

5

The Rhine Drive

Pirmasens, Germany, 22 March 1945

We were packed on trucks, moving swiftly in a cloud of dust, when someone cried out “There’s the border—the German border!”

It was 1002 hours, 22 March 1945 . . . and it was the second time Company E had crossed the German frontier. The pursuit-race had begun in Schweyen early that morning. The town had had barely enough buildings standing to shelter the Battalion. Companies scrambled to secure quarters. It was an enthusiastic scramble, though, for on the march from Waldhausen to Schweyen, news came that we had been taken off the line for a brief assignment as Corps reserve. At last, Company E was to get a rest. Men congratulated one another and spoke of the letters they were going to write, the sleep they were going to get, and the food they were going to eat. They dreamed for seven hours of their great reward. Then they were ordered back on line. The seven-hour reserve status had only one result: our record for continuous contact with the enemy was interrupted after 134 consecutive days.

After Bitche, our objective had been Waldhausen. Our march to that little French town had been a long and eerie one—under heavy skies, through still, dark forests. The roads were bordered by countless gun positions. Shell cases and ammunition boxes were strewn about. Mines were concealed in neat piles among the trees. The forest had been a German concentration point, and had been heavily shelled by American artillery. We were on the enemy so fast that here again they had been unable to remove their dead . . . or else didn’t care. One German soldier, who had been covering a roadblock with an automatic rifle, was scattered over a 40-foot area. There were no recognizable parts of his body; only minute fragments of flesh and a red putty-like substance.

Jerry corpses lay along the roadside ditches, the dirty gray death pallor on their faces. “Wish every one of his buddies could see his stinkin’

body now,” said a buck sergeant viewing a blood-drenched German corpse.

We took Waldhausen quickly, at dusk. There we had a chance to sleep off the nightmare of Bitche. There were a few shells, a few wild rushes for the cellars, but we had a rest. We stayed three days and reorganized. Our executive officer, back from a brief leave in Paris, assumed command.

The 60-mile lightning drive through the Siegfried Line (the Germans called it the *Westwall*) to the Rhine took only two days. We climbed on anything that was rolling forward—artillery trucks, tanks, half-tracks, jeeps, and trailers. We moved fast . . . so fast that tankers burned up bogey wheels as fast as they could replace them. The weather was warm; we enjoyed the race.

We left Schweyen at 0800, crossed the German border, and drove through the Siegfried Line. Viewing the maze of tank traps, dragon’s teeth concrete tank obstacles, wire entanglements, trenches, and cunningly camouflaged steel-reinforced concrete pillboxes with their carefully-arranged interlocking fields of fire, we had to admit that it was all in superb defensive terrain; we breathed a prayer thanking Him we didn’t have to fight our way through it. The Siegfried Line stretched out as far as one could see, and was about six miles deep at our breaching point. It was a game, during those six miles, to spot the well-camouflaged gun positions and pillboxes.

The white flag of surrender flew from every house in every town through which we roared. Flags? Well . . . pillowslips and sheets and nightgowns and petticoats, all converted suddenly into something more than protection from chilled air. In the first town, a group of *Wehrmacht* “supermen” were huddled dejectedly in the main square, guarded by two proud GIs. The very young civilians and the old waved us a happy welcome. We didn’t wave back. The men and women from 15 to 40 years weren’t happy. Their faces showed no hate, however, only dull

A Seventh Army M-10 tank destroyer crosses a row of "Dragon's Teeth" tank obstacles in the Siegfried Line. Combat engineers have built a field expedient berm over the otherwise impenetrable obstacles, and filled in the antitank ditch that laid beyond. The 100th Infantry Division was fortunate that the Germans chose to not defend the Siegfried Line in its sector. (*Signal Corps*)



incomprehension. They couldn't admit to themselves that the Fatherland, land of the *Herrenvolk* (the "Master Race") had been overrun by the "gum-chewing cowboy Americans."

By 2300 the first evening, we reached North Pirmasens, where we billeted in a former German Army Officer Candidate School. It was a group of beautiful modern structures much like a typical new American college. There were adequate quarters for the entire candidate battalion. Having ascertained there were no booby traps, we ate, posted guards, and slept.

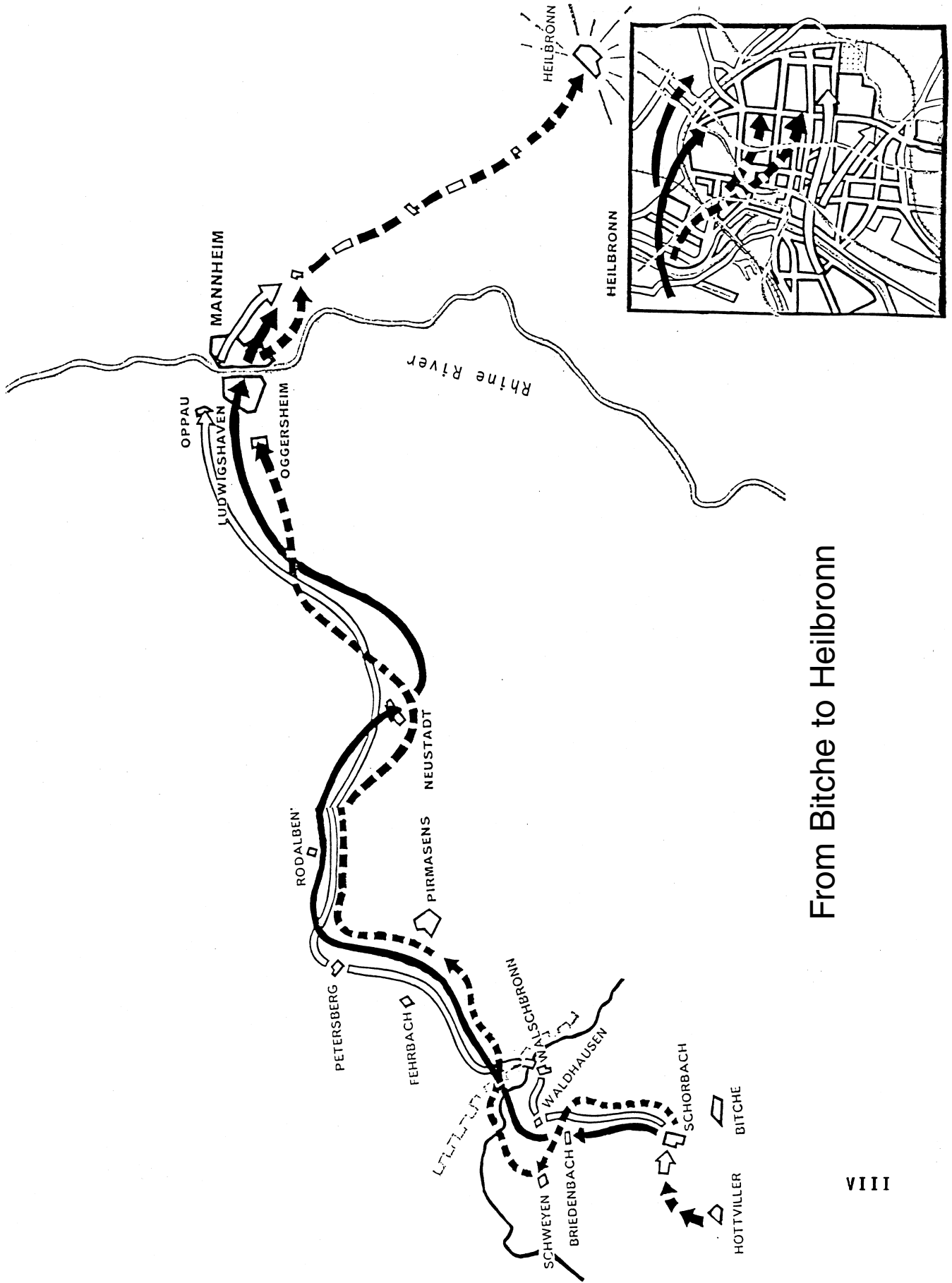
The morning came warm and bright, and we left Pirmasens after a rush for souvenirs of the German OCS. We passed through deep gorges cut with flashing streams, dark evergreen forests, and charming villages. In one of the streams we washed away the dirt accumulated since we left Waldhausen. We passed through town after town and were gratified to see white flags everywhere. The people crowded along the sidewalks and hung out of windows to gawk at the passing Americans. The children ran in terror from our tanks. The civilians' faces exposed what was in their hearts. There were expressions of hate, resentment, and incomprehension.

We encountered a great many log crib roadblocks and also some roadblocks made of overturned army vehicles and huge buses. These blocks aren't effective, though, unless they're covered by infantry or artillery fire and with tanks and division engineers, we bored through quickly and without casualties. The quantities of enemy soldiers retreating along these roads must have been enormous. There was evidence of their

mad confusion on either side of the road. Their overloaded vehicles were abandoned where they broke down on the road. There were civilian cars and trucks, SP guns, kitchen vehicles, ammunition half-tracks, radar trucks, motorcycles, and even some French trucks.

The retreating enemy seemed to have demolished most of the heavy guns and other ordnance they abandoned, but the rest of the materiel lay where it had been driven—into a ditch or over a mountain precipice. Many of the vehicles had caught fire, or been burned purposely, and they still smoldered and stank of burning rubber. Despite their invention of modern mobile warfare, signs of the World War One level of technology that characterized much of the German Army were everywhere; many horse drawn vehicles lay abandoned or destroyed along the road, along with the occasional dead horses that had drawn them.

One thing very noticeable about the vehicles was the abnormal amount of trash around each one. It seemed that the Nazis had collected a little bit of everything and stored it all in their vehicles. After abandoning their unserviceable vehicles, they were unable to carry so many belongings on their backs and had apparently strewn them over the ground to pick out what they could use. There were scores of records, forms, photographs, manuals, toilet articles, apparel (both male and female), and *Wehrmacht* uniforms. There was also tableware and trinkets, possibly French loot. They were now running for their lives and were no longer interested in such items. Apparently, they were also through fighting, since many rifles



From Bitche to Heilbronn

were left behind. There was an occasional dead soldier along the road who had probably died of his wounds and been left behind to lighten the load. It was the refuse of an army in its death throes, dying, but not yet dead.

We passed through two long columns that had been strafed the day before by our fighter bombers. The first that we saw was in a deep valley. We could smell the stench of death even before we could see the mass of wreckage. A haze of smoke drifted lazily above this area we dubbed "the Valley of Death." It was reported that 155 vehicles had been hit; in addition, there were scores of dead horses and destroyed wagons. A large number of dead Krauts were visible from the road. The scene indicated untold suffering. Horses had twisted themselves around the wreckage in their death struggles. Their bodies had burns on them with blisters as large as watermelons. The odor of burned flesh filled the air.

Toward the end of the afternoon, we roared into Neustadt, Germany. It is a large city, the largest we had been through. The rail yard at the approaches to the city had been thoroughly bombed as were other sections of town.

We stopped for the night in Hochdoch, Germany. Our first experience of evicting civilians from and taking over their houses as quarters for our troops was here. We were clumsy at this at first, but we soon became very proficient. A veteran of many quartering parties described the process this way,

The method, approved by *Good House-keeping*, is to select the most pretentious section of town with enough modern houses for at least two per platoon and one good house for the CP. Have the interpreters go to all the houses except the house chosen for the CP and give the civilians fifteen minutes to vacate. The civilians then take all their bedding and food to the CP house. After all is accomplished, take the quartering party to the house picked for the CP and evict the neighbors who thought they had a haven in the house not picked by the Army. The supply sergeant then sorts the bedding and food equally among the platoons.

The next morning, we left Hochdoch at 1115 hours, marching six miles to Schieferstadt. We arrived at 1230. The pace was too fast and because of the heat and the weight of their equipment, there were a great number of stragglers and some men fell out. We had no more than eaten and gotten settled when orders came to prepare to move once again. That evening we entrucked and shuttled to Oggersheim, Germany, arriving at 2145, having traveled about eleven miles. We were informed that we were in Corps Reserve, and we waited to cross the Rhine.

Oggersheim, a suburb of Ludwigshaven, the I.G. Farben chemical company manufacturing center, was a fair-sized town with only one modern section. We had that section. The men were in high spirits for these were the best quarters they had ever had in Europe. They banged away at pianos in the 1st and 4th Platoon houses from morning until night and sang until they were hoarse. They found extra food in the houses and chicken coops so the "cook" of the 1st Platoon cooked all hours of the day and night.

We maintained some roadblocks near Ludwigshaven but our main mission was getting rest. In our six days at Oggersheim, we resupplied the company and conducted some training. The training consisted mostly of athletics, however. It was good for morale, and enhanced agility.

We spent a day practicing techniques for fighting in built-up areas. We used a street of houses for the work, climbing all over them and throwing colored smoke grenades. We were interested and serious about this training for they told us our job from now on would be, for the most part, fighting in exactly this sort of environment.

Those of us who were among the original men to enter combat with the company were now seasoned veterans. We had the confidence of experience, but yet felt that we had had enough. Any combat soldier knows that the odds are against him and that the more days one spends on the line, the greater are the odds of calamity.

We hoped that we had seen the hardest part of the war and that the rest would merely be a chase after the defeated *Wehrmacht*. After all, we were at the Rhine. . .

6

Heilbronn Horror

Heilbronn, Germany, 4 April 1945

The company mounted tanks, as many as 15 men on each, and left Oggersheim at 0715 on 31 March. It was a beautiful day and the men had an exciting time roaring thru town after town. Riding on top of a tank is an experience incomparable to any other one. A tank lunges when it starts or stops. They can turn on a dime and usually do. If you don't hold on tightly and pay attention to what the tank is doing, you don't stay on very long. The roar of the engine and the clatter of the tracks is terrific, and the vibration becomes painful after a few hours. The dust is ever present.

We rolled through Ludwigshafen with sirens screaming. The people "fell out" to watch us although division after division had passed through there to cross the pontoon bridge on the Rhine at that point. C.W.S. (Chemical Warfare Service) had the entire bridge area smoked to screen the operation from enemy view. The traffic was so great over the bridge that you had to have a priority number to cross. Ours were chalked on each tank. We had been allotted a definite amount of time to cross and the column had to arrive at the bridge site at a specific hour.

Mannheim was on the other side of the Rhine. This huge city had also been severely bombed. A

great number of the population of both Ludwigshafen and Mannheim still lived in the big public air-raid shelters because fire and high explosive bombs had leveled their apartments.

Arriving in Eppelsheim, we took quarters in civilian homes. Five tanks, separated from the column, got as far as Heidelberg, met reconnaissance elements of the 12th Armored Division, and decided the column wouldn't be found in enemy territory. Men in Company E have frequently remarked that Sundays and holidays were always days of unrest and danger for us. We could expect it as surely as we could expect the dawn. Our first attack, near Baccarat, France, was on a Sunday, and with a few exceptions, successive Sundays brought tough attack orders under unfavorable conditions. Some of our bitterest experiences were encountered on holidays. Remember Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day?

April 1st was April Fools' Day and also Easter Sunday. It was a holiday, so something was bound to happen. The Krauts had never let us down. At 0615, we left Eppelsheim for our LD (line of departure). Here we got into position for the attack. We cleared the LD, a stream, at 0800, guiding on the autobahn. Moving through an old-growth forest for several hundred yards, with our tanks in support, we crossed the autobahn and went cross country in a direct line toward the town of Wiesloch. We had hiked nearly 10 miles, without making contact with enemy or enemy artillery, when we reached a large clearing. There were about 1,500 yards of completely open ground and two obstacles to cross. A railroad embankment, elevated about 10 feet, was the first; and a deeply-cut stream the other. We crossed the clearing aggressively but uneasily, negotiated the obstacles, and started up the slope toward a wood.

We had reached a row of trees along a road when the enemy opened up on us with direct fire



Centurymen barrel into Germany aboard Sherman tanks of the 781st Tank Battalion, spring 1945. (SOC)

continued on page 38

The Enemy, From Bitche to Stuttgart . . .

From the time of the fall of Bitche on 16 March 1945 through the remainder of the 100th Infantry Division's combat service, it would be misleading to identify specific large units which fought against the Division. Rather, the 100th was opposed by hastily-organized, *ad hoc* amalgams of available units, often lacking significant armored, mortar, or artillery support.

When the 100th first burst through the lines beyond Bitche and headed through the Palatinate toward the Rhine at Mannheim/Ludwigshafen, it was opposed by scattered units of the 17th SS-Panzer Grenadier Division and by *Volkssturm*, or local defense, units. It is in these latter units that the "14-year-old boys and 70-year-old grandfathers" that so many Century-men remember as their quarries during the war's final phase were assigned.

There were sometimes, however, also fanatical members of the Hitler Youth in these outfits, and they could make life difficult for both their fellow *Volkssturm* members (who might be inclined toward surrender) and attacking Century-men. The *Volkssturm*, however, were strictly last line of defense outfits, members of which were often clad in a sad sack mixture of German Army, *Luftwaffe*, police, and even *Reichswehr* (the pre-Nazi era German armed forces) uniforms, and equipped with odd lots of rifles, machine pistols, and, of course, the ubiquitous *Panzerfaust* anti-tank rocket launcher.

The last semblance of organized resistance met by the 100th was at Heilbronn, from 4–12 April 1945. Although the German defenders were truly remnants of regular infantry and other units, the mixed bag of *Volks-Grenadiers*, *SS-Panzer-Grenadiers*, infantrymen, and training unit troops that were brought together to resist the Division's crossings of the Neckar gave a good account of themselves during more than a week of ferocious fighting in and around the city.

The following list of German units and related information was gathered by the late Dr.

Günther Beck of Beilstein from American PW records (especially the 100th G-2's) available in the US National Archives.

Without doubt, the most well-organized and highly-motivated defenders of the Heilbronn area were the elements of SS-Panzer-Grenadier Regiment 38 of the 397th's old nemesis from Rimling, the 17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division. The better part of two weakened, but hard-fighting battalions of this regiment opposed the 398th Infantry along the Neckar. In fact, they were the same two battalions that attacked Rimling in early January.

Combat Group (*Kampfgruppe*) Bodendörfer (built around a remnant of Grenadier Regiment 689 of the 246th Volks-Grenadier Division) fought in the city center and industrial quarter, opposing the 3d/398th and the 397th Infantry Regiment. It counted among its ranks soldiers from a confusing array of combat and training units. The core unit, Grenadier Regiment 689, was originally activated as an integral part of the 337th Infantry Division, which was raised in November 1940 in Bavaria. After performing occupation duties in France, it was transferred to the 246th Infantry Division in combat in the Soviet Union in late 1941. After over 2½ years of fierce combat there, the 246th was transferred to Germany, reorganized as a *Volks-Grenadier* division and committed in the ferocious fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. After being brought back up to strength with the addition of many former *Luftwaffe* personnel and participation in the Ardennes Offensive in December, it was committed to defensive operations in Germany.

Combat Group Bodendörfer also apparently included remnants of Grenadier Regiment 223, formerly of the 16th Volks-Grenadier Division, veterans of fighting in the High Vosges and Colmar Pocket; a company-sized element of the 2nd Mountain Division's Mountain Infantry Regiment 136, veterans of three years of fighting above the Arctic Circle against the Soviets near Petsamo; and part of the 553rd Volks-Grenadier Division's Grenadier

Regiment 1121, which had fought in the Saverne Gap in November and counterattacked across the Rhine during *NORDWIND* in January. Several of the non-combat units pressed into defensive service, also evidently under Combat Group Bodendörfer's command, included the locally-stationed Training (*Ausbildungs-und-Ersatz*) Regiment 525, Flak Regiment 42, and even Punishment Battalion 292, a penal unit for errant German soldiers. Several of these units disappeared after the 100th seized the Heilbronn area, but Combat Group Bodendörfer continued to exist as an identifiable entity and withdrew toward Beilstein where it continued its defensive operations until destroyed.

Combat Group Krebs (built around a remnant of the 719th Volks-Grenadier Division) fought primarily around the south of Heilbronn, near Sontheim and Flein. The 719th was organized as an infantry division in 1941 in the Brandenburg region, in and around Berlin. It performed three years of occupation duty in the Netherlands and coastal defense duties along the North Sea coast. In September of 1944, it fought British and Commonwealth forces in the Netherlands and Belgium before being redesignated as a Volks-Grenadier Division and transferred to the Saar to fight US Third Army units.

Combat Group Mockros (principally Grenadier Regiment 423 of the 212th Volks-Grenadier Division) also fought in the southern districts of the city and its surroundings. Another unit raised in Bavaria, the 212th, had been activated in early 1939 as an infantry division and took part in the invasion of France in 1940. After three years of combat in the Soviet Union, it was transferred to Germany, quickly refurbished and reorganized as a Volks-Grenadier division, and thrust into the Ardennes as part of the massive German offensive there in December 1944. Coincidentally, most of the division ended the war in its home region of Bavaria after a long series of defenses and withdrawals across much of Germany.

By the end of the fighting in Heilbronn, both Combat Groups Mockros and Krebs had ceased to exist as recognizable units, and they were incorporated in the 559th Volks-Grenadier Division, known to the 100th from the fighting

in January around Bitche. Elements of the 559th, namely the company-sized Combat Group Maier, also fought in the Heilbronn area against units of the 100th, but further participation by this old foe of the Century Division is unconfirmed. The 559th withdrew toward Backnang and Münsingen, finally surrendering in those areas in late April.

Even as the 100th settled into occupation duties in the closing days before and just after the German unconditional surrender, there was one last foe with which Centurymen had to contend. Having viewed the havoc caused by partisans against the German armed forces in occupied lands, Heinrich Himmler and his SS had created a network of guerillas intended to hamper Allied and Soviet conquerors if and when they set foot on German soil. Called the "Werwolf" movement, these highly-motivated irregulars were to perform the full gamut of guerilla tasks, from gathering and communicating intelligence on the enemy, to ambushes, sabotage, and even intimidation and terror against German "collaborators" who may have lapsed into cooperation (read "not resisting against") the Allied and Soviet occupiers of their local regions.

Ultimately, the *Werwolf* concept did not live up to Nazi hopes, and lost momentum significantly after the final German surrender. In fact, many incidents that were attributed to the *Werwolf* by the Allied side turned out to be simple criminal acts by unconnected individuals. However, terror and crime incidents—especially violence against Allied soldiers, retribution against German "collaborators," and black marketeering aimed at raising funds for the movement—did continue sporadically all the way to 1947.

Overall, however, like the "Alpine Redoubt" in which high-ranking Nazis were supposedly going to carry on the war indefinitely, the *Werwolf* movement was a Nazi pipe dream which a demoralized and thoroughly defeated German population was too exhausted and too poor to support.



continued from page 35

from an 88mm and a 75mm antitank gun. They were located in a little town at the top of the ridge and so close you could almost hear them feed the shells into the breeches. They opened fire on our light tanks from the 781st Tank Battalion that had scooted to the row of trees and bushes for concealment. One tank bogged down in the middle of the field and, being a perfect target, the crew scrambled out as fast as they could. For some reason, however, the enemy didn't fire on that tank. We were sure a couple of their rounds were direct hits among the tanks in the row of trees, but found later that the hits were not direct and only tore off parts of the tanks. One tank section leader was killed, however, while in front of his tank, directing it into a firing position.

Most of Company E was caught in the open in a very vulnerable position. All we could do was try to run faster than they could traverse their artillery pieces—which we did. At that moment, they fell back on their old stand-by—the deadly tree bursts. They caught Company F just entering the woods, severely wounding a large number of men in the headquarters group, including the company commander.

Then the enemy turned on us with their artillery. It seemed as though they couldn't miss because we were spread all over the field like ducks in a shooting gallery. Shell after shell fell in our midst and the dispersion of fragments was terrific.

Most of the men hit the ground every time they heard the searing screech of a shell coming in at close range. Before they were down, the shell had detonated and they were up again running. Up and down, up and down, really running for their lives, and it was the longest 600 yards any had ever run. Shell fragments tore a walkie-talkie radio out of a runner's hand; another man would lose his helmet every time he hit the mud. Still another man crawled on his stomach across the field in a 12-inch-deep drainage ditch filled with water. We reached the woods that, of course, did not afford protection, but at least concealed us from direct observation.

The men fell into shallow drainage ditches trembling with exhaustion. We were all out of formation. The company was disorganized so we immediately checked casualties and reorganized. We found that we had lost contact with the 3rd Platoon and one squad of the 1st Platoon that

were with the company commander. Shells smacked in occasionally, but there wasn't time to duck. The company was split and that was dangerous. Then the first sergeant of the company on our left contacted us and said his company commander was badly wounded and he couldn't find an officer. "What should I do?" he asked. We got him to reorganize his company and told him to follow us when we moved out. Presently, a wicked firefight developed and we knew the 3rd Platoon had made contact with German infantry and was probably in trouble.

A civilian ran in on our flank. A soldier almost shot him for he waved no white flag of any sort. The enemy fired on his back from high ground on our right flank. He got to us without a scratch and with a sweep of his arm exclaimed in Polish, "German soldiers all over that high ground." From what he said and the occasional rifle fire from that direction, it looked like they were going to envelop us, so we built up a firing line to watch for them. We moved some elements of the company forward a few hundred yards closer to the sound of the firefight in which the 3rd Platoon was engaged. We could see nothing of them, however, through the dense underbrush. A party was sent forward to contact them and learn the situation. It would have been foolish to blindly commit the rest of the company in the same firefight if we could use them to maneuver around the German positions. Artillery began screaming overhead. It came from the direction of our artillery, was falling ahead of us, and had the noise of our 105s, but it barely skimmed the tree-tops and was uncomfortably close.

In the meantime, we had established radio contact with the company commander. He said our artillery was playing hell with the squareheads and that he had sent a runner back to guide us into position. By the time we reached the 3rd Platoon, the enemy had fled. We learned that our artillery observer had directed some daring missions; he had had the gunners drop some of the rounds within 50 yards of our troops' positions, but that had done the trick and scared off the enemy. We occupied the high ground that the Germans had located, and from it, we could look down into the town of Wiesloch. There were several homes on the peak of the ridge from the attics of which we planned our attack of Wiesloch. Through our field glasses, we could see the Krauts scrambling half way up the slope of the

ridge, beyond the far side of town. There was also activity in the trees at the crest of the ridge. It looked very much like they were going to leave the town for us. Our artillery observer radioed for concentrations and plastered the ridge. They used a lot of white phosphorous. Jerry threw some shells our way, but they struck behind us.

The right half of town, as we looked at it, was our responsibility for clearing. It was a big town and there was a lot of work ahead of us. The area was divided into four parts and each platoon had its zone to clear. By dusk, all platoons had reported "all clear" and established strong points around the perimeter of our end of town. The town was taken with but one casualty to Company E. We picked up about ten prisoners, mostly walking wounded. Battalion said we could expect hot chow to get up to us, so we settled down, worn out and hungry, to await it. Before very long, orders came from battalion that they were consolidating the battalion into the center of town. Leaving our newly-occupied quarters, we moved into the area designated by battalion, "harassing" more civilians to quarter the company. Chow arrived just as we got to our new quarters. The supply sergeant had come along and brought up sleeping bags for the men.

Wiesloch was a hospital town with several large hospitals and thousands of *Wehrmacht* casualties. One hospital had four Yank prisoners who were liberated when our battalion took the town. They had been working in the hospital. Their story was the same as was all of our soldiers'. The closer the American army came, the better the treatment they had received from the Germans.

The next morning, we guarded one of the larger hospitals. No one was allowed out and only

doctors and nurses were allowed in. It was very evident that there were hundreds of German soldiers limping around there with nothing more wrong with them than an unrelenting fear of the United States Army. The head surgeon was furious with us because we wouldn't let him go home. He was brazenly intoxicated and his nose indicated he had been in that condition a long time. He was much quieter after we shoved him against the wall and barked at him. Later he turned his rage on his staff with all the dramatics of a cheap movie. He was a little Göring, from his pompous attitude to his ostentatious uniform.

That afternoon, we left Wiesloch for Sinsheim. The battalion marched about 10 miles along a highway with tanks dispersed in the column. We drew close enough to see Sinsheim and took cover on both sides of the road. Elements of the Division Cavalry Recon Troop contacted us and said as far as they could see the town was clear of enemy. We waited while this was confirmed. As we were waiting, enemy artillery shelled us. They lobbed rounds in, up, and down our long column from a great range. Because of the range, our tanks were unable to locate the German artillery and deliver counter-battery fires.

Although the Germans' fire wasn't concentrated, they did demolish a jeep in the battalion and wounded a man near it. They harassed us all the way as we rushed into the outskirts of Sinsheim and took cover in the first few buildings we encountered.

Our quartering party found a newer section of town and evicted the tenants. By the time the Company was ready to move to their quarters for the night, the shelling had ceased and it was almost dark.



An M-18 "Hellcat" tank destroyer of the 824th TD Battalion blasts German positions in support of the 2d/397th's advance near Wiesloch, April 1945. (SOC)

The modern, luxurious homes in Sinsheim were comfortable. The next morning, when we hadn't gotten orders to move by 0800, we started some wishful thinking. By 1000, it seemed that we surely would not move that day. Shortly thereafter, however, attack orders came and by 1100, we were on the march with medium and light tanks and a few tank destroyers from the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Our mission was to attack and clear the town of Hilbach south of Sinsheim. We passed through several small farm towns en route to our objective. The only obstacles were blown-out bridges; a minefield laid across the road that was detected and removed; and a sniper. The sniper shot at our backs just as we passed a small village, the people of which had waved at us as we passed. It was not unusual to be "shot in the back" after passing through a cheering, waving village. This sniper didn't hit anyone and an officer grabbed a BAR and emptied a magazine in the sniper's direction.

The clearing of Dubach was uneventful. We systematically searched all buildings in the portion of town assigned to us. We took some prisoners. One was caught discarding his uniform and donning the garb of a farmer. Having completed clearing the town, we sat down to eat and rest while we awaited further orders. The town baker gave bread to the GIs and civilians passed around *Most* to those thirsty enough to drink it. *Most* is an apple cider-wine type of drink, used principally by the urbans, with practically no alcoholic content, and a flavor resembling stagnant horse urine (or what we imagined it would be). By our orders, the natives brought cameras, firearms, ammunition, and knives to our CP.

Our orders arrived within an hour. We were to backtrack to a point where there was an east-west road and then follow this road, in Battalion column, heading east. This was the beginning of another long record-breaking road march. We passed through town after town not bothering to clear them, since we met no resistance. The only breaks we got were on the occasions that we were held up by a roadblock. Hour after hour, we marched forward. By nightfall, as we would approach a town, the doughfeet would ask, "Is this the town?" But on and on we marched, one foot in front of the other in a stupid procession. As each hour passed, it seemed that they couldn't keep us going another hour. In the darkness, some men became too exhausted to march and

the tanks would stop while they climbed on for a ride. Our sweat from the heat of the day chilled us in the cold of night and, to add the ultimate to our misery, it began to rain. We had been marching since 1100, on our feet 14 hours for it was now 0100 and we were on the outskirts of a town called Furfeld. The column halted and quartering parties were called forward.

The troops were terribly exhausted and wet and anxious for a place to lie down, so the quartering party had to do a fast job. They did! Civilians were awakened from their deep slumbers to see American soldiers, dripping wet, with haggard faces, ordering them to go sleep with their friends, that American troops were occupying their house. Some people in typical German obstinacy tried to argue, but most of them, reading the urgency in our soldiers' faces, hurriedly dressed and vanished in the night. One old Kraut, probably with a guilty conscience, started down the street in his nightgown, barefooted, dragging his wife behind him. A soldier realized that he had been drinking and made him return and get his clothes. One prolific young lady fell her squad of infant Aryans onto the streets crying that she welcomed soldiers in her home, but that we were very inconsiderate. Apparently, the *Wehrmacht* had slept in the same house with her, but the Americans wouldn't.

Usually the platoon leaders decided whether the men were to sleep with their boots on. That was the big question every time we slept and took careful consideration. The situation was thoughtfully weighed and when the men slept with their boots, the situation was grave. This night, however, there were no questions asked. Boots were taken off to care for bloody, blistered feet and to rest throbbing arches. We had marched 20 miles through hilly country.

The men made beds where they had dropped, exhausted, in their houses. It was generally felt that after such a grueling day and night the command would not move the next day. We were there fore disbelieving when, early the next morning, we were alerted and told to be ready to make a motor march by 0800, after a hot breakfast brought up by our cook.

On 4 April 1945, Company E, entering its 154th day of combat operations with five officers and 147 enlisted men, advanced to the west bank of the Neckar River opposite the heavily fortified city of Heilbronn. The Company was assigned the

mission of spearheading the 2nd Battalion's attack on the city by first clearing the factory district to enable the remaining companies to attack into the city center. With very little prior artillery preparation, the Company jumped off at 1430, paddling in small assault boats across the swiftly flowing Neckar River under observation and direct fire by rockets, artillery, and mortars from a dominating ridge northeast of the city. Leading the Company's attack, the 2nd Platoon, despite murderous crossfire from automatic weapons and heavy mortar fire, overran the enemy dug in along the east bank, taking sixty prisoners and inflicting heavy casualties upon the enemy.

The Company then advanced over open ground to the factories lying two hundred yards to their front, but well situated automatic weapons closed all avenues of approach to the buildings, their fire being so heavy that the Company was pinned down and unable to gain cover or concealment. The enemy continued their devastating fire, inflicting heavy casualties upon Company E. The 2nd Platoon platoon leader finally reached one factory with a squad of men. There he started to adjust 81mm mortar fire on the hostile automatic weapon position. The enemy emplacement was so close to his own that several rounds were direct hits on his building. Unhesitatingly, he continued to fire on the enemy position, getting a direct hit. Still the remainder of the Company could not move without extreme casualties. The situation was desperate and it was decided to move the 1st Platoon of the Company around the right flank of the 2nd Platoon under the cover of dusk and assault the heavily fortified factory from which they were receiving fire.

Achieving complete tactical surprise, and with great daring of movement, the 1st Platoon penetrated enemy positions, gained control of the building and provided covering fire for the remaining platoons as they struck at another factory. Company "E" then received the order to push on and take the remaining buildings even though darkness was at hand and it was difficult to differentiate between friend from foe. At 0300 on 5 April 1945, the enemy mustered every available man and weapon and struck at the 1st Platoon positions, employing infantry in superior numbers estimated to be battalion strength. Under cover of heavy and accurate artillery fire, the Germans fought viciously and stubbornly in an effort to seize the positions. They killed the 1st

Platoon platoon leader during this assault and wounded many with grenades and panzerfausts.

Failing to take the position by physical force after three separate assaults, the enemy set fire to the buildings by using panzerfausts in numbers never encountered before. After this volley of antitank rockets, 34 Germans turned to assault the remaining platoon positions. Under the leadership of the Weapons Platoon Sergeant, the 1st Platoon, with one attached light machine gun squad, fought their way back into friendly positions. Although many men were wounded and injured by enemy fire and the burning building, the fighting courage of the men from the 1st Platoon could not be denied. Some, although wounded, carried, dragged and encouraged one another back to safety, bringing their weapons with them. What was left of the machine gun squad dragged their .30-caliber back with them, too.

Along with their platoon leader, several members of the 3rd Platoon were cut off by this attack. They had infiltrated to a position on the second floor of an adjoining building where they could observe the Germans assembling for a flanking attack on the Second and 3rd Platoons. They killed and wounded a score of the enemy by a coordinated surprise volley of automatic fire and a barrage of hand grenades. The enemy soon reorganized and attacked our handful of men by throwing hand grenades through the windows and shooting through the wooden floor on which they were standing. However, by crawling 75 yards on hands and knees over one iron catwalk between two factories, this small group managed to get back to positions occupied by the remainder of the platoon.

Although having observed the fate of the 1st Platoon, the 2nd and 3rd Platoons, along with machine gunners and mortar men acting as riflemen, grimly held their ground until support was brought by another company. The buildings they were holding were burning and direct hits from rockets and large artillery shells were landing every few seconds, but they still clung tenaciously to their hard won gains.

At 0700, 5 April 1945, Company E, despite a shortage of ammunition, no food, rapidly mounting casualties, and determined enemy pressure, attacked again and forced the enemy to withdraw, and the remnants of the company held the positions against repeated counterattacks.

Company E had weakened the defenses of the enemy to such an extent that the battalion's objective was attacked successfully with the remaining companies. During these two days' actions, Company E suffered 42 casualties, which included nine killed, 29 wounded, and four missing in action. Enemy casualties including an estimated 400 dead or wounded and 150 captured, plus losses of 200 rifles and automatic weapons, 150

panzerfausts, 100 miscellaneous pieces of ordnance and munitions, and large quantities of rifle ammunition. The fighting aggressiveness, intrepidity in battle and devotion to duty displayed by the officers and men of Company E, 397th Infantry, reflect the highest honor on the Army of the United States. The 2nd Battalion received the Presidential Unit Citation for its capture of Heilbronn.

Objective Heilbronn

by William J. Law

On April 4, 1945 Company E, 397th was on the road to Neckargartach with the mission to clear the area on our way to the Neckar River. That morning a big ball of dust came rolling toward our rear. It was Captain MacAlister, our battalion S-3 (Operations Officer), driving madly in a jeep. He was in a hurry to get me to General Burress for a meeting. I turned the company over to my Executive Officer, Lieutenant Craig Davison, and climbed into the jeep for the ride to Neckargartach. It was then that MacAlister told me that the town had been taken by elements of the 10th Armored Division and was secure.

In the middle of the town, we met Major General Burress, members of his staff, and the CG of the 10th Armored Division, Major General William H. H. Morris. Pointing at Heilbronn on the wall map, and with tension evident in his voice, General Burress told me of the situation that was generating Company E's mission. The 3rd Battalion, 398th Infantry had crossed the Neckar River near Neckargartach, established a beachhead, but had been counterattacked by larger German forces and extremely accurate artillery. In fact, they were facing our old adversaries from Rimling, elements of the 17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division. Unless supported quickly, they would be wiped out.

My mission was to assemble the company quickly, cross the river, and attack the glass factory area on the 3rd/398th's right flank. This was to be done with no artillery or mortar support. I was assured the remainder of the battalion was enroute to support us. I then asked the 10th Armored Division's CG for a platoon of tanks to remain in Neckargartach and support us from there with their heavy firepower. He quickly answered "No." He insisted that enemy artillery was too hot in that area. He had tried to put a bridge across the river and it had been blown out. His division was headed north to explore other potential crossings. General Burress closed the meeting by wishing us luck and promising some kind of support as soon as possible. It was a bright, sunny day. Almost every movement drew

more German artillery fire. Nonetheless, I got MacAlister to drive me to the tallest house near the river. From the third floor of the house we could see the general location of the 3rd/398th, the power station and the glass factory area. The company hadn't arrived yet, so we went on to contact the 325th Engineers. With them we arranged for small rubber assault boats manned by engineers. We specified the location of the boats, routes to them, and our objective which was the powerhouse on the other side. It was selected because it was tall and wide and would give us the most protection even though the Germans could observe us at the boat loading area.

As soon as the company arrived, the men consumed their K rations. We were down to about 150 men and five officers (from the authorized strength of 187 and 6). The 60mm mortars were left behind for our supply sergeant to pick up. Their weight was too much for the boats and there wasn't enough room. The mortar men replaced their mortars and mortar ammo with rifles plus extra machine gun and rifle ammo.

Without prior training, the company was going to make a hazardous river crossing in heavily laden rubber boats under artillery and small arms fire. Soon, the 325th Engineers were at hand and ready with boats and had a smoke generator functioning. We started loading boats at 1400 hours on 4 April. The 2nd Platoon led, followed by my command group—first sergeant, runner, and radio operator. Next the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Platoons crossed, in that order. The machine gun sections crossed with the 1st and 2nd Platoons so that their firepower would be available when establishing the beachhead.

We had our first break—we crossed the ominous Neckar in very short order, without loss of personnel or equipment. As soon as the 2nd Platoon hit the west bank, they initiated their assault to the right of a coal pile, crossing an open yard toward the glass factory. The 1st Platoon attacked across open ground toward a house, probably the plant superintendent's. It was

located outside the factory compound of the power plant. They reached the house but could not move beyond it because of artillery and automatic small arms fire. The terrain was wide open and flat, extending back to hills that dominated the area. The hills afforded the Germans excellent observation into our area of operations.

After moving 300 yards from the bank of the river, the 2nd Platoon was pinned down by automatic fire from three directions.

In the meantime we had the mortar section, serving as riflemen, dig in just beyond and to the right of the coal pile. They would help hold a beachhead area for support troops when they arrived. We were pinned down on flat ground and suffering casualties. We were in trouble and needed artillery support. We didn't get it.

I had positioned our company CP group in the right rear corner of the powerhouse. It was full of people—two CPs from the 3rd/398th Infantry and their observer teams, plus a temporary aid station and a holding area for wounded. The 2nd platoon was still pinned down and unable to move forward. I ordered the 3rd Platoon to attack to the right of the 2nd to provide more firepower. Both platoons then moved forward, reaching the supply shed of the glass factory. This was a better position, but we still sustained some casualties.

The 1st Platoon, in the superintendent's house, couldn't move forward and the house was of little tactical use. I moved the platoon back to a position near the coal pile and power station. On the way back, they sustained artillery fire. Several were wounded. First Lieutenant Pete Petracco picked up one wounded man and carried him back to cover. In doing so he exposed himself to additional fire. He later received the Silver Star for this, which was also the first one awarded for valor in this action. Ultimately, he was the only man in the entire 397th Infantry to earn two Silver Stars (the other was awarded for his actions at Rimling).

Both the 2nd and 3rd Platoons were taking casualties every time they moved, mostly from the open plant yard area on the right. I sent the 1st Platoon to attack on the right to eliminate this flanking fire. They captured the administrator of the glass factory, and that eliminated the flanking fire for the time being. The mortar section maintained the "hold line" for the beachhead.

It was becoming dusk. German artillery and mortar fire never stopped falling on us. The

Battalion wire group was not sent to us, so we could not communicate with the three platoons by phone. I had lost radio contact with both the 2nd and 3rd Platoons, so I didn't know how far into the glassworks they had gotten. In desperation, I sent a runner to each and neither one returned.

As dusk turned to darkness, I heard from battalion. They said Company F was on its way to support us. By now, it had been four hours since we had crossed the river. I knew where the 1st Platoon was and decided to go there. I took my radioman with me. He didn't take his radio with him because the weight slowed him down. Crossing the open ground of the glass factory yard, running full speed, we reached the cover of a small shed. It was a little more than half the distance to the office building. As soon as we caught our breath, we began our run for the side entrance of the administration building. As we were running we could see men in open windows on the second floor. It was Lieutenant Petracco and several others who had come to the windows to cover us from fire on the right. That's when all hell broke loose.

The withering fire was coming from a house on the right at the edge of the yard. They let go with an incredible number of grenades in our direction. Although intended for us, the grenades hit the side of the office building and others went through the open windows. We heard calls for medics as we entered the door. We reached the second floor by taking steps two at a time. The room was dark. Walls were crumbled by the grenades. The dust was so heavy that it was difficult to breathe. We used a flashlight cautiously. There were wounded men, blinded by debris and men disoriented by the concussion intensified by a small room.

I found Pete Petracco. He lay mortally wounded. Pete died in my arms and his men fell silent. They knew from my anguish he was dead.

As the senior noncoms present were wounded or blind, I asked a junior noncom to take over the platoon. It was important to hold this position with what was left of the 1st Platoon. My runner and I returned, under cover of darkness, to our CP in the power station. There we learned that there was still no word from the 2nd and 3rd Platoons. There was also no word from battalion HQ. We found a forward observer from the Company H mortar platoon who called in fire on



The rubble-strewn streets of Heilbronn provided excellent cover and concealment for the German defenders. Here, Centurymen advance under fire in the Division's last major battle of the war. (SOC)

the house and row of buildings from which the grenades had come. We could not use him to hit any other areas because we did not know where the two lost platoons were.

I thought about the junior noncom I temporarily put in charge of the 1st Platoon. They needed a strong leader, so I sent Technical Sergeant Tom Convery, the 4th (Weapons) Platoon platoon leader, up to the 1st Platoon with my runner, Private First Class Bert Schleisman. I told Tom to reorganize the platoon, set up a defensive position, and to hold the administration building at all costs. I knew if we lost it, the Germans could outflank our position and drive us into the river. Between 2200 and midnight, Company F arrived. Because it was so dark they took a position in the first shelter of the glass factory yard. There they prepared to attack in the early morning.

The Germans counterattacked at about 0300 on 5 April, focusing their attention on the administration building. They fired automatic weapons, and panzerfausts, and used plenty of grenades, both fragmentation and incendiary. This set the building on fire.

The building was soon an inferno. Sergeant Convery told his men to abandon the building, and that each man was to get back across the open yard to our final defense line, held by the 4th Platoon. In the process, a number were wounded, burned or temporarily blinded. Most reached our final defensive position and were evacuated back across the river as soon as boats were obtained. Sergeant Convery was seriously wounded, as were others. He stopped the litter carriers at the CP to apologize to me for not holding the building. It was not necessary. He had done all he could. Then he said he had to leave five dead soldiers in that burning building. Much

later we found out that one of those soldiers, Private First Class Victor H. Nash, found his way into a subbasement where he survived the artillery and fire and came out two days later when the action advanced past the area.

We soon had the support of our artillery and heavy mortars. With what remained of Company E, we forced the Germans to suspend their attacks. Not long afterward, Company F passed through Company E to continue the attack. Companies G and H then crossed the Neckar to support the 2nd Battalion's attack. In its devastated condition, Company E was unable to continue offensive operations. Not knowing what had happened to the two platoons, it appeared that we had lost three officers and fifty-four men since crossing the river.

As Company F continued its slow, building to building advance in the industrial compound, they picked up parts of our Company's 2nd and 3rd Platoons. This group was returned to the CP which was now located in the glass factory. The two lieutenants were OK, as were most of the men in both platoons. I asked the officers how they got out of contact with the CP. They said they were in a vulnerable position and did not want to risk detection by using their radios.

Our corrected count of soldiers present for duty was thus four officers and fewer than a hundred men. We were very tired and very hungry. None of us had eaten since noon on April 4th. We were ready to go back across the river and revert to battalion reserve.

We started the reorganization of the company, changing assignments, appointing new squad and platoon noncoms, and assimilating replacements. We were now in a position to renew our support of the block by block attack on the city.

All of the Division's infantry units had crossed the Neckar River. Company E was given the mission of clearing pockets of resistance including the fortified high ground that 3rd/398th had failed to eliminate. We met strong resistance, but now we had heavy mortar and artillery to pin the enemy down. By dusk we had taken the high ground. It was a German observation post that had given all of us a hard time before and during the battle for the city. We finally silenced our nemesis.

* * *

The five men who lost their lives in the administration building of the glass factory were Lieutenant Peter F. Petracco, Sergeant Earl H. Leland, Technician 5th Grade Olan Dabbs, and Privates First Class Harold E. Miller and William A. Brenahan. They were cremated in the fire of the burning building. All that was found were their dog tags. Their remains were buried initially in a common grave in France. Later they were moved to Arlington National Cemetery. I have visited them there many times. Along with the rest of the 2nd Battalion, the soldiers of Company E received a unit Presidential Citation for outstanding accomplishments, plus Silver Stars for Lieutenant Petracco, Technical Sergeant Convery

and Lieutenant Knighton in addition to numerous Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts.

Observers of the initial struggle for Heilbronn have said that more awards were earned than awarded. Comments have also been made that casualties would have been lower if artillery had been available.

Bill Law

When asked what the most memorable experience of his life was, Bill Law said "Heilbronn." He then provided a picture perfect account from memory of what happened on Wednesday and Thursday, 4 and 5 April, 1945. At that time he agreed to also provide a written account and did so on January 26, 1993. William J. Law is the author of "Objective Heilbronn."

Bill Law was the Commanding Officer of Company E, the outfit that led the attack on Heilbronn. He was a First Lieutenant promoted to Captain after the battle.

He is now a retired major living comfortably in Greensboro, North Carolina with his wife. He keeps in touch with WWII comrades and participates in various military and veterans' group functions, including extensive support of the 100th Infantry Division Association.

The Distinguished Unit Citation for the 2nd Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment

authorized by War Department General Order 101-46

The 2d Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding accomplishment in combat during the period 4 to 12 April 1945, at Heilbronn, Germany. On 4 April the 2d Battalion launched its frontal assault against Heilbronn, key German rail center and defensive bastion of the Neckar River line. Ferrying assault forces across the Neckar under intense concentrations of artillery and mortar shelling as well as small-arms fire, advance elements overran entrenched enemy positions on the east bank, inflicted heavy casualties, and established a precarious bridgehead. For 7 consecutive days, the 2d Battalion then fought its way forward street-by-street, house-by-house, and even room-by-room, overcoming fanatical enemy resistance and repulsing counterattack after counterattack as the enemy struggled desperately to hold Heilbronn at all costs. Enemy artillery fire on dominating hills surrounding the city pounded the river crossing site with unabated savagery, preventing the bridging of the stream and making it necessary to ferry supplies and casualties across the Neckar throughout the battle. Attempts to float armor across the river failed when improvised rafts capsized, and lacking tank support, the 2d Battalion doggedly inched its way forward until, on 11 April, final remnants of the defending forces were routed from high ground behind the city. Thus the 2d Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment, by dint of resolute, unfaltering courage displayed by every man and the perfect coordination of all elements, crushed fanatical enemy resistance, breached the formidable Neckar defense line, and made possible the present drive into Austria.. (General Orders 260, Headquarters 100th Infantry Division, 29 September 1945.)

Military Government Occupation Germany

by Major William Law, Army
Captain Craig Davison, Army

They walk through the woods at a wary but fast pace. They did not intend to lose the two soldiers who were leading them along a nearly invisible trail. They were quiet and absorbed in thought. They knew they were headed into a horrific battle, and that their destination was Company E. Their combat gear was new and clean. They looked young. They heard the sound of thunder in the distance. It was artillery shells detonating—theirs and ours.

The 65 replacement soldiers entered Heilbronn. The buildings had been pulverized by mortar and artillery fire. There was the stench of burned buildings and worse, and choking smoke reaching high into the sky. They followed over debris, under it, and around it in the factory area of the city. They reached the partially standing walls of a factory building. A piece of roof remained for cover. This, they were told, was the Company E command post. It was too small to enter. They were very uncomfortable standing outside hearing small arms fire and the artillery shells exploding near enough to shake the earth under their feet. Their CO, Captain Bill Law, introduced himself and then his executive officer, Lieutenant Craig Davison. The faces of both officers showed the strain of several days and nights of intensive combat and the pain of seeing their men wounded and killed. The replacements were taken to their platoon leaders. For them it was a time of terror and confusion: the time for their baptism of fire and the unknown that follows.

It was called "Observation Hill." From its height, the German artillery spotters had had almost unrestricted fields of observation across the Neckar River Valley and the city of Heilbronn. Company E led the 2nd Battalion out of Heilbronn, leaving the First and Third Battalions to secure the city. Our objective was to seize Observation Hill. Our attack formation was the 2nd and 3rd Platoons in the lead, with the 1st and 4th platoons following.

We began moving across 1000 yards of open ground. The company was immediately pinned down by artillery and mortar fire. This was the baptism of fire for the 65 replacements. They became temporarily immobile. Experienced men advanced to get out of the beaten zone, but the green replacements did the natural thing and froze where they were. Captain Law and the other company leaders pleaded, urged and kicked them to get the new men advancing. They had to move off the open field to the slope of the hillside. They were less likely to be hit there.

Eventually we scaled the high ground in the face of harassing fire from automatic weapons. Near the hilltop there was silence. By that time the Germans had moved away. The company occupied the high ground at the edge of a densely wooded ridge, and established a defensive perimeter. The Company dug in in anticipation of the expected German counterattack. It was 1500 hours.

The CO turned command of the company over to his Executive Officer and went with his runner, Bert Schliesman, to confer with Major Wisdom, the Battalion Commander. Battalion headquarters was located on a lower part of the lee of the hill. It was dark before they could return. They dug a foxhole and returned to the company position at dawn.

Captain Law told his officers our mission was to proceed toward Bad Canstatt at 0700. We went through miles of vineyards. Later we learned that there were over a 1,000 acres of vineyards in the region. We could see the 1st Battalion moving out of Heilbronn on our right and attacking in the same direction. We encountered intermittent harassing fire. We had firefights in two small towns. From that point on, although we remained in attack formation, and we weren't fired upon. The march from Heilbronn to Bad Canstatt was about 30 miles. We were surprised that the *Wehrmacht* had not adequately defended these towns.

The next morning, Captain Law asked Lieutenant Davison how he would like to manage Bad Canstatt. Normally, military government was the responsibility of specially trained civil affairs personnel. This was a sudden change from fighting skills to the administration of a city.

When the *Wehrmacht* left Bad Cannstadt, confused citizens returned to farms, stores and homes. With no training in military government we established a priority of tasks to be accomplished and began carrying them out. Having studied German, Lieutenant Davison could communicate with townspeople in a passable fashion. The first thing he did was to locate the former *Bürgermeister* (mayor) and put him back in his *Rathaus* (town hall). He knew how to run his city and we could then just supervise and enforce the rules. The *Bürgermeister* set up a dusk-to-dawn curfew. That included Germans and French and American personnel in the area. We started 24-hour jeep-mounted patrols of four soldiers with rifles and carbines ready for any emergency. Our men cleaned up and washed their jeeps to present the sharpest appearance possible, the German populace would undoubtedly be judging us, and we wanted to instill respect, as well as fear.

For a while, people broke curfew and there were other disturbances but soon there were few problems to report. We commandeered German vehicles so that the mayor could handle the distribution of food and garbage. We helped them rebuild their communication system and other public service utilities. Our behavior earned their appreciation and respect. They knew of the deeply seated hatred of the French and of the Russian propensity for brutality. At first they were cautiously fearful of us, but before long they were friendly and anxious to please us.



Centurymen advancing through southern Germany, April 1945 (SOC)

Captain Law and Sergeant Charles Martinotti visited the German commanding officer of a hospital in Bad Canstatt. They went there to make sure the commander understood the rules of the area and specifically that nobody was to leave the hospital without clearing it with our CO. Two German enlisted men were waiting in the hall leading to the commander's office. One was missing an arm, while the other was missing a foot. They stood at attention and saluted Captain Law as he passed; he returned their military greetings. Through the German Youth and Hitler Youth systems, Germans had been trained since boyhood to show respect for officers. They may also have been showing respect for a conqueror.

We had problems with French military units that were coming into Bad Canstatt from Stuttgart. It had originally been the 397th's mission to seize Stuttgart, but for political reasons, General Eisenhower allowed elements of the First French Army take the city and occupy it.

Frequently, the hospital CO would alert us to the location of an SS man who had returned home. We took them into custody and sent them to the proper authorities for trial. When the Germans realized the SS men were being put on trial for their crimes they began to inform about them. They were despised and feared by the people. Their power was so absolute they could imprison, torture and murder. They were in charge of intelligence, central security, police functions, and racial affairs, including the extermination of undesirables.

We left Bad Cannstadt in the hands of military government and road marched southeast as fast as we could in attack formation. We passed through Esslingen, Göppingen and Geislingen. We covered 60 miles without conflict and reached Ulm in three days.

On the walk to Ulm our senses were adjusted. The sights of war were gradually eradicated and the beauty of the countryside and the smells of budding spring emerged. We came back to reality at last. The tip of a church spire could be seen above the skyline. The spire gradually rose as we marched forward. Finally, we could see the church and the town surrounding it. We saw Ulm in the distance. Company headquarters was set up in the center of the city. We cleared the city of German soldiers then looked for the mayor. We found an intelligent and well-informed person. He knew the people to contact to build an organ-

ization and get the city functioning. He put the curfew into effect for us and was quick to get milk and vegetables to the citizenry. After two days in office, we learned he was a Communist.

The catholic Bishop spoke to Captain Law about the mayor's political persuasion and was adamant about having him replaced. Law replied that the bishop should find someone who can run the city for us. The Bishop phoned two days later saying the people he had in mind refused to take the mayor's job. The Communist did a good job running the city so we kept him in office. The military government people could solve this dilemma when they took over. We had other problems at the moment.

The most formidable challenges were caused by the situations of laborers from central and eastern Europe, including Poland, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Estonia. They had been brought to Germany to support the German war effort, sometimes as volunteers, but usually as forced labor. They lived in camps provided by the German Army. When the Germans left Ulm, they abandoned these laborers and they became, in official parlance, DPs (displaced persons). While many wanted nothing more than to return home, many others were reluctant to go, as the Red Army was now occupying their countries. Those who had willingly cooperated with the Germans—and those who might be falsely accused of such comportment—were truly “up the creek.”

We found them starving and in poor health. They were without means of obtaining food. We found food for them and gave them some of our rations, but we didn't have the means to provide as much as they needed. They were frequently violent, attacking German civilians, perhaps in retaliation for past abuses. They stole and didn't have much regard for curfew regulations. They were difficult to control because they didn't seem to understand German and were absolutely unable to comprehend English.

One DP camp was close to a large cheese factory where they worked. They constantly raided the factory for the cheese. When we first heard of a raid we put a guard on the factory. We evicted unauthorized people from the factory. They resisted. We used force and some DPs were injured, but none seriously. They had to obey the rules for citizens, but we were very sympathetic toward their condition.

The beautiful blue Danube flows southeast through Ulm. Many buildings in the old town were destroyed, but many remained. The former beauty of the city of 92,000 could be envisioned in the undamaged buildings surrounded by the city walls with their gates and towers.

Ulm possesses one of the most beautiful cathedrals in Germany, a fourteenth-century structure whose 528-foot tower is the highest church tower in the world. Inside the cathedral are wonderfully carved choir stalls. It took an accurate, considerate bombardier to spare that religious masterpiece. The mayor wanted us to know that Ulm was the birthplace of Albert Einstein. He also wanted us to know that at nearby Giengen there is a bust of President Theodore Roosevelt. The citizens placed it there because that is where the original Teddy Bear was made and named after him. The big news at that time was that the Russians were advancing rapidly on Berlin. We had a selfish but normal view about that news. The more they sacrificed, the less we had to.

A military government outfit moved into Ulm and we moved out. Our next move was back north-northwest about 30 miles to Göppingen. It was a beautiful spring day in May. As we marched, we could see people playing on the banks of the Danube. The Division was placed in corps reserve when we occupied Göppingen. From early November 1944 when we took over Baccarat, France from the 45th Division, except for what literally amounted to a few hours spent in reserve, we were in constant contact with the enemy without one day of relief up to the time we moved into Göppingen. That was almost six full months of action. Through it all, the backbone of our company were those men who had been with the outfit at Fort Bragg, who lasted through the war, and were often those who had been wounded and returned. Those combat E-men, and the replacements who joined us before Heilbronn and fought with us through that last major battle have a bond closer than brothers.

We found an Olympic-size swimming compound with a pool, bathhouses, tables, chairs and umbrellas. The Germans who ran the place told us that some Olympic events had been held there in 1936. Wearing swim trunks pool side, the artillery tattoos were noticeable on the exposed bodies of some of the men. A shrapnel scar appears jagged on the skin and is often large. We made a commercial building into an enlisted

men's recreation area and furnished it. The men called it the "Copcabaña East" after a then famous New York City nightclub. We set up baseball diamonds and played a lot of baseball and football, much to the entertainment of a lot of German spectators. There was not much military activity.

We patrolled the area and kept a 24-hour guard on our housing complex. We had forced some residents out of their houses which sometimes caused hard feelings and thus a possible problem. We allowed the owners into their houses one hour on one day each week. Women asked to clean our laundry. They did not want their currency (marks) but rather chocolate, cigarettes, sugar and canned food.

Göppingen had been the home of Heinrich Himmler. He was one of the most sinister figures in Nazi Germany. As head of the SS, he was in charge of the German Police, including the dreaded Gestapo. He was also responsible for the entire concentration and death camp systems, and as such, he ordered the deaths of millions of innocent people, including Germans as well as unfortunates from conquered territories. He committed suicide by taking poison after British troops captured him in 1945. Captain Law was given a letter signed by Himmler ordering an atrocity, and turned it over to the appropriate authorities.

Early on the morning of 8 May 1945, we received a radio message from Battalion HQ. They said the war with Germany was over. General Eisenhower would be on Armed Services Radio that night and the armistice would be signed the next day—which became known as Victory in Europe Day, or V-E Day. In anticipation of incautious exuberance we immediately called for non-imbibing volunteers to stand guard. This was the time to celebrate. Everyone dug into their bags and pulled out whatever they had to drink. Captain Law recalled the extremely unusual behavior of Sergeant Bill McKegney that day. He was an upstanding soldier who was never seen drinking and had been a respected friend of Law's since Fort Bragg. Sergeant McKegney sat under a kitchen table, a significant traffic area, and proceeded to drink most of a newly acquired bottle of whiskey. He sopped up the sauce like Prohibition was just around the corner. Hours later he was unconscious. We carried him out and put him in his bed.

Shortly afterward, we received orders to prepare to seize Stuttgart from the French Army. The

elements of the French 1st Army there were commanded by French officers, but the enlisted men consisted mostly of African colonial soldiers who were only paid half as much as their metropolitan French counterparts. They were pillaging and raping the citizenry of Stuttgart. General Eisenhower, who had curtailed our planned attack in the first place under political pressure from DeGaulle, got angry and ordered the French to withdraw and be replaced by the 397th Infantry Regiment. The French refused to evacuate, so he ordered the 397th to attack. Company E was to lead the attack against our erstwhile allies.

It was a 30-mile march, taking a day and a half to get to Stuttgart. By midday we got word from battalion HQ that the French were pulling out. They left hangers-on of remnants of various units who did not want to leave. When they saw us they pulled out that night and we occupied Stuttgart without firing a shot. Thus, what could have been a very serious rift in the embryonic western alliance was avoided.

After V-E Day we had a serious accident. Our jeep ran over an antitank mine, and two of our men were killed. They were driving on an unused, unpaved road. We found no other mines and the civilians knew of no mines planted in the city. This tragedy brought to reality what every occupation soldier continuously feared. The possibility existed that German fanatics could still cause problems for us. In addition to the possibility of booby traps and landmines being laid by these diehards, there was also the possibility of sniping, individual murders, and even ambushes by these members of the so-called "Werwolf" movement. Of course, the countryside was littered with unexploded ordnance and unswept minefields, too, which only added to the daily danger. After surviving six months of combat, a postwar casualty would be the worst that could happen.

Stuttgart was the capital of the German state of Württemberg located on the Neckar River. It is a large city with a population of over a half million. Being a manufacturing center, it had been bombed repeatedly. The railroad yard, military installations, and the factory district was destroyed. A 13th century moated castle was bombed. Daimler-Benz, the oldest automobile factory in the world was not then making Mercedes. It had been exporting half of their annual production to practically every country in the world. Stuttgart also possesses magnificent

gardens. Only 25 percent of its area is built over. It has parks, vineyards, orchards and gardens.

The Württemberg State Opera House was never hit by an aerial bomb. The beautiful mosaic ceiling of the great hall was badly scarred, however, by bullets from a vandal's machine gun. The ceiling was repaired before we left Stuttgart in 1945. One of the fine hotels in the city was the Graf Zeppelin, opposite the main train station. It was crippled by the war but still operating.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions remained in Stuttgart. They occupied a former German army cavalry barracks. It was a handsome two-story brick building which included spotless tile horse barns. The second battalion moved out of Stuttgart to a picturesque village called Ditzingen north of the city. We were called a permanent occupation force at that time. Our CP was in a large home owned by a dentist who had his dental office in his home. He stored his equipment in one room. We also had a store across the street from the mess hall which we used as an office. The first sergeant and runners worked in the office. The supply sergeant used a nearby building for equipment and supplies. He issued clean uniforms, which were badly needed.

We captured a number of SS men who were attempting to get to their families. They were identified by neighbors who no longer feared them. We set up checkpoints at various locations to control unnecessary or unauthorized traffic and DPs who sometimes wandered aimlessly. We received two new officers with no combat experience. The closely knit, experienced team of combat officers at that time consisted of Captain Law and Lieutenants Davison, Teiser, and Thena.

Early on in the Occupation, some guys got together and formed the "Society of the Sons of Bitche." Men who fought that battle were given a certificate. It read: "(Name of soldier) is A Legitimate Son Of Bitche. Duly Inducted Into The Exalted Society Of Sons Of Bitche For His Part In The Storm And Capture Of The Proud Citadel In The Maginot Line On March 16, 1945." The comical "ceremonies" that accompanied the formation of the organization was great for morale, and helped set the stage for a robust and highly active division veterans' association which would be founded in the years to come.

We conducted many military ceremonies in downtown Stuttgart, using with the complete regiment and regimental band. Often, these were held to honor men who were receiving

decorations, and the German people turned out in great numbers. Generations of Germans had grown up with military uniforms, marching, and martial music, and they liked ours as well. They were also curious. The Germans we got to know were nice people and they found our behavior acceptable.

Instructions for secret operations were circulated on 20 July throughout the 397th Infantry Regiment. The operation entailed the systematic search of all civilians and homes in the area and it was to come as a complete surprise. Company E had a specific zone with collecting points for contraband articles as well as for individuals picked up for infringement of occupation orders or lack of an identity card. Everyone was ordered to stay where they lived on the designated day.

Operation TALLY-HO started at 0700 and lasted until 1700. A fair amount of small pieces of German and American military equipment was confiscated, along with some Nazi propaganda literature. Much of it turned over voluntarily by the citizenry. The most fuss occurred when we took their hunting rifles and shotguns. Some of us sympathized with the displeasure of German families of quality when we saw their splendid shotguns dropped into the Neckar River. It was rumored that some pornographic literature was confiscated, too. It wasn't in the orders. None of it appeared at the collecting points.

"No-Fraternization" policies forbade association with German other than on a business basis. We were not to socialize with German women of *any* age. Over time, those rules were slackened and social contact was allowed. This largely welcome change of policy nevertheless brought some new difficulties, including medical problems. We had a good medical detachment that handled these incidents very capably. They prepared several hygiene classes that kept the men aware of their personal health responsibilities.

As the summer of 1945 wore on, with the war in the Pacific far from over, we received orders to initiate an intensive training program that included physical exercise, classroom work, and field training. It was obvious that the regiment was getting back into shape both mentally and physically. A rumor passed around that we were being tuned up for the invasion of Japan. Latrines were abuzz with speculation that the Division would be shipped back to the States for a short respite then refurbished and sent to the Pacific Theater. Captain Law checked with battalion HQ several

times because the company was noticeably depressed by the rumor. All he was told was that that was one possibility. This was difficult to tell the company, so he said nothing.

Captain Law decided to throw the enlisted men a Victory Dinner to temporarily distract them from the Pacific rumors. First Sergeant Stan Leach was a positive and decisive leader. He was a strict father figure for the enlisted men. He could get supplies to the company within channels quickly or, when necessary, knew how to work outside of channels to achieve results. He could obtain what was needed that a company commander couldn't or took too long to get through the chain of command.

Leach was the key figure in putting the Victory Dinner together. He enhanced the army rations with German baked goods and fresh vegetables from the local green grocer. Good German low alcohol beer was obtained, as well as high alcohol *Schnapps* and a donation of American whiskey from the officer's rations. Law said he had a friend at a nearby army field hospital who could bring a group of nurses to the Company E Victory Dinner. The dinner and drinks were great but as the enlisted men said later, the nurses were greater. The nurses knew what they were there for. They had made similar appearances. They really worked hard, getting around to visit or dance with everyone, even the shy men. Captain Law came to the Victory Dinner after desert had been served. The men saw him and became quiet expecting him to speak. His speech consisted of a few words of great importance to the men. He said, "I've just come from Regimental Headquarters where I was told that the 100th Division is going home." He started to say more but the immediate response was a wild uproar of cheering. Private First Class Allen Holderfield ran over to the CO with tears running down his cheeks. He grabbed the captain's hand and shook his arm strenuously. "I'm just the messenger," said the captain.

The delightful visit by the army nurses to the big Company E dinner drew memories of donut dollies from Lieutenant Davison's memory. One day on the front line we were dug into a defensive position. Things were quiet when a perimeter guard radioed the CP to say there were a bunch of girls at his position, equipped with donuts. We went to see if he was delirious. We found four girls in a jeep with a trailer. They were

escorted by two armed soldiers and a Red Cross officer in another jeep. We put them in a covered position and then pointed out nearby empty fox-holes for their use in case the enemy interrupted us. Four girls lined up beside their jeep and trailer dispensing coffee, donuts and delightful chatter. Small groups of soldiers passed slowly by holding out their aluminum cups and taking as many donuts as they could carry. It was a cold day for girl watching. The girls were bundled up in bulky clothes and wore helmets. There wasn't much girl showing but they had pretty faces and sweet girl voices. Their mission was completed in 40 minutes and they were on their way back to safety. Before they left the Red Cross Officer told Lieutenant Davison said they always spread their cheer to soldiers behind the front lines. This time they decided on an unauthorized trip to the front to visit combat soldiers. They were curious about the combat zone and compelled to extend their feminine charms where it was lacking. The CO and Exec were greatly relieved when the girls left without being fired upon during their visit.

Unfortunately, the plan to send any divisions back to the States was cancelled. We became what was called a "constabulary force." However, the good news was that the Japs surrendered in August, so even if our trips home were delayed, there would definitely be no detour to the Pacific. General Burrell relinquished command of the 100th Infantry Division on 22 September 1945, and stepped up to command VI Corps. He took Captain Law with him. Craig Davison assumed command of Company E in "the final stage of occupation operations."

The principal topic of conversation among the men then became "points." They were based on the amount of time served and the awards received by each man. The higher each man's accumulation of points, the sooner he was rotated home. After a period of time, the regiment was relieved of military duties in Stuttgart. As men were judged to have enough points, they were transferred to a homebound unit. The company gradually became unrecognizable by those who had been around it for a long time, but those of us without sufficient points waited our turn. After a long period of expectation, Company E daubed-cosmoline on their equipment for overseas shipment to the U.S. Units of the 397th Regiment started leaving Stuttgart on drafty 18 wheel trucks headed for Marseilles, France 600 miles to

the southwest. They reached the embarkation camps near the port in cold, wet weather after a long bumpy ride. They listened for incoming military ship arrival reports on Armed Services Radio. Finally, our group left for Marseilles, France bound for New York City on 7 January 1946.

Bill Law was assigned to the Corps Chief of Staff's section. He was responsible for collating a variety of reports for the CG. The "Occupation Reports" he put together allowed the CG and his staff to track incidents of sabotage, motor vehicle accidents, injuries, and the venereal disease rate of each subordinate unit. Graphs depicted the significant trends more dramatically than numbers. Bill Garden, Bill Law's Company E predecessor in command, was also assigned to VI Corps headquarters.

Bill Law assumed command of a field artillery battalion consisting of men who had the required

points to go home. They marched to the Stuttgart railroad yard where they waited for the station master. They entertained themselves by examining a line of very old freight cars. They learned that these were antique WWI freight cars called "forty and eights." They were designed to carry 40 men and 8 horses. Good enough for horses, Law supposed, but men in freight cars, he asked himself? When the stationmaster arrived he told Law that these cars are taking you and your men to Antwerp. Bill was shocked into utter disbelief. He was told this is the only rail transportation at this time at this place. The fragile 40 and 8's were slowly pulled 400 miles to Antwerp with absolutely no amenities. Rail-side buffets were served at towns along the way. Reasonably frequent countryside stops were made so the men could eliminate near the track.

A ship met them at the Port of Antwerp and they landed in New York City, 19 March 1946.

The Company "E" Anthem

(to the tune of "Talk of the Town")

I can't show my face, it's a damn disgrace
People stop and stare, because I cut my hair
Just to please the Commander of Company "E."
Every day we shave, then go out and slave;
We come home at night, don't we look a sight,
Just to please the Commander of Company "E."
What an aggregation, filled with aggravation
Marching along all day.
But this aggregation will receive ovation
On Armistice Day, what more can we say?
So until that day, we've no time to play
As we march along and sing this G. D. song
Just to please the Commander
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha of Company "E."

The Men of Company E

In Memoriam

1st Lt Peter P. Petracco*
2nd Lt Donald W. Holland
S/Sgt James P. Grimes
S/Sgt John A. Miller
S/Sgt Richard Polhemus
S/Sgt Artur D. Shutskin
S/Sgt Francis Wayte
Sgt Earl H. Leland
Pfc William A. Brenahan
Pfc Robert Burlison

Pfc John Chillemis
Pfc Donald Hildenbrand
(PW)
Pfc Murray Hornstein
Pfc Herbert Hulmes
Pfc Chester Merrill, Jr.
Pfc Harold E. Miller
Pfc Jason Miller, Jr.
Pfc James C. Rembert
Pfc John J. Speier

Pvt Abner C. Culbertson
Pvt Olan Dabbs
Pvt Robert L Hooper
Pvt Lloyd Jester
Pvt Philip Librone
Pvt Harold E Miller
Pvt Gene K. Neubold
Pvt Stanley Thomas
Pvt Garo Yazujian

William Garden
William Law
Dominic Cuccinello
Craig Davision
Oliver C. Knighton
Peter P. Petracco
Stanley Teiser
Donald Holland
John W. Mallory, Jr.
Robert H. Thena
Stanley J. Leach
Joseph J. Bellavia
Avis D. Hammond
Virgil M. Kilgore
Charles Martinotti
Frank Outslay
Ernest H. Blackwelder
William M. Ditto
Herman M. Duerr
Philip C. Esslworth
Loren Harrison
Frederick Heinzmann
Bronislaw Lis
Daniel S. Lynch
John J. Marcheterre
Joseph P. Mudd
Floyd D. Nemecek
John Olejar

Edward J. O'Rourke
Stanley J. Stetz
David E. Thomas
Rudolf Andrle
Robert E. Dawson
Joseph F. Dolan
Harry C. Gratz
Noramn L. Larson
George W. Mays, Jr.
William M. McKegney
Kenneth A. Murton
James R. Nance
Michael G. Pappas
John E. Thoma, Jr.
George J. Walters
David I. Watson
Joseph J. Lake
Keith T. Beegle
Eugene J. Doffing
Orville F. Dolan
Abner G. Hinkle
Jim M. Izett
John J. Reardon, Jr.
Seldon S. Ridenour
Bernard U. Ritzert
Robert G. Ross
Robert W. Shaughnessy
Elson L. Thompson
Marshall E. Walker
Marshall Buchanan

William A. Constantino
Clifford Crandall
James E. Ledbetter
Frank M. Maniscalco
Phillip Nassif
Bradford C. Parsons
Gascon M. Stuffield, Jr.
Robert B. Abel
Troy L. Adams
Joseph P. Alfano
George R. Apgar
William B. Bailey
Dale J. Balding
Paul Barringer
Jack O. Beams
Robert L. Beehn
Roy L. Bianchi
Robert A. Billinger
Robert G. Boyee
Charles E. Bowman
Virgil C. Braden
Walter W. Bray
Ralph Q. Broll
Roy L. Brown
Armand R. Burle
Seccy L. Bucciarelli, Jr.
Owen E. Bullock
Robert L. Cain
Marcus Campbell
Russell Campbell

*Battlefield Commission

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