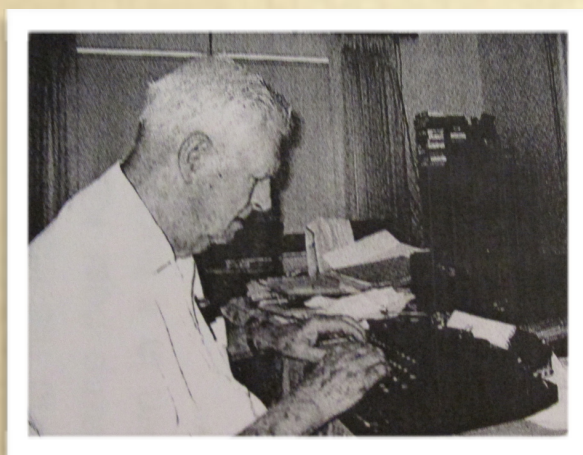
"As it turned out we were short one typewriter. So we stole the 1st sergeant's typewriter in one of the radio rooms and turned it in," Cleveland remembered with a smile. "When we got back to Fort Monmouth, N.J., the Signal Corps' Headquarters, we found the missing typewriter. We ended up with an extra one. They wouldn't let me turn it in. So I've got it in my closet."

The old solder went to a bedroom closet filled top to bottom with historical records of all kinds. Cleveland is a well-known local historian. Under dozens of boxes he pulled out a small box covered with black oilskin and opened it up.

Inside was a shiny, black, portable typewriter with the word "Corona" emblazoned in gold letters across its front. It looked almost new.

I sat down in front of the typewriter when I saw it still had a red and black ribbon. I ripped out a sheet of paper from my reporter's notebook, slipped it in the typewriter and began typing, "The quick brown fox jumped over the wooden fence."

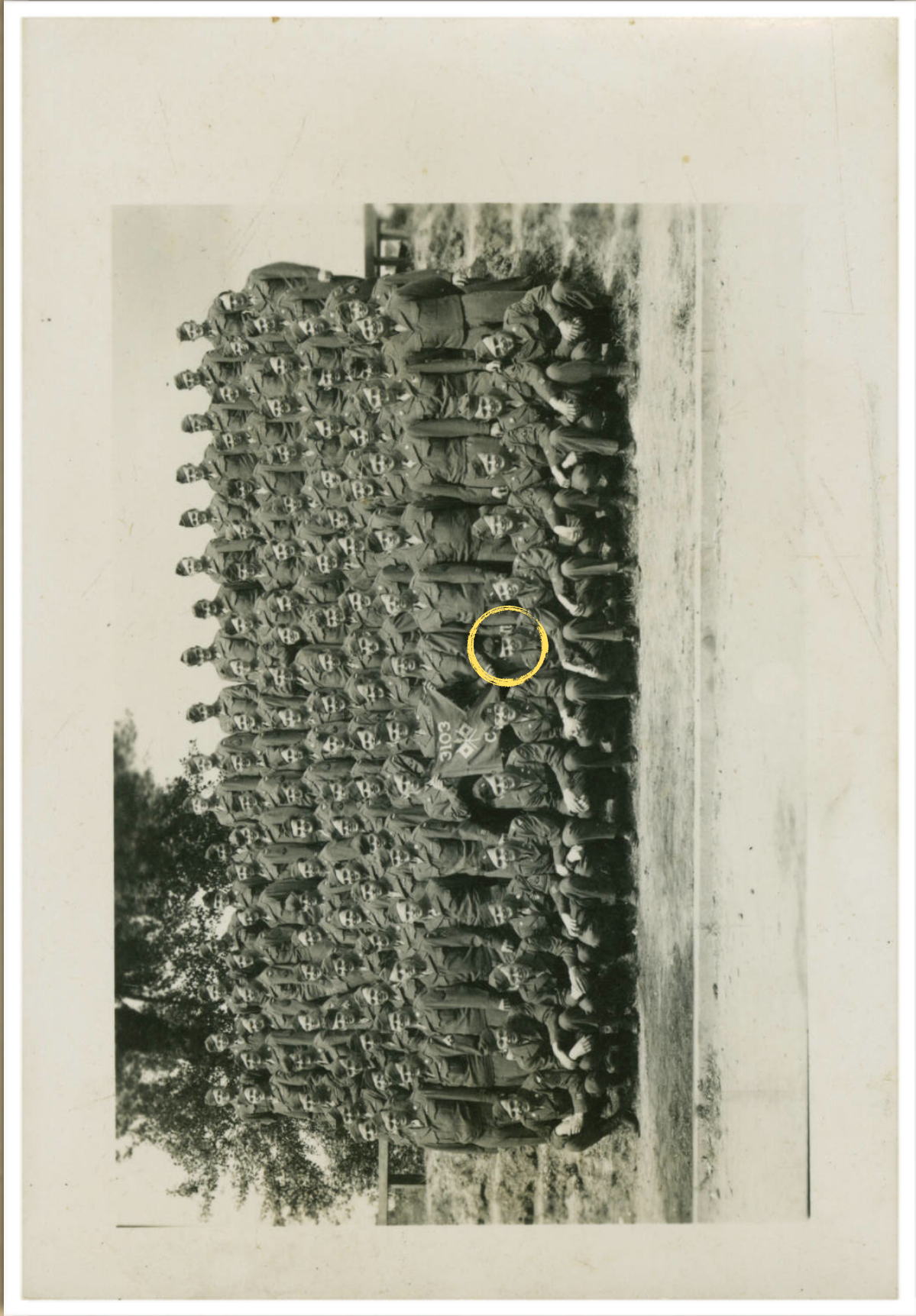
"Well I'll be darn. It hasn't been used in 60 years," Cleveland said. He couldn't believe how well it worked.



*Cleveland tries out an old "Corona" portable typewriter he "liberated" from the Army Signal Corps in Europe a lifetime ago. It still works perfectly.  
Sun photo by Don Moore*

*This story was first published in the Charlotte Sun newspaper, Port Charlotte, Fla. on Monday, Aug. 2, 2004 and is republished with permission.*

*You can view this story and other veterans stories online at <http://donmooreswartales.com/2014/03/03/u-s-cleveland/>*



Members of the U.S. Army Signal Corps Company-C, 3103rd Battalion. They helped Allied Forces turn the phony FUSAG into reality for the Germans during World War II. U.S. Cleveland is the young lieutenant squatting the the front row sixth from the right.