

LOVE COMPANY

THE WAR IS OVER

On 25 April 1945, the 399th Infantry Regiment was assigned to Seventh Army Reserve and the 100th Infantry Division was officially off the front line after 175 days of combat.

26 Apr 45 Left Waldenbronn Ger 0900 by motor Arrived at Stuttgart Ger 1100 Distance motored 12 miles.

About 3 May 1945, the company was stationed in Kirchheim, Germany. I was there on 5 May 1945 when we received the following order:

EFFECTIVE AT ONCE, 100TH INF. DIV. TROOPS WILL NOT FIRE UPON ENEMY TROOPS UNLESS FIRED UPON OR UNLESS NECESSARY IN CONNECTION WITH POLICE DUTIES. PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN HQ. SEVENTH ARMY AND GERMAN FORCES OPPOSING SEVENTH ARMY REGARDING UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER BECOME EFFECTIVE 1200 6 MAY 1945. THIS ORDER EFFECTS SEVENTH ARMY TROOPS ONLY. THIS INFORMATION IS NOW BEING ANNOUNCED OVER SEVENTH ARMY RADIO AT FIFTEEN MINUTE INTERVALS.

BURRESS Maj. Gen.

The official end of the war came two days later and was greeted with barely a grunt from the soldiers of Love Company. I was in a house in Kirchheim when the radio broadcast the news. I was smoking a cigarette and having a beer and felt absolutely nothing. No one whooped or hollered or even shook hands or congratulated each other on a great victory. The broadcast was full of cheering and noise-making from Paris, London, and New York, and we did not feel a bit happy or sad, just numb. What was the meaning of it all? Were we heroes? Yes, we were still alive, but what next? We were still soldiers, and we took orders. There was no special celebration held here in the heart of Germany. The Germans were not celebrating for their own reasons. We felt no joy either. It was a quiet day almost like a holy day to be remembered in silence.

Love Company took part in defeating a defending army in the vosges Mountains for the first time in history. It fought in the campaigns of the Rhineland, Alsace-Ardenne, and Central Europe. Its young men

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were courageous and victorious despite extreme hardship and determined enemy resistance. Yet, they were not gladiators, just average Americans.

I thought of the wreckage around us: the homes, factories, churches, cathedrals, hospitals, and the tanks, trucks, cannons, wagons, and the soldiers, people, children, horses, cattle, and the fields, farms, roads, bridges, railways – the waste, ruin, and chaos. It was total madness.

All our lives had been changed forever. We had an unconditional surrender. We were the victors. Will the enemy remember what destruction we inflicted on them? Will they accept the blame for their part of this disaster? Will we ever be able to forgive and become friends again? Are we human beings or are we savages?

I felt no pleasure in victory.

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A CERTAIN FOREST

Down the slope into the woods I walked,
Dried leaves, fallen branches beneath my feet.
Brilliant rays pierced as somber shadows stalked.
I could feel a terror o'er me repeat.
It was muddy cold the stream I crossed,
Followed the scout up the rising, sloped,
Distant flashes, the dark skies embossed.
Steel shards burst above, as earth I groped,
Dank smells of forest assault my nose.
A strident fusillade swept over all.
Sniper's gunsmoke from a tree arose.
Death fire from my hand bought his fall.
Bravo! Miserable fallen one!
Hail! Miserable, grim, survivor!
For God and Country, let young blood pour!
Dense forest, cold streams and gentle hills,
Ever changing through time eternal,
New leaves, new limbs, new trees and new rills.
Nothing marks our glory infernal.

(Written many years later at an Elderhostel poetry class by JMK)