

A SHORT INTERVAL IN THE LIFE

OF A

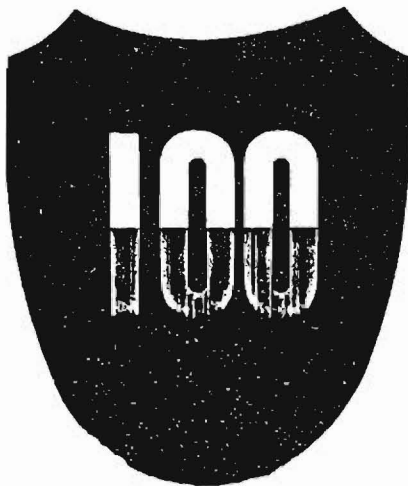
G. I. IN WORLD WAR II

BY

LESTER O. GLUESENKAMP

A SOLDIER IN THE

2nd PLATOON, CO. C.,  
1ST BATTALION, 397TH INFANTRY REGIMENT  
100TH INFANTRY DIVISION, 7TH ARMY, EUROPE



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A picture of the author, S\SGt. Lester O. Gluesenkamp, taken in March 1945 by a comrade with a confiscated camera prior to the crossing of the Neckar River into Heilbronn, Germany. The film was sent back to the U.S.A. after the war for development. My comrade was kind enough to give me my one and only picture as I appeared in combat uniform.

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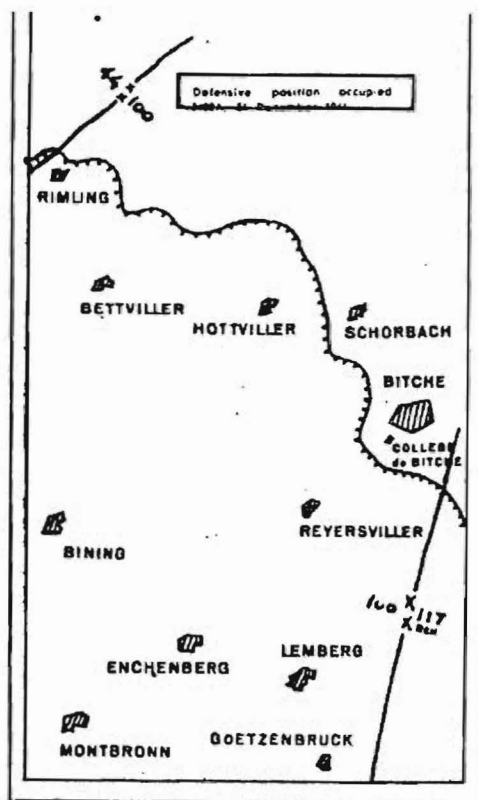
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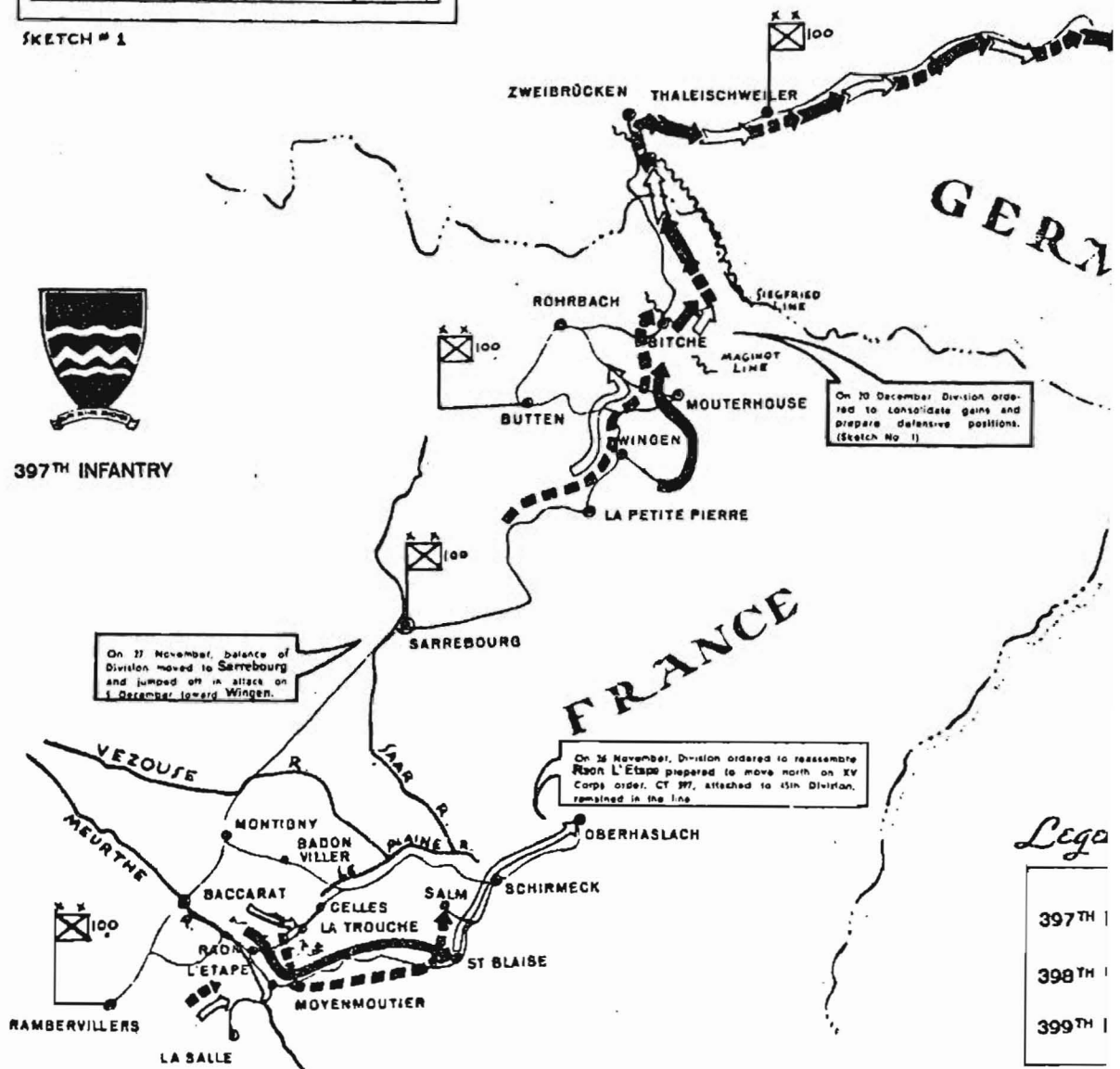
# OPERATIONS of in the EUROPEAN



SKETCH # 1



397TH INFANTRY



Lego

397TH

398TH

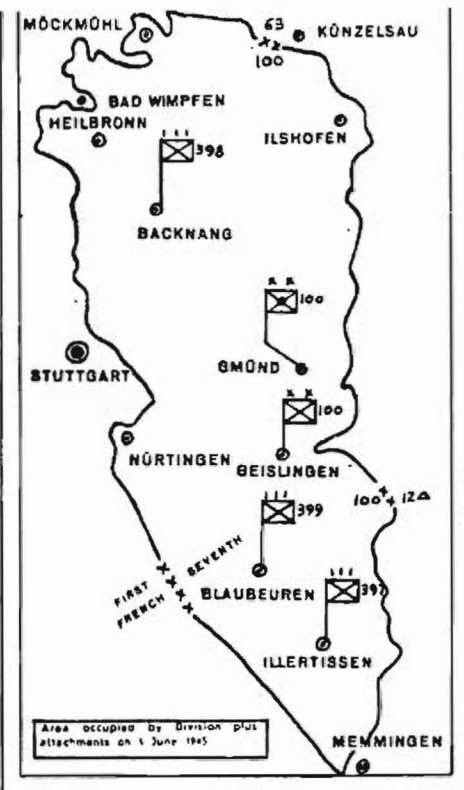
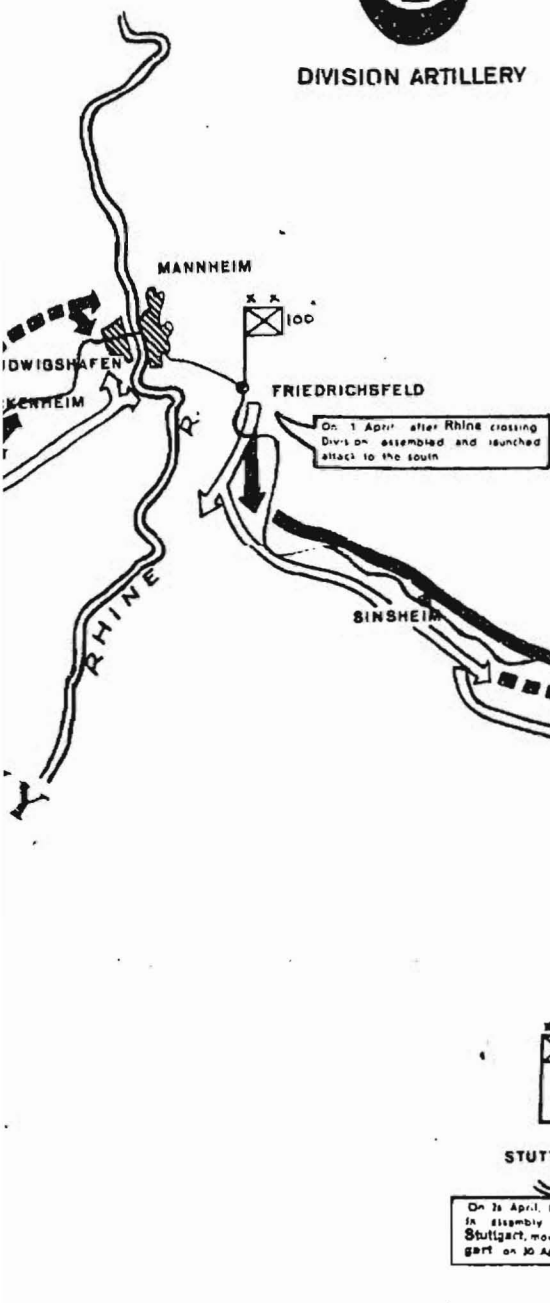
399TH

# 100<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY DIVISION THEATER of OPERATIONS

1944 — 11. May 1945



DIVISION ARTILLERY



SKETCH #2



399<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY

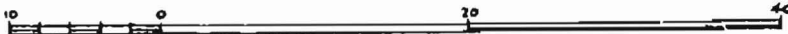
## Supporting Units

374th Fa Bn - D/S 397th Inf  
378th Fa Bn - D/S 398th Inf  
926th Fa Bn - D/S 399th Inf  
373rd Fa Bn - General Support  
325th Med Bn - General Support  
325th Engr Bn - General Support  
800th Ord Co - General Support  
100th Qm Co - General Support  
100th Sig Co - General Support  
100th Rcn Tr - General Support  
100th MP Plat - General Support

On 11 May, Division given occupational and security mission in large zone (Sketch No 2)

Scale: 1/500,000

Statute Miles 10



398<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY



## PREFACE

### THE AUTHOR

The author was born and raised in of St. Peter, Illinois, a town with a population of about 250. St. Peter was located in a rural farm community of south central Illinois. The people of the community were generally second and third generation German immigrants. The German language was sometimes spoken in the homes and all children were required to learn to read, write and speak the German language while in grade school. This author detested the subject of German in school as did many others in the community. The issue of German in the home, church and school was centered on emotions related to religious and Americanism ideas. Little did I ever dream that being able to speak and understand German would someday be helpful in a future time of crisis.

My parents lived in town and as a young boy Dad would often take me along as he hunted rabbits and quail for meat on the table. Even though we lived in town, I often began my hunt as I left my home. The excitement of hunting and feeling "grown up" instilled a confidence of exploration of brush, woods and fields for game as a boy. This search for exploration was continued as a young man as it was quite normal for me to leave home, for some unknown exploration activity, accompanied by my dog and to return for the noon and evening meal. My parents never knew where I went or seemed to worry about my absence as they had confidence in my ability to take care of myself. In the summer my friends and I would either walk or ride bicycles to one of our swimming holes which could be as much as eight miles from home. The thought of drowning or that some unforeseen mishap may occur never entered our mind. Life was simple and we made our own toys, games and fun.

Being part of a conservative German community, the work ethic was a basic part of the life of everyone, including the children. I did not live on a farm, but I did many chores as a part time helper. These included chores which today are but distant memories of how things were in the past. These chores

included the hand milking of cows, driving a team of horses, shocking wheat in the field, pitching wheat bundles into a steam operated threshing machine, driving one of the first tractors with rubber tires, and operating a new machine, called the combine. My grandparents raised strawberries, peaches, apples and pears. I was expected and I was told to help where needed in almost any aspect associated with this activity.

During the summer, I worked at least 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, for the local grain, seed, and building material company. The work was strenuous, particularly unloading by a hand shovel railroad cars loaded with limestone, coal, sand and gravel. In addition we manually unloaded lumber and cement from railroad cars. Loading railroad cars with wheat and seeds in temperatures exceeding 125 degrees in the summer was a common experience. My extensive experience with a shovel undoubtedly contributed to my survival.

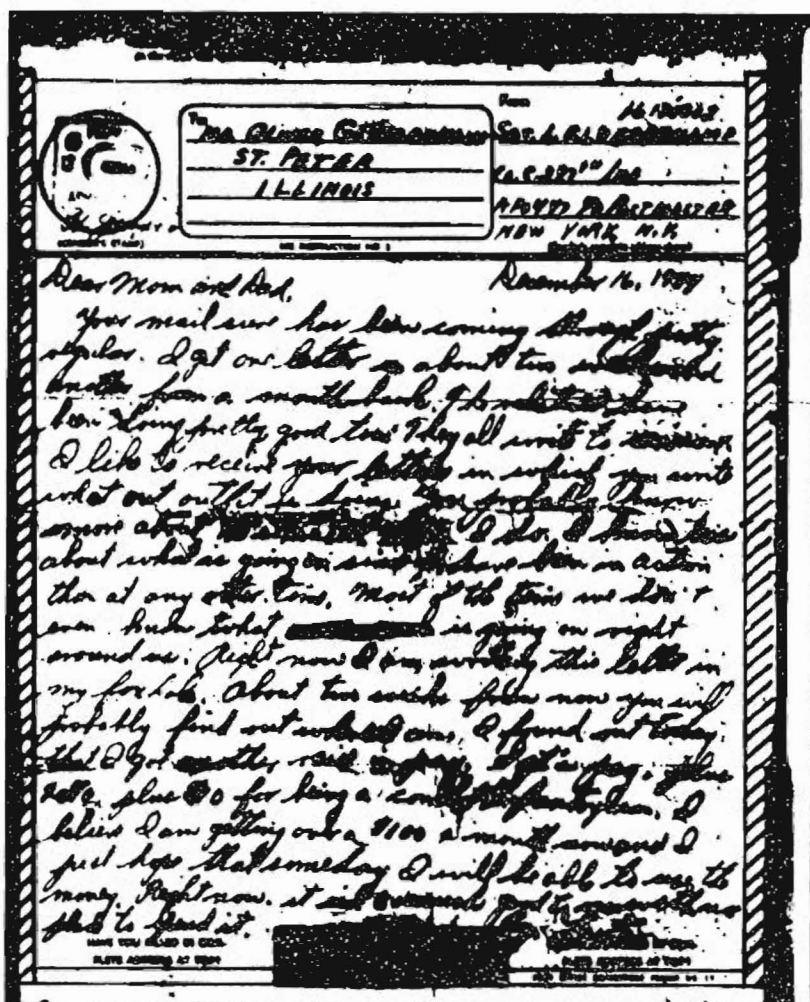
The community concern for a person in a small town is very much in evidence from the numerous letters that were sent to me overseas by relatives, friends and acquaintance. However, this concern was also prevalent throughout the nation during this war-time-crisis. The stark contrast between the attitude of relatives, friends and the nation to the Vietnam soldier and the soldier of World War II is very much in evidence from a reading of the letters sent to me and to the letters of the parents of servicemen.

My letters were edited for spelling and clarification, but were not edited for grammatical correctness. The letters reflect the way we communicated at the time and the simple thoughts of a small town boy, their parents, relatives and friends.

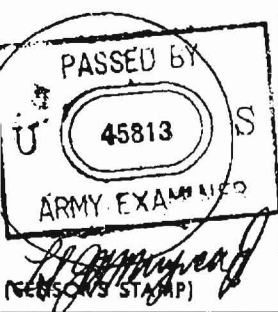
I had completed four years of high school and I was attending the University of Illinois at the time I was called to active duty from the reserves at the age of nineteen. The letters were written without the benefit of maps, dictionary, English diction and grammar. The letters reflect the memory of the author whose sole intent was to express the conditions, emotions and feelings of the times. In this way the reader may also feel part of the emotions and suspense of a time in the past. I hope the reader will find the account of one G. I. in World War II of interest and with the resolve to help avoid the need of such experience in the future.

My letters to and from home often refer to V-mail, air-mail and regular-mail. During World War II the shortage of paper, the additional bulk, weight and volume of mail to over 10,000,000 servicemen required conservation. The one page V-mail letter,

reduced to film, the film shipped overseas and then developed and reproduced was an answer to the necessity of that period. An example of such a letter is reproduced below. A copy of my letter of January 9, 1945 is shown on the following page.







TO: MR. OLIVER GLUESENKAMP  
ST. PETER  
ILLINOIS

FROM

1612032  
SGT. L. GLUESENKAMP

CO-C. 397TH INF

RD 447 76 BOSTON 45TH  
NEW YORK, N.Y.

SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

(Sender's complete address above)

Dear Mom and Dad,

January 9, 1945  
I wrote you a letter two days ago, but I didn't give it to the lieutenant till today to be censored. I was too busy doing other things that I forgot about them. The other day I got the letter in which you told about C. d. Soldier and how lucky he was. I just hope I'm that lucky. The close calls are getting to be too frequent and I may not be lucky all the time. Day after Friday it's the same thing close, but not close enough. I know my nerves are not what they used to be. Sometimes I just feel like I want to sit down and have a good cry. Tonight though they helped out our morale. We got our P. X rations of two cans of beer, a chocolate bar, some cookies and a cigar. These are some things which we don't see very often. I had one can of beer before and did it taste good for a change. So bad we don't get things like that more often, but if we did we ~~probably~~ probably wouldn't stay in one place long enough to enjoy it.  
Bye, Lester

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE  
ADDRESS AT TOP?

REPLY BY  
V...-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE  
ADDRESS AT TOP?

Chapter one covers my period of training for combat. In the beginning of the infantry training period, I was of the opinion or more in the hope that the war would soon be over. As the war progressed and the training more intense, I began to take a greater interest in the training. The war and propaganda movies presented some of the horrors of the war. Patriotism and freedom were vividly compared to the forced labors of the conquered peoples and their tortured treatment by the Germans and Japanese. Hitler and Tojo were the villains of the world which must be eliminated.

In chapters two through six, I relate my personal recollections of the fateful days and events which followed from October 5 through December 8, 1944. These accounts were written after World War II in a series of letters to my parents of St. Peter, Illinois, 62880 from May through November 1945. Interspersed are several letters sent home to relatives and copies of letters addressed to me while overseas during the same period. In order to complete the story and add continuity, I have in many cases summarized the thoughts contained in the letters or woven the thoughts into the accounts as they occurred.

It was during my period of recovery from hepatitis that I began to write the detailed diary type of accounts covered in chapters two through six. My Dad wanted me to continue writing, but recalling the days activities became too depressing, obscured and monotonously remote that I never completed the balance of the detailed daily diary accounts. These accounts became so remote to my thinking that I did not wish to read or discuss the letters until some FORTY FIVE years later. My period of combat ended April 11, 1945 when I came down with hepatitis while we advanced out of the city of Heilbronn, Germany.

The reader may marvel as to how I was able to recall these events in such detail. I believe the answer can be learned from my letter to my Dad, dated September 17, 1945, where he asked the same question. "The only help I had when I wrote about my experiences was the sheet of paper with contained the names of the towns and the dates of our entry. The dates may not be exact, so I write as I remember the dates. It was not difficult for me to recall all that happened. In my mind, I can trace through every event which took place. These events are not easily forgotten. Fortunately, I have no bad dreams now and neither did I while we underwent the fateful experience."

In chapters seven through twelve, I have written for the first time, my most vivid memories of what I recall some forty five years later. The memories or events cover the period from early December, 1944 to my discharge in January 1946. I had only minor difficulty recalling these events after reading the book,

minor difficulty recalling these events after reading the book, **THE STORY OF THE CENTURY**, the short story pamphlet, **THE STORY OF THE CENTURY**, the book, **REGIMENT OF THE CENTURY**, the 1st Battalion paper, **HEILBRONN**, Volume I, No. 2, dated October 4, 1945 and my letters home during this fateful period. If I failed to properly state the story, I hope that my comrades will attribute this to a lapse of memory and to the confusion and uncertainty which was always present in combat.

## CHAPTER 1

### TRAINING FOR COMBAT

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 was an exciting and yet, a horrendous event to me a high school junior at the age of seventeen. Since I was too young to serve my country at the time, I was not particularly concerned about my being called to service. As the war dragged on, including my age, I developed a deep interest in the stories of the War and the heroic accounts of the many home town boys involved in the conflict. I became an avid reader of the war stories in **TIME** and **LIFE** magazines as well as a movie buff on anything pertaining to the War. The War movies were exciting because they seem to be in the nature of watching the western cowboy and army heroes as they conquered the west. The enemies were the bad Indians and the outlaws who were killed by the "good guys" from hometown U.S.A. The horrors and suffering of war were something that happened to the "bad guys" as the "good guys" were always victorious. The wounded and dying "good guys" were made into heroes as they fought evil in the world.

About two years later, as I was attending the University of Illinois pursuing a course of study in Business, it became obvious to me that this War was about to require my services. In March of 1943, I received my call to duty at Camp Grant in northern Illinois. After my initial processing, I was sent to another camp in Michigan for assignment to a branch of service. To my surprise, I was assigned to the Air Force for basic training at St. Petersburg, Florida. Our basic training camp was located in the city of St. Petersburg with our billet being a former hotel which had been taken over by the Air Force.

Our main order of training was calisthenics, close order drill, parades, hiking, learning army rules and etiquette, saluting, seeing army war movies, and kitchen patrol (K.P.). During this period, we spent many hours learning the fundamentals and use of the 30 caliber M-1 rifle including the bayonet. After about three months of basic training, the day of graduation came with the usual "spit and polish" parade before the Generals and

Staff. After graduation, I was honored to have been assigned to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), which meant going back to college for an education in Engineering. I was sent to Georgia School of Technology (Ga. Tech) in Atlanta, Georgia, where I studied engineering courses designed for the War effort. After completing three semesters, the army decided that my services could best be used as an infantryman. My education could wait until the war was over.

On or about March 18, 1944, I was transferred to the 397th Regiment of the 100th Infantry Division, located at Fort Bragg, N.C. After processing I was assigned to the 1st Battalion, C Company, 2nd Platoon, 2nd Squad. After indoctrination, the company undertook a program of getting all the men in top physical condition. This included calisthenics, drill, night bivouacs and long marches with full field packs. Some of the veteran men had been on maneuvers during the past winter in Tennessee and the new training and physical conditioning was not appreciated. Many of those who had been on maneuvers were reassigned to other combat outfits overseas as replacements for those injured and killed.

It was during this period of training that I was assigned a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), which by my holding the trigger, would fire a clip of 20 rounds of 30 Caliber cartridges. The rifle platoon comprised three squads of twelve men, with one BAR-man per squad. The platoon was commanded by an officer and five sergeants. The company included three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon which were provided with light mortars and machine guns. The company was commanded by a Captain and a staff. At full strength, the company comprised approximately 190 men including medics.

The Battalion included three rifle companies and supporting units such as Anti-tank, Engineers, Medical, Service and Headquarters with a total complement of men in excess of 800. Other units were available for action as needed such as Tanks, Artillery, Anti-mine, Signal and Service.

During July and August our platoon underwent firing tests with live ammunition to improve our firing capability. In some cases this included the advance behind live artillery shells and live machine gun fire as we crawled our way through the obstacle course. Our training included the bayonet assault course, infiltration course, squad combat firing and 20 mile long hikes with full field packs. We also received instructions on coping with mines, booby traps, snipers and training in the use of bazookas, antitank grenades launched from the M-1's rifles and hand grenades. It was during this period that the Platoon developed into

a unit with some combat efficiency. Little did we realize that this training was just a small test of what was to come later in France and Germany. Training in the hot summer does not prepare you for the rigors of winter combat and the physical stamina required in coping with the conditions resulting from rain, snow and the extreme cold.

It was during the month of May that a composite battalion of the division was assembled to represent the Army Ground Forces in celebration of the nation's first Infantry Day. The composite battalion of approximately 800 men was trained and drilled in marching to no end for the purpose of launching the Fifth War Loan Drive in Times Square and in the five boroughs of New York City. I was fortunate to have been selected to participate in this activity and to enjoy the excitement of marching before many thousands. The pride of the men of the battalion in their ability to march as the Army's representative was evident on all occasions. We particularly looked forward to the nightly passes to New York City. Most of us had only heard and read of the city and us country boys were awed by the number of buildings, people and sights. During our train ride to New York, we learned that our troops successfully landed in France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. The landing was greeted with a great deal of relief since we assumed that we would not have to go overseas. We returned to Fort Bragg towards the end of June where we continued our combat training.

My most notable memorial training event was as a result of a night bivouac where I was found to have made my bed among the vines of poison ivy and poison oak. Upon my return the next day or so, the rash and the swelling had developed to the point that I could not bend my fingers. A week of rest and first aid treatment restored my skin to a weakened condition.

Liquor was not allowed in the barracks, but we could tip a mug or two of 3.2 beer at the local P-X. A number of brave souls learned that if you drank a sufficient quantity of beer in a short time that it had the same effect as regular beer. The result however was a giant hangover the next day. On one particular occasion our company commander was transferred and we gave him a 3.2 party to no end. It was a couple of days later before the company could function again.

As the War dragged on into late August and September, we learned that we were scheduled to go overseas. We were scheduled to travel by train to Camp Kilmer, N.J. as the staging area by September 30, 1944. Last minute passes and furloughs were granted as the unit made final preparations for the upcoming combat experience. Presumably we were ready for combat. I myself felt

that we have just been through kindergarten and we had not completed the first grade. Regardless, the war needed more infantrymen, whether they were adequately trained or not. The casualties were increasing as the armies advanced throughout Europe. On October 5 we were alerted for loading on ships. By October 6 all units were on board.

## CHAPTER 2

### OVERSEAS--THE ANTICIPATION OF COMBAT

On May 11, 1945, while recuperating in a hospital in France from hepatitis, I began to write a series of letters which cover my daily combat experience. The first letter was written one month to the day after I came down with hepatitis as the Company continued its attack and advance out of the city of Heilbronn, Germany. The letters were written from hindsight, approximately six to twelve months after the horrible experience. Some pertinent facts and details were either deliberately lost in my memory or could not be recalled.

The account which follows was the first of my experiences which were included in letters written to my parents.

-----

I read in the Stars and Stripes today where we can mention places where we have been and the fighting we saw. Everyday, I'll try to mention in each of my letters what I was doing from the time I went on the ship and into combat. I believe you (my parents) would like to hear about my experience.

I don't remember the date (September 30, 1944) I arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, but we were only there for about nine days. We didn't have much to do except play football and softball. One day we heard a lecture on PTA, how much money we needed overseas and any changes we wanted to make in allotments and insurance. Another day we spent hearing lectures on abandoning ship and what to do in case it sank. We even practiced going down a net into a lifeboat.

Monday October 2 was the last time I went on pass. Wednesday, October 5, we were told that we were boarding ship that day. In the afternoon we boarded a train which took us to the river, where we went on a ferry boat. The boat had been used to ferry automobiles and they really piled us on with our packs and duffel bags. (Our duffel bags were now bulging with the addition



of heavy winter clothing and shoe-pacs which had recently been issued to us.) I had so much stuff that it was all I could do to make it. On the boat we hardly had room to stand up. After about an hour ride we came up to a pier. Here we piled out into a big warehouse. Everybody was standing in line the length of the warehouse. Some were sitting on duffel bags, others stood humped over from the weight of the pack. Red Cross girls came along and passed out Hershey bars to everybody. My guess is that they passed out about a thousand or more because there were that many soldiers.

After awhile I noticed the first files of men were moving through a door onto the ship that was anchored next to the building. Finally after about an hour or so our company boarded ship. We were put on C deck along with the rest of the battalion and some of the Field Artillery men. I thought I had been in crowded places before, but this had it all beat. Our bunks were canvas stretched between rectangular pipes which just gave you enough room to stretch out. The bottom bunk was about 8 inches from the floor, the second about a foot and a half above and third about the same distance which just barely gave you enough room to turn over. The aisle in between the bunks was just wide enough for one man to walk through at one time. That meant that six men had the standing place of the length of the bunk which wasn't quite enough. By the time we placed our duffel bags on the bunk, packs hung on the side, rifle strapped to the pipes, life jacket on the bunk you hardly had any room at all. In the morning we had quite a time as only a couple of guys could dress at a time. Moving around the compartment was aggravating with our duffel bags always getting in the way and other fellows coming and going in the same aisle. After a few days we sort of got used to the confinement.

As I said before we were on C deck which was okay by me. Altogether there were seven decks on the ship. A deck being the top and G the lowest. Our deck was above the water and in case a torpedo hit, we would have the advantages of being above water. That afternoon after we were settled, I went up to B deck where we could go out into the open air. Then I saw where we were, tied up to the pier of 43rd street and only 8 blocks from Times Square. I watched the cars, street cars and buses go along the water front and I wish I were there instead of on the ship. People were walking along the street glancing up now and then at the ship and the G. I's looking back and whistling to every pretty girl that went by. This was the front part of the ship where you could see the street. After awhile, I tired of standing there and I went over to the right side of the ship. I don't know whether its port or starboard, but I'm no sailor and it makes no difference. On this side was the 42nd street ferry

terminal where ferryboats are continually going across the river from New Jersey. 42nd street runs straight to Times Square and it is a busy street in case you don't know. Watching the ferryboats come and go I remembered that this was the same place that I went to in New York City when I was at Camp Shanks last summer. Boy how I wished I was back there going on pass everyday. The train from Camp Shanks would take you to the terminal on the New Jersey side, where you boarded the boat which took you to New York City. It didn't cost you anything to ride the ferry because that was part of the of the railroad system.

After awhile I went around to the other side of the ship and watched more soldiers come aboard until they made us go below to our quarters. Later I found out that we were the first ones to board and that it wasn't till the following afternoon that everybody boarded the ship. Altogether there were about 7,000 soldiers on the ship including officers, navy personnel and soldiers. That night I didn't sleep too well on my hard bunk. The excitement of the day and the anticipation of the trip contributed to a sleepless night for everyone.

By October 6, the entire division, comprising 806 officers and 13,129 enlisted men, completed the boarding of the ships. On this day, there wasn't anything to do so I spent most of my time looking over the ship, watching the ferry boats come and go and watching the activity on the street. After taking a good look all around the ship, I decided it was impressive. The ship was a former German ship, but now was named the **George Washington**.

That night I heard the bad news, beginning the next morning the company was going to pull K. P. the whole trip. Early the next morning at 5 o'clock we were roused out of bed for K. P. Most of us were so sleepy that nobody felt in the mood to get up. By 5:30 A.M. we were all down in the mess hall wondering what next. Finally after standing around, I was put on the steam table, where I had to help serve the food. It wasn't a bad job and I didn't mind it too much. The usual breakfast was potatoes, scrambled eggs with ground meat, fruit, cereal, bread, butter and coffee. One morning there would be scrambled eggs, the next boiled eggs. It was the same with the cereal, oatmeal on one day. and something like Ralston on the next day. The fruit was a little different, it might be peaches one morning, apricots the next, prunes another and once in awhile pineapple. I forgot to mention that the men were issued an orange one day and an apple the next. The apples and oranges tasted good. About eleven o'clock we finished serving and by the time we had the place cleaned up it was noon.

Since we were working we ate three meals a day. When break-

fast was finished, another relief took over for the rest of the day and we were off until morning. I never went to the noon meal because we ate all morning as we were serving. This was against the rules, but nobody seemed to care.

In the morning we wasted a lot of time. They always awoke us up at 5 A.M. in order to be down in the kitchen by 5:30 A.M. From then until 6 A.M. we would lay on the floor as we tried to sleep. At 6 A.M. we had to put the food on the serving table and eat breakfast ourselves. By seven o'clock we began serving and we served continuously till around eleven. There were two serving tables and each table served over 3,000 soldiers.

We really ate our share of the food of which there was more than enough to go around. When we left at noon, we would take something along like apples, oranges or cans of juice. One day we took a whole turkey to our bunks. On another day, we ate a whole ham at our bunks. This is normally what we ate in the afternoon and evening. The rest of the fellows ate loads of food on two meals because we piled all the food they wanted on their messkits. We were encouraging the fellows to take a second helping, but most of them were tired of seeing the same thing all the time and they would refuse. Later on when we landed in France and were eating K rations, I would think of all the good things we had to eat on the ship.

I guess I had better stop for today as this letter could go on indefinitely. The censor will have a fit when he reads my long letter. I guess its all right to write of my experience since the war is over. Tomorrow, I will continue my daily account.

About nine o'clock on the morning of October 6, while I was on K. P., I felt the ship shake. I looked out of the porthole and I noticed that we were moving away from the pier. Everybody that wasn't working went to the portholes to take a good look at the disappearing city of New York. I happened to be working and I was only able to take a few glances at the disappearing skyline. I thought to myself, I wonder when or if I will ever see the city again. After awhile I was relieved from my job and I looked out the porthole. The New York skyline was no longer visible and instead there were about six large ships nearby, in addition to several patrol boats and a dirigible in the sky. We were not moving and I assumed we were waiting for more ships and our convoy escort. That was the last time I looked out of the porthole that morning. Our destination was Marseilles, France, but you could not learn this from all the rumors that circulated among the G.I.'s as to where we were to land.

When we were through for the morning, I went up on the open deck. I counted five troopships, four cargo ships and five destroyers in our convoy. (According to the **Story of the Century**, the convoy was composed of 11 ships, plus one destroyer and four destroyer escorts. Troops of the 100th Division occupied four transports, the **George Washington**, **George Gordon**, **McAndrews** and **Mooremac Moon**. Major units carried on the seven remaining ships were the 103rd Infantry Division and the Advance Party of the 14th Armored Division.) Since our ship was the largest we were in the center of the convoy. I felt better when I learned that we were on the largest ship and that we were in the center of the convoy.

The fellows soon tired of watching the water and they found something else to amuse themselves, most of it being poker and blackjack. All around the deck there were groups of four or five fellows playing cards and in between the groups, men were sleeping, while others were reading. The Red Cross gave each soldier a bag with a deck of cards, writing paper, soap, candy bars and a pocket book. These books were always being passed around and you could always find something to read. Many of the fellows who had nothing to do played cards all day. Money was always changing hands and by the time we reached France some were richer by several thousands dollars while others were without a nickel to their name. Nobody cared because the money could not be spent at the place where we were headed for. I did not gamble because I had only a couple dollars when I boarded the ship and I figured I had better save my dollars for when they may be needed later.

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While we were at sea I wrote the following in a letter to my parents. "I was assigned K.P. (kitchen patrol) for the entire trip overseas. I was one of the unfortunate ones assigned to this detail along with a lot of other guys from our company. We are on duty from five in the morning until noon. I have the afternoon and evening off to do what I please. Most of my free time is spent reading books provided by the Red Cross. Movies are shown in the afternoon and I manage to squeeze through the mob to see the picture. A band plays on the deck in the afternoon. I usually try to sit near the band and read. Time passes very quickly."

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Twice while we were out at sea we ran into a storm. (I was unaware at the time that the second 48 hour storm was called a hurricane. At one point, the 8,000-ton **Mcandrews** came within a few degrees of capsizing and later that night narrowly missed colliding with the 26,000-ton **George Washington**.) The first day, the fellows took the storm action pretty good, but by the second day, nobody was hungry. The number going through the chow line decreased by the hundreds. Those who ventured to pass through

the line would often take one look at the food and hurriedly walk away. I didn't feel any too well myself. By the third day I had to give up. I could not stand to look at food anymore. About half of us were sick and new men were ordered to replace us. The next day the sea calmed down and everything was back to normal. While the storm was raging outside, the portholes and hatches were closed. This reduced the amount of fresh air. The reduced amount of fresh air added to the stench of our vomit and increased our nausea.

Almost every afternoon there was some entertainment on the deck. One day there were boxing matches, another day the orchestra would give us a concert and one day a British comedian put on a show. He was the tops as far as I was concerned. One minute we were laughing, another we had tears in our eyes.

One afternoon, after work I went up on deck to read a book. After searching for awhile, I found a space wide enough for me to sit down. Everyone had to carry his life preserver and I slipped mine off where I sat down. I opened the book right away and started reading. About fifteen minutes later while busily absorbed in the book the deck officer came along and told me to get up. At the time I thought it was a little odd. I looked around to see whether they were sweeping the floor, but they were not. At the time I was sitting on a corner of my life preserver and I thought nothing of it. He told me to come along so I followed. I asked him what I had done and he said I was sitting on my life preserver which was against the rules. I told him that it was new to me and that they were a lot of other guys sitting on their life preserver. He didn't pay much attention and wouldn't listen. He took me down to the Provost Marshal, where they took my name, rank, and serial number and my company commanders name. I was then locked up in the ships brig. About an hour later I heard the company commanders name called over the loud speaker, telling him to report to the Provost Marshall. A short time later I was released. That was all I learned or heard about the incident. The day before we were to leave the ship, I was handed my paybook, which has a record of promotions and transfers. I glanced through the paybook and I read these few words; Reduced from Pfc. to Pvt. effective October 18. This was all I needed to know, because then I knew how I was busted from Pfc. to Pvt. The funny part of the story was that no one spoke to me about the incident and I never asked any questions, since it didn't amount too much.

In a letter dated October 23, 1944 to my parents from our bivouac area outside the city of Marseilles, France, I wrote the following regarding this incident. "At the present time I am sleeping in a pup tent. It rained the other day and some of the

tents washed away. We are now walking around in mud. Tonight I am writing this letter by the light of a fire. In my other letter, I forgot to ask for candles. Small or large will do. On the ship one day, I was sitting on a corner of my life preserver reading a book. An officer asked my name, rank and serial number and he told me to get off my life preserver. I inquired as to the reason. I was not told that you could not sit on the preserver. He told me that this rule was in effect since we boarded ship, but this was new to me. He said that was no excuse, so my name was turned in to the company commander who promptly reduced by glorious rank from Pfc. to Pvt. I believe I received a raw deal. Out of the hundreds of guys that sat on their life preservers everyday, he picked on me. The money does not amount to much, but there is the principle of fairness in addition to our pulling K.P. everyday, while others do nothing. [I did not tell my parents of my being put into the brig, in addition to my demotion at this time, because I was too embarrassed to report that part of the incident.]



Late on the afternoon of October 18 (about 12 days later) I had my first glimpse of land since we left the states. We were passing through the Straits of Gibraltar. The rest of the day and the following day we were always in sight of land as we were following the coast of North Africa. The coast gleamed under the bright rays of the sun and the rolling hills and small villages looked beautiful from the ship. Nobody seemed to know where we were going, but the main rumor making the rounds was that we were bound for Marseilles, France.

On the night of October 19 our ship left the coast of Africa and headed for France. The next afternoon, October 20, we saw land again, but this time it was France. Off in the distance we could see a harbor and a village so it seemed. Gradually we drew closer and you could see that it was a big city. It seemed odd at first with the red tile roofs and stone houses and in the background hills rising from the sea. This was a strange country site for everybody.

Our ship dropped anchor about a mile from shore, while some of the smaller ships in the convoy docked at the shore. Soon after we stopped a landing barge drew along side our ship and men began to climb down a landing net into the barge. They crowded about three hundred men into each barge and there wasn't enough room for anybody to sit down. As soon as one was filled another pulled along side and more men scrambled down the net with packs and rifles. Our duffel bags were loaded on other barges and our bags did not reach us till several days later.

About midnight we were told to be ready to go, but first we had a little work to do. Packs had to be made, floor cleaned and bunks all securely folded up. This required about an hour with everybody getting in each others way. We were ready to go at midnight, but no barge was available. By 12:30 A. M. our turn came and we scrambled down the net. Our packs were so heavy we had a tough time making it.

About 1 A.M. on the morning of October 21, we landed in France. With so many troops coming in from the ships, everyone was ordered to move out as soon as possible. Our C.O. told us that we had about a five mile hike ahead of us before we would bivouac for the night and that most of it was up hill. He was a little mistaken on the distance because it was several miles (approximately 7 miles) further and all uphill. By the time we reached the staging area, our backs were just about at the breaking point as we crawled our way to the site. Many of us wished we had left some of the clothes in our duffel bags, rather than in our backpacks. It was four o'clock in the morning when we reached the area and everybody dispersed and slept where he was.

I unpacked my pack and I curled up between two blankets and a shelter half. The damp chill from the ground made me shake like a leaf in the wind and this was the way I dozed till daylight. A light rain came down this morning which did not help matters.

Before we left the ship we were issued three K rations for the day. For breakfast that morning I ate my first K ration (a package about the size of crackerjack box) and the first one I ever saw. It didn't taste bad, but there wasn't enough in comparison to what I ate on the ship.

That morning we pitched pup tents, parade ground style, with all tents in a straight line and evenly spaced. I pitched tent with my squad leader S\Sgt. Merrill from Maine. The rest of the day we did nothing except lie around. That night I didn't sleep very sound on the hard ground. We had three blankets under us, but that wasn't much. Afterwards when I had to sleep in a fox-hole without a blanket, I wished I had the luxury of three blankets. One does not know how well off he is until such time as he finds how tough conditions can become.

The second day (October 22, 1944) after we landed at Marseilles was just an easy day for us. The only thing we did was sit around all day wishing we had some more to eat. As yet the kitchen had not been set up and we had K rations again this day. Sitting around with nothing to do, our minds only thought about food. The next day the kitchen was set up and we ate hot meals. Then the brass decided we should have reveille at 6 A.M. every morning. We were awakened before 6, at which time we went into company formation for roll call in order to check that all were present.

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After I arrived at our site near Marseilles, I wrote my parents the following letter. (Somewhere in France. October 23, 1944.) "I arrived overseas safe and sound. I am okay so do not worry about me. Two months ago I never thought I would be where I am now or come through some of the places where we traveled. It does not seem real to be over here. I visited ----- (Marseilles deleted by censor), but that is about all I can tell you. I expect to see a lot more before this is over. The bad conditions in France which you read in the papers are true. The food is scarce and people do without. You may be wondering what kind of bed that I have to sleep on. The answer is none, but the cold damp ground which sometimes even feels good. As soon as you receive my letter, send me V-mail stationery, air mail stamps, steel wool and small cans of fruit. I only have a few sheets of paper and I have no idea when I will receive more paper. If I did not know where I was overseas, I would say I was down in Tennessee since the country here has the same appearance."  
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Everyday, the weather was rainy and misty and soon we were walking around in deep mud. Then one day we had a downpour and our troubles really began. Shallow trenches were dug around each tent in order to keep the water from coming into the tent. On this day it just poured and trenches could not take care of the water. The fellows in each tent had to get out and start draining the water away from his trench. The only trouble was there were no drainage ditches and consequently each fellow would drain water into his neighbors tent. The rain finally ended and everybody was soaked. A lot of tents had to be moved to higher ground. We had enough to eat, but living in wet pup tents is for ducks and pigs. Because of the rain, we are forced to walk in the ankle deep mud. Our worst trouble was trying to keep dry and clean.

On our fourth day orders came down for a detail of fifty men to go down to the docks and help unload the ships. We didn't mind as this would be something new for us. In the morning we were up a five o'clock and we marched down the road for about a half mile to where trucks would pick us up and take us down to the docks. Finally, after we had waited for a half hour the trucks showed up. We arrived at the docks and we were divided up into groups which would work on one job. I happened to get an easy job helping unload crates which held the field artillery guns. Cranes would lift them up and all I had to do was guide them on trucks and unhook the cable. This did not last all day and I had a lot of spare time in which I spent walking around the docks looking at the damage that had been done. Bomb craters were all around, ships were sunk in the harbor and supplies were piled everywhere. By five o'clock we were through for the day and trucks again hauled us back to our area.

As I worked, I found one Frenchman who could speak German and I talked to him. He said they had enough money, but there was nothing to buy. No clothing was available so all they had was the clothes on their back. They ate bread, grapes and drank wine as their basic food supply. When the Germans were here, cigarettes sold for \$3.00 a pack, but now they could be bought for around \$.50 to \$1.00 when they can be found. Prices dropped when the Americans came over. While on board ship I pulled K.P. everyday. I was getting tired of K.P. at the time, but I later I wished I was back on the ship. At least it was warm. The weather was cold, damp and rainy.

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In the following letter I asked my parents to save the letters I wrote. I had visions of recalling many wonderful memories when I returned home.

France, October 27, 1944 (Received November 9, 1944)

Dear Folks,

Last night I worked in a supply depot and now I have the day off. I slept all morning. I wish I could tell you what work I did, but that will have to wait. **I want you to keep all the letters I write home because I may want to refer to the letters someday.** At the present time, I am still living in a pup tent. The sun came out today for a change and it will probably dry our tents and clothes. So far I received a letter from you, Aunt Amelia and from Glenna. Before we can buy anything our money (\$) has to be changed to francs. I believe we are going to be paid in francs. The French have no coins, just paper money. I have not caught a cold after being out in the damp cold air. Lester

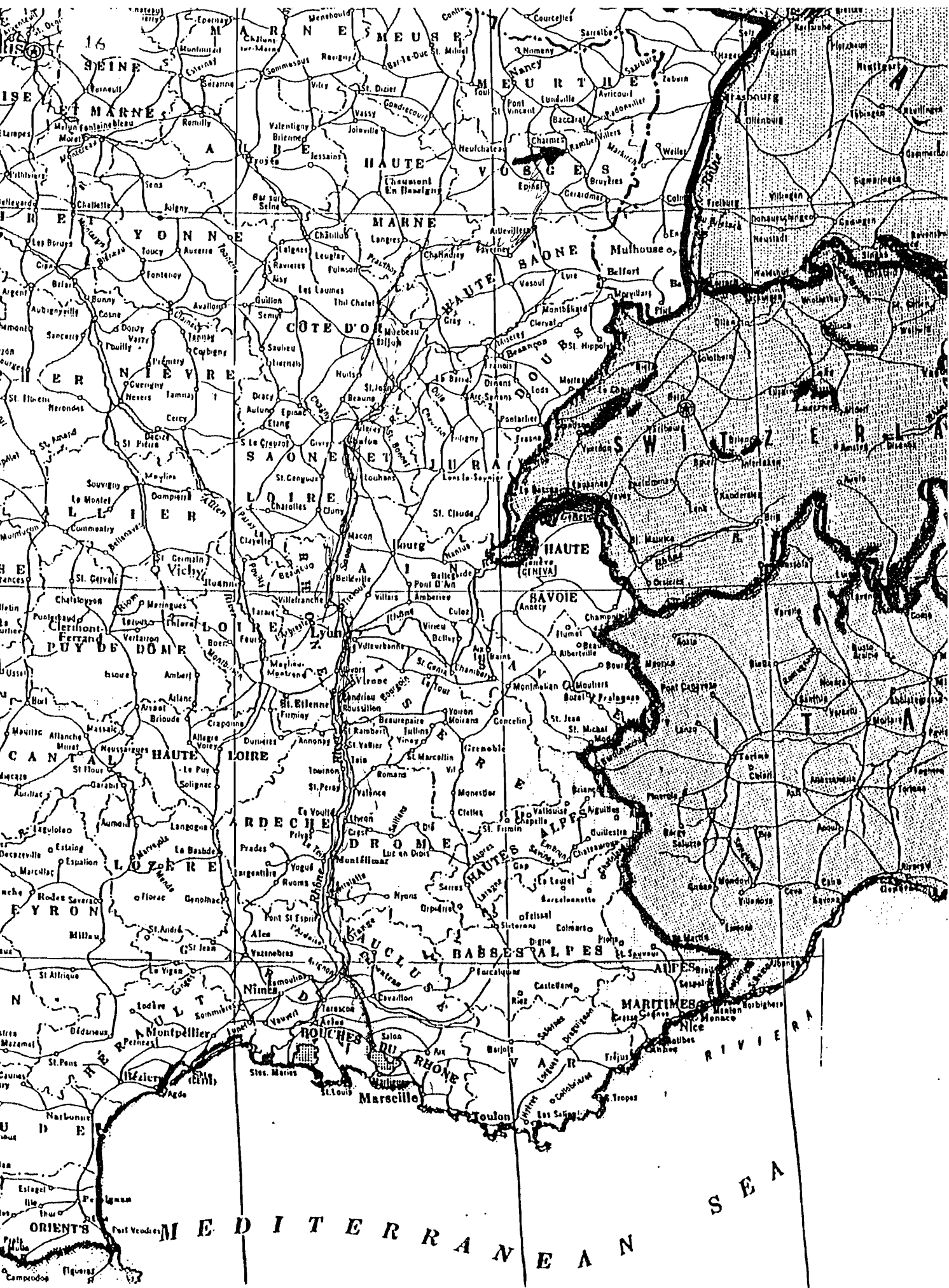
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On our tenth day we climbed onto trucks which were going to take us up to the front. Nobody expected to see combat for a least a month, since we had no training overseas except a demonstration on German mines and how to deactivate them in case this became necessary. (Our trip from Marseilles covered approximately 500 miles with overnight stops at Valence and Dijon. We arrived at St. Helene, which is about 21 kilometers southwest of Baccarat, where we bivouacked for several days.)

The ride on the trucks covered four days. We were so crowded on the trucks that nobody could be comfortable. By the time we had all of our equipment on the trucks we did not have room to sit down. Each morning we would start out at seven o'clock and ride till about ten when we had a five minute break. At noon we would stop for a half an hour in which we could stretch and eat our K rations. About three o'clock we stopped and took another five minute break, after which we would ride till five when we would stop for the night. Sometimes we would pitch tents depending on whether it looked like it would rain. Otherwise we would just roll up between the blankets and sleep on the ground.

It was cold as we rode on the trucks and we wore our overcoats and we also wrapped a blanket around us. The scenery in France was something new for us and most of the fellows did not mind this aspect.

In one stretch of the road we came upon a lot of wrecked vehicles scattered all along the road. The Air Corps caught a German convoy several miles long when the Germans were retreating. Trucks, buses, motorcycles, cars, guns and tanks were scattered everywhere. In my opinion there were over a thousand vehicles of all types wrecked and burned with not even a scrap worth saving. It is hard to describe the wreckage because it was strewn all over. As we went by the wreckage, we could still see and smell the burned and decomposed bodies.



On our fourth day we came within about ten miles (actually it was about six miles) of the front. Here we climbed down from the trucks and we marched into a woods where we were going to bivouac for a few days. The 1st Battalion was located in this woods and the balance of the regiment was nearby. Each company and each platoon were assigned an area.

Living in the woods here was just about like living in the woods of the states. We pitched tents in our area, but we did not have to dig foxholes as we were in the rear. The kitchen was set up on our second day and we ate hot chow. There wasn't anything to do in the daytime so we just sat around. We could have small fires which we kept burning all day. At night we had to pull guard around our perimeter. Usually we patrolled along a given stretch for two hours every night. Each soldier had been issued ammunition so we had protection just in case an enemy patrol would attack our position.

On our fourth day we had to move to another area closer to the front. Before we left, we all piled our duffel bags on a pile as we were going to leave them here. This was the last time I saw my duffel bag until March 13, 1945. They were going to put the bags in storage for us. We figured we would get to see them in a couple weeks when we came back for a rest, but little did we know then that the only time we would get any rest would be when the war was over. The only gear we retained were two blankets, a shelter half, overcoat, set of O.D.'s, fatigues, underwear, socks, pack, belt, and rifle. This was a heavy load to carry on our backs.

We again climbed onto trucks this day with thirty of us to a truck. There was standing room only. It was raining when we climbed on the trucks and everybody was soaked. We rode for an hour or more, until we came too close to the front for trucks. Orders were issued to climb off the trucks after which we walked to within a mile of our lines. By the time we arrived near the front it was dark and everybody was all in from carrying such a heavy pack. This time we bivouacked in another woods for the night. Nobody pitched tents because you could not see a person even if he stood next to you. Joe Drozs and I slept together by laying a shelter half on the ground on which we placed two blankets on top of the shelter half. As we lay on the blankets, we pulled two more blankets over us along with another shelter half. This was not enough to keep out the cold and dampness. By morning we were soaked and cold. It did not rain the next day and we managed to dry the blankets to some extent. Our company commander decided we were too close to the front to not have foxholes so we dug ours near our tent, just in case.

Everyday after that it rained and we never did stay dry. At night we pulled about three hours of guard in our area. They did not bring up hot chow so we ate C and K rations. While we were there we heard our first gunfire. It was our artillery, but we did not know it at the time and everybody was a little scared.

On our third day at this site, we climbed onto trucks again, which were to take us to Baccarrett. Here we de-trucked and hiked about a mile out of town to another wooded area. On the evening of November 11, 1944, our company commander told us that tomorrow would be our big day. We learned that units of the 398th Regiment had been fighting since November 1 and we would enter combat November 12 the day after armistice day. The C.O. came around to all the men talking to them about tomorrow. He asked me whether I was ready for combat and I told him I was as ready as I ever would be. He did not like the answer as he expected me to say that I was raring to fight.

That night we all sat around talking. Some of the fellows seemed scared. Others said they were not. I don't know what I thought, but I just felt I would do my best whatever came up. Nobody thought that he himself would get hurt, but he expected the man next to him would be hit. Some of the fellows thought they wouldn't be hurt in combat, but the first day they stepped off the ship in New York City, they would be hurt in some freak accident. This would be about the worst thing that could happen.

In my mind I just wondered how combat would be. Pictures of the last war always showed men going over the top with bayonets fixed and going through artillery fire, trenches and barbed wire. This was the picture I had in mind, but this war was a lot different. I just pictured myself in combat hoping that everything would come out okay. Before I went to bed that night I prayed I and I hoped that I would come out okay.

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The following two letters were written to my parents a few days prior to the entry into actual combat.

France November 3, 1944 (Received November 13, 1944)

Dear Mom and Dad,

This is the first occasion I have had to write since my last letter. (Oct 27) I have been on the go all the time. It seems to rain everyday. I am sitting by a fire writing this letter. Our blankets are wet and we are trying to dry them by the fire. My clothes are muddy. I hope to scrape off some of the mud when my clothes dry.

At the present time I believe I am near Lawrence Scheer (a friend from home) and probably not too far from where Eugene (a cousin) was injured. Even If I did know where Lawrence was locat-

ed, I could not get to him under my present situation. I have seen a lot of France and I feel lucky to have been born in the states. If all the people at home knew what it is like over here, nobody would complain.

So far I visited Marseille, but that is about all I can say. I wrote this same sentence in one of my V-mail letters. If you will recheck a previous letter, the name Marseilles may have been deleted. The towns are very different than those at home. Here all the houses have shutters on the windows. At night the shutters are closed and the streets are dark. In the cities, food is scarce. When my buddies and I went to Marseilles, we could not find food to eat during our visit. The only thing we could buy in Marseilles were small cookies which cost \$.16 apiece. These were not fit to eat. We saw a Frenchman with several loaves and we traded three packs of cigarettes for a loaf. A pack of cigarettes is worth around 40 francs or eighty-cents. You can see what it costs to live over here. (A loaf of bread in the states cost about 10 cents.) I have been eating C and K rations for many days.

The mail situation is bad, but that may be because I have been on the go and the mail may not have caught up with me. I have had only four letters since I left the states (October 6). One of them was a Christmas card from Grandma. I was surprised to receive one so early. So far I have been issued about two cartons of cigarettes and toilet articles.

I never thought that I would be where I am now. The sound of American and German artillery does not sound very pleasant. I am still living in my pup tent in the mud, rain and eating K rations. A person never knows what is in store for him over here. Several weeks ago I never thought I would be close enough to hear gun fire from the enemy. Time and conditions sure changes your perspective. I thought the war would be over with by now, but now I do not believe it will over until next spring. You can not do very much in the winter and mud.

During the past two months I missed the hunts I used to have at Sam Pruett's place. (This descriptions was for the purpose of telling my folks about the physical terrain) However, I am hunting different game on the same type of ground. Lester

P.S. I forgot something I wanted to include in one of my letters so I will add a few lines. The situation right now does not look too good. I remember though what you also said that you will not die until your time is up. If you should happen to collect on my G.I. Insurance, I would like for you to use the money to send my sisters Gertrude and Helen to college unless by chance you should need it yourself. Several days ago I met Ed Maahs at the Red Cross canteen in Marseilles. Bob Davis is around here someplace, but I would not want to be where he is at the present time. I will write again when I am able.

France. November 8, 1944 (Received November 24, 1944)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I received two of your letters today and five the other day. The 1st one was dated Oct. 26. I was sure glad to hear from home because your letters means more to me now. At the present time I have only one blank V-mail letter and when I will receive more is uncertain. We are issued a sheet every few days, but then I may not be in a position to write. At the present time, I am sitting by a fire trying to dry out. You may be having some nice weather at home which is more than I can say for myself. It rains here almost everyday and I stay wet until I have a chance to dry out. This morning the ground was covered with snow and I was very cold. I am okay and as well as can be expected under the circumstances. I hope that you do not worry about me. Bye now, Lester

## CHAPTER 3

### THE FIRST THREE DAYS OF COMBAT

#### Introduction

The French **Vosges Mountains** during the winter of 1944 could not have been visualized or anticipated as we trained in the hot summer of 1944 in North Carolina. Instead of perspiration, it was now rain, snow and sleet which penetrated our clothes as the cold penetrated our bodies. The mountains were covered with dense pines, interspersed with a few open fields and with endless hills and valleys. The woods were dark and eerie in the sunless daylight. The darkness gripped you with the fear of an unknown enemy who was imagined to be hiding among the snow covered trees.

The darkness seemed to exacerbate the rat-ta-tat of machine guns, the sudden rifle shots and above all the fear of mortar and artillery shells landing in the tree tops and scattering the steel fragments into ground. If you were lucky, a fragment or bullet would miss you as you advanced or as you dug a hole for a temporary haven. The exploding burst of shells sent us deeper into the mud and dirt as we shriveled our bodies to a small object.

We were scared because we seemed to be alone. The world, our friends and relatives could not help us in this trying ordeal. Our greatest fear was not so much in being hit, but the thought of dying and never returning home to our friends and loved ones. The wonderful things in life were the precious memories we all wanted to come back home to. To live for tomorrow was our hope as we saw many of our comrades and the enemy lying dead or dying in the mud and in the cold wet snow stained with their blood.

The first combat period was our most horrendous ordeal of the war. Here for the first time we saw what war was all about. None of us could have possibly imagined such destruction of human life or the cries for help, "I am hit, medics." The men who were there can never forget the moaning of those who were wounded



or dying. These memories can only be put aside like a bad dream. The sound of mortars and artillery shells bursting above you could not have been duplicated in training. Here, the training was real and fateful and lucky were those who survived this training.

Our officers and sergeants always seemed to tell us "move out, move out" to somewhere. As an infantry foot soldier we did not know where we were, where we had been, or what was in store for us over the next hill or valley. The ache in our tired muscles and the cold shivers were our constant companion as we dug another hole in the mud like a groundhog escaping the gunshots of man. And just when we thought we had a respite, the order came "move out" to begin another attack on another hill. Misery was the order of the day.



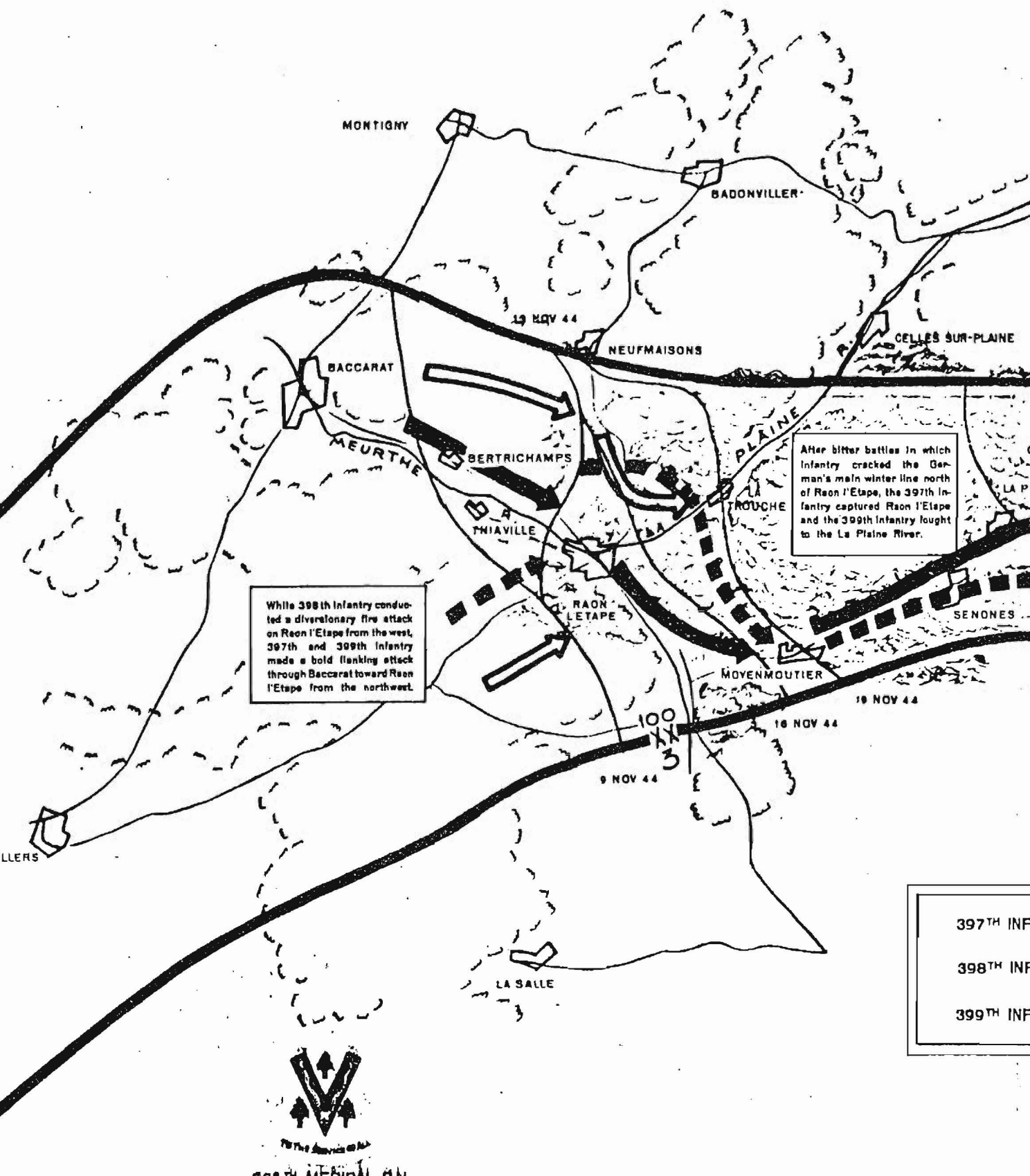
100th Takes Raon L'Etape, Fr. Sig C 61-9

The first campaign battles of the 100th Infantry division began in the Vosges Mountains. A summary of tactical operations of the division is illustrated in the diagram below.

## SUMMARY OF TACTICAL OPERATIONS IN THE VOSGES CAMPAIGN From November 9 to 24, 1944



# THE BATTLE of the VO 100<sup>th</sup> INFANTRY



# ES MOUNTAINS

## DIVISION

25

After the capture of Raon l'Etape, 399th Infantry drove west to capture St. Blaise. 98th Infantry crossed the La Laine River, cleared the woods northwest to Moyemoutier, and moved to Salm.

117  
RCM  
XX  
100

CHAMPANAY  
ST. BLAISE  
BRUCHE  
BELVAL  
MOULIN  
LE VERMONT  
23 NOV 44

GRANDFONTAINE

SCHIRMECK  
FRECONRUPT

SALM

SAREMBACH

LUTZELHOUSE  
WISCHES

URMATT

OBERHASLACH

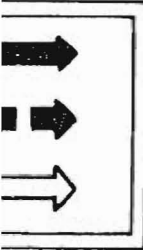
26 NOV 44

399th Infantry, fresh from a well-earned rest, knifed through scattered opposition to Oberhaslach. Here the division was ordered to assemble in the vicinity of Raon l'Etape.

24 NOV 44



100TH RGN TR



Scale: 1/100,000



At midnight November 11, I was awakened for my turn at guard. I was to be on guard from midnight until 2 A. M. stopping all vehicles which may come along a little used road. None came along. It snowed and by morning an inch of snow covered the ground. At 5:30 A.M. November 12, they awoke us and told us to pack a combat pack and place all the other gear on a pile. I left my blankets, overcoat and underwear. At 6:00 we formed into a formation and we were issued handgrenades and more ammunition plus 3 K rations. I put two handgrenades in my pockets and I was loaded with about 300 rounds of ammunition at this time. We began to walk down a muddy road covered with snow. We walked for almost an hour. At our first rest period, we all made the decision that if we were to fight with all this weight, nobody would make it through the day. We were given a few minutes to rest at which time we threw a lot of stuff away. I left a new pair of shoes, leggings, towel, mess kit, underwear, handgrenade, ammunition, ammunition box and toilet articles. Someone should have told us that it was impossible to carry all this into combat. As it was, much could have been saved, but now it was wasted. The mail was brought to us as we walked. I received about ten letters which I read rather hurriedly as we continued to walk.

We were at the line of departure at 7:30 A. M. and everybody was so, so tired and yet we had not even started to fight. Nobody knew what it was to fight and everyone was scared. The road we had taken led us through a thick pine forest. Snow and water were dripping from the trees. By the time we arrived at the line of departure, we all were wet and cold. I wore my raincoat, but this would have been in the way if I would have been required to move fast. I stuffed the raincoat in my pack.

The line of departure was the edge of a woods and after that an open field, with more woods beyond. The Germans were supposed to be in that woods. At 9:00 A.M. sharp, as we were all on the edge of the woods, our artillery fired over us into the woods ahead of us. If anyone were still living after the barrage, they could consider themselves lucky. When the artillery let up, we charged across the open field for about 200 yards and up a hill into the woods. No Germans were there. Before we went across, everyone fired into the woods. The woods appeared to be cut and splintered into many pieces. I was only able to fire 20 rounds as my gun jammed. The artillery barrage and the firing of our rifles was a dumb thing to have done. Nobody knew if the Germans were there and instead of taking them by surprise, the enemy knew we were coming. A house was located near the edge of the woods. We found civilians in the cellar. They told us that the Germans departed about twelve days before we arrived. We later learned that the Germans were dug in about a mile from the edge of the

woods. The enemy was now able to locate our position.

On the way up a hill into the woods where the enemy was located, we stopped. Soon, two mortar or artillery shells landed among the men of the platoon. The shells landed about 25 feet in back of me. Bartelson and Rosenswig were hit in the ankle. They never came back to the company. The platoon medic gave them first aid and bandaged their wounds. We advanced a little further up the hill and here we waited for further orders. I picked up one of our propaganda leaflets which had been scattered about. I tried to read the message which was printed in German. Just as I began to read, another enemy barrage landed about a hundred feet in back of the platoon. Lucky none were hit.

Lt. Bacos, our platoon leader, said their shelling was too hot at this spot, so we went forward to get out of the area. Here we learned that it is good idea to be near to the Germans as they won't fire on their own men. You can't fight artillery with rifles when we did not know where the guns were located.

We kept advancing expecting to find Germans everywhere. We found none. We came to a road which was our first objective for the battalion. Everyone formed a line along the road with about twenty feet between each man where each man was to dig a hole. I was so tired by now. I managed to dig a hole about four feet deep at the edge of the woods. It rained during the morning, and I was soaking wet. Some of the fellows had hand axes and they built a roof of logs and dirt over their holes. I did not have a hand axe, so I did not put a roof over my hole. I stayed in my hole till about three in the afternoon as heavy mortar shells were coming over our heads and landing in back of us all through the day. The Germans did not know exactly where we were located and they did not get our range. (BB's was the buzz word for all enemy barrages.)

At three o'clock the order came to attack again and we started to move into the woods on the other side of the road. The pine forest was so dense and dark that you could only see about twenty feet. The manner in which we attacked was with two squads on line, with the third in support. The third platoon was to our left. Nobody was on our right as we were near the edge of the woods and an open field. We continued to advance until sometime after four in the afternoon. This was about the time a German machine gun fired on us from our rear. It was then that we learned that we had lost contact with the third platoon and that we were two hundred yards out in front of everybody. After we heard the firing, we went back to find out what happened. We headed into a forest of pine trees which were planted in rows about four feet apart. Here we stopped. A German machine gun

opened up on us, firing down the rows. As we hit the ground, three men were hit, Naughton, Christianson, and another man. Only one man was seriously hurt.

The bullet hit Naughton in the forehead and also dented his helmet. Christianson was hit in the neck. The German bullets went down another row than the I row where I was located. We lay on the wet snow for awhile when somebody saw five enemy soldiers running in front of us. By this time, it was almost dark. We could not distinguish faces, but someone yelled "get them" and we all fired. All five men went down. Later, we heard one moaning, but nobody went over to check. A few minutes later, we were ordered to go back further into the woods and we were to dig in for the night.

We may have gone back about two hundred yards. All the woods were hilly as this was part of the Vosges Mts. By the time we started to dig in, it was dark. You could not see the person next to you even if that person stood a foot away from you. Joe Drozs and I dug our hole, but we could not see to dig. We were so fagged out beyond words. We did finally manage to dig a hole about two feet deep, but not large enough for both of us to stretch out. We had no blankets, so I put my raincoat on the bottom and we used Joe's to cover up. I lay on my back with my feet doubled up as this was a tight fit. The raincoat wasn't long enough to cover the knees and feet. By morning my legs and feet were numb. I could barely move. It snowed more during the night which made matters worse. We were too tired this night for either of us to stand guard. We just tried to sleep and rest as best we could under the circumstances.

At daylight on November 13, we woke up stiff, wet, tired and miserable. Our hole was shallow, so we began to dig. We had nothing to eat for the day and our canteens were empty. About 8 A.M., enemy mortars shells started to land in back of us. We now dug a lot faster. A few minutes later, I heard a fast whistle and a couple of shells landed in the trees above us. The shells burst in the trees and the shrapnel just rained down. Childers, Whudden and Joe Drozs were hit. I was on the side closest to the shell burst, but I did not get hit. Joe said he was hit in the back. I looked him over, but I could not see anything. I thought he was hurt from the concussion as we were very close to the shell burst. Later, I discovered that he had a small hole in his jacket above the kidneys. The barrage that came at this time hit 12 men in the company. One lieutenant (Mrazek) was killed. My raincoat was lying next to my hole and it was cut to pieces. I just left it there. This place was too hot for us so the whole battalion withdrew to the holes we dug the day before. I helped Joe to walk back to our new line, but I could not take his equip-

ment or rifle. I left it there to rust. We managed to get back to our old positions with great difficulty. The wounded were taken back further to the aid station. Our platoon medic could not take it anymore. He went to pieces crying like a baby.

We stayed here for a couple of hours when the order came down to go forward again. In the meantime, water and K rations for the day were brought to us. This time we went through same woods again using a compass and maps as a guide. We encountered no opposition as we came to the end of the woods. Here I found a hole which had already been dug by the Germans. Before going in I poked around with my trench knife to see if it was mined. It was not. Chadwick was now my foxhole buddy and we slept in this hole for the night. He had a raincoat so we used that for cover. Throughout the night, I stood guard for two hours and then he stood guard for two. I slept, but shivered all the time.

The night of November 13 was another miserable night for all of us. My buddy and I only had one raincoat between us for cover as the rain came down on us during the night. It did not rain continuously, but was more like a light drizzle. Since there were only two of us, each of us had to stay on guard half the night in two hours shifts. Whoever was on guard stood up, and shivered and the other curled up in the raincoat and tried to sleep. Both of us snored and we had to poke each other to lower the noise level caused by our snoring. Our hole was on the edge of a dense pine woods and we could only see about ten feet into the clearing. The night was rather quiet. However, we were always imagining that something was moving about in front of us. We were still too green to know any difference.

The next morning November 14, we awoke at daylight and we surveyed our situation. I still had a K ration from yesterday so I ate it cold without water. About 8:30 A.M. our K rations and water were issued to us. Only a few of us were allowed out of the holes at any one time to secure our K rations and to fill our canteens with water from the supply located at the platoon C.P. We were only allowed to partially fill our canteens as they were unable to bring us adequate water for the day. There was a creek nearby, but you wouldn't catch me leaving my homely old foxhole for water unless it was absolutely necessary.

At 9 A.M. the firing began. A and B. company with D company in support made a frontal attack on a trench in a woods about 700 yards in front of us. (I was in C Company) It was quite a fire fight and we had a number of casualties. They secured the trench. I was unaware that they took the trench at this time. The next day we were to go through the trenches. The rest of this day we stayed in our holes. While in these holes, we re-



ceived three artillery (88's) and mortars barrages on our area. Three G.I's were wounded. A shell fragment glanced off my helmet on this occasion. This was the only instance in the war where I remembered that a fragment actually hit me.

Around five o'clock that afternoon we received orders to move out and into the town of Clairupt, France. There wasn't much left of the town as only a couple of houses were remaining with their roofs intact. Just as we started to move out, we received a barrage of our own 81 millimeter mortar shells. Everybody went scurrying to their holes, but lucky for us, no one was hurt. Right after the barrage we continued to advance to the town. We made it to the edge of the town by dark.

The house where we were to stay for the night was without a roof. We moved into one with a roof. Half the platoon was on guard at one-time as snipers were everywhere, since a number of Germans were by-passed this day. I managed to sleep about three hours this night. We did not receive adequate water to fill our canteens this night. It drizzled part of the night.

At daylight the next morning (November 15), we were ready to move out again. I ate my K ration as we walked. We were going into the German trenches that were supposed to have been taken yesterday by A and B Companies. During the night, the Germans slipped back in the trenches. Our platoon, the 2nd was ordered to lead the advance, with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd squads to follow in the order named. I was in the second squad and the third man in line. We slipped in from the end where the trenches began and we started moving through the trenches. The mud was ankle deep and the yellow clay sides were sticky.

First thing you know, we came upon a German with no weapon. He was left there during the night and was scared so he was ready to surrender. I was called up to talk to him and to learn what I could about his situation. All I learned was that he was on patrol last night with five other men and he was separated from the patrol. We sent him back with one of our guys as guard. We continued to look for the enemy as we moved through the trench. After awhile, the first scout spotted a movement. We now realized that we were in trouble. The automatic rifle of the first squad was dirty from the mud and would not fire. I was called up to be the second (BAR) man behind the first scout.

Earl Evans of Kentucky was 1st scout as we began to advance through the trenches. We came to a draw which looked suspicious. On the other side was another trench and a number of dark spots which looked like entrances to dugouts. Earl looked over the edge of the trench and he fired at what he thought was

somebody moving. I stuck up my head for a quick peek, but no more than a peek. After his first shot he ducked down and waited a few seconds. He took another peek and just as his helmet went below the edge of the trench, a bullet hit the ground about two inches above his helmet. At this point we decided to wait awhile before we would take another peek. After a short period, we took another peek over the edge of the trench. We concluded that we were too close and our position too exposed. We backed up in the trench where we would have more protection. Word was passed back up to the company C.P. about the situation.

The third platoon was sent around to the right flank of the Germans. While they were moving around to the right, everyone was trying to see what was out in front. It appeared that there was a movement in one of the dugouts. I fired about 80 rounds into the entrance. Whether there was anyone inside, no one went to look.

By now, the third platoon had worked around and behind the enemy positions and they took the Germans by surprise after only firing a few rounds. They accepted the surrender of six prisoners and they killed two of the enemy. As they were among the German positions, one of our sergeants stepped on a shoe mine. His leg was shattered by the mine. The last I heard he was sent back to the states for treatment. As the third platoon came up in front of us, we thought it was safe to be out of the trenches. We looked around the trenches. Barbed wire was everywhere. We heard someone moaning. We went over to the moaning and we found a German Major who we later learned was the battalion commander of the enemy facing us. He was lying on the ground with both legs broken. Lying nearby were other dead and wounded German soldiers. They had been wounded the day before by our artillery or mortars.

There was nothing we could do for them at this time, but to let our medics give them first aid. While all of this was going on, the third platoon was fired upon by a German burp-gun. Nobody knew where the firing was coming from, so we all jumped into the trenches. The sniper was a poor shot as no one was hit.

A call was sent back to the medics for litter bearers and our wounded were evacuated. The Germans were left lying there until late that afternoon when the medics came and moved them out. Our own men helped to carry them out.

After dark this night, the decision was made to send a squad of men back to town to clean their rifles. Only about one of four would fire, as the rifles were covered with mud. Our rifles were also covered with mud and they would not fire. The second

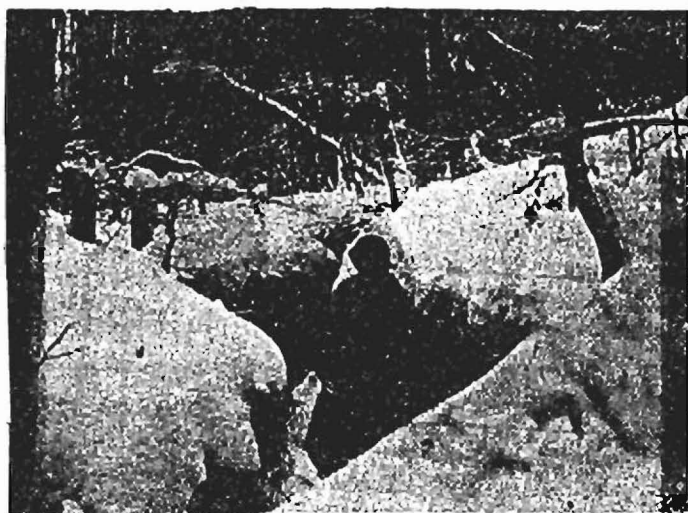
squad was the first selected to go back and clean rifles. We moved back through the trenches. The worst aspect was when we had to step on the two dead Germans who were lying on top of each other in the trench. Everybody had to step on them in order to continue back. This was a horrible sensation to all of us. The memory of this sight lingered with us for sometime. There was no other way to get around the bodies.

Just at the time we were about to move out of the trench, an artillery or mortar barrage landed in front of us. Nobody was hurt. We ran to the house located about a quarter of a mile to our rear. Here, we ate our K rations and cleaned our rifles as best we could under the circumstances. At midnight we headed back to the trenches. We made the trip okay, and again we were forced to step on the dead Germans in the trenches as we returned to our positions. I located the spot in the trench where we had left in the afternoon. We had a very difficult time getting around the men that were sleeping in the bottom of the trench. I put on my raincoat. I lay down in the trench in a curled position. I slept for about a half hour, after which I was awakened for guard duty. I stood guard with a buddy for a hour. I then woke one of the other men and he stood guard as I went to sleep. I managed to sleep till 8 in next morning.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PERIOD OF COMBAT NOVEMBER 15-26, 1944

On the morning of November 15, Capt. Roe, our C.O., who hailed from the state of Indiana, came through the trench to awake me from my sleep. He also awoke all the others that were still sleeping this morning. I felt somewhat better after several hours sleep. One of the other squads went back to the company C. P. to clean their rifles and to bring up the rations. The rest of us stayed in the trenches. There wasn't much we could do except sit around, wait and scrape off some of the mud that clung to our clothes. I again attempted to clean my BAR. When we returned through the trenches last night, the BAR appeared to be as muddy as it was before I cleaned it last night. The squad that went back this morning was fired upon by a sniper and one man was hit in the foot.



A G.I. in the a snow covered trench.  
Note the limited visibility.

Sometime during the afternoon we received orders to move on through the trench and advance toward the Germans. Everyone packed up his equipment, put it on and soon we began to move through the trenches. We followed the trenches through the woods for a long stretch. The trees in the woods were cut to pieces from artillery and mortar shells. The smell of pine sap and gun powder was very sharp.



A dead German soldier lying in the snow.

After we had moved forward for about an hour, we came to the edge of the woods. The trenches ended at this point. We did not come across any enemy soldiers during this movement. The Germans must have pulled out during the night. At the edge of the woods there was an open field with a narrow draw across the field. At the bottom of the draw we could see a road. To the right of the draw and several hundred yards further down the road, we saw the town of Raon L'Tape.

Our scouts were sent across the draw into the small woods on the other side. The woods were clear of the enemy and the rest of us followed across. We continued to move up the hill until we came to an open field. It appeared to be safe and we continued on again to the edge of another woods. Chadwick and I were told to start digging in as soon as our platoon had been assigned an area. Chadwick was from Massachusetts. About the time our hole was about a foot deep, orders came to us to get ready to move on. Apparently this location was not a good defensive position so we moved up to the top of the hill. By the time we reached the top, I was tired. Our platoon was assigned an area with each squad being assigned an area within the platoon. Soon after we began digging our hole to a depth of only six inches, we hit solid rock. It was impossible to go any deeper.

Our Lt. said we had better dig another hole. I was so tired by then, that I did not care where I slept. It was dark by now. I did manage to locate a partial hole a few feet further up the hill. There was a rock at one end of the hole. It appeared to be an old grave, but at this point, if this were a grave, I did not care. Chad and I widened the hole and we let it go at that for now.

One of the fellows from the weapons platoon came over to hole up with Chad and me. He cut pine limbs and we put them over the top for cover. He cut enough to cover  $3\frac{1}{4}$  of the hole. We covered the pine limbs with dirt. While we were constructing our hole, a German first aid man came in to surrender. I was called over to talk to him. He said the Germans were about 400 yards in front of us, but whether they were there, no one went to find out.

Blankets were brought up to the road which was located about a quarter of mile in back of us. A detail of 10 men was sent back to bring up the blankets. Chadwick was one of those that went back, but they could not find their way back after dark. We had to do without blankets this night. This meant that we only had my raincoat for cover. We put the raincoat on the ground and we lay on top of the raincoat. Both of us were so tired that we just did not care whether anybody stood guard or not. After

our hole was finished we crawled in and snuggled up to each other as close as possible and we went to sleep. I don't know how many times I woke up from shivering so much. Somehow we managed to get through the night. Lucky no Germans came around.

At daylight the next morning, I awoke with no feeling in my legs. It froze during the night for the first time and here we slept without any blankets. When the men who went back for the blankets last night returned this morning, they came up with our rations and water, but no blankets. We built a small fire out of the K ration boxes and heated our K rations. The heat helped to restore some feeling in my legs and feet.

Before I had finished eating my ration, orders came down to move out. I ate the rest as we started back down the hill, the same way we came. We continued on down the road and turned right and away from Raon L'Tape. There were several houses along the road which were undamaged. We continued walking on past the houses and on into another woods up a hill. No enemy was in the woods, but the edge of the woods looked suspicious. About this time someone spotted two Germans walking down the road toward us. We waited for them to come in. They said the rest had pulled back, but we did not trust them. A number of German foxholes were out in front of us as was a house. It was here that we were going to stop for the night. The foxholes were located in a good defensive position for us.

Before we went in the holes, the two prisoners were ordered into each hole to test if they were booby trapped. None were. The house nearby looked like a nice place to stay, but it looked suspicious. After an investigation, we found a booby trapped window, but that was all. Some one disarmed the booby trap and a group of guys spent part of the night in the house.

Looking around the area the third platoon found a dead G. I. The dead G. I. turned out to be our regiment commander, Col. Wm. A. Ellis. I do not know the true story, but I was later told this story. The colonel was inspecting the front lines and his driver had taken the wrong road. With him in the jeep was the driver and another officer. As they went forward, things did not look right and the Colonel went forward to have a look around. The Germans surprised him and he was shot on the spot. The other two saw the action, but could not help so they departed. Whether this is the total story, I cannot say for certain.

During the early part of this day we were able to take it easy. It looked like the Germans had pulled back and we had nothing to worry about at the present. In the afternoon we watched a group of our P-47's bomb and strafe the Germans posi-

tions which appeared to be several miles in front of us. One of the fellows found a bicycle to ride. Each of us took our turn in riding the bicycle back and forth down the road. On this night half the platoon slept in the house for half the night and the rest stayed in the foxholes for the other half. In this way we were able to sleep an extra hour and at the same time we were able to stretch out and sleep for a change. Half of those outside were on guard all the time while the others slept.

The next morning we were served hot chow for a change. The chow really hit the spot. Around 10 o'clock we received orders that we were going back for a rest for several days. Every one was happy for now. The 3rd battalion was to relieve us. We thought we would stay in a town, but no such luck. Instead we went back about a half mile and we dug our holes in the woods. At least this was better than being in the front position. I dug a hole with my buddy, and soon we had it finished except for putting on the top. About this time, the Chaplain came to our company to conduct a church service. I went to the service as did all the others. Before he was finished a jeep driver came and told him to cut it short as we were going to move again. He concluded the service in a few minutes and we went back to put on our equipment. I did not know where we were going, but I was used to this procedure by now. The average soldier just went. The C. O. and platoon leaders received their orders and presumably they knew where to go.

As soon as everybody was ready we started back down the road toward Raon L'Tape with a column on each side of the road with about ten feet between men and 15 yards between platoons. The reason for this was in case of artillery, fewer casualties would result. It was about a mile to town and it was about a half hour later before we arrived in the town. Our artillery was firing over us to the other side of the town so we knew something was up.

The town itself was in bad shape from our artillery, German artillery and our bombings. Every bridge in town was blown up and the 325th Engineers were already rebuilding the bridges. A and B company were in the lead and we (C. Co.) had no trouble as we advanced.

A and B Companies ran into quite a bit of trouble and we were held up in town. While we were stopped in town, the kids in town were always asking us for something to eat and for cigarettes. By this time it was getting dark so we stopped for the night and stayed in the town. The platoon slept in two rooms. There was just enough room for everyone to lie down. Three fellows stood guard on the outside of the house during the



night. I was on guard from 12 till 2. Nothing happened during the night except for a few shells landing in town. About a block in back of us the Engineers worked all night building a bridge. By morning the bridge was up and ready for tanks to come along with us in case they were needed.

At daylight the next morning we started out again down the road. We were going to take the lead for the battalion and go through A company. On the outskirts of town we came to a road block. We went around the road block and we were able to keep moving. Just as we reached the last houses of town, bullets whizzed by us. We were out in the open with very little high ground or ditches for protection. From the sound of the gun fire we figured it came from the hill to our right which was covered with a woods of pine. In front of us was another woods and a garden and slightly to right was a rock quarry. At a signal, our squad leader told us all to fire into the woods to our right. This stopped the enemy firing, but our artillery pounded the woods as we requested.

When our artillery let up, the enemy fired on us from our left. This time we thought it came from a house so we all fired into the windows. Our Lt. called for our 60mm mortars to be fired at the house and hit the house if possible. The area around the house was blanketed with fire, but no results were observed.

From here on I don't know exactly what took place. I lay in the ditch along side of the road for a couple of hours waiting for orders. In the meantime one man from the third platoon was killed when the third platoon led the advance to our left through the garden. An unknown number of Germans were dug in here and more enemy were in the woods in front of us. While I was in the ditch, I ate my K ration as I had no time before then. Later while I was still in the ditch waiting for orders, the first squad was sent down to the rock quarry located about two hundred yards to our front. They were able to reach the quarry. About this time, one of our tanks came up the road to fire in the woods in front of us. A number of rounds were fired in the woods and by some mistake they also fired two rounds at the building by the rock quarry where our men had just gone. Lucky no one was hit. Our men had returned to our positions just prior to the tank firing, but we did not know this at the time.

The second squad, which had been lying low in the ditch for some period, was sent up and around to the left of the third platoon located among the houses. We reached the first house all right and we were proceeding on forward only to have a machine gun fire on us. The bullets were high and they hit the house in

back of me. I hit the ground right away and I crawled back to the house to be under some cover. The rest of the squad was okay, but I happened to be the only one out in the open at that time. The fire must have come from the woods in front, so we went into the house to see if we could see anything. We could not. The assistant squad leader of the third squad, who was always along when there was any trouble, fired from one of the top windows and into the woods. He was taking a good look when two shots from a burp-gun put two creases in his helmet. That stopped his peeping around for awhile.

We were ordered to go back down to the road, since the enemy seemed to fire on anyone who would dare to stick his head out in the open. When we reached the road, they sent us and the third squad down to the road to see how far we could advance. The balance of the company was to follow. We started out keeping as low as possible and by traveling in the ditch. To our left was a bank about 15 feet high and here was where the garden began. About 150 yards down the road, we stopped, as nobody was following us. The platoon guide, now Lt. Hurley, went back to check while the rest of us stayed put in the ditch. Before he left, we spotted two Germans coming up over the bank with their hands up as they waved a white handkerchief. They came over to us and Hurley took them back to the company C. P.

Hurley did not return for a half hour or more and we began to wonder what we should do. The platoon sergeant instructed us to start digging in because we may stay here for the night as darkness was approaching. The platoon sergeant was becoming impatient since Hurley did not return. I was sent back to find out what we should do. I left all my equipment with the exception of my BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) and two extra 20 round magazines. It was about two hundred yards back to the company C.P. and I had to return through the ditch all the way back. I ran back while in a crouched position for most of the way. I did not find the company C. P., but I located the first platoon sergeant. He told me the company had moved back and that I had better go back on the double and inform my platoon of our exposed position. This frightened me as I realized that we were down there all by ourselves and here I was to return to this position again. My better judgment told me not to go down, but that would have left the others down. I hurriedly took off again and soon I was all out of breath. About half way back, bullets began flying all around me. Our machine guns were firing over me and the Germans returned the fire. I lay down in the ditch for a minute or two until the firing stopped. At this point I crawled on my stomach for a short distance. After crawling for about fifty feet I decided that this was too slow, so I took off and ran until I reached the other guys. I told them the sad story. We

promptly returned to the company positions without incident. The enemy did not fire on us as we returned. Whether our machine gunners thought I was a German as I returned to the platoon, I do not know. They were shooting too close to suit me.

We went back to the company C. P. and we learned that we were to build up a line for the night. A shallow German trench in the garden would be part of the line which continued on further to a house. Each squad stood guard  $1\frac{1}{3}$  of the night. Our squad stood guard during the first shift. John Shanto and I stood guard in a shed about halfway between the house and the trench. We stood out there from 6:30 until 11:30 without sitting down. This was the longest guard shift I ever spent. It was a good thing I did not have a watch to see how long I had been there. Around 10 o'clock we heard a chicken squawk in the hen house near us. At first we thought somebody was snooping around, but later we learned that the assistant squad leader grabbed a chicken and fried it during the night. The civilians had vacated the area and left everything.

At 11:30 P.M. our relief finally came around and we went back to sleep in the basement of our house until daylight. I slept on a cot. It was great to be able to sleep on a cot even for so short a time. At daylight we were awakened, because of an expected counterattack. None came. We stayed in the trench until 9:30 A.M. when orders came down to move out. The Germans had pulled back during the night. Now that the enemy pulled back, we apparently had nothing to worry about for awhile.

A bridge on the road near the rock quarry was blown. As a result, we had to go down to the bottom of the creek and cross and then go up on the road again. A little farther, we advanced into the woods which was to our front as we advanced the day before. Here we found a network of trenches. This must have been where we were fired on the day before. For now, all was quiet. We followed the trenches which ran parallel to the road until the trenches ran out of the woods and into an open field. While we were protecting the left flank of the company, the rest of the company followed along the road. The trench ended at a curve and here we went to the road to follow the route of the company until we reached the outskirts of the town of St. Blaise.

The other company platoons were to advance through the town while we were to go through the woods on the left to protect the left flank of the company. They encountered several Jerry's in town because we could hear the sound of handgrenades and rifle fire. The Jerry's did not stop their advance so we kept going in order to keep abreast of them as they passed through the town. In the woods was another trench running parallel to the road

which we continued to follow.

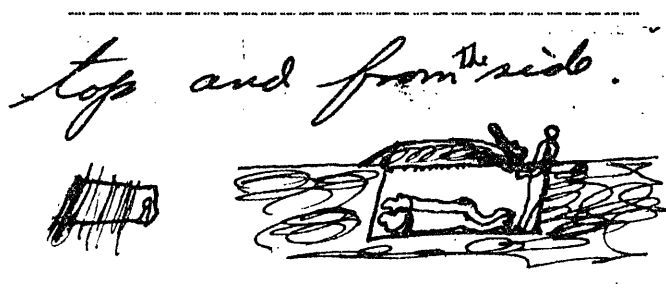
All at once we spotted a bunch of Jerry's taking it on the lam and we all cut loose. They were running in a trench and very little was visible. There were only about eight of us up front at this time. They appeared to outnumber us so we did not take off after them. In addition, a number of suspicious dugouts were located on the hill to our left and above us. Slowly we pushed on and we only found one dead German out of all our shooting. I do not recall that anyone took a shot at us. Our poor shooting was a result of our just pulling up our guns and firing them as fast as the guns could be fired. I fired 60 rounds as fast as I could change magazines.

After this incident, we continued on until we came to the edge of town which was where the woods ended. It started to rain before we reached the end of the town. By this time we were wet from top to bottom. It was no longer necessary for us to stay in the woods so we went down a street and into town searching the houses as we advanced. The first squad headed for the first house, but before they reached the house, they spotted a Jerry running away. They shot him right there. In the house they found a radio transmitter. That ended our fighting in this town as all the houses had been cleared. After this encounter, we were waiting for further orders.

In the meantime, we went into a house and built a fire. This looked like a nice place to spend the night as it was almost 4 o'clock and by 5 it would be dark. By the time our clothes were dry on one side, orders came down to move out. What a nice place this would have been to spend the night with potatoes, carrots and wine in the basement. I did have time to bake a couple of spuds before we left.

We continued advancing down the road with A and B company advancing through the woods on our left. We only continued to advance for about a half mile from the edge of the town. By this time it was dark. Before we were settled for the night, rain began to fall. I thought to myself, this was going to be another bad night. About the time Chadwick and I completed digging our hole large enough for the two of us to just lie down in a cramped style, Nyman, who had been slightly injured several days before came into the hole to be with us. There wasn't time to dig another hole as it was almost impossible to see five feet away in the darkness. He helped us finish the hole. We cut small pine trees to lay across the top of hole for cover. When we had enough to cover  $3\frac{1}{4}$  the hole we laid them across the top and we piled dirt and leaves on top. We put pine boughs across the bottom to make it a little softer and to keep us out of the

water. It stopped drizzling after we had completed our covered hole. I have sketched below a side view of how our holes appeared.



A sketch of a G.I. in a typical foxhole

When our hole was complete, my squad leader called on me to be part of a detail to go back and bring up water, rations and blankets from the road below. I went back with two other men and returned with our supplies. The water and rations were for use the next day. At this time, it was the practice to bring up the rations at night as there was not time in the mornings.

This night it rained again. I ate my supper while I was on guard during the first shift. My fingers were so cold and raw by now from being out in the cold and rain the past few days that I had very little strength left to open a K ration box or hold my rifle. I thought we were well prepared for the night with three blankets and two raincoats. One raincoat was put on the mound of dirt over the hole and the one on guard wore the other. My first two hours of guard were a drag, but finally my time to sleep came around. I crawled in between the blankets and fell right to sleep. I was just worn out.

First thing you know, I was awakened for guard duty again. Those four hours went by so fast, that I felt like I had just laid down. I arose and stood my guard. While I was sleeping, a slow drizzle was falling and everything was soaking wet. Our hole was fairly dry considering. While I was on guard, I munched K rations and crackers. My time on guard duty soon passed away. I woke one of the men and he took over the guard while I went to sleep. It was after two when I went to sleep. In the meantime more rain fell.

Soon afterwards I woke up shaking all over from the cold. I discovered that a ditch overflowed and was draining into our hole. By this time the water was two inches deep, our blankets

were soaked and so were we. Water had run into my boot packs and my feet were so, so cold. There was nothing we could do, so I sat on my helmet under the cover of the hole in order to keep myself out of the water. Somehow or other I managed to fall asleep this way until some one woke me shortly before daylight. I was told to get ready to move out. The blankets were too wet to carry. We left the blankets in the foxhole. My hands and feet were numb from the cold. I could hardly hold my rifle or even button my raincoat. After struggling for sometime, I managed to put on my pack and belt. We stood around here waiting to move out with our teeth chattering from the cold like a machine gun. Daylight was breaking and we could see where we were heading.

As we advanced down the road, we came upon a group of houses. The houses were searched by the men of the first platoon. As they were being searched, about 25 German soldiers came out of one of the houses with their hands up and with each man waving the white rag of surrender. The first platoon collected several pistols from the Germans. This was something new for us. Up till now, we had not collected pistols as souvenirs, but this was just the beginning.

The houses which the first platoon cleared were along the road, but to the left and up the hill was another house which was in a commanding position should Germans be in the house. The captain ordered our platoon to go up to the house. Our platoon leader directed my squad to check if any enemy were there. The only way to get up to the house on the terraced hill was through an open field, a distance of maybe 300 yards. The terraces provided the only available cover. I was directed to lie down behind a terrace and to fire at frequent intervals with my automatic rifle at each of the windows and doors. The squad was to rush the house as quickly as possible. In case anybody were there, they would not be sticking their heads up to fire at the squad with me firing on them.

The squad advanced to the house, but found no enemy. The house was in fair shape, so the platoon leader went down to the captain to see if we could not stay here for the night as it was just about dark. He came back and said it was all right for the whole platoon to stay here for the night. The guard shift was worked out and I was on guard from ten till two in the morning. Before we went to sleep, a detail was sent down to get blankets and rations. I was one of the detail that was sent down to get blankets and rations. I carried a roll of blankets back to the platoon. Nothing happened during the night except that I shivered all the time I was on guard from the damp cold.

The next morning, November 21, 1944, we again advanced down the road with headquarters in the lead and our platoon was to follow. Our objective was the town of Moyenmountier located about a mile from our starting position. We slowly advanced along the road as we passed through an open space between a field. Along the way I ate my breakfast. After about an hour of walking, the circulation in my feet was restored. Up until then, I had no feeling in my feet.

Upon reaching the outskirts of town the captain told our platoon leader, Lt. Bacos, to proceed down the road which led to the left and to see if any enemy were there. We went down there and found one of the houses locked. A couple grenades were thrown into the windows and the locks were shot off. Nobody was in the houses which we searched. We continued going through the town searching each house as we went. About halfway through the town, we stopped searching as all the civilians said the Germans had pulled out. When we broke through around Raon L'Tape, the main hinge of resistance was broken and the whole 19 German divisions were routed by our army. From here on the enemy attempted to hold us back by snipers as a form of delayed action, until they were able set up new positions in back of Strasburg.

While we were stopping in town waiting for orders to move as usual, we built a fire in the street to dry out. As soon as we had a nice blaze, we moved out down the main street. This end of town was all knocked to pieces. The air corps had dive bombed this end of town and litter and debris was everywhere.

Along the way we saw one dead German soldier and several dead horses and cows. We did not leave the town right away, but stayed in a house and built another fire. This time I dried out. I thought we would stay there as it seemed late to me, but since I had no watch and no place to go, it made no difference.

As we started down the road again out of town, I noticed civilians carrying big hunks of raw meat. A little farther, I saw where they had cut the meat from the dead horses and cows which had been killed the day before. They seemed very happy about the whole deal, getting meat for nothing. We proceeded on out of town following the road which was a quarter mile from the Meriuth River and which was in a valley with wooded hills on both sides.

The order of march was headquarters, followed by the first second, third and weapons platoons in this order. After about an hour of walking, the road led up a small hill. The first platoon went up all right and nothing happened. Just as my squad started up, two shots in rapid succession came from the woods to

the right. The bullets just missed the scout, kicking up dirt in front and in back of him. The next fellow to follow him was me, but no shots were fired. However, each of the next four fellows in back of me had a pot shot taken at them. Nobody was hit. The enemy must have been around 500 yards away when he fired because you heard the crack of the rifle fire before the bullet hit.

Before we started out on the morning of November 22, our first replacements or reinforcements as the army calls them, came into our platoon. From the time we entered combat until the present, about ten men were wounded, one was too old to take this rough life, two were shell shocked and one developed trench foot (14 men) out the 38 men in our platoon. We were glad to see some new guys come in to help out. One that came in was Pvt. Elton Landry from Baton Rouge, La. who later became our platoon sergeant.

On this day we advanced to the town of Senones without difficulty. Senones looked quiet and peaceful from a distance. The first battalion was to go through the left part of town, with C company leading and the 2nd platoon leading the company into town. About two hundred yards from the first town house, the company was halted behind a bend in the road. Our platoon was sent on the right side along the road to investigate the first few houses. We crossed a high fence and went through the first house. We found civilians in the first house. They were surprised to see us and happy at the same time. After we had gone through three or four houses, we were held up for awhile.

In the meantime the first platoon was sent on the left side of the road to investigate those houses. The houses were vacate, but at the curve, the enemy had constructed a road block of heavy timbers. The first platoon sergeant was looking through one of the windows in order to observe the road block when the Germans cut loose on him. He was hit in the head and he died shortly thereafter. Here we lost one of the best platoon sergeants in the company. Today we have a ball field named in his memory, Smorhosky's Field.

After the Germans opened up on the sergeant, other events soon took place. We now knew that the road block was covered by enemy guns and it would be difficult to get around the road block. About the same time our sergeant was killed, two other men were wounded in our platoon. While he was in the house, the first squad leader, S\ Sgt. Ralph Gore shot a Jerry as he stuck his head up in a window from another house. A few minutes later, Jones spotted one in the same place and he shot him. This eliminated two of the enemy and this shooting must have caused the others to flee. We observed that the second battalion was coming



towards us from about 600 yards to our left. When the Germans saw all these additional men coming towards them, they must have concluded that retreat was the better course of action, since their only purpose was to delay us.

The forward observer of the 81mm. mortars platoon came to our house in order to see if we could spot any more Germans. We did spot some over 500 yards to our right. He called for smoke shells to register the landing location of the mortar shells. While he was calling for smoke shells, we could see the Germans running away. The enemy was too far away for our rifle fire. After the first firing, we knew something was wrong. The mortar shells were landing in back of us, since we could hear the mortar bursts. The forward observer radios back to the C.P. to increase the range. Guess what happens, the shell hit the roof of the garage beside our house. Tile and shingles flew everywhere. At least we knew where they were now landing. I do not know, if any of our men were hurt by our mortars. At the time, I was looking through field glasses watching the Germans run away. We were unable to direct our mortars into their positions prior to their disappearance.

We did not stay here, as we continued to go from house to house, through back yards, over stone fences, walls and what ever was there to investigate. Somewhere along the line, orders were passed back for the rest of the company to follow the two squads of the second platoon who were being led by Capt. Roe and the Lt. from cannon company. The two squads of the second platoon were apparently the only ones who were advancing toward the enemy out of our company. At the time our squad was ordered to follow the two squads, we were of the opinion that our Capt. was a bit crazy. We believed that the Captain was half-lit up to continue the advance. As we advanced, snipers were taking pot shots at us. Finally, the Captain realizes that we are all alone. He sends a runner back to make contact with the rest of the company to follow our advance. After proceeding for about four blocks, the civilians came out of their houses to inform us that more Germans were up ahead. As we passed each house, a bottle of wine with a glass of wine were handed to us. At one of the houses where we stopped for a few minutes, a civilian brought us a bottle of champagne which he had just taken from his hiding place. Before long everybody was feeling pretty good. At another house where we stopped for a few minutes, a sniper shot the Lt. in the foot. Boy, you should have seen him jump for cover after getting hit in the foot. He went into the house and a first aid man bandaged his foot. Harry Kloft fired at what he thought was the location of where the shot originated. After he fired, we received no additional sniper fire while in the town.

As we continued advancing through the town, Frenchmen and women were standing in the doorways waiting to embrace us with a kiss. They handed us apples and passed around a bottle of wine or champagne. They had very little food to eat, but they were willing to share what they had. While we were being greeted by the French, the remaining part of the company caught up with us. We felt more secure with the additional men.

In the center of the town, we came upon a road which led to the left and into another section of the town. Our platoon was given the mission of searching all the houses on this road, while the rest of the company proceeded down the main street and to the edge of town. We found no Germans in the houses, but we did find a lot of happy French people. One woman told us that the day before we arrived, the Germans had taken away her dad and husband to work as slave laborers in Germany.

By the time we had gone through all the houses, it was getting to be late in the day. We were in no hurry to spend the night in another foxhole. We figured the longer we stayed in town, the better our chance to sleep in a house this night. By the time we completed our search and we returned to the center of town, the company was nowhere in sight. Instead we came upon lots of other G.I.'s from the Division. I never saw so much military equipment and troops before this day. They had all come in while we were searching the houses. I thought we were alone when all those snipers were firing on us. After the enemy was cleared from the town, everybody behind us came forward. The town was a busy place with tanks roaring through the town while other tanks were stopping for the night. The two infantry regiments who had been following us came into the town. Our artillery was there and it seemed just about everybody else. We were not aware at the time we were advancing through the town, that the whole division was lined up outside of town, with vehicles bumper to bumper, waiting for us to clear the town. Here two squads of infantry were trying to clear the town, when the whole rear echelon was right outside waiting for us to get knocked off. During the night I talked to one of the tank men, who was guarding the tank. He made the remark to one of the guys that he hoped they would not have as much trouble taking the next town as they did when they took Senones.

After taking the town, the 397th Regiment went into reserve more or less, while the 398th took over the job of pushing the Germans for awhile. This night the Lt. located a couple of houses occupied by the French civilians, where we were to sleep for the night. For the first time since coming overseas, I was able to sleep in bed. It was a wonderful feeling, even with three of us in one bed. I felt like I had slept for a change.

We pulled no guard this night and we were able to sleep the whole night in peace.

We awoke at daybreak the next morning and the platoon began to immediately walk in order to catch up with the company in the next town. I was late in getting started this morning, and our platoon was nowhere in sight. I started down the road until a jeep came by. I hitch-hiked a ride on the jeep. It rained during the night and it was still raining this morning. I was glad that I slept in a house last night.

At the next town, I left the jeep and started to look for the company. I located several fellows who gave me directions to the company. I found the platoon was billeted in a house with more French civilians. My squad leader gave me C rations for the day. I proceeded to heat the can on a hot stove. After breakfast, I cleaned my BAR rifle as it was getting rusty from all the rain and dirt. Around 10 o'clock this morning, orders came down to get ready to move out. It was the same old story, move out. We never knew where we were going. This whole war business is very uncertain.

Rain was still falling intermittently as we proceeded down the road. Troops had already gone ahead of us, but we still kept the usual precaution of distance between men. As we walked along the side of the road, trucks and jeeps were passing us as they hauled supplies or made the return trip. On this occasion, I wished I was in some other outfit. I was tired of walking from one place to another. Late in the afternoon after everyone was worn out, we came to a battered old town on a high hill. Several dead horses were lying around and the houses were leveled. Towards the end of the row of former houses, there was a church, and other houses and barns which were still intact. Here we stopped for the night. The division reconnaissance or armored scout cars were also stopping here for the night. The men told us that the 3rd Division was in front of us and that tomorrow we would go back and take a different route.

We slept in a house this night. The old lady who lived in this house did not appreciate our presence. Someone said she was a Nazi lover. For supper this night, we ate our Thanksgiving dinner including turkey, dressing and trimmings. Eating a turkey dinner outside while standing in the rain is not the ideal way to celebrate Thanksgiving. The meal was better than K rations. I was thankful to be able to eat a good meal, but more thankful to still be around. I believe the rain fell all through the night. We cared less about the rain on this night, since we were in the dry. Only two men from the platoon pulled guard at any one period. I stood my guard shift from 1 to 2 this morning.

While I was on duty, I talked to the Lt. in charge of the armored car. I discovered that he had attended the U. of I., but I can't recall his name anymore.

The next morning after eating a breakfast of French toast, cereal and coffee, we started out again back the same way we had just come. The distance to the main road seemed shorter as we walked down the hill instead of up the hill. We walked for about six miles until we reached the town of Belval. In between, we passed through several towns. Our regiment was now in support, so we had it easy for awhile. There was no shelling or sleeping in foxholes for the time being.

When we arrived at Belval each squad was assigned a house to billet along with the French civilians. Since we were in reserve and with the Germans retreating, we were in little danger this far back. The house I stayed in was occupied by an old couple. They were very friendly to us. We gave them a few gifts like extra K rations, cigarettes and items from packages from home. The elderly lady was like a mother to all of us. She washed our clothes, she kept the fire burning in our room and she made us feel at home. We all stayed in one room with the one bed. I slept on the floor with rest of the guys for the two nights we stayed here. The two sergeants slept in the one bed. I did not mind as it was warm on the floor and a lot better than a foxhole. I took off my boots at night and I slept without them. This helped my feet as they appeared to be white with no color. Several of the men had a touch of trench foot and were back at the aid station for several days.

The same day we moved into the house, the 925 Field Artillery Battalion set up just outside of town and about 100 yards from our house. The 925th was part of the division which operated the 155mm. howitzers. The 925th was not ordered to fire their guns from this location. We were happy and relieved for some peace and quiet. The civilians believed that the firing of the 155mm. guns would have shattered the glass in their windows.

While we were billeted in the house, a number of Christmas packages came to us. I received three packages from Mom. We feasted for awhile. The eats really came in handy after eating C and K rations for almost two weeks. I passed my goodies around and in no time they were gone. I could not have carried the packages with me if we moved, so we devoured all the goodies.

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It was during this respite, that I wrote the following Air-mail letter to my parents dated, November 24, 1944.

I was beginning to think that I never was going to get the

chance to write, but the day came sooner than I expected. You are probably worried and wondering why I did not write. Where I was and still am, you do not bother about writing letters. Your letters have been coming to me at the front and I am thankful as they have helped my morale. I have been under the same thing as Eugene, but for a much longer period of time. So far I have come out of this war in one piece. I have had many close calls and who knows how many others.

Send me a package every few days with some cookies, candies and any small item which I can carry like a few sheets of stationery and a pencil. At the present time, my total possessions consist of the clothes that I am wearing. I have all the clothes I need, but a warm pair of leather gloves would help. Tell all the relatives that I am okay and I will write when I can. Yesterday was Thanksgiving and it will be a day I may never forget. I had turkey and a hot meal for a change. Since I have been over here I have learned a lot. The Jerry's are not supermen. The only superman around here is G. I. Joe. I will write on every occasion that it is possible. Bye, Lester

Dad wrote me the following letter on the same date, November 24, 1944. We received your most welcome letter this morning, which was dated November 8, 1944. All of us are thankful that you are well and alive. Receiving your letter was quite a relief as for some reason we have been worrying a good deal the last few days. Please write at every opportunity. From now on we will enclose one blank V-mail stationery with each of our letters.

Yesterday I read in the paper where your division is located. When you wrote that the country there was the same kind as around Sam Pruett's we had a pretty good idea of your location. After the Chicago Tribune had mentioned that your division had come on line at that point, we could see that our first guess was correct.

According to the Tribune you are with the 7th Army, the 6th Corps and are located around Raon l'Etape, St. Die and the Saverne area with General Patch in command of the 7th Army. Lt. Gen. Devers is commanding the 6th Corps. I read all this in the Tribune, so apparently it is no military secret. The censor might mark out these names in your letter, so I thought I would write the names for your information. The paper mentioned the 3rd, 36th, 100th and 103rd division as being part of the 6th Corps and that this information could now be given out.

We are glad to see that you have been receiving some of our letters and that the last one was dated October 26. We sent you a five pound package of goodies including stationery. This noon while eating we were talking about you and that you did not have any shelter and that you had to sleep out in all kinds of weather. Helen (my kid sister) suggested that we should give you our house and that we should build another. We told her that you

were too far away, but if it would be possible we would be glad to give you our house. Will close for now. Dad

A day later, I wrote the following letter home.

Still in France. November 25, 1944 (Received Dec. 9, 1944)

I wrote you a letter yesterday and I am able to write again today. I am on break for a few days. A person does not know how much he can physically stand until the event occurs. I never believed that you could sleep in water and snow with only the clothes you have on your back. You can if your are too tired to know the difference. This war would be shorter if we had good weather. Right now I am staying in a French house along with two caring older persons. They were glad to see us. I did not believe the stories about what the Germans did to these people when I was in the states, but now I know how they were mistreated. The German I learned in school comes in handy. I talk to the prisoners and to the French people who know German as well as French. I received two of your packages yesterday with the cookies and candies. They sure hit the spot. I never knew you could bake such delicious cookies. Your packages were not damaged. The foot powder came to me at the wrong time and I had no use for it then. Now I wish I had the powder. I was paid today for last month. I was paid 1450 francs or \$25.00. I sent you \$20.00 and kept \$5.00 for myself. You should note that my title has been changed back to Pfc. I survived the first battle and somebody must have thought I deserved the Pfc. rank again. Bye, Lester.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DECEMBER 1-4, 1944 PERIOD AND POW INCIDENT

Several amusing incidents came to light, after the people with whom we were staying, began to feel that we could be trusted. The German soldiers led the people to believe that we would harm them in some way. The old man told us that they killed a German soldier who came into their town during the German occupation. I do not remember the exact method of the killing. After the soldier was killed, they cut the body into pieces. The pieces were buried in various gardens of the town in order to hide the evidence.

Another story was the hiding of things like jewelry, food, and cognac. They buried most of these items in the ground. When we came along, they were dug up again. Boy, were they happy to have us come along. He gave us a drink of his cognac.

There is one big disadvantage in eating lots of solid food after having eating C and K rations for sometime. We always seemed to get the G. I's (diarrhea) as we call it. Everybody got them each time our food was changed. This was a new experience for us, but there was nothing we could do about this condition, as this was to affect us throughout our period of combat. A change of eats and we all came down with the G. I's.

On our second day in the house, two new replacements came into the squad, Cortellessa and McDonald. On the morning of the 27th of November, orders came down to move back to Raon L'Etape. This was to be shuttle march, hike part and ride the rest. The French Army took over our divisional sector and we were ordered up to the Bitche sector.

I guess it was around noon when we started back with about five yards between men and a column on each side of the road. I carried my BAR with 13 magazines (260 rounds), plus an extra bandoleer and grenade. After walking for sometime, I pitched the bandoleer and grenade. I kept the 13 magazines. This was still too much to carry and besides we were in the rear.

Those 13 magazines weighed me down and by the time we walked back to Moyennoutier, I was barely able to walk. My feet felt like I had developed blisters. When I checked the bottom of my feet later that night, I found several blisters.

Sometime later trucks came back from shuttling B company to their positions and we were able to climb on the trucks and ride to Raon L Etape. When we arrived, a half wrecked hotel was assigned to us, but that did not suit our C.O. We went through other buildings and found one with several beds. Four of us holed up in a room with two beds. There was no stove in this room, so we removed one out of another room into ours, put a stove pipe out the window and built a fire. We had all the comforts of home, so it seemed. For supper this night, we received a hot meal for a change. This of course did not help our G. I's. We pulled no guard on this night. I slept like a log for the whole night.

At daylight the next morning, they woke us up again for hot chow. After breakfast, we were told that we were to go for a long ride in open trucks. Everyone was to take an overcoat and a blanket out of a pile to use for cover as we rode. Shortly thereafter, the trucks came for the battalion. We all piled on and we rode till after dinner. I remember coming through Sarrburg and seeing a radar outfit along the way as well as artillery pieces. After about a twenty minute stop in a town, we continued on until dark when we came to Neweiler. Here we climbed off the trucks. Somebody led us through the darkness to a large school building. The whole battalion ended up billeting in this building for two days and two nights. I slept on the floor as usual with the rest of the guys. Our space was limited and the only space we had for ourselves was the space our body occupied.

I walked through the town the next day in order look at the buildings and people. The people were not very friendly. It appeared to me that the people were pro-Nazi. Hot meals were served to us during our stay in the town. No one had a mess kits of their own, since they had all been pitched after the first days of combat. Apparently the kitchen had retrieved quite a few and we ate out of the ones available. Sometimes there was not enough to go around and when one man was through, he gave the used mess kit to the next man.

Showers were set up in the basement of the building and I took a shower for the first time in three weeks. We were not issued a change of clothes on this momentous occasion. I put on the same clothes that I had worn for past three weeks without ever taking them off. My clothes did not smell too bad as far as I could tell. I guess they did, but we were so used to our



condition that we could not tell the difference.

The morning of November 30, the battalion moved out. It was a good thing we did not know what was in store for us at that time. All we knew was that we were moving up on line to relieve part of the 45th Division. By the middle of the afternoon we came up to the 45th positions without any trouble along the way. Along the way, we pulled turnips from a garden. I did have a difficult time peeling and eating the raw turnips as we walked.

The following account on page 71 in **THE STORY OF THE CENTURY**, presents a general perspective of our situation at the time. "The 1st Battalion of the 397th entered the lines again on 29 November when it took over the foxholes, CPs, and installations of the 45th Div's. 1st Battalion 157th Inf. These positions were on high ground overlooking the Hagenau highway just north of Ingwiller. During the morning the 2nd Battalion had moved from Ernolsheim into Weinbourg, and the 3rd Battalion moved behind it into Weitersiller. Advancing to Ingwiller, the regimental Cannon Company fired 50 rounds at probable enemy positions.

While Co. B of the 1st Battalion 397th remained in position on the right or east side of the Hagenau highway just north of Ingwiller, Co. A, followed by Co. C, attacked north along the other side of the highway. As soon as the attack began at 0800 on 30 November, Co. A received fire from enemy foot troops to the northeast. The advance went slowly until, in the face of mortar fire, Co. C was committed on the east side of the highway and the two companies made a little headway." [At the time, it was my personal view that we made no headway. In fact, I thought we had to withdraw in the face of stiff enemy opposition.]

The 45th Division platoon which we relieved was located on a rocky hill in a woods. The men gave us the dope on the situation. They said that two barrages of mortars or artillery shells came into their positions during this day. We moved into their holes. Chadwick and I did not like our hole. For one thing the hole was not deep enough and the logs over the hole were too thin. I asked the guy who was leaving if he had been overseas for a long period. He said that he had come through North Africa, Anzio, Italy and Southern France without getting hit. All I could think at the time was that he sure was lucky if all of his holes were like this one.

We immediately started to fix the hole by digging out more dirt, cutting additional logs for the top and piling dirt on top of the logs. By dark we had it to suit ourselves. Just about the time I thought I could take a break, my squad leader sent me

back about two hundred yards to the company C. P. to eat supper and to bring up our new bed rolls. On the way back, several barrages of mortar shells landed in back of me. I hit the ground several times as I heard that famous whine. Up until now we never carried any bedding with us, but relied on the supply sergeant to bring us blankets whenever possible. Now that we were issued a bed roll, we had to carry it with us if we wanted cover for the night. This was an extra burden, but it was worth it on many occasions. Dry, it only weighed a few pounds and the bag could be rolled into a roll which was easy to sling over your shoulder. The bedroll cover was water resistant.

Neither one of us slept in the bedroll this night because we were afraid that it would take too long to get out if things got hot. The one who was not on guard laid on one bedroll, while the other bedroll was used for cover. It wasn't much of a guard for either of us this night as I dozed off once and I caught Chad doing the same thing. Staying awake half the night is not an easy thing to do when your are all worn out and cold.

Nothing happened to us this night which was a good thing. By this time we had learned how to heat our canned rations without making any smoke. We would punch holes in the K ration box, strike a match and then hold the opened can over the burning fire of the box. The box burned just long enough to heat the can.

Somewhere around nine o'clock the next morning, orders came down to us to get ready to shove off again for where we did not know. The day that was in store for us was something that is not easily forgotten. Two good friends of mine were killed, two captured, one went out of his mind for awhile and another was wounded. All of this would occur to the men of the second squad, at a time when there were only ten men to begin with.

#### December 1, 1944 in the vicinity of Inqwiller & Wimmenau, France

Shortly before we shoved off this morning, several replacements came into the platoon with one coming into our squad by the name of Young. This gave us 10 men in the squad out of a possible 12. While we were waiting to get started, I built a small fire out of K ration boxes in order to take the chill out of me. Just as my fire was burning, orders came to put on equipment and start moving. This was the same old story.

A road or trail ran along our lines and slightly to the rear of where we were starting our movement this morning. On the way down the hill, Earl Evans of Ky. sprained his ankle and he was sent back to the aid-station for several days. He was a lucky guy. After walking for some five hundred yards, we halted for a

short period. An armored scout car happened to be next to my location as we waited. We all spread out as we talked to the guys from the armored scout car. A few minutes later the whine of the whistling shells could be heard and we all hit the ground. We rolled to the lowest possible spot. Lucky for us, the mortar or artillery barrage landed short, but some larger pieces of shrapnel landed around us. We could hear the whizzing sound from the shrapnel as the fragments whizzed by as you hit the ground. Then you breathed a sight of relief. This was not the end for us this time. We received 5 more barrages and we sweated out each barrage. After the first two barrages, I decided to move to a deeper depression as this would be safer. I rolled into an old road bed ditch which ran through the woods.

After awhile, I noticed the guys up front were moving out to the front. I followed as the men behind me followed me. I did not know where we were heading. I believe A and B company had gone before us. The route we were taking was on the side of a hill which ran through a valley. It was possible to see the other side of the valley through the trees which continued down our hillside for about three hundred yards from where we were located. At the bottom of our hill side was a black top road. The Germans had constructed and mined several road blocks on the road. This was the reason the armored car was held up.

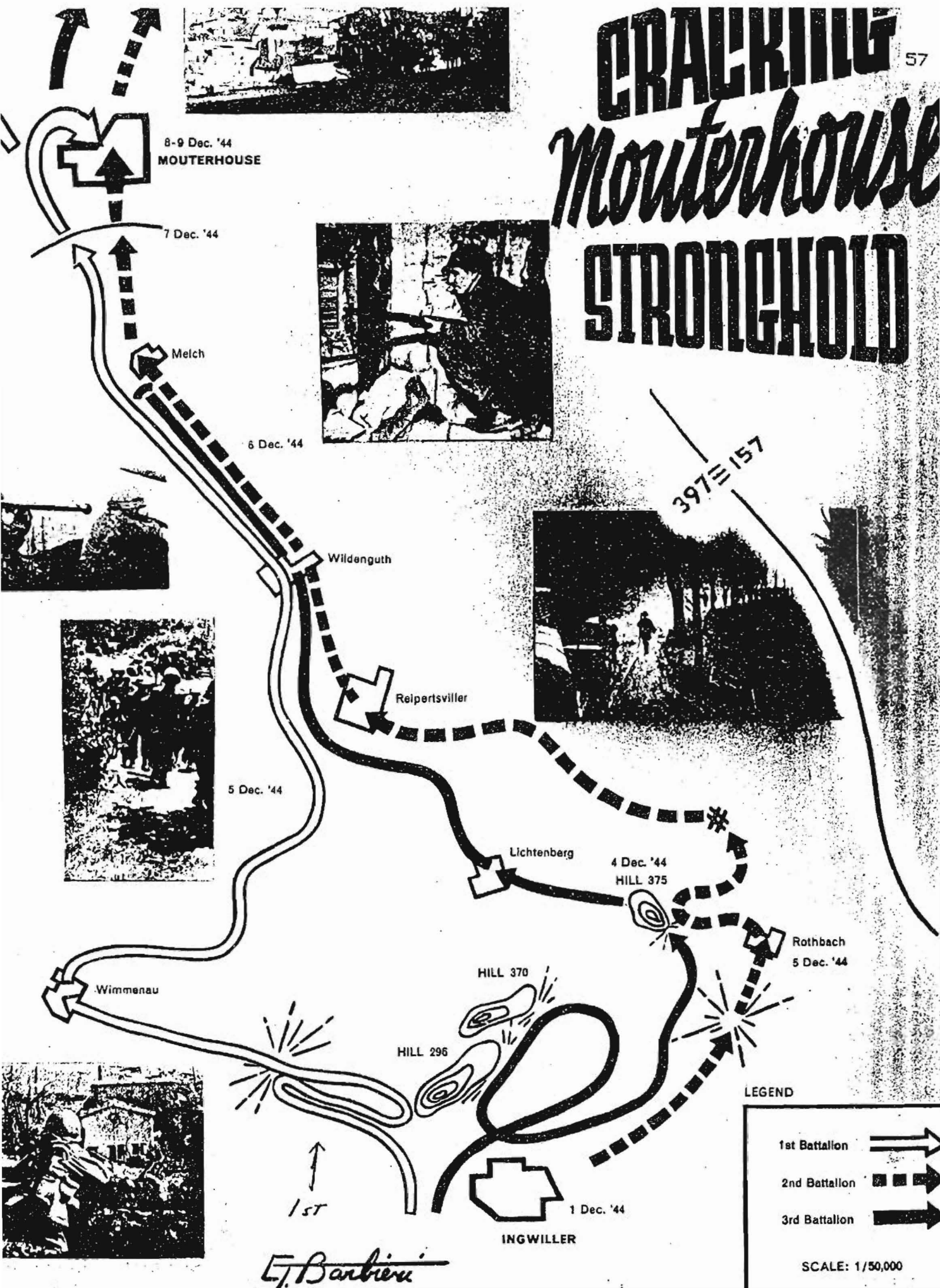
We continued to advance on the side of the sharply rising hill (2967). This winding route led us through rocks and small cliffs as we continued up the side of the hill and then down again for about 300 yards. No enemy or artillery was encountered up to this point. Then for some reason we were told to stop our advance. Orders came from the front to back track all the way back to where we had started. I never did learn the reason for the backtracking. The reason may have been to protect A company's right flank by our company advancing on the other side of the valley, or more likely, it may have been to let our artillery pound the Germans as we withdrew. (The official account in the **REGIMENT OF THE CENTURY** at the end of this chapter seems to confirm the latter.)

We all back tracked until word was passed down the line to stop. This was the usual way of getting orders from the front to the rear of the column and vice versa, mouth to mouth messages. The other form of communication which the Battalion possessed, was to use the 300 radio to the Company or Regiment C.P. Usually the wire men were stringing telephone wire right behind us as we advanced, but this time they were not present.

When we were halted, after the back tracking, whoever was in the lead started down the hill towards the road. Along the road,

# CRACKING Mouterhouse STRONGHOLD

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we traveled through a ditch, which provided some protection, even though it meant walking in water. On our right was an open field where we could be seen if there were Germans on the other side. We slowly advanced through the ditch in single file with about five yards between men for a distance of about a 100 feet. At this point, one man at a time took off as fast as he could run over the road, then through an open field, then up a railroad embankment and then down the other side into a ditch. Nobody was fired on during this movement and the company was able to safely reach our new location. After the crossing, we all kept our bodies as low as possible in the ditch by the railroad. Each man maintained a few yards distance between the next man. I ate my dinner in the ditch at this time as if it made any difference. A slight interruption occurred as a barrage of 88's or mortars landed in the open field where we had just crossed. The Jerry's were a little slow on the draw this time. The railroad embankment saved us, but a few pieces of shrapnel landed among us after they had gone up in the air and fell down among us. These pieces were not very dangerous as long as you wore your helmet.

After everyone had gotten across the field, we started up the hill and through the woods. We followed along the side of the hill for some distance. How far we went, I had no idea as our path wound all around and up the hill and down again. The action this day isn't very clear to me as everything seemed to be one confusion after another.

I remember firing one magazine from my BAR (20 rounds) at German soldiers running about 100 yards off to my left. They disappeared as I fired. We never went to check as to what happened. I also fired 20 rounds at a German scout who came up to our front while we were lying waiting on the ground for artillery shells to land. I missed and the German soldier disappeared into the woods.

Somewhere around here machine gun bullets whizzed all around us. How they missed all of us, I will never understand. I believe the third platoon was in front of us and they killed several Germans as they advanced. At this point we spread out more along with the 1st and 3rd platoons forming a line and advancing while we all were strung out. The 3rd platoon was on the right to protect our flank. The other platoons ran into a number of Germans and either captured, wounded or killed all of them. The second squad had no trouble. At this action a friend of mine was killed by the name of Smith. We both came into the company the same time and we both were BAR men. It was getting late in the afternoon and it was about time for us to stop and dig in for the night and reorganize. Somehow or other our platoon had gotten out too far in front of the rest of the company and we had to

withdraw to be on line with the company.

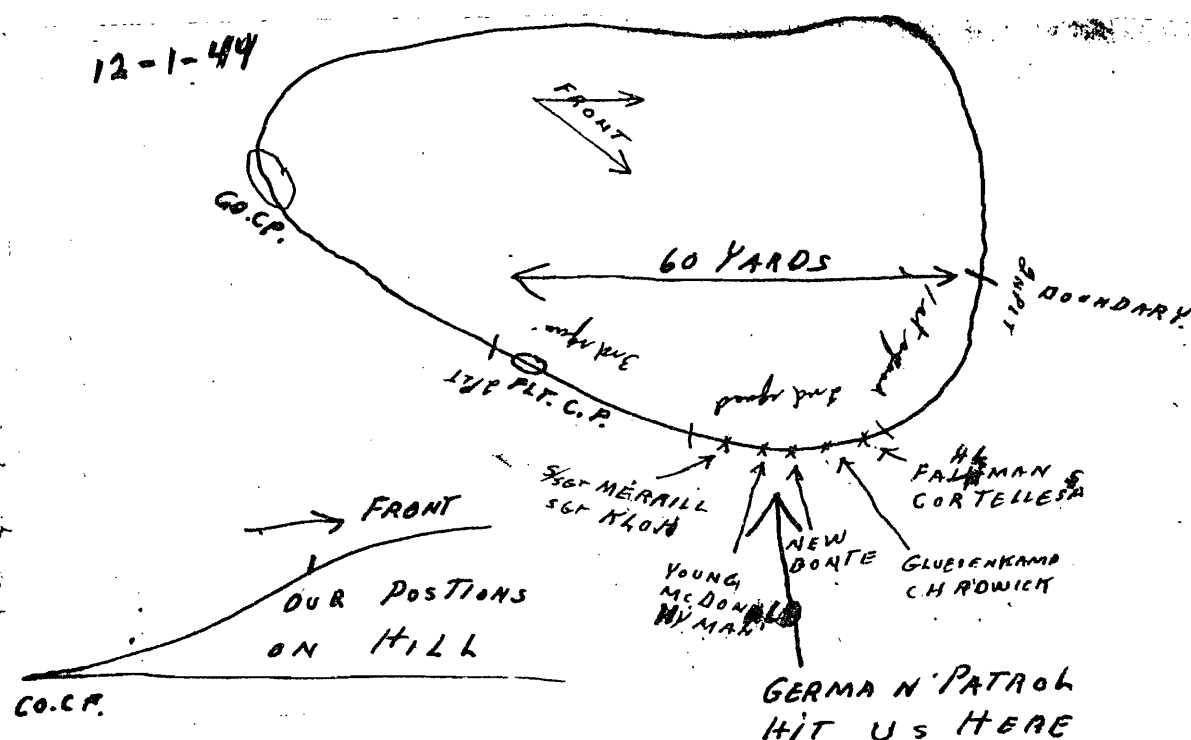
Now, I am thankful that we did return to the company lines. By this time it was getting dark. The days were getting shorter and on this particular day it was darker and there were more clouds than usual. The thick woods added to the darkness. Chad I immediately started digging a hole as fast as we could possibly dig a hole six feet long and three feet wide. When we had dug down to about a foot, I told Chad to cut some limbs for top cover while I kept on digging. He used a sharp trench knife (a knife for stabbing) which cut the pine limbs in no time. By the time I had dug the hole to a depth of a little more than three feet, he had cut enough to cover the top. We lay the pine limbs over the top for support as we piled leaves and small pine boughs over the pine limbs. The dense leaves and boughs were to keep the dirt from falling on us. When this was complete, we heaped a mound of dirt over the cover, after which we added leaves and branches for camouflage. We soon had our hole completed to our satisfaction. I noticed we were the first ones to complete our hole. Twice while we were digging, a few 88's landed in back of us, at which time we hit the ground.

Just about the time we had our hole finished, mortar and artillery shells began to hit the trees in back of us. They were landings were very close to our positions and shrapnel was flying all around us. We immediately climbed into the hole and we thought we would stay there until the shelling stopped. Our rifles were standing against a tree about three feet from our hole entrance. This was the spot where we had put them while we were digging. We soon found out that this was bad planning. We now know that you should always keep your rifle within reach. Both of us were sitting in the back of the hole resting and thinking we were relatively safe in our hole. This seemed like a good time to take a break, so I lighted a cigarette. We did not think it necessary to keep a lookout as the other men were still digging and gathering cover in the area.

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Just about this time all hell broke loose. It seemed that German burp and machine pistols were chattering all around us. I heard German soldiers hollering "Aus, Aus, Aus" a number of times. (Aus I believe means "out or move") We both knew at this point that the Germans were right outside our hole. We were in a predicament of the worst kind. We had no weapons in our hole. If the Germans had thrown a grenade in our hole, it would have been T-S for us. The best thing for us to do right then was to stay back under the cover of our hole and hope they would not see us. Maybe it was the right thing to have done for those few minutes after all.

Suddenly it was all quiet again. I decided to take a quick look around from the hole. I slowly eased my head up out of the hole and I reached for a grenade which was lying on the edge. No one was near us at the time. At the same time my hand and arm were ready to toss the grenade. I leaned out of my hole to grab my BAR. I then laid the grenade down and I held my BAR in position ready to fire. It was then I noticed a movement in the brush of the woods about forty yards away. I caught a glance of soldiers moving away, but it was unclear if they were ours or theirs who were moving away in the darkness. The movement was to our front and I figured it might be the Germans. For some reason, which I can't explain, I did not fire at the soldiers. I suppose it was because the soldiers maybe ours or maybe because I would be giving away my position if I fired and missed the enemy who may still be present. My uncertainty made me hesitate. Someone did fire a few rounds in the direction of the movement. This was the last gun fire I heard at this time. The diagram below indicates our positions and the point where they hit us by surprise.



Rec. Sept. 13, 1945

By this time, we both had our heads out of the hole while we tried to keep a sharp lookout for any sign of movement. Neither of us knew what had happened at the time. About an hour later Sgt. Norman Stevens of Texas, the assistant squad leader of the third squad came up to our hole. He was about the only one who seemed to have the nerve to come out and find out what happened.

Here is what happened to our squad. While we were sitting in our hole and the rest were still digging their holes, no one was keeping watch for signs of the enemy. A German patrol came up to our location under the cover of the barrage of mortars and artillery. It was so unexpected that everybody was caught off guard. This was the first time an enemy patrol attacked near darkness under mortar and artillery barrages. This incident sure taught the rest of us a valuable lesson the hard way.

Nyman and Kloh were both killed in their hole where they had gone when the artillery had come into our position. Young and McDonald were taken prisoner. Sgt. Merrill went haywire or was a case of shell-shock. Kenneth Bonte of Moline, Ill said the Germans had him with his hands up, but then somebody opened fire on the Germans and they let him go free. He quickly jumps in his hole. Stevens informed me that he was going to take over the squad and that I was to be his assistant squad leader. He wanted to stay in our hole for the night, but as he was as large as me, it would have been too crowded. He sends Charles New over to another hole and the Sgt. holes up with Bonte. With the loss of Kloh, Nyman, Young and McDonald, there was a gap between the holes in the line. The gap in the line could not be corrected at this time. We stayed up all night as we were afraid to go to sleep. One of us stood guard, peering into the darkness, while the other sat in the hole with his rifle ready to fire as he dozed or just closed his eyes. If one of us snored, the other would poke him to keep him awake and to keep down the noise level. Chad and I were the worst snorers and we were continually poking each other during the night.

Later that night, another patrol hit our lines and Richardson was shot in his hole which was located near the company C.P. Wheeler of the weapons platoon was in the same hole, but he was asleep at the time when the German fired into the hole. The Germans apparently did not see Wheeler as he was sleeping in the bottom of the hole under cover. We will never know why Richardson, who was on guard at the time, did not see the Germans in time.

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This was about the extent of what happened this day and night. All the while we were there, mortar and artillery shells were landing among us. One man from the third squad was severely injured during the night from the shrapnel. He was not evacuated till around noon the next day. Our medics were not able to come into our exposed position as the Germans were behind the company lines as well as in front. All the time we were in our hole on this dark and eventful night, I wished I had a small pistol to use if such a situation would ever arise again. About a week later my wish came true as we removed several pistols from German soldiers whom we captured.

I did manage to sleep part of the night, but the next morning, I felt as if I never slept. With three of us taking turns on guard, we were able to rest and doze which helped relieve the tension. The next morning the weather was somewhat brighter and with fewer clouds. The sun never did shine this day. Word was passed from hole to hole that rations were in and I was sent to the platoon C.P. I returned with the days rations for the squad that was left. This was the first and last time I ventured out of my hole the whole day. It was my good luck that no artillery came into our positions while I was out of my hole. Shortly after I returned, a barrage of shells landed right among us. Bonte was hit in the hand and another man from the third squad received a direct hit on him with a mortar or artillery shell. There was very little left of him after the shell burst. I believe this covers all that I recall of the events and the casualties we sustained while in this position.

The rest of the day we all stayed in our holes with one man on guard at all times. Occasionally, a barrage of shells would come into our position during the day. The Germans did not attack our position again. I noticed that the trees around us were literally cut to pieces from the shrapnel. Every tree seemed to be skinned or splintered. Broken tree branches and limbs were lying all over the ground as a result of the shell bursts in the trees.

During the morning of December 2, Stevens and Crumrine from the company C.P., came over to occupy one of the holes which were vacated near our position. Stevens and Crumrine had to take the bodies out of the holes before they could move in for the day. This night turned out to be very quiet for a change. I do not recall any enemy barrages or attacks during the night.

#### Vicinity of Wimmenau, France December 3, 1944

Sometime around 9 o'clock this morning, orders were passed along to the men in the holes to get ready to move out in a half hour. I put my things together and I was ready to move out. No

mortar or artillery shells had landed in our area this morning and we all felt fairly safe for a change. We climbed out of our holes and stretched. I walked over to where Nyman and Kloh were lying and looked at where they lay. They did not look like the two guys I had known at Ft. Bragg. By the hole next to mine was a new field jacket which belonged to Young who had been captured. I went through his jacket and I found his wallet, a packet, a bible, and several other items. I removed these items and I gave them to the sergeant to send to his folks. I took off my old dirty jacket and I put on his new field jacket. I removed all the junk from the pockets of my old jacket and I left it there. Shortly before we left, the platoon sergeant and several other men carried the bodies over to the C.P., where they were laid with the rest of the bodies. Altogether, there were six bodies at this one spot.

After the bodies had been assembled at this spot, we put on our equipment and we were ready to move back to the battalion. Our company was cut off from the battalion and all our rations and supplies had to be carried at great risk to where we were located. We could not take the bodies with us at this time so they were left where they were lying. Later on when we had pushed forward, I learned that the men were evacuated and buried somewhere in France. I never did learn as to how long a period it was before they were evacuated. It usually took a week or more before this gruesome job was completed.

We followed the same route back which we had earlier taken up the hill. Nothing happened on our return trip. We were glad that nothing did occur on this trip. Our next mission now was to occupy a hill guarding the right flank of the company. B company had been in this position the day before, but had since moved. It was uncertain as to whether the Germans had moved back again after the attack of the other day. Our line formed a half moon on the rocky hillside or rather the small mountain. The woods had been cleared of timber about half way up the mountain. I did not like the situation because the enemy could observe our movement from the top of the mountain. About the time every man was in shallow holes, 88's came streaming over us. I don't know whether they were trying to hit us or the main-highway at the bottom of the hill. We were very uncomfortable in our position. As soon as the 88's came over us, Chad, Stevens and I started hacking away at the rocky soil to deepen our hole as deep as possible. We hit solid rock after only digging a couple of inches. All we could do at this point was to build up the sides in order to provide as much protection as possible. By darkness we had the sides about two feet high, but it was impossible to construct a roof. A roof was not really necessary, since there was little danger of a tree-burst in the open.

Shortly before dark, word came to us that our rations were in. Three men from the platoon were sent to the company C.P. which was located at the bottom of the hill. This was one time I was glad that I was now the assistant squad leader, since I was no longer required to pull this detail. Stevens had a small gas stove and tonight we ate hot C rations and drank hot coffee for supper.

The night turned out to be a very uncomfortable for all of us. All through the night, enemy shells were landing in front of us, behind us, and they always seemed to be landing in our hole. I timed the landings with Steven's watch. Every twenty minutes, we could figure that a screaming barrage would come into our position. Each time, we all crouched down as low as possible.

While Stevens was on guard during the night, one shell burst came very close and a piece of shrapnel flew into our hole. The fragment missed my head by about an inch. It was a good thing I was asleep at the time this occurred. To make matters worse, it started to drizzle around midnight. Since we had no cover and we had pitched our raincoats as too much baggage to carry, we could only use our sleeping bags as cover. Our bedrolls kept out most of the dampness and rain. In the morning, we were damp, but we were not wet. When we stood guard, we stayed in our bed roll. I would hate to think of what would have happened should we have been required to move out fast. This was our only way to keep warm and dry.

Vicinity of Wimmenau, France      December 4, 1944

At daylight this morning, I crawled out of my damp bedroll. Even though it rained during the night, my clothes were dry and I was warm. Stevens still had a squad stove. We lit the stove and heated our C rations and we each made a cup of coffee. At nine o'clock orders came to the platoon that we were going to move out to new positions and to relieve I company who were located to our right at the top of the hill. I don't remember what time it was when we moved out, but it was shortly afterwards when we were told to get ready to move out.

No enemy artillery shells had come into our positions this morning so we felt fairly safe to be out of our holes. I rolled up my roll and I put it on my pack. Most of the fellows did not carry a pack as they preferred to tie a rope around their rolls and sling the rope over their back and carry the bedroll in this fashion. I preferred a pack as this helped to hold up my BAR belt which contained 10 or more 20 round magazines. Otherwise it would have been very difficult for me to move.

The company followed a path leading up the hill. (This may have been hill 296.) The path was the safest route as the trees in the woods had been mined by the Germans. I company had many casualties when they took the hill which were caused by the men tripping wires which ran from the trees to the mines. On the way up the hill, I counted at least five dead G.I.'s lying along the path as well as a number of dead German soldiers. There must have been others who were killed because we only saw a small part of the area. I noticed G.I. equipment scattered all along the path indicating the locations where our men had been wounded. Their equipment was left on the location where they had been wounded.

It was a tough climb up the hill, but we finally made it to the top. By this time I was all tired out. I had to stop and take a rest. The other men were in the same tired condition. Upon reaching the top and with no artillery landing among us, we discovered a number of the holes which had been occupied by I company. The holes were not the best, so we immediately set to work digging the holes larger and deeper. Stevens started cutting and chopping pine trees about 8 inches in diameter with an axe. With three of us working, it was no time before the hole and roof were finished. While Chadwick and I were digging, we hit rock which our small shovels would not break. I remembered seeing a pick lying by one of the holes which we had passed. I took off after the pick. I had only gone about a hundred feet, when all of a sudden I heard a whine and I hit the ground. I was late in hitting the ground as the shell hit the tree about fifty feet in back of me. Only five seconds earlier, I had walked right where the shell landed. Immediately after the first burst, I crawled towards a hole and I fell in head first on top of another guy who was already in the hole. I had no sooner crawled in the hole when four other guys, who had been out of their holes, also jumped in the hole. There were now six of us in this one hole. It was crowded as we lay on one another, but nobody complained. One of my buddies, Raymond Ward of North Carolina was hit in the leg by a piece of shrapnel from the same shell. Later I learned that his leg was broken by a shell fragment. He was later sent back to the states. Soon after he was hit, a medic from the third platoon came over to dress his wound.

I stayed in the hole for about five minutes when I decided that no more shells were coming into positions for awhile. I made a dash for my own hole. The pick could wait for all I cared. Later, we figured that this one shell fell short of its intended target. The Germans were aiming for the road at the bottom of the hill. This was the only mortar shell that came in all the while we were at this location.

The next morning we received orders to move down the hill. As usual, we had no idea what new experience we were to encounter this day. The route we followed led us parallel to the railroad track and near the same path we had followed two days earlier. This time we did not meet any Germans. It appeared that the enemy had pulled back about five miles to the town of Mouterhous. We continued walking on the railroad until we came to a railroad underpass. Before we passed the underpass, we observed that a number of German soldiers had discarded their equipment. We also observed that a number of German bodies were lying along our route. In one of their foxholes near the railroad underpass, we saw a loaded bazooka which was aimed at the nearby road. The enemy bazooka was larger than ours and the shell part was painted orange. The road under the pass was exposed so as we went through everyone ran until he was able to get down in the ditch on the other side of the tracks along the main highway. The highway led to the town of Wimmenau. B company had preceded us along the highway to Wimmenau with the tanks. Farther up the road we came to a house which was on fire after receiving tank cannon fire. About a hundred yards from the house, the road led through a woods and still farther up we saw where our men had run into a lot of trouble.

The infantry soldiers had been walking beside the tank when the tank hit a personnel mine. When tripped, this type of mine springs into the air about two feet and explodes. When we arrived, we found one man who was just about dead and five others were lying on the ground, where the platoon medics had bandaged their wounds. The men had to wait there until an ambulance could be brought up to evacuate the men to an aid station.

We continued on down the road without meeting any opposition. By three o'clock in the afternoon after we had by-passed several road blocks, the battalion stopped for the night. We dug in for the night. The tanks had taken up positions near us with their guns pointing in the direction of the enemy in case of a counterattack. Chadwick, New and myself holed up together today while Stevens dug in with T/Sgt. Wm. Hurley.

While we were digging in, B company went into the town of Wimmenau with tanks for support. They accepted the surrender of a couple of prisoners, but met no real opposition. In the process they sort of shot up the town. This made the people living there very angry. Most of the people were of German descent and all spoke German.

As soon as our hole was finished, it started to rain. We had a good hole and we were able to keep from getting wet. After dark, we were told to move into the town as it was cleared by B

company. The Germans had retreated for some distance. As we walked into the town, it was so dark that you could hardly see the man in front of you. The whole company assembled on the road which led into the town of Wimmenau about a mile away. While we were on the road waiting for one platoon to join the company, Corky decides to check his rifle which was slung over his shoulder to be certain it was on safety. Instead, he hits the trigger and fires into the air. He was standing right in front of me at the time and I believe I jumped a foot when he fired. A few minutes later, the platoon joined the company and we began walking towards the town. After some confusion about locating a house for each platoon, the civilians were told to move out. Capt. Roe from Indiana assigned our platoon to one of the houses. We slept here for the night. I even had a mattress to sleep on for the night.

This painful encounter was aptly documented on pages 114 through 116 in the book **REGIMENT OF THE CENTURY**. I believe this account presents a picture of the total action at the time, whereas my account reflects my own view and experience. "The constant harassing by hostile small arms and automatic weapons as we approached Hill 375 was accompanied by the really serious obstacle of difficult terrain and maintenance of contact and control. Hourly barrages of 120 mm. and 75 mm., varying from 20 to 60 round, came in. For the first time we ran across booby traps with trip wires. Our troops took Hill 369, Hill 296, and a motley assortment of prisoners; shoemakers, carpenters, and some in civilian clothes who claimed to be AWOL or on furlough.

In the face of violent resistance we captured Hill 375 on December 4th. Behind this simple declaration there lies the gory details of many heroes, dead and wounded. Our leaders showed gallantry and heroism in selecting positions for us which proved to be the best.

The stubborn defense caused us to back off Hill 375 and call for a TOT of all available artillery. This was an old and well-proved trick. As we edged backward, the enemy, in line with expectations, was quick to follow, and by so doing walked smack into the artillery barrage. Although our barrage did not quite hit in all the right spots, it dazed the Krauts to such an extent that we were able to fall on them before they could get back to their prepared positions. They were well-camouflaged, dug-in 6 by 10 feet, and protected by heavy logs and sandbags. The enemy also utilized road-blocks covered by flak guns and automatic weapons and kept his artillery and mortars going at the maximum pitch, shelling the town of Rothbach all day long. It was tough and rough for hand carrying parties and liter-bearers who operated in defiance of the heaviest mortar and artillery fire the foe

could possibly muster. The Kraut abandoned his positions during the night and retreated to the north.

On December 5th the First Battalion, assisted by a platoon of medium tanks from the 14th Armored Division, took Wimmenau. Going cross country, we ran into an abundance of Schu and "S" mines which caused a few casualties--blowing off men's feet, thus giving what was more expensive than 'the million-dollar wound'--the one that sent a fellow home.

We were now veterans. We knew the full content of war and we had become more cautious in our association with it. We had seen what it had done and could do. We were now more careful to feel our the way ahead, rather than advance unknowing toward the enemy. We waited for the support of our artillery. We now instinctively took cover. When replacements, just renamed 'reinforcements,' took their places among us, we talked with more assurance in answer to their hesitating questions as to what to expect. We were rather proud of our experiences, and appreciate this opportunity to display our hard-won knowledge.

Our attack went on unabated and we scored some notable gains December 6th when we took Wildenguth and Melch. Our immediate objective now was Mouterhouse. Most of us didn't realize at the time that the Division ultimate objective was the fortress city of Bitche on the Maginot Line and for that reason we could not appreciate the importance of Mouterhouse as the gateway to such objective. We had been in the Army long enough now to know better that to ask. We were oriented for our mission, and off we'd go, content in the supposed belief that someone higher up knew what the score was.

So it was with Mouterhouse. We knew only that here was a town ahead that was occupied by the enemy and that our mission was to drive him out and occupy it ourselves. It was that simple. No maps and overlays to show the entire front. Some us had little overlays showing the few hundred feet in which we were to operate. Ahead was a bush or a small clump of trees to which we would advance, and beyond that still another form of cover. This was our 'big picture'. "

## CHAPTER 6

### ON THE WAY TO MOUTERHOUSE, FRANCE

On the night of December 6, 1944 we moved into the town of Wimmenau, France which had been taken by B company in the afternoon. As they went through the town with tanks, bullets from the machine guns of the tanks and our troops were very much in evidence. The buildings were nicked and chipped, windows and doors were knocked out and the place looked a mess. The people did not welcome our arrival on this occasion. It was about 9 o'clock by the time we arrived in town and all wet from the rain. Capt. Roe tried to find places for us to stay and after talking to the mayor and others, a house was selected for each platoon. The people living there moved to the cellar.

My squad was in one of the front rooms of the house. We all slept on the floor. The guard duties were divided up by squads with the three hours to a shift. Two men were stationed at the doors. The next morning after a good nights sleep, we all busied ourselves cleaning up because nobody had washed or shaved for more than a week. I asked Chadwick to give me a haircut with his safety razor.





He did a cutting job, but not too neat. We thought we might stay here for a day or two and rest as the Germans had withdrawn again. At noon, hot chow was brought to us with the same old stew taste. All the meals seemed to have a C of K ration flavor as the cooks prepared all the food from dehydrated packages.

Before we finished eating, the company commander received orders to proceed to another town about four or five miles away. We were ready to stay there for the night with the rest of the battalion. The next morning we were to attack again, but we did not know this at the time.

Soon afterwards we left the town walking along the road strung out on both sides with the company C.P. group leading. The C.P. group led because the area ahead had been cleared and was fairly safe to lead this charge. After walking for an hour or so we stopped for a rest and then continued on to our objective. We passed through several towns, but none had been damaged. Along about 4 o'clock we walked up a high hill to a town by the name of Melch. The battalion C.P. had preceded our company into town and they were waiting to assign places for us to stay. Each company took over several houses and we slept where there was room. The civilians were still living in these houses, but we did not run them out as they were French. About five of us found a place in a stall under the house along with two cows. Straw and leaves were at one end of the stall. This was an ideal place. The soft straw would keep us warm, while the four concrete walls would provide protection. About dark a hot meal was brought up to us and after supper everyone found a nook in the stall in which to sleep for the night. I went into a stall and I fixed up my corner with about two feet of straw. The place had a stinking odor, but after awhile we were stinking like the manure and we thought the smell was normal.

During the first part of the evening we lighted candles while we sat around and talked. Several guys had comic books. We all had the opportunity to read as they were passed around. Soon we all fell asleep in our bedrolls. I believe this was the most restful night I spent since I left the states.

Early on the morning of Dec. 7, someone came around and woke us all. We were given a hot meal or more appropriately a warm breakfast of lukewarm coffee and French toast. The breakfast was the old standby, but still a lot better than K rations. As soon as we were rushed through the chow line, we were given two K rations. We knew we were headed for trouble. The captain gave orders to put on our equipment and to move to the road and be ready to move out.

The battalion march this morning was led by A Company, with companies B, C and weapons to follow in this order. After walking for some time, each company took a different route. Our company was on the right flank of the battalion with B to our left. The battalion assignment was to protect the left flank of the second battalion by skirting the edge of the town called Mouterhouse. The 2nd battalion was assigned the job of taking the town of Mouterhouse, while we were protecting their flank.

Our route led us through the woods which we were hilly and with very rough terrain, but sparsely wooded. The path which our company followed wound around and down into a valley. In the valley was a small creek. There had been a bridge across, but this was blown up by the Germans. We managed to cross the creek by jumping from one bridge pillar to another. On the other side a path led up a steep incline. This path would have taken us directly into Mouterhouse had we taken this path. After traveling for several hundred yards we swerved off to the left in order to go up to the top of the hill which overlooked the town. At the top of the hill was a house and small barn. The path which the company was following veered off to the left of the house. It was possible for the Germans to have set up a machine gun next in the house, so Capt. Roe sent my squad up there to investigate. There were only seven of us in the squad at this time as Stevens lead the squad. While we were cautiously advancing up the hill to the house, the company took cover just in case.

As we started to advance to the house, a German burp-gun fired on the company from somewhere. We could not tell the location of the firing, but it seemed to come from the patch of woods behind the house. This woods was about a hundred yards on the other side of the house and it appeared to us that a number of foxholes were dug at the edge of the woods. The most logical way to see was from the house.

The firing did not slow our squad leader Stevens as we continued on to the house. We reached the deserted house without difficulty. On the other side of the house was a barn. Again, Stevens took the lead and he went into the barn. Fahlman was next in line and he also made the barn. Both had gone around the right side of the house in order to reach the barn. From this location we could see the town of Mouterhouse in the valley. A fence was located about 10 feet from the side of the house and on the other side was a row of small brush about 10 feet high. John Shanto followed Fahlman and I was to follow John. Shanto had made it to the far corner of the house and I was at the other when 4 high explosive shells hit the brush on the other side of the fence. The shell burst really scared the life out of both of us. We did not know what it was at first because the loud noise

and bright lights from the shell bursts surprised us. It did not take us long to get into the house after this happened.

Shanto thought it was a booby trap, which the Germans had placed in the trees. I did not believe that was the case. Later, we learned that an enemy armored car, which was located in town, spotted us as we were passing the house. The armored car fired their 20mm cannon at us as we passed the house. Stevens and Fahlman were spotted as they arrived at the house and it had taken the Germans about this time to zero in on the next men who passed this spot. We were fortunate that the brush caused the shells to explode or they would have hit the house as we passed. No one was hit by the fragments and neither were any more shells were fired at this time.

The Germans were aware that we were coming up the hill and soon a barrage of mortars came into our position. Three men in the company were injured by this barrage. I knew two of them, S/Sgt. Gontausky and Sgt. Stoyio. Gontausky was severely injured. The company was forced to stay along the path while the second squad stayed in the house and barn.

The house and barn afforded a good observation point overlooking the town and the clump of woods. We all tried to spot the point where the enemy fire originated, but with no success. Capt. Roe and several other fellows came up to us to also observe. The battalion S-1, with his radio telephone, was there too, just in case we were able to spot anything. The battalion S-1 could have relayed this information back to battalion headquarters so that artillery and mortars could have been directed into the enemy positions. The whole battalion was held up at this location. It would have been possible to advance, but the number of many casualties would have been high. Since we now had learned to use our artillery and mortars more effectively, our leaders preferred to hit the Germans with these long guns first before the infantry advanced. After such a pounding, we always suffered fewer casualties as we advanced.

After the Germans fired on us with the 20 mm shells, we all went around to the other side of the house and then on into the barn. We should have done this before, but we thought the other side was the safest route. After the squad moved into the barn, the Germans again fired at the house and barn. The shells hit the barn, but since it was made of concrete and rock, the cannon shells were not large enough to penetrate the walls. In the barn we found blankets and equipment, indicating that the Germans had slept here before. They apparently departed in a rush as we advanced to the house and barn.

We had no luck in spotting any Germans and neither was it safe to be out in the open. At one point in this affair, I sure had to laugh. One of the fellows from battalion headquarters wanted to leave the barn and return to the battalion C.P. which was located back down the hill. He asked Shanto whether it was safe to go out, as if Shanto could tell whether it was safe. Shanto told him that they had not fired on us for sometime, so he could try. This fellow took off on the run from the barn to the house and just as he passed the corner of the house, 4 more 20mm shells burst between the house and barn. He was not hit. I assume he is still running down to the bottom of the hill.

Since we were effectively pinned down in the barn and unable to spot the enemy, Capt. Roe said we would pull back down the hill and try another way. It was getting too hot for us to remain in the barn as enemy artillery and mortars shells were landing in back of us and they would soon land on the barn. We took off on the run, one at a time from the barn and back of the house and then down the hill. The whole company was proceeding down the hill in a very disorderly manner. All of us were glad to get out of this situation.

At the bottom of the hill we spread out along the path and waited for orders. Each platoon sent a couple of guards back up the hill part of the way just in case the Germans may have followed our retreat. Chadwick and I went up from our platoon. It started to rain while we were on guard and the rain continued for several hours. We were soaked to the skin as we lay on the ground. I don't know how long we stayed at this place, but it must have been for several hours as it was beginning to get dark. We hoped we could stay in a house for the night and dry out. It appeared to us that we were in for an all night rain.

Shortly before dark, the order came to move out. We were to follow the path back along the side of the hill for a short ways and here we were to dig in for the night. A and B company had followed this path while we were held up in the barn. They had run into a lot of opposition and could go no further. We were unable to go any further, so we took another route and we ran into a lot of opposition. A and B companies had more casualties than C company while they tried to advance along this route.

Just before dark we stopped for the night. The place where we were to dig our hole was located on the side of a steep embankment. Fahlman, Chadwick and I found a place where we were able to dig. The ground was rocky and it took a long time to dig the hole. Two of us would dig while the other cut pine trees and small brush. There were not enough pine trees for everybody to be able to cover their holes, so we shared. We worked

fast and by the time it was dark, we had our hole just about finished. We could not see to work anymore, so we quit. One of us had a raincoat which we threw over the top to shed water.

After we covered the hole, we crawled in for the night. The one who stood guard, sat on the edge of the hole, while the others slept. On this night, each man stood guard for two hours and then he would sleep the next four. The rain fell all night long and by morning our bedrolls were very damp. However, our clothes dried during the night as we slept in the bedrolls. We were not as miserable this morning as we were on many other mornings.

At daylight on December 8, we crawled out of our bedrolls and we ate our K rations. The clothes and bedrolls of the others were wet as they had no raincoat to put over the top of their hole to shed water. About an hour later, we received orders to get ready to move out. We were apparently going to try to come into the town from another location.

A and B company were dug-in in front of us and they took the lead. They followed the same path which we had followed the day before. The whole battalion was strung out along the path in single file. We did not go very far as the other companies soon ran into more opposition than they could handle. Since we were in reserve, we could not advance unless they moved. This stop and go movement continued throughout the day. We had nothing to do except to sit and wait while we were able to take it easy. I munched K ration crackers to pass the time and we talked among ourselves. The medics came through our positions on several occasions while on their way to pick up the wounded. We heard that one platoon was caught out in the open and the Germans dropped mortar shells among them. This platoon sustained 12 casualties on this occasion.

This day passed very slowly. By late afternoon, we received orders to go on ahead through the other companies and take the lead as the regiment continued its advance into Mouterhouse. We followed a slightly different route and we ran into no opposition. The path which we were following lead over this hill and down into a valley. The other companies were digging in as we went through their lines. Our platoon was leading the company. Each squad took a different route through the woods and down the hill. We followed a little draw which led through a small pine woods to the other side into an open field where several houses were located. We cautiously worked our way through the woods and at the edge we looked out to see what was there.

It looked safe enough from where we were located. Jones

was the first to take his squad across the field. No shots were fired. The rest of us followed across the field and over to the houses. French civilians were living in the houses. They were very surprised and glad to see us. They had not known that we were this close. The people had been hiding in the cellars because of the shelling. Just on the other side of the houses was a small lake and a road was next to the lake. Enemy mortar shells were landing on the road about two hundred yards to our front. We were not certain if the mortars were ours or theirs. The loud sound from the bursting shells kept us on edge as the sound echoed and reverberated through the valley.

The other company platoons came to the houses after we had found no Germans. We soon made ourselves at home. It was getting towards night, so our company commander telephoned the battalion C.P. to learn if we could stay here for the night. He received permission and we had a fairly safe and warm, dry place for the night.

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This concludes my daily type of memories of my combat ordeal. It was at this time, that recalling the daily combat experience became rather depressing to me. In addition, the lapse of time obscured the monotonously detailed daily activities to the point that I could only remember significant events. The significant events are covered in chapters seven through twelve.

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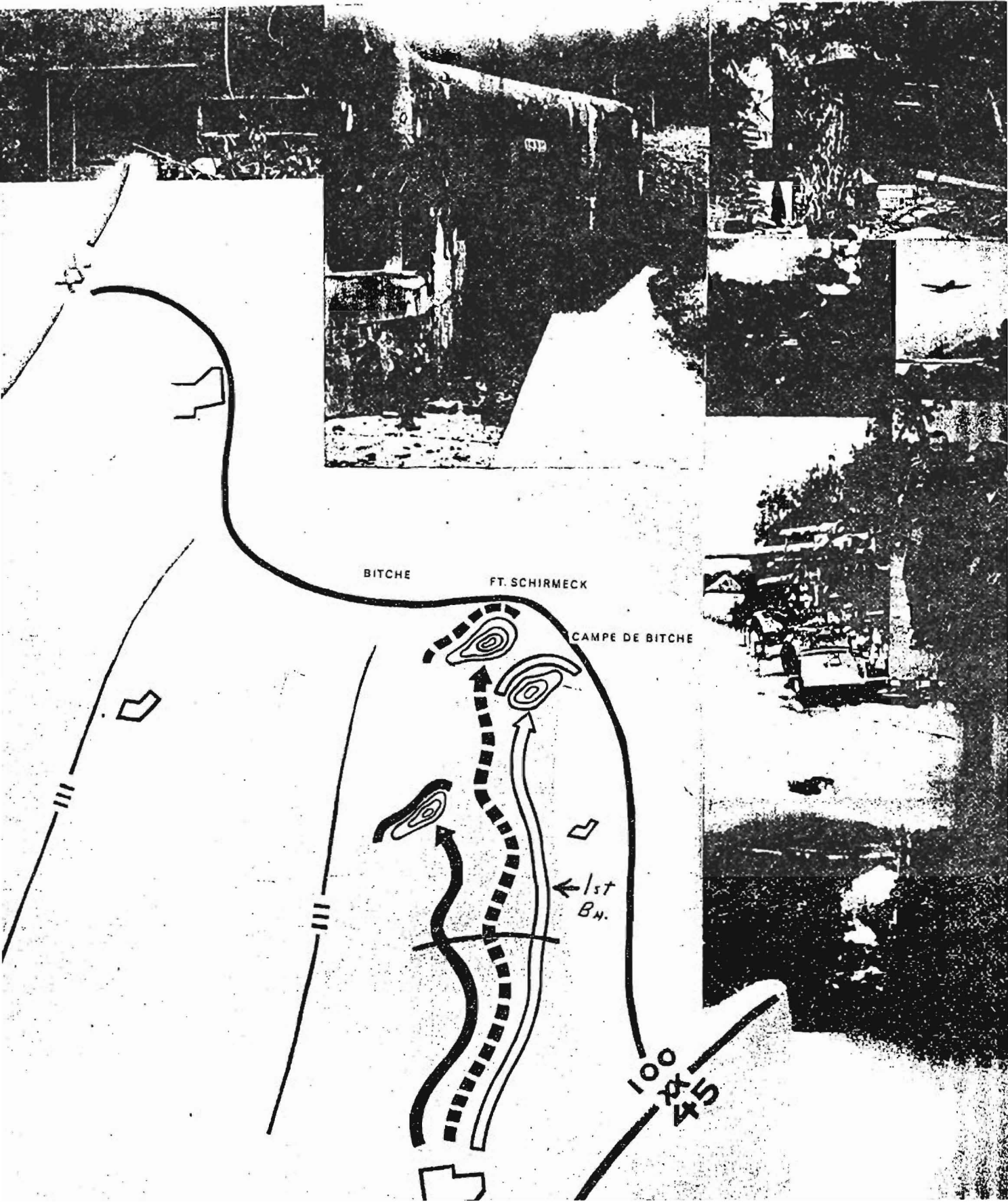
My story does not end here as we continued to fight the enemy. The **REGIMENT OF THE CENTURY** continues on pages 121 and 122 as follows, "The actual battle for Mouterhouse was over on the 8th, but things were yet popping in and around the town until the 19th. It was in our hands, but there was the surrounding terrain and other vital nearby points of resistance. We continued making gains on the 8th, but they were not easily won. The opposition had gotten its second wind and inflicted many casualties. The First Battalion moved to the northeast to secure the cross-road near the town. Company B was caught on a hill near the point of the cross-roads by artillery fire, but succeeded in getting to the road by infiltration. There were heavy casualties many of whom could not readily be evacuated before dark.

Night evacuations were made even harder because the road to the battalion aid station was heavily mined. Everyone from the Battalion Commander to the litter bearer put out unreservedly. All wounded were cared for and evacuated by midnight with the resultant saving of many lives."

As the division continued its advance toward Bitche, **THE STORY OF THE CENTURY** contains the following account on page 80 and 81.

# the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Citadel

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On December 12, "there were only two enemy actions on the 397th Inf. front, above Mouterhouse: the first was a sharp fire fight when the enemy was taken by surprise as part of the regiment took le Hochkopf, or Hill 430, the commanding peak in the area; the second was an enemy counterattack against Co. A on the crest of a hill, in which our troops drove off an enemy force twice its size. Although the enemy continued to throw in harassing mortar shells, one of which temporarily knocked out the mobile shower-unit, supplies got through unhindered and the 397th, when it had taken le Hochkopf, held positions well suited to block an enemy attack from the northeast while the division continued its northward advance toward Bitche. Our division was now in position to begin its attack to breach the Maginot Line in the Bitche area."

On December 13, 1944, Sgt. Paul K. Spurgeon, who lived a short distance from my home town was killed in action while a soldier in the 397th Infantry Regiment. The following notice was published in the county newspaper, **The Vandalia Union**.

#### **THE VANDALIA UNION, VANDALIA, ILLINOIS**

##### **KILLED IN ACTION**

Mr. and Mrs. S. M. Spurgeon, Patoka, have received word their son, Sgt. Paul K. Spurgeon, was killed in action on the Western Front, Dec. 12. He served with the 7th Army with Sgt. Lester O. Gluesenkamp of St. Peter and Pvt. Earl L. Harris of Vandalia.

After taking the town of Mouterhouse, the Division attempted to take the 16th Century Citadel Fort of "Bitche". This attempt was not successful. My own memories of the incidents which followed this attempt are rather vague. The introduction to the account on pages 137 and 138 in the **Regiment of the Century** may explain in part my lapse of memory.

"Our Regiment did not have the glory that comes with liberating a city but this was our fight and the end could not have been achieved without the contribution we made. In this campaign there are many stinking scenes we don't like to remember or talk about but someone has to know about it. No, we didn't take the town but the evidence of our heroism is documentary. Dead soldiers and dead sheep at a cross-road used as a zeroing in point; mine fields, deceitfully covered by snow, killing four and five



at a time; forest fires from phosphorous shells that burned your eyes out curling hatefully about at dusk, and the ground, frozen solid, so you couldn't dig and snow three and four feet high that covered other holes, and 88's that landed directly in a fox-hole and the GRO (Grave Registration Organization) comes back with a basket and says 'I think I've got nearly all of one of them.' No, we didn't take Bitche.

And the expression 'No Man's Land' belongs to this war too. All the towns surrounding Bitche had been abandoned and the desolation was everywhere. Ghost towns with ghosts.

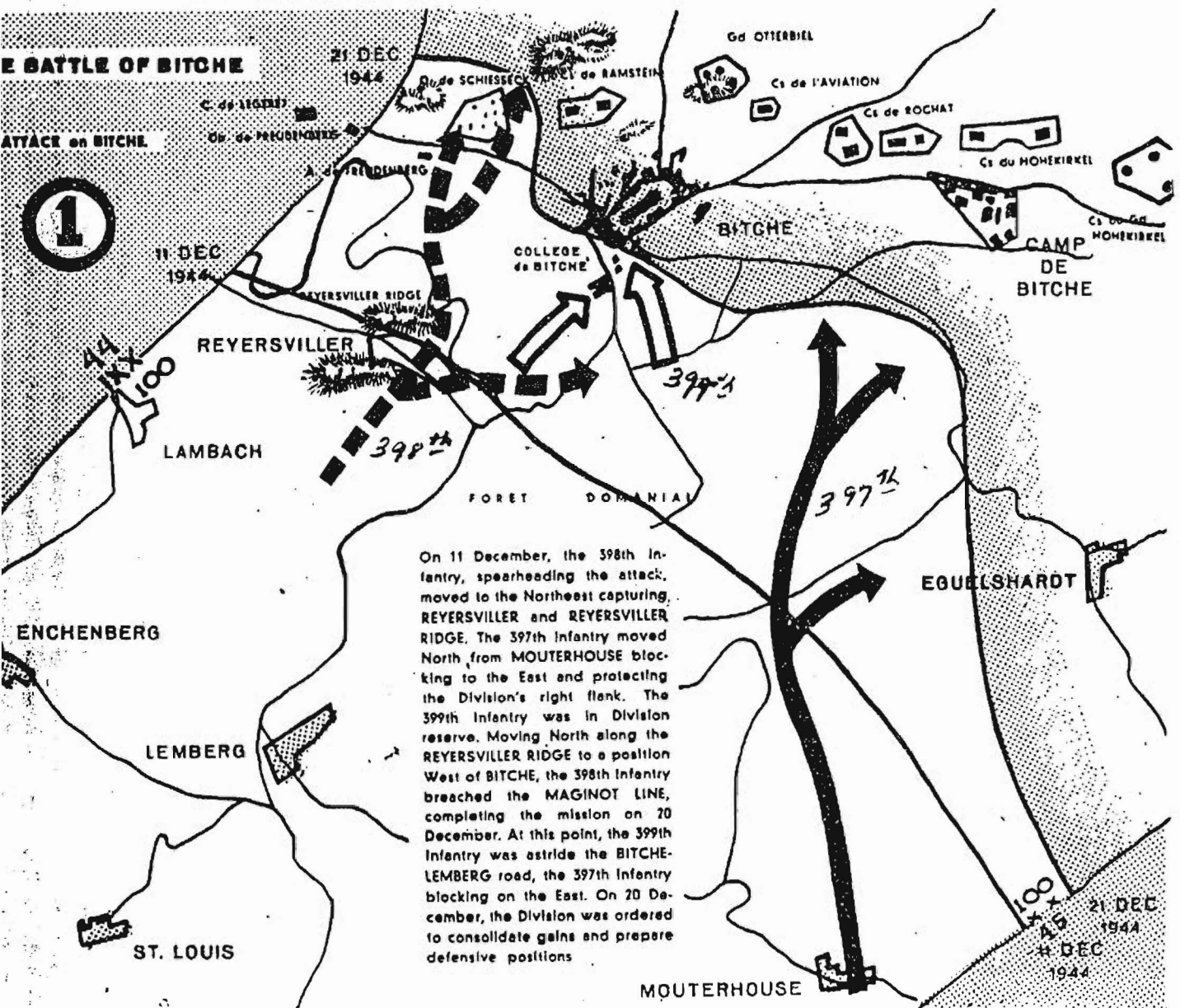
No, we didn't take Bitche but the high ground on the north and west; not Bitche, but the strongly defended outlying positions and the entrenched gun and personnel positions that threatened the advance of the main offensive. No, we didn't take Bitche, but like the mist, brush away the snow, and count the dead."

The attempt to take the Citadel of Bitche was more than the Division could accomplish in the face of an entrenched enemy and the severe winter weather which now prevailed. Coping with the extreme cold and snow on uncertain terrain made it necessary for the Division to consolidate its positions. To the foot soldier this meant digging a deep hole, covering the top with timber and dirt with only a small entrance to keep out the cold. Keeping warm and dry replaced the fear of the enemy. The extreme cold and snow dominated every aspect of our daily lives. The enemy must have the same concern as he became a minor concern at this point to the G.I. in the foxhole.

The map on the next page indicates the route and positions of the regiments during this period.

# THE BATTLE OF BITCHE

ATTACK on BITCHE



## CHAPTER 7

### THE DECEMBER WINTER EXPERIENCE

The memory of World War II, like so many events of our lives, will never be completely forgotten. After I had written the letters of my early experience, I found the particular events of each day were obscured by the seemingly endless bad days and the repetition of miserable days and nights. The usual bad days were accentuated by events which I will now try to recall, some forty-five years later. These events are those that I seem to vividly recall even today, but fortunately without anguish, regret or bad feelings.

There were occurrences which I have never disclosed until now. One such happening was the beast or brutality of man. During the heavy fighting of November, the many corpses, G.I., German and civilian were a common sight. On a number of occasions, I observed G.I.'s using the butt of their rifles to knock out the gold teeth of the corpses. The bayonets were then used to pry out the teeth or to chop off the fingers in order to remove a gold ring. In a few isolated cases this was attempted on G.I.'s, but orders were immediately given to stop this practice. It was a common occurrence to see valuables taken from the German and civilians corpses, but not from dead G.I.'s.

The weather in the early part of December was colder and even more miserable than November. Snow, sleet, and rain were quite common. Sometime during this period we were issued winter clothing. By this I mean boot-packs, insulated overalls and a water resistant parka reversible to white or light green. By this time I was wearing four pairs of heavy socks, long underwear, wool pants, cotton pants, plus the insulated overalls. I also wore long sleeved underwear, plus three or four shirts covered by a jacket and the parka.

At night I took off the pair of socks that I wore next to my skin and placed it inside my shirts to dry out during the night. The next morning I put on the warm dry sock which was of a softer variety than the other socks. I crawled into my sleeping bag

each night wearing all my clothes with the exception of boots and parka.

I seem to recall taking off my clothes one time during each of the months of December, January, February and March. This was usually when we were sent back from the front lines for showers and a change of clothes. The change of clean clothes consisted of a used pair of socks, underwear, pants and shirt. I put these on next to my skin and left the outer layer since this was dirtiest and probably smelled the worst.

During this winter period, our primary concern was as follows; stay warm and dry, rations and water and a deep hole with cover to keep out the elements. The Germans at this point were a minor concern because the winter elements controlled your thoughts and actions. Many G. I's had experienced frost bite. Some were returned a lot wiser, others lost their fingers or toes and never returned.

Sometime after December 8, 1944, the company was placed in what was called a reserve position away from the front lines. It was during this period that our company was stationed in several of the large pillboxes or forts of the former Maginot line. The Maginot line was constructed along the eastern border of France after World War I to prevent the Germans from ever again invading France. Subsequent events proved the folly of this thinking. By this time all the guns were destroyed and all that was left were deep concrete bunkers that were warm and dry compared to the outside. We stayed in these bunkers for several days and received a rest for the first time since November 11.

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After the severe fighting I wrote the following letter to my parents on December 10, 1944. I received your letters of November 24th and 25th today plus five other letters. In your letter of the 24th, you mentioned the town of Raon l'Etape. This was the first town that we captured. For two nights I slept in the wrecked buildings in the town. At the present, I am a long way from that town. You will probably read about my current activities in the papers several weeks from today. Do not worry about me because that will not help matters. I am here to do a job and I trust in the Lord to bring me out according to whatever is his will. When I think back to when I was small, you were always concerned that I would catch a cold if I was cold and wet. Now I am cold, wet and sleep very little, and I have not caught a cold. Maybe the outdoors agrees with me. Whenever I get wet, I try to go in an old house, build a fire and dry out. The censor does not censor your letters to me. Write everyday so I hear from you. Bye, Lester

The next day, December 11, 1944, I was able to write the following letter. This stationery is a little beat up, since I have been carrying this paper with me since I was on leave. I can not read the French on the stationery, but it appears to me to have been a gay place. (Please keep this as a souvenir) Enclosed are francs which may give you an idea of their currency. Yesterday, I received 7 letters. I forgot to mention that my watch is broke. The watch broke while on the boat. The watch is stored in my duffel bag somewhere. I am thankful that I can speak German. The ability to speak German has been helpful on many occasions. The other day I talked a German soldier into surrendering. I relieved him of his small pistol. I hope to bring the pistol home with me. I wish that you would let Grandma read my letters. I signed the payroll today for last month. Don't worry too much about me because it does not help you or me. Bye-now, Lester

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About the time we thought we might stay a long time, orders came late one afternoon to get ready to move out at 4 P.M. to relieve an outfit on the front line. By this time the snow cover was 6-10 inches deep and the ground was frozen. However, this afternoon a very warm front came in as we departed. Fog developed as the warm front hit the snow to the point that you could only see the person in front of you as you kept on walking. After dark a light rain fell. The light rain turned to snow at times, and other times into a very hard driving rain with sleet. Through all this period, we kept walking except for five minutes breaks on the hour. We continued walking until about 2 or 3 A.M. until we reached the front. By this time over half the guys had dropped out or decided the hell with this ----.

When we reached the front and talked to the guys present, we only learned that the Germans were in a certain direction and that 88's (artillery or mortar shells) came into their positions several times a day. My platoon sergeant sent my squad, (by now this was John Shanto and me) to an outpost foxhole on the other side of a hill in front of the company. We found the foxhole and relieved two happy guys. They were soaking wet, cold and miserable. We were not cold because we had been walking for some 10 hours.

We crawled into the hole and rested our aching body. Before daybreak, John and I both awoke while in our sitting position in a somewhat frozen condition. During our short rest, more rain fell and our hole filled up with ice water. By daybreak John and I decided we had to get out in order to survive the freezing cold water.

John and I returned to the company and found another dry hole, or stated another way, one that was not filled with much

water. Our dry hole soon turned into a hole filled with ice water and we had no hole for cover. By this time, John and I were in a state of shivering and shaking panic. Out of desperation, John and I decided that we had to do something about our condition. We left our lines at the front without permission and headed back a mile or so to several buildings which we could see in the distance. Since these buildings were in the supposed opposite direction of the Germans, we could hopefully build a fire and dry out. After trudging along for awhile our circulation was restored and by the time we reached the buildings we were feeling a little better. Lucky for us, troops of one of our outfits were housed in these buildings with stoves. We took off our clothes and lay them out to dry near the stoves. The troops gave us food, coffee and water while we waited. Several hours later, we put on our dry clothes and returned to the company at the front. Nobody missed our presence while we were gone. Apparently everyone was so miserable or already missing, that no one had the courage to inquire about any missing person.

After we returned, we found all of the holes were filled with water and everyone was digging a new hole with drainage at one end and away from small streams of water. By this time all the snow was gone and mud was everywhere. John and I found a new spot and dug it on the slant so that the water would run down to the low end where we would occasionally use our helmets to dip out the water. As I recall we stayed in this hole for about two weeks. During this period we received an occasional artillery shell from the Germans, but no barrages. This was the beginning of the quiet time of winter.

The most memorable event during this period occurred after the next big snow which came down the following day. During this long period at this location everybody crapped in the snow near their holes. Since the ground was frozen and the snow was used to cover the crap, nobody thought about tomorrow. The day of reckoning came near the end of our stay, when another warm and rainy period came upon us. The snow disappeared and guess what was everywhere where you stepped. Orders soon came for everyone to dig a hole and cover up all the crap. After an hour or so the place was no longer an above ground outhouse.

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It was during this period that I wrote the following letter which is dated December 16, 1944. I received two of your letters, the one was dated about two weeks ago and the other was dated about the middle of November. All my relatives write to me. I appreciate your letters in which you write what other outfits are doing as we know nothing of what is going on here or elsewhere. You probably know more about our situation than I do other than my present hole. We seldom learn of what (censored)

is going on right next to us. I am writing this letter in my foxhole. In about two weeks you should learn of my location. I learned today that I received another raise in pay since I was promoted to Sgt. plus 20% for combat pay and \$10.00 for being a combat infantryman. I believe I am receiving about \$100.00 a month at present. I hope that I can spend it someday since there is no place to buy anything in a hole. Bye, Lester

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After staying in this muddy place for sometime, we moved to a position near the town of Rimling which is located in Alsac Lorraine, a disputed piece of land between Germany and France. This land had been part of either Germany or France on and off for several centuries. This movement occurred about Christmas 1944. Nothing eventful happened to me personally at this location with the exception of the New Year's Eve attack by the Germans when they tried to break through our lines. I seem to remember receiving a hot Christmas dinner with all the trimmings. (See letter of December 28 for more details) By hot, I mean one where all the food was piled into a single messkit like plate, which by the time you sat down to eat was already cold.

I vividly recall the hole that John Shanto and I dug and stayed in for about four weeks at this location. It was a nice comfortable hole, one that was long enough for both of us to stretch out and where we could cover up the entrance to keep out the cold. We heated our C rations with sterno cans for heat and with nothing to do and no German artillery, (with the exception of time when the Germans tried to break through our lines) life seemed tolerable during this period. We received several snowfalls during this period. The ground was frozen solid. The snow seemed to be about 12 to 18 inches deep. I have no idea of the temperature, but it must have been around zero or below at times. Our rifles were difficult to operate during this period.

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This was a relative quiet period during which time I was able to write many letters. I also enjoyed a well earned four day rest between Christmas and the New Years Eve attack by the enemy.

Dear Folks and Helen,

December 20, 1944

I slept in a house last night for a change and I feel great. The floor was hard, but warm. I expect to be able to take a shower today and receive clean underwear, socks, pants and shirt to wear under my present clothes. I wrote my last letter from a foxhole in which I holed up in for a whole week. I received two packages last night, one from Aunt Leone and the other from Aunt Alma. I went to a church service a short time ago. This was my first opportunity to attend. It may not be Sunday, but I go whenever I have the opportunity. I received your letters of

December 7th and 8th. It does not take too long for your letters to arrive. So Syl is in the hospital with wounds. I hope it is not too bad. Ed Maahs is in a hospital somewhere with shrapnel wounds. If you do not hear from me for awhile, and then you receive a letter from Bob Davis, don't be surprised. He is in a different outfit and he may be able to write when I cannot. I have not seen him since we left the states. The time he was staying in a house, I was in a foxhole eating K-rations.

We receive enough food and it is usually more than we wish to carry. That is our big problem, too much weight. This is what we riflemen normally carry with us at all times. Rifle, approximately 100 rounds of ammunition, two handgrenades, trench knife, small .25 caliber automatic, steel helmet, (which I live in all the time) shovel, small axe, canteen of water with cup, first aid package, back pack with sleeping bag, two pair of socks, toilet articles, one spoon, and four or five layers of clothes on my body. I do not carry an overcoat as that is too heavy. This is a heavy load as you can see. Send me a package with some mixed nuts in your next care package and air mail envelopes. I am still okay. Keep on praying and I may come out of this in one piece. Bye, Lester

December 23, 1944 (Received January 4, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

There are only two more days till Christmas, but you sure can't tell it from my hole. I have been receiving your Christmas packages, but in the wrong atmosphere. I looks like I will spend my Christmas in this foxhole. Yesterday, I received the first package that you sent to me with the V-mail. I love those gum balls you included in the package. Next time send a fruit cake. Aunt Leone sent me a fruit cake and it was great. I received many Christmas cards from relatives and friends. Now I wished I had some cards to send. If any ask, give them my thanks. Do not send me cigarettes as I have more than I need. A couple of cigars would be nice. If you hear of some at home complaining about the lack of cigarettes, tell them I will change places. Bye, Lester

December 28, 1944 (Received Jan. 17. 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I really feel good in my present situation. I have nothing to do but sit around, write letters, eat and see movies during my rest period. Sometime ago I believe I said that I expected to be sent back for a four day rest. After being in the front and fighting for over a month and a half, I received the break I really needed. There is no point in keeping a person up at the front until he just can't go anymore.

The first thing I did when I arrived was to take a shower, shave and put on clean clothes. I feel like I am back to my old-self again. I don't have to wear my helmet, stand guard, dig



holes or worry about somebody taking a shot. Yesterday when I arrived, you probably would not have recognized me. I looked like a wild man from the West. I had not shaved or washed my hands and face for over two weeks and I was about as dirty as you could become. I did not wash during this period because of the extreme cold and we were unable to build a fire. I preferred to stay dirty rather than freeze. I have no idea of the temperature. You can probably determine the temperature from your newspaper. I hope you had a nice Christmas and did not worry too much about me. Does Helen still believe in Santa Claus? I just wished I could have been there to watch her expression.

It did not seem like Christmas over here. Part of Christmas eve I spent in a foxhole and the rest of the night I spent hiking eight miles. In the morning I slept in a wrecked house. Later on Christmas day, I spent about four hours trying to dig a foxhole in the frozen ground. When I had the hole completed we hiked another five miles to another site. Then I spent another four hours or so at night trying to dig another hole using pick and shovel. On Christmas day we did have a turkey dinner and one other meal. I was too tired to really appreciate the meal. I hope that I will never spend another Christmas like this past one.

Last night I attended a movie which I had seen about a year ago in the states. It felt good to see the states again. While at the movies, I talked to an officer from the company of Bob Davis. He told me that Bob was fine and that he was promoted to squad leader. I have been a squad leader for two weeks. I was an assistant squad leader for only one week. There are times when it is great to be a squad leader and others when it is risky. The way I look at the job, one place is about as safe as another, but with more pay. The money is of no use here, but may help someday.

I know that a lot of people at home believe that the war is about over. That is not true. When I was at home in the states reading the war news, I believed that this war already won and we were about to take Berlin. The Air Corps may be over Berlin, but we still have to get the Infantry out of the holes which is what really counts. This war may go on for some time and I will have to stay here to complete the job. I have been mighty lucky so far and I hope to keep it that way. I just pray that I will come out this war in one piece.

Tell Grandma Gluesenkamp that I am sorry that I have not written to her in a long time. I am superstitious for some reason. I will tell you why when I return home. It is nothing personal so I hope she will not feel too bad. By the time you receive this letter, I will be back in the fight again. I hate to go back again, but there are guys who need a few days rest like I received. A person can only stand so much misery. Tell Vera and Jess that I received their card. Bye, Lester

Dear Mom and Dad,

December 30, 1944

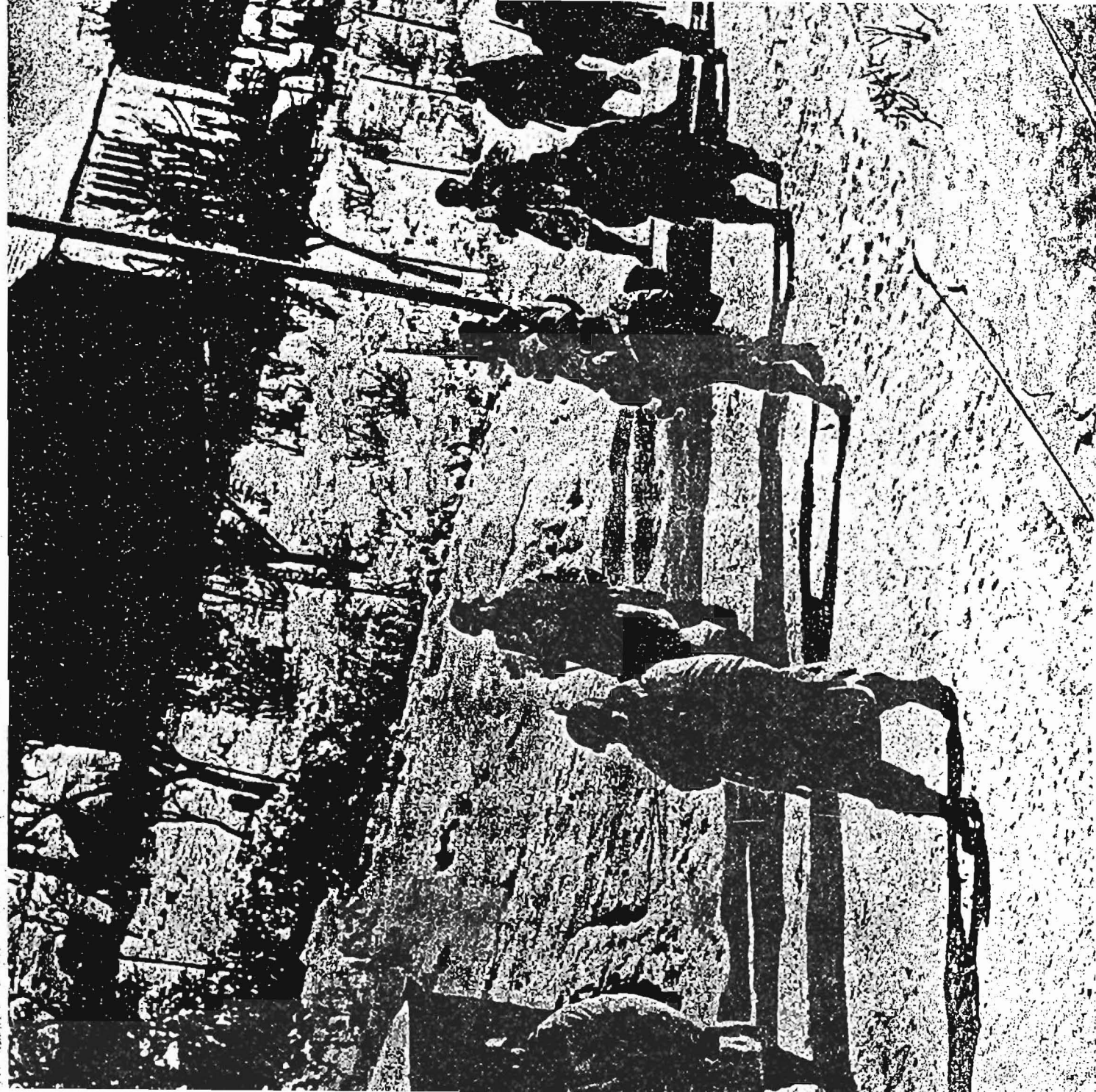
I did not write to you yesterday because I spent several hours with the dentist. My back tooth was in such bad shape that he had to pull the tooth. The day before I also saw the dentist. The pain from the tooth plus the emotional strain from the loss of so many friends was too much to allow him to pull the tooth on the first visit. (I just broke down and cried which is the real reason he did not pull the tooth. This is the first disclosure of this secret to my family. **Dated 11-21-89**) He gave me several pain shots so it did not hurt at the time. Last night my jaw ached for a short time. I saw the movie Greenwich Village. I missed the picture when it came to camp several months ago. Yesterday afternoon the Post exchange opened up and I had the chance to buy a pipe and a couple of cigars and candy bars. Everything is rationed and you have to have your ticket before you can buy anything. You only get one chance to go to the PX and buy something while you are here. In the next package you send I want some handkerchiefs. We don't get any and I don't have the chance to wash the ones that I have now. Put in a fruit cake too. They go pretty good over here. Bye, Lester

This letter was written during the day, December 31, 1944, and prior to learning that we were going out on the failed night patrol. Dear Mom, Dad, Gertrude and Helen,

Just as I expected, I am back in a foxhole again for New Year's Eve. This war does not recognize any holiday. When I returned to my outfit, I had 21 cards or letters waiting for me. It was a great feeling to receive so many from so many people. Armin Hotz sent me a nice note with his card. If I get the chance I will drop him a note. I wrote quite a few letters while I was at the rest area. In your next package send me 4 handkerchiefs and a couple of cigars. Tell Helen to be good. Lester

On December 31, 1944, our platoon was apparently assigned the task of clearing a patch of woods occupied by German soldiers. Four medium tanks were assigned to us to eliminate any German soldiers or major obstacles. This was the official story in the record. I recall being told that we were to attack the Germans in order to determine the extent of their buildup of troops to our front. We knew from the noise level at night that something big was going on with the Germans. I assumed that we were to test their strength by gauging the number of artillery and mortar shells which we attracted and from the machine gun and rifle fire which came down on us.

On the next two pages are pictures of the third battalion walking past a cemetery as they headed to the front near Rimling. The picture recalls the cold and snow that plagued us during the January period.



*"We were hauled from one front ..."*



"The third battalion left ..."

The prospect of us coming back from this night attack appeared bleak. The day before we read the accounts in the Stars and Stripes Newspaper of the desperate position of the G.I's who were fighting in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. Prior to reading the newspaper, we were dreaming of the possibility that the war was about to end and we could then go home. We should have known that our "good times" always ended up in a new disaster. It appeared to us that the Germans were going to attack us like they did in the Battle of the Bulge.

Before continuing I need to describe one of my new replacements. I was very much impressed with his fighting capabilities. He was a convicted Chicago robber, car thief, burglar and he claimed to have escaped on several occasions under gunfire. He was released from prison in Illinois by volunteering to go overseas and to fight as an infantryman after a short training period.

The attack this night was to take place after dark. We all stripped down to the bare essentials, clothing, rifles, grenades, and ammunition. Our outer clothing consisted of our white parkas and with white cloth covering our helmets since the area was white with snow. Late in the afternoon we left our positions and we walked towards the front. Several hours we joined up with the four tanks. This was a new experience for us, to attack at night and with tanks. Shortly before we began our attack (which consisted of us accompanying the tanks in the direction where the Germans were supposed to be located) our artillery and mortars saturated (shelled) the area in front of us. The noise from the exploding shells was tremendous.

As the artillery advanced in front of us, we advanced with the tanks. The tanks were noisy and we soon attracted the attention of the German artillery and mortars. German shells began to fall all around us. The artillery and mortar shells in this case were a mixture of metal and burning white phosphorous. When the phosphorous shells exploded this night, the ensuing expanding white flame of fire was frightening. One of our tanks was hit and burned. About this time my new replacement was in a state of panic. He clung to me like a monkey, cried like a baby and threw away his rifle in the process. My ability to do anything at this point was severely hampered.

I seem to recall going a short distance forward when we came up to one of the lead tanks which was stuck in a frozen creek. The cleats of the tank could not penetrate the frozen ground of the steep bank of the creek. The loud noise from the engine of the stuck tank attracted the attention of the German artillery observers and soon the Germans concentrated their shelling on



this site. The officer in charge apparently concluded that our task was now hopeless and he ordered us to retreat to our starting point. The tank was disabled by the tank crew and abandoned. We all were very glad to get out of this predicament. On the way back my heroic replacement continued to cling to me while pleading with me to not leave him. The last I heard, my replacement was sent back to the states for analysis and discharge. To my knowledge no rifles were fired and neither did the tanks fire a shell. I never did learn or care to inquire as to the extent of our casualties from this debacle.

The following is the account description on page 97 in the book which tells the exploits of the **100th Infantry Division**. Any resemblance to the facts is conjecture. "A platoon of Co. C 397th, accompanied by four medium tanks and preceded by high explosive and smoke shells from the artillery, attacked across open ground to the hill east of Rimling and cleared the patch of woods, taking 19 PWs and finding 12 dead."

The next day the Germans attacked in force. They tried to break through our lines similar to what happened in the Battle of the Bulge. Apparently their plan was to go through us and attempt to encircle a large area and then join up with the German troops fighting in the Battle of the Bulge. At the time we had no idea of what we were facing. Fortunately for our company, the Germans attacked the area about a mile to our left at E company of the 2nd battalion. While the Germans were attacking to our left, our position was shelled relentlessly. The artillery shelling continued for many hours. No shells hit any holes, and to my knowledge, no one was injured. Other than being shook up, we soon were back to calm again.

While all this shelling was going on, we did not learn of the attack by the enemy on our 2nd Battalion to our left. The Germans attacked in force with tanks at the E Company area and E Company had to withdraw as best they could. According to the map in the book, **The Story of the Century**, E Company took up positions near our location. According to the account, 56 enemy were either killed or captured in one small area about a mile behind our positions. Fortunately for all of us, enough fire power was leveled against the Germans, and they were forced to withdraw. According to the account in the book, **The 397th Infantry Regiment**, 237 of the enemy were captured by the regiment while fighting in the Rimling area. Many G.I.'s were also captured during this period. The extent of the total casualties on both sides were impossible to calculate.

The next two pages present a schematic drawing of the action on New Years Eve.

92

Front lines before counter-attack

HILL 375

RIMLING

Bettviller

Petit Rederching

Hottviller

Holbach

Bining

Gulsberg

Reyersviller

Front lines before counter-attack

Mouterhouse

100

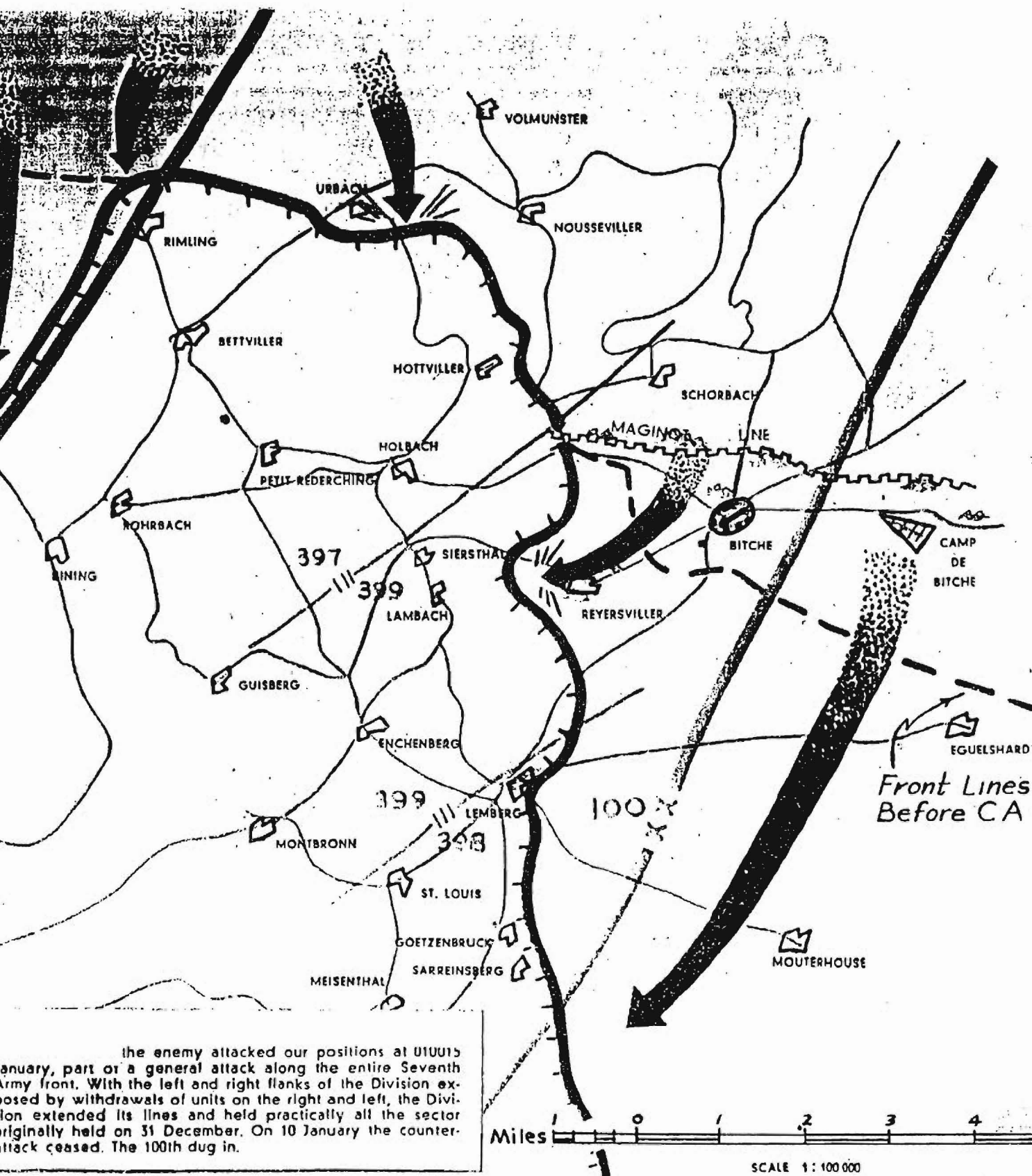
**THE FOE!**  
*They come! They come!*

LEGEND

- 1st Battalion
- 2nd Battalion
- 3rd Battalion

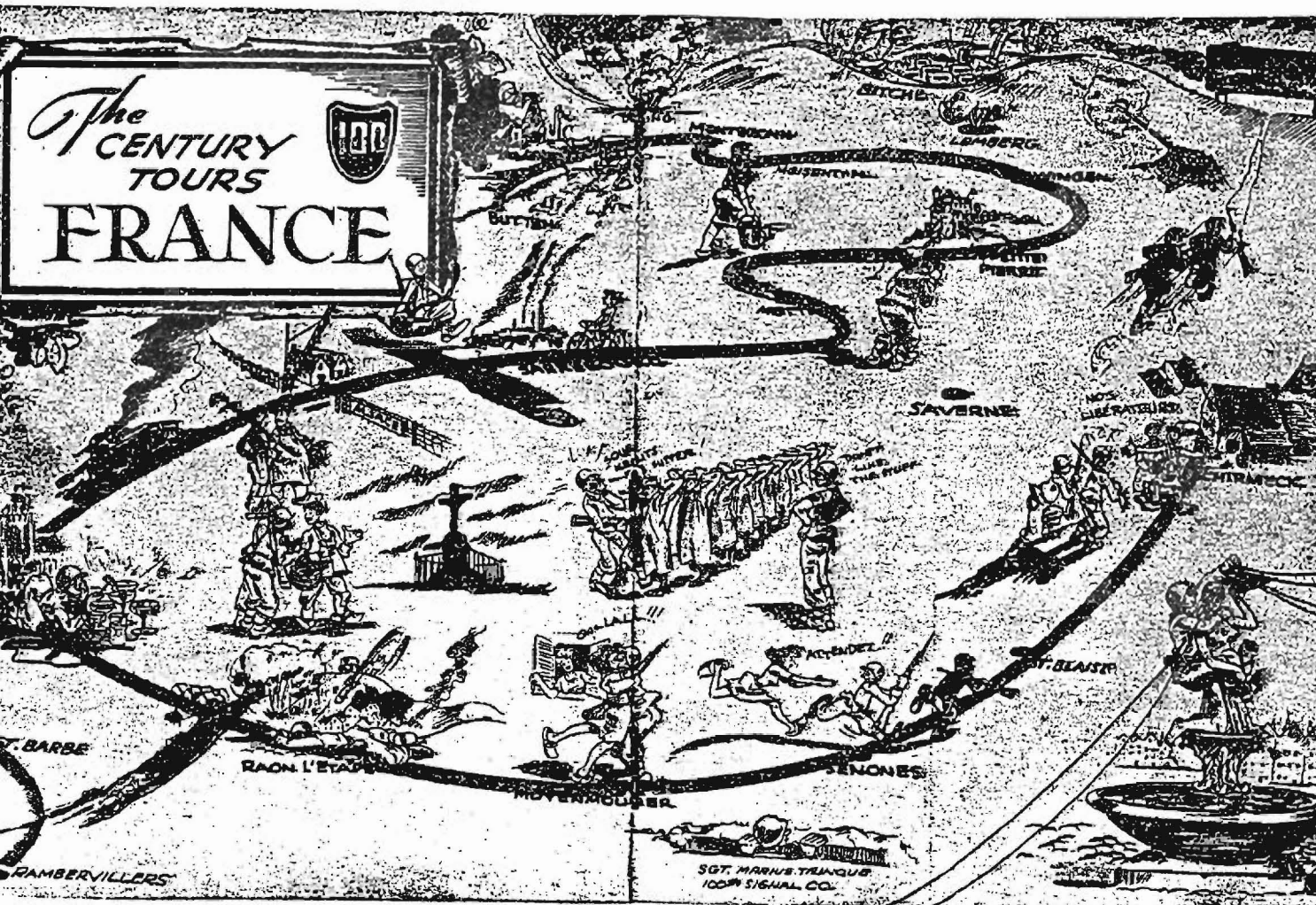
SCALE: 1/100,000

*G. Barbier*





The New Years Eve action was vividly described in the pamphlet **THE CENTURY TOURS FRANCE** on pages 19 and 20.



"The week of relaxation was abruptly ended at 0015 New Year's Day when the German counter-offensive crashed the Seventh Army front with the brunt aimed directly at the 100th Div. sector.

Third Bn. 397th, was the first to be hit. On the division's left flank near Rimling, the battalion repulsed the thrusts. The 100th's entire right flank was exposed when the 117th Recon Sqdn., holding a portion of the front to the east, was hit by powerful German forces. Unable to hold against the onslaught, the squadron dropped back several thousand yards.

On the same flank, the 399th was faced with the serious

problem of maintaining a line to the front and extending another to the right to prevent Krauts from infiltrating into regimental and division road areas. By skillful maneuvering of troops and tenacious fighting on the part of its forward elements, Powderhorn men stretched their front into an L-shaped line which, although dangerously thin, held off repeated German stabs. The 141st Inf., 36th Div., was attached to the 100th Jan., 2 and put into position to help the 399th stem the tide at the Bitche salient.

Although activity on the front quieted down for several days after the German had established their spearhead at Bitche, the attack was not over. Germans hit 2nd Bn., 397th, at Rimling Jan. 8, and a terrific two-day struggle for the town began. 2nd. Bn., skillfully veiling its operation, withdrew just south of Rimling. A Nazi attack on the town, 20 minutes after the troops had pulled back, was greeted by an artillery barrage.

Net result of the 100th's defense during the entire counter-attack was that it was the only division on the entire Seventh Army front to hold its original ground. The enemy had come from two directions, Bitche on the right and Rimling on the left--and had come with his fullest force, but the Century held its ground. When the Nazi offensive had ended, the 100th Div. sector protruded ahead of all the rest of the Army line."

The first week of January was a very cold period of waiting. During the day and during the night, we waited for the next German artillery shells to be directed to our exposed holes out in the snow covered field. The whine of the artillery shells fragments seemed to buzz around us like flies. No shells actually hit any of our foxholes as I recall. At night our eyes were always looking for the Germans to try another sneak attack. Although our immediate area was not directly attacked, the chatter of machine guns, burp-guns, rifle fire, grenades, bazookas and the noise of tanks, made us aware that the Germans were attacking our guys on the left near Rimling. If we had known of their precarious position and our being cut off and possibly captured had they withdrawn, I know we would have been concerned. John and I were glad to have a deep well covered hole and we were not ordered to attack or move out. Daylight was a time for rest and sleep. The night was for peering out over the snow covered ground as we looked for signs of enemy movement. The night shadows seemed to move at first only to remain stationary as the night progressed. Daylight was greeted with a sense of relief.

After this attack, the memory of the past soon faded into a sleeping period of rest. We stayed in our holes without moving about till the end of January. Our daily lives consisted of two hours on watch, and two hours of sack time. Sack time was now described by the very thoughtful phrase "fart sack." While on

watch, we heated our C ration cans with cans of sterno for heat. We were unable to build fires because of our exposed position and because there was no wood. The snow was knee deep and any movement was difficult.

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It was during intervals of this period that I wrote the following letters.

January 2, 1945 (Received January 24, 1945)

Dear Folks,

The last letter I received from your was dated December 18. I believe V-mail arrives sooner than air-mail. Do not send me more blank V-mail at this time as I have enough for two weeks. I could use a book of air-mail stamps. Yesterday, I received the letter from Syl inquiring about his friend. His friend and I were transferred to this company at the same time, but he has since left since he was injured. I remember the occasion when he was hit since I was only a few feet away at the time. I believe his hometown was near Moline, Il.

I am writing this letter outside of my foxhole for a change. You may wonder how we can sleep at night in the cold. We do not take off any clothes at night. We cover our sleeping bag with a couple of blankets and coddle with a buddy for warmth.

I know Wayne Stokes outfit from his address. They have been through more than we have had thrown at us so far. Don't get the idea that I can see him anytime. We are not issued passes and it is very risky to go anywhere around here.

Yesterday, we had turkey and dressing. I ate too much turkey. My stomach is not used to eating quantity. The cooks went to a lot of trouble to feed us. Bye, Lester

January 4, 1945 (Received January 22, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I had the urge to write a letter this morning. I am still in my usual foxhole. It appears that I will be out in the cold all winter. I believe I asked for handkerchiefs the other day. Please send two inexpensive handkerchiefs in all your packages from now on. I wish I could tell you of my activities the past few days. We have been receiving hot food for several days for a change. The meals are hot when first piled in our mess kit pan, but are cold by the time we reach our holes and we can sit down to eat. When I was in the states, I had heard or read that the Germans were running short of munitions. During the past few days, I learned that this was another false rumor. They are not throwing rocks at us, but they are throwing artillery shells by the hundreds at our location. I would like to see the guy over here in our hole and watch him eat his own words. Bye, Lester

January 5, 1945 (Received January 26, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I have not had any mail for several days. It seems I receive a stack of mail one day, and none on the other days. When I came back from my rest, I found 21 letters waiting for me. I wish the war would end so we could get out of the cold. It is getting on my nerves to be out in the cold all the time and at the same time to have someone shooting at you all the time. It appears to me that this war will go on for sometime. Guy is a lucky person to have been able to stay in the states. I never really appreciated home and the states, but I do now. I am looking forward to a quiet peaceful life after this war is over. I returned from my rest just in time to spend New Years eve in my foxhole. I did not sleep that night or the following night. If you want to know why, check the papers. These -----do not know when to quit. Bye for now, Lester

January 7, 1945 (Received January 26, 1945)

Dear Folks,

Today is Sunday, but here it is just like any other day in my foxhole. I received your letter of December 21 in which you stated that you read in the papers about our present location. I was in the area for sometime and I am still near that location. We seem to move around, but we never stay in one location for any length of time. In almost every letter I write I think of something I want you to send me. This time I want a small calendar which I can put in my billfold. You probably got some in the bank. The only way I can keep track of the date is to ask someone. Another thing that I want is a pipe. I have one now, but it will probably be broken before you send me a new one. Get a good one if you can locate one. You can count that as a Christmas present. You did not write what Helen and Gertrude received for Christmas? There isn't much to write about today. Bye, Lester

January 9, 1945 (Received January 25, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I wrote you a letter on the 7th, but I forgot to give the letter to the lieutenant till today for his censorship. I was too busy doing other things the last two days. In one of your recent letters, you mentioned that Ed Soldner was a very fortunate. I just hope that I can be so fortunate. These close calls are becoming more frequent and I may not be so fortunate all the time. Day after day the shelling is close, but not close enough. I know that my nerves are not what they used to be. Sometimes I just feel like I want to sit down and have a good cry. I feel better tonight and my morale has perked up as we received our PX ration. I received two cans of beer, a chocolate bar, cookies and one cigar. We seldom see these goodies. The beer sure

Dear Friends, Mt. Vernon, Il. January 10, 1945  
My brother Pvt. Lloyd Jester was reported missing in action in France December 16. We received the telegram January 4, 1945. Then on January 8, we received word that he was killed in action on the same date, December 16. He was in the 397th Infantry of the 100th Infantry Division, the same outfit as your son. Was your son reported missing? We would appreciate his serial number and address so that we could write to him and learn more about the circumstances surrounding Lloyd's death. I hope that you have better news about your boy. Sincerely, Mrs. Leroy Rueffer

Dear Mrs. Rueffer, January 12, 1945

I have your letter of January 10th regarding your brother, Pvt. Lloyd Jester. My wife and I would like to extend our deepest sympathy to you and your parents in the loss of your brother and their son. We have not heard from our boy since December 23rd. However, my sister who lives in Chester, Il. received a letter from him dated December 29, 1944. He was having a rest at that time, but expected to go back to the front about January 1st. I will write to our son today and ask him to inquire about your son. You can write to our son at the following address.----- I am curious as to how you learned that our son was a member of the 397th Infantry Regiment? Very truly,  
O.J. Gluesenkamp

## CHAPTER 8

### THE JANUARY FREEZE

The last major attack on our lines by the Germans occurred on or about January 8, 1945. After these nightmares, we settled down into defensive positions. We would occasionally move to a new location or relieve an outfit as the lines were continually adjusted to fit the perceived enemy threat. Digging new holes was a major undertaking with pick and shovel. On more than one occasion the engineers helped us by blasting the frozen ground at the spots where we were to dig our holes. The pictures below depict the situation at the time.







*With the ground frozen hard as flint, digging in for the expected counterattack became a major problem.*

The next two months (January 11 through March 15) were relatively quiet. We received an occasional shelling. There were days when no shelling could be heard by either side. It was during this period that I was able to write many letters. The letters which follow describe some of our thoughts and feelings during this period.

January 14, 1945

(Received January 2, 1945)

Dear Folks,

Yesterday, I received a wonderful present and I feel great today. The present was the Vandalia Union, The Farina News, and five letters. I noticed that a number of boys from the Vandalia area were reported as injured during the past few days. I have been very lucky so far, and I hope to keep it that way. This war can't end too soon to suit me. I read in the paper where the 6th War Loan subscription went over the top. It is time for some people to wake up to the fact that this war is still raging. I was happy to learn that you received one of my letters on Christmas Day, and at the same time you did not learn of my miserable day till later. The hotels which I stayed while on rest were nothing but ordinary rooms with no beds. The hotels were partially destroyed by artillery shells and small bombs. We are having difficulty digging holes in the frozen ground. The Engineers helped us yesterday by blasting the snow and frozen ground.

If I am fortunate to get back home, I believe I could go quail hunting in any kind of weather. We are sure having a cold and rough life at the present time. When I was in high school I never dreamed that I could possibly be over here. The history books made the wars of the past look like they were a great event. I guess the writers never went to the front. The other day I was six stories below the top of the ground in one of the forts of the Maginot Line. Bye, Lester

January 17, 1945 (Received February 11, 1945)

Dear Folks,

I am writing this letter on regular stationery and will send it air-mail. You can let me know how long it takes to reach you. This letter will use my last air-mail stamp. Enclosed is a cartoon by **Bill Mauldin** as published in the Stars and Strips.

The cartoon by Bill Mauldin depicts a couple of G.I.'s wrapping handgrenades in the form of snowballs and graphically illustrates the freezing snowy conditions and our dejected outlook under these miserable conditions.

**UP FRONT**

**Bill Mauldin**





That is about the way we look and feel. I took a shower this morning in an old barn by a stove. The water was hot, but you seemed to freeze as soon as you left the shower. We were issued a clean suit of underwear, woolen pants and shirt plus socks. At the present time we are in reserve in one of the forts of the Maginot Line. At least I have a place that is warm and dry. I wish I knew the reason we are not receiving mail. This past week I received two letters whereas I usually received two each day, one from you and one from the relatives or friends. I would like for you to buy me a box of chocolates if they can be found and send them to me. Ed Maahs came over to see me after he returned from the hospital. He was gone for 33 days. Bye, Lester

January 23, 1945 (Received February 10, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I attempted to write this letter outside of my hole by the fire, but I had to return to my hole because the wind was too strong to write on my leg. I finally received the package with the gloves. I was hoping for warm leather gloves rather than the thin pair of cotton gloves. I wrote my last letter from a nice warm fort, but like before, all good things come to an end. Since then I believe I can state that I spent the most miserable day and night of the whole war. We hiked all night through a blizzard consisting of snow, sleet and rain. After reaching our destination we took a position in a foxhole filled with a couple of inches ice water. I sat on my helmet and promptly fell asleep. When I awoke, I found that I was sitting in water because the water had risen over my helmet. I was unbelievably cold. I still do not understand why a person does not get sick with pneumonia or something else from being so wet and cold. If I were at home, I am certain I would come down with something. Please send a fruit cake in your next package. I am enclosing a page from the Stars and Stripes which contains an article about a soldier from the 398th Infantry Regiment. Yesterday, we learned that our division was given credit for stopping the German attack in our sector on New Years. Apparently the Germans tried to do the same here as they did in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. The war news is beginning to look like the end is not too far in the future. Bye, Lester

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A series of letters between Dad and the parents of James R. DePauw, a member of Co. F. 397th Infantry Regiment

January 24, 1945

Mr. C. D. Depauw, 412 Rockwell St. Kewanee, Il.

Dear Folks,

I noticed the name of your son in a published list of the men from Illinois with the 397th Infantry Regiment, and I have a

boy with Company C of the same Regiment. Just recently we had a boy from this town who was wounded and was in a hospital in England and while there this boy became acquainted with another wounded soldier from the 397th Regiment and the boy from this town was not allowed to write the name of the wounded soldier to his folks, however, the name was given to our boy. This morning we received a letter from our boy telling that he knew this soldier of the 397th very well and was within a few feet of him when he was hit. I am trying to trace the name of this boy. I would appreciate if you would write me the address of your boy and also if your son is still all right. Very truly yours, O.J. Gluesenkamp

January 25, 1945

Dear Mr. Gluesenkamp,

I am in receipt of your letter of January 24, 1945 addressed to the parents of Pfc. James R. De Pauw. The last letter we received from him was dated January 5, 1945 and we received it on Jan. 18, 1945.

Yesterday we received a telegram from the War Department that he was missing in action as of January 9th. which was four days after he wrote the letter we received on the 18th. We have hopes that we may receive another letter from him as he was in the habit of writing about every three or four days.

I hope that this is the information which you desire and we would very much appreciate any information you might be able to obtain about him. His last address as shown on his letter is----- . Yours very truly, C.D. De Pauw

February 26, 1945

Mr. C.D. De Pauw,

We just received a letter from our boy who is a member of Co. C. 397th Infantry, and I thought you may be interested in the following excerpts from his letter, as you wrote me on January 25th that your son was missing in action and we hope that you have had some better news by this time.

"I didn't know the Depauw boy, but I know very well where he was at the time. I sent you a clipping about our outfit sometime ago and he was there at the time. Thirty-eight (captured) out of hundred and twenty is pretty bad."

Our boy sent us the following clipping: "The 100th Division in the area of Rimling, successfully repulsed repeated enemy attempts to penetrate its lines. Your great accomplishments, General Devers said forced the enemy to give up the offensive action on your front. Inflicting great losses to strong elements of three divisions, you have successfully protected an important sector in the Hardt Mountains. When the force of the powerful

enemy drive carried him into a salient in the Bitche area--prompt extension of your lines blocked his advance, a splendid example of skillful maneuver."

If at a later date I can give you any more information I shall be glad to do so. Very truly yours, O.J. Gluesenkamp

May 8, 1945 Dear Mr. De Pauw,

I have your letter of May 5th with the wondrous news that your son had been liberated from a German prison camp. It makes us feel happy to know that your boy will be returned to you. We are glad that both of our boys made it and we wish to thank you for letting us know that your boy has been liberated.

Very truly yours, O.J. Gluesenkamp

**Pfc. James R. De Pauw Is Liberated By Allies**  
 Armies in Germany, on April 13. The happy news was to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. D. De Pauw, 412 Rockwood, Friday afternoon in a letter which their son had on April 18 from a hospital in France.

The letter brought to a anxious months of waiting any word of "J. R." since arrival of a War Department telegram stating that he had been reported missing in action as of Jan. 2. Outside of a letter telling where Pfc. De Pauw was last seen, his parents had had no word as to his fate.

Pfc. De Pauw, employed in The Star-Courier's circulation department prior to entering service, describes his capture as follows: "Was captured Jan. 25th; arrived at Stalag IX B, No. 304 Jan. 18th; captured on Feb. 25 to a camp near Paris which I was told was Stalag IX B."

**Pfc. James R. De Pauw Is Liberated By Allies**

They know what freedom means. They are in the hospital here, where there is a good food situation. We are looking to the states. At any time I will return home some day. That is more positive now than it has been for the past six months. So disregarding the mythical term 'lucky', God has been generous with me."

Pfc. De Pauw writes that upon his liberation he was flown from an evacuation hospital in Germany to a general hospital in France. He is receiving treatment for a severe case of malnutrition but states "I assure you I am feeling fine, and with the excellent chow they have at these hospitals I will soon have back all the weight I lost and more. So far as my health is concerned I am not so worried about."

Spring here everything is new and the birds are singing. It's a wonderful time of year to become a free man, of course it would be wonderful anytime, though. It's good to be back with the G. I.'s under G. I. care and, of course, the inevitable red tape. Was shocked on my bed last night. First time since leaving. It was--and there we had only one sheet--here two. Had three bottles and three scrambled eggs for breakfast."

January 27, 1945 (Received February 14, 1945)

Dear Folks,

I received your letters of January 3, 4 and 6 this morning. Your letters were long overdue. We have been receiving the regular mail, but for some reason the quicker V-mail is not arriving. I will try to learn what I can as to the circumstances surrounding the death of the boy from Patoka who was in our outfit. I have been very busy this past week patrolling our outposts, doing guard duty and just trying to keep warm. I have had very little sleep or rest all week. I was glad to know that you learned of the area where we had been fighting. I was one of the first ones that arrived in Seonnes. The people really gave us a welcome. I received your sample of peanuts. Bye, Lester

January 28, 1945 (Received February 17, 1945)

Dear Mom, Dad and Sis,

I wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon of Patoka, Il. that I would try to learn what I could about the circumstances surrounding the death of their son in combat. However, it may be some time before I can learn anything, because I can only do that when the war is over. I want to thank you for sending me the small sample of peanuts. However my buddies wished you had included more since we share our goodies. I would like for you to try to purchase a watch with a luminous dial. Either pocket or wrist will do so that we can tell the time at night for changing the guard duties. It was good that you did not know where I was when we first went into combat. If you had known, I believe you would have worried a lot more. Now you see how thankful I am to still be around. It is still tough going, but not as tough as last November.

What a day we are having. If it is not snow, it is sleet or rain. All the rain seems to flow into our holes and we keep on bailing like we are on a sinking ship. We are wet most of the time. We have been eating K and C rations for the past three weeks. I hope the Russians take Berlin in a few days. They can't get there too fast as far as I am concerned. Bye, Lester

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## CHAPTER 9

### THE LULL BEFORE THE FINAL PUSH-COOKIE TIME

About February 1, 1945, we were sent back for a shower and change of clothing. I seem to recall on this momentous occasion that the water was hot, but the air was freezing. After this shivering experience, we were sent to a new location on the front. Our new foxhole position was located in a valley overlooking a devastated town. The Germans were supposed to be on the other side of the town.

There were two notable events which occurred during our long stay in this hole. Sometime towards the end of February, somebody got the bright idea of sending some of us out on night patrol to take German soldiers as prisoners. Apparently a patrol was routinely sent out each night on a rotating basis from one of the companies to see if the Germans were still in front of us and/or to capture prisoners. In late February our company was selected to send out a patrol. The officer in charge of our platoon was now 2nd Lt. Wm. Hurley of New York City, a veteran sergeant who received a battlefield commission without officer training. Bill had visions of being the first target if the Germans learned of his officer rank, so we called him Bill.

Whenever an assignment of this nature came along, the surviving veterans were always chosen for this glorious detail. We were very fortunate in having a practical officer now in charge of our platoon. I had by now been promoted to the rank of S\Sgt., second sergeant in command of what was left of our platoon. Bill selected several men including myself to go out on this patrol.

After Bill received his orders from Battalion, he returned to the company C. P. with a map which outlined the scope of our patrol. Before dark we prepared ourselves by stripping down to the bare essentials; enough clothing to keep warm as we walked, rifles, grenades and ammunition. By this time the snow had melted and the ground was dark, dreary and muddy. We blacked our faces and removed anything that would make a sound. This preparation was done in a very elaborate style and would have im-

pressed the higher ups. We were thoroughly indoctrinated with the position of the Germans and our own troops. The password for the night was rehearsed many times. By this time we were confident of our mission. After dark, Bill led us out on patrol. Shortly after we were out of hearing distance from our company area, Bill halted the patrol.

Bill explained his plan to the patrol of about eight veterans. We were going to stay here at this location for about four hours and then return to our company lines. He told us that we had been through enough already and he was not about to get his ass shot off in a dumb act like a night patrol where your chances of coming back were almost zero. We now rehearsed a unanimous story of how we scouted out in front for several hours as outlined on the map, but we found no Germans. About four hours later, after an uneasy rest, we returned to our foxholes. He reported to Battalion C. P. as previously planned and the rest of us slept the balance of the night. Needless to say, we were wiser for this enlightening experience.

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A series of letters during the lull of February 1945

February 1, 1945 (Received February 17, 1945)

Dear Folks,

Here it is a new month again. The time sure seems to go by in a hurry. I wrote you a letter several days ago and I asked for a watch. Send it by first class mail so that I will get it sooner. I was unable to mail the letter with the request until now, so you may receive both letters at the same time. At the present time I am holed up in the cellar of an old house, but I expect to be back in my foxhole shortly. The snow has begun to thaw and I can expect to find my hole filling with water. If it is not snow and cold, it is more rain. Either way, our life is miserable. I am still waiting for the packages that you sent several weeks ago. Those toll house cookies taste good even before they are received. If you do not feel like baking the cookies, a fruit cake would be fine. The cookies and fruit cakes keep well in this weather. I am still okay and well. Tell Helen to be a good girl. Bye, Lester

February 1, 1945

Dear Velva and Joe, (A cousin whose husband was in service)

Well, so you finally got settled down long enough to have an address to write too. I thought maybe you would end up by Glenna someplace. We have part of the family in Texas now, you, Uncle Harry and aunt Amelia and Web's brother. What changes are always happening. I got your letter today along with about five others. I've been answering letters all afternoon since I'm in a dry cellar of an old house. It is raining outside now and the snow

has started to melt. What a mess to be out in. Thanks for the envelopes. I was going to send you an air mail letter, but I had no paper. Always something wrong. One time I have paper and then no envelopes. Now it's the other way around. One of these days now I expect to go back and take a shower and clean up. Poor Joe. It must have been tough not to have a change of underwear in four days. I haven't washed, shaved or changes underwear in over two weeks. Someday its going to be different. Bye, Lester

February 3, 1945

(Received February 17, 1945)

Dear Folks,

Boy, I sure feel good today. I got one of the packages with the cookies and three candy bars. Yesterday, I went back and washed, shaved and put on some clean dry socks. Now it is raining out, but my hole is nice and dry. Is it ever so nice to be in a dry hole when it is raining and eat cookies from home. I got two Vandalia Leader's this morning from the 21st and 28th of December. It doesn't take too long for them to get here. Yesterday, I got paid \$65 through the P.T.A. again and your should get it soon. With part of it I want you to buy a \$50 war bond and put the rest in my checking account. Beginning with this month you should receive a class E allotment of \$65 a month. The \$25 class E allotment never was put though so don't worry about not getting it. I saw in the paper where Edwin Heinrichs came home after 32 months in the Pacific. That's too long for anybody. I will close for now. Bye, Lester

February 4, 1945

(Received March 1, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

We sure are having some bad weather. First its snow and now its rain and mud. It's always something to make it miserable for you. Now if I was home it wouldn't be bad at all since I have a place to come in and dry off. Several days ago I was paid and I sent it all home. I don't have any place to spend money where I am. Boy do we have a time now since the snow has started to melt. A hole will fill up with water in no time at all. Today is Sunday again, but it is just like any other day over here. I won't get to go to church today where I am. I got two of your letters this morning. Sometime's some of the letters come through in two weeks and then some take three. I usually get one old letter and one not so old. I am enclosing the Combat Infantryman's badge in this letter. It doesn't do me any good to wear it over here. You can keep it for me until I get back. I think it looks pretty good myself. I've gotten paid \$10 a month extra since December 1 for being in combat. It isn't much for what we have to go through, but it helps anyway. Christmas cards are still coming through. Most of them that I get now are dated around the middle of December. It still took them a long time to

get here. I forgot to mention before that I told Bill New to write his mother so she in turn could write to you. He was in my squad and we were in the same hole together. (Bill was hit by shrapnel) Right now he is in a rest camp. Velva sent me these envelopes the other day and I borrowed this paper from another guy to write on. If I have envelopes, I usually don't have paper. I still have some of the V-mail you sent me some time ago. The package I got yesterday is almost gone. That was okay to put those peanuts and candy in between the cookies to fill up the space. I sent you a clipping out of the paper sometime ago. I'm still in the vicinity. I will have to close for today. Don't worry about me. Bye now, Lester

This note written on the back of a letter that I sent to my Aunt, who in turn sent the letter to my folks.

Dear Ella, (My mother) Friday February 23, 1945

Received this letter from Lester this A.M. so I am forwarding it to you. I also received your letter this morning. I often wish Lester would request something from me more often. I wrote and told him it was his own bad luck if he didn't. Good thing he has so many to write to. It keeps his time more occupied if he's in his foxhole and something to think about. We are all well. From, Lydia

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To the Parents of Pfc. Ralph W. Bowen 307 S. Congress St. Polo, Il.

January 24, 1945

Dear Folks,

I noticed the name of your son in a published list of men from Illinois with the 397th Infantry Regiment, and I have a boy with Company C of the same Regiment. Just recently we had a boy from this who was wounded and was in a hospital in England. While there this boy became acquainted with another wounded soldier from the 397th Regiment and the boy from this town was not allowed to write the name of the wounded soldier to his folks, however, the name was given to our boy. This morning we received a letter from our boy telling us that he knew this wounded soldier of the 397th very well and was within a few feet of him when he was hit. I am trying to trace the name of this boy. I would appreciate if you would write me the address of your boy and also if your son is still all right. Very truly yours, O. J. Gluesenkamp

My Dear Friend; (My dad)

Palo, Il. February 7, 1945

Your letter was mislaid here at home and I couldn't remember your name, but did the town. At last I found it. I should have answered it at once but there was quite a bit of excitement when I came home for supper, and failed to do so. Our boy is in the C



Company - 397th Infantry. His serial number is 36012846 APO 447 C/O Postmaster New York, N.Y. We haven't heard from him since January 5th last. He was in a rest camp then. Had hoped we would hear from him so I could tell you if I had to send it in care of Cashier of the bank. Received a letter today from Holly Jester 802 N. 9th St. Mt. Vernon, Il. saying his son Lloyd E. Jester, Co. C. 397th Infantry was killed in action on Dec. 16th last. This was an official report. They were seeking, that is the parents, were seeking more particulars as to cause of his death etc. Perhaps you could help them in this matter. I did not mention your name in my letter to them, so that is entirely up to you. If either my wife or I can help you, feel free to write to us. This terrible war should bring all mothers and fathers closer to one another and create a closer and finer bond between all decent mankind regardless of his or her station in life. Our boys are giving all for us. Sorry I made you wait so long for an answer to your letter. Yours sincerely, Bert W. Bowen, Father of Ralph W.

February 8, 1945  
Dear Folks,

(Received Feb. 21, 1945)

Today, I got one of the Christmas packages Mom sent. It had two cans of cookies and several candy bars. The next package you send put in a small can of dried beef like I used to put in between my sandwiches. If you don't have time to bake some cookies, go to the store and buy some. I'm not too particular on the kind I get. Boy is this some country, always rain, snow and mud. I guess the weather at home is like this too, but then I wasn't out in it all the time like I am now. I's okay except that I'm a little damp and muddy. Otherwise I'm all set. My hole is dry even if it rains almost everyday. I had one the other day and it filled up with water. I dug another with my buddy on the side of a ditch so that the water would run right out. It isn't bad at all except for the mud we drag in. The news sure sounds good. This war over here may be over with before long. Washington also announced that a number of divisions will be sent to the Pacific from this front. Who knows, I may end up by Erwin in the Pacific one of these days. I saw in the Stars and Stripes (An army area newspaper) today where Ernie Pyle is writing again this time about the navy. He still mentions us poor doughboys. I believe we've got the worst life of them all, but without us this war wouldn't be won. I've been eating C and K rations now for over three weeks straight and I'm getting tired of them. Bye now, Lester.

February 10, 1945

(Received February 23, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I've got my boots off and my feet are wrapped up in a blanket. It sure is miserable to be out. Mud up to your ankles and rain everyday. About the only time I get to sleep is from 5 till 10 in the morning, and the rest of the night I'm up most of the time. This night life is no good. If you haven't sent me another package of V-mail do it right away because I'm running low. Here lately I've been doing a great deal of writing. I write to more people now than I ever did. Quite a few of them are to girls only you don't need to tell it around. They really are friends and by writing back and forth, I get to hear more from home. It makes me feel better to get letters and I guess they sort of feel sorry for us boys. Don't go telling this around or I wouldn't have written this. This is for you only. This makes the fourth letter I've written today already. I've been in a situation for some time now where I could do a lot of writing even if I'm at the front. Bye now, Lester

A clipping from the Stars and Stripes newspaper was attached to the above letter which contained the following:

#### Trees

I think that I shall never see,  
A substitute for the Infantry.  
Our job is full of ache and pain,  
We live amid the sun and rain,  
We train for days and nights no end,  
In hopes that we might live again.  
The war is judged by our advance,  
Brought not about by shining pants.  
I know that there shall never be,  
A substitute for the Infantry.

- Sgt. George J. Janssen

February 25, 1945

(Received March 12, 1945)

Dear Mom,

Today I received two letters, one from Dad the one you wrote and Dad typed on V-mail. I also received two packages, one from you and the other from Aunt Lydia. That makes four packages I got in three days. I'm really living in style now for awhile, plenty to eat with my C rations. I wish they would have come a few days apart, but the mail doesn't always work that way. The way things are, I can keep all the stuff you send me because I am not doing much moving around. I'm still living in a foxhole all the time.

I also received the Vandalia Leader with the article about me. Quite a write up I must say. The way the paper reads our

outfit had quite a time and we really did at that time. Since then we have had some worse times, but somebody must have been protecting me. Don't worry about me now as we have it pretty nice even if we are at the front.

The hole I have now is like a dugout with a roof of logs and dirt on the top, high enough to sit up in, straw on the bottom, a stove made out of a gas can with cans as a jointed stove pipe and wide and big enough for three men to lie down comfortable. It is dark now, but my hole is blacked out and I'm using a candle for light. By my description of what it is like, you can see that it isn't too bad right now. I also got a different job and better one at that. I was squad leader and now I'm platoon guide. You don't know what it is and it would be hard for me to explain it. A platoon guide is third in charge of platoon and he takes over when the platoon sergeant isn't around. I don't receive any more pay, but its a better deal than I had before. I have less work to do than before.

You asked quite a few questions about sending stuff so I'll try to answer all of them now. You complain about Helen not economizing on paper, but you should see the waste of stuff over here. If you ask me this war is all a waste of time and money. Don't send me any more gloves because summer is about here and I won't need any. My hands are so tough and used to the weather that I go without gloves quite a bit.

A package sent first class gets through sooner than one sent by regular mail. If I want you to send me something fast send it first class otherwise send a big package the regular way. I get it in just a little over a month. My pen went dry so I had to use a pencil.

The baby food is okay in the little cans and I like it all right. If you can't get the others send the baby food. Cranberries might be all right for a change, but not too many.

Don't send me any large cans of fruit. A can of soup is okay as long as it isn't vegetable. I make soup once in awhile out of the cans of C ration stew and hash. I ate so much stew already that I'm tired of that. A chicken noodle will be all right or better yet if you can get it in dry form and all I have to do is add water. So far I never used a shovel to cook on. I always found a better thing than that. I got a kick out of using napkins. What a luxury to wipe your hands on one. The usual method is seat of my pants. Put napkins in to fill up the cookies or put some Sunday funnies to help fill out the space. Don't send a whole box of napkins though.

On the list you had some of the things that I would like to have such as tuna fish and maybe some Frem (dried beef). I usually get enough meat in rations.

I'll let you know how the cookies come in the oatmeal boxes. I believe they should come okay. I know I'm on your mind all the time, but don't worry too much about me. I stopped worrying a

long time ago. At night before I go to sleep, I always pray the little prayer you taught me. "Now I lay me down to sleep" and the 23rd Psalm and I go to sleep without a worry, except what I'm going to eat tomorrow and memories of home. You know when I was home you always did almost any little thing I wanted and you still would if I were there. I couldn't have asked for a better mother. I never realized it when I was home, but I do now. Dad was really good to me too and I'm thankful I was brought up as I was. You never told me about life, but I hope you will tell Gertrude and Helen.

It's a good thing the people in the states don't know how filthy the people are here. In all the small towns, manure is piled right out along side the street. The people all go to one place in the center of town to get water. The house and barn are together. You can go right out of the kitchen into the barn without going outside. What a country!

Say I've written quite a letter already. The censor doesn't like these, but I don't write them very often. The one who censors my letters is in charge of my platoon. We were together back in the states and he was my squad leader before he got a so called battlefield commission. This will be all for tonight. Bye Mom, Lester

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## CHAPTER 10

### THE ATTACK TO END THE WAR BEGINS

Sometime in early March the weather this one day turned decisively warm. From early February to early March we remained in this same hole. As I recall it was a used hole, either by the Germans or Americans prior to our long occupancy. We made minor improvements to suit our taste. On this particular warm day, and not hearing any shelling, John and I lay on the outside sunning ourselves. We were still wearing our normal layers of clothing, but we soon found that we were perspiring. At first we thought that the perspiration was causing this crawling sensation that we were both feeling. A short time later we both decided that something was wrong as we could no longer stand this crawling sensation.

We both took off our tops and stripped down to the skin. As soon as we stripped off the underwear next to our skin, we found what seemed like hundreds of crawling lice. These lice were white-like with black lines across their back. The lice were shaped in the form of turtles about the length of small ants with many legs. At this point we could not get the balance of our clothes off fast enough. We both stripped down to a naked state and shook and beat our clothes on the ground to dislodge the lice. The army had issued cans of DDT powder to us, and after shaking out most of the lice, we doused our clothes with the powder. We also rubbed our bodies including our head since lice were very much in evidence. Any hazards associated with DDT were unknown to us. If we had known, I am certain that it would have made no difference to us while we were in our crawling condition. The eerie feeling and sensation of these lice was long remembered by John and myself. Any similar feeling after this day caused us to recheck our bodies for lice. After inspection of our bodies and hair, we examined our clothes for any remaining lice. We found none after which we put on the same clothes. Apparently the DDT worked because this was our only momentous occasion where we experienced this unforgettable event.

The weather was now becoming warmer each day and we found we could remove a layer or two of clothing. A few days before March

15, we learned that the whole 7th Army was about to launch a major offensive with tanks to end the war. We thought or hoped it was already over. After such a long period of inactivity, our bodies were in no condition for extensive hiking and the digging of foxholes. This fact never influenced any decision of the Generals.

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A series of letters from March 1 through March 12, 1945

March 1, 1945

(Received 13, 1945)

Dear Folks,

I wrote you a letter last night and I forgot to tell you that I received the fountain pen four days ago. The date the package was sent wasn't clear enough for me to read so I don't know when you sent it. Let me know how long it took. You can sure tell the difference between my old pen and the new one. Today was payday again. I got \$95.40 on the books, and in francs it amounts to 4761 francs. We couldn't send money home this month by PTA so I'll send most of it home by money order when I get the chance. It might be awhile before I send it and in the meantime I'll just have to carry it around with me. I haven't carried this much money around with me before. Right now it is of no value to me with no place to spend it. I'm okay, but still in my foxhole. Bye now, Lester

March 6, 1945

(Received March 13, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I bet you can't guess where I am now--lucky me. I'm at a rest center again for four days. I came here this morning and I go back Saturday. My turn for a rest came around sooner than I expected. The city I'm in is pretty big, much larger than La Pittet Pierre where I went the other time. When I get back again I'll tell you the name of the city. It is really nice around here and better than the other cities.

The mess hall is nifty except for the wait to get in. All you do is go in have a seat and wait for a pretty girl to bring your meal. What a life. The food is good too. The orchestra plays some of the latest hits while you eat. You couldn't ask for anything better. A bed to sleep in, a reading and writing room, movies, games, showers, haircuts and best of all it doesn't cost you a thing. I haven't seen much of the town yet, but I intend to look it over tomorrow or the next day.

This rest came as a surprise to me. I also got another pleasant surprise as all of our duffel bags are located in this city. I hope to be able to go through my bag tomorrow and remove my watch and other items. The watch is broken so I'm going to send it home when I return to me company area. The only thing that is wrong with it is the stem where you wind it broke off. Before I left yesterday, I received your letters of February 17,

19 and 21. I'm glad you bought a watch because I really need one. If you want me to pay for it take the money out of the checks I sent to you. When you get my old watch you can have it fixed and use it yourself if your want too. It may be awhile before I get to use it again.

As for the boy that wrote to Lawrence, I know nothing about it. I wrote him the other day and when he answers I may find out more about him. My buddy whom he saw, must have ended up in the hospital where he works.

The letter I wrote to Adel Rubin (Adel should have been spelled Adell, but I did not know this at the time. I married Adell on June 1, 1947.) was written while I was awake in an old cellar at an outpost in front of our lines. Some day I'll tell you the name of the ghost town. I was on the phone right then while some of the guys were on guard outside.

In this city is our personal clerk and I went to see him and see whether the allotments and bonds had been taken out. For the two months of Dec. and Jan. I thought I had been underpaid, but when we checked up I found that a \$55 PTA allotment had been taken out. So now you should receive that check and another for \$60 besides the four bonds. When I get back I am going to send you a money order for \$75 for last months pay. Now for the month of March you are supposed to get a PTA check for \$75 and after that a class E allotment of \$75 a month. Quite a mix-up but that is because papers were lost which told him to change the allotment several months ago. When you get the \$60 and \$55 checks I want you to buy all the war bonds you can with the money and the same way with the money order I'm going to send. Whatever is left put to my checking account.

Coming back for a rest really is nice. After living like ground hogs for so long, you just don't know how to act when you get in a city again where people can walk around without worrying about somebody taking a shot. They tell me you can get ice cream in town so I'm going to find the place tomorrow.

The show that is on tonight is entitled "Mr. Wrinkel Goes to War." I saw it once before, but I'll see it again. I'm going to enjoy myself while I can. Supper time is about here so I'll stop for today. If I get around to it, I'll write everyday while I'm here as well as write to all the relatives and girl friends. Bye-now, Lester

March 7, 1945

(Received March 17, 1945)

Dear Folks,

Yesterday I wrote you a long letter and sent it by air mail. I'm at a rest center again, just in case you get this letter first before the air mail. I went and looked through my duffel bag this morning. The watch was still there along with all the other junk I had in it. This morning I went uptown and bought some postcards. I'll send you a couple if they go by the censor.

They have the name of the city on them and pictures of the streets. I would have bought some other little souvenirs, but I didn't think they were worth much. I've still got a lot of time to collect souvenirs. Last night I thought I was going to see the movies "Mr. Wrinkle Goes to War," but I saw "Nothing But Trouble" with Laurel and Hardy instead. There are two movie theaters in town. The news really sounds good. Bye, Lester

March 8, 1945

(Received March 17, 1945)

Dear Folks,

I just finished wrapping up my old watch and I'll send it this afternoon. The strap was still all right so I'm going to keep that just in case the new strap break sometime. A watch strap is hard to get. Yesterday I had a treat of ice cream and was it ever good. I had three dishes all together. The French make it, but it isn't as good as our ice cream. Uptown there is a pastry shop and in between meals I go up there and have something to eat. I don't know what they call it but it tastes pretty good. Oh yes, I also got some beer yesterday. This was the first time I ever tasted French beer. It doesn't have any kick to it though. I went to the movies and saw a **Marriage is a Private Affair**. The pen that I am using is the one you sent. It writes finer than my old one. Bye, Lester

March 9, 1945

(Received March 20, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

Boy is it nice to sit here and listen to the radio for a change. The music sounds the best of all and every so often they give the latest news. I remember how I used to always listen to the news when I was home. The news always seems to sound better over the radio. This morning the PX opened and I got a couple candy bars, couple cigars, lemon drops and a watch strap for one of the boys. They didn't have much to offer us this time. You can only buy stuff at the PX once while you are here. I sent you my old watch yesterday by first class mail. I couldn't get anything good to wrap it up in so that I could insure it. Let me know as soon as you get it. I just wrapped it up in a lot of paper and I don't think it will get broke more than it is. Bye, Lester

March 11, 1945

(Received March 19, 1945)

Dear Mom, Dad, Gertrude and Helen,

Well I'm back in my hole again. I didn't get to finish reading all the letters I got yesterday and I just got through reading the last few minutes ago. Quite a stack of letters and papers. Most of them were written by Glenna and the rest of the family. The Gluesenkamp side of the family writes the most letters. By the way Mom, I didn't find a letter from you in all the stuff you put in those two big envelopes. I got twelve



letters yesterday and then inside most of them were other letters. It must have been about twenty letters altogether. Aunt Lydia sent the scribbling that Helen wrote. I had a hard time making out what she wrote. She needs more practice. The candy you put in the box was very good. I haven't tried the cranberry sauce yet. There isn't much news to write about. I've got combat shoes on now instead of the arctic boots. The other day I visited Sarrburg. Bye, Lester

March 12, 1945

(Received March 22, 1945)

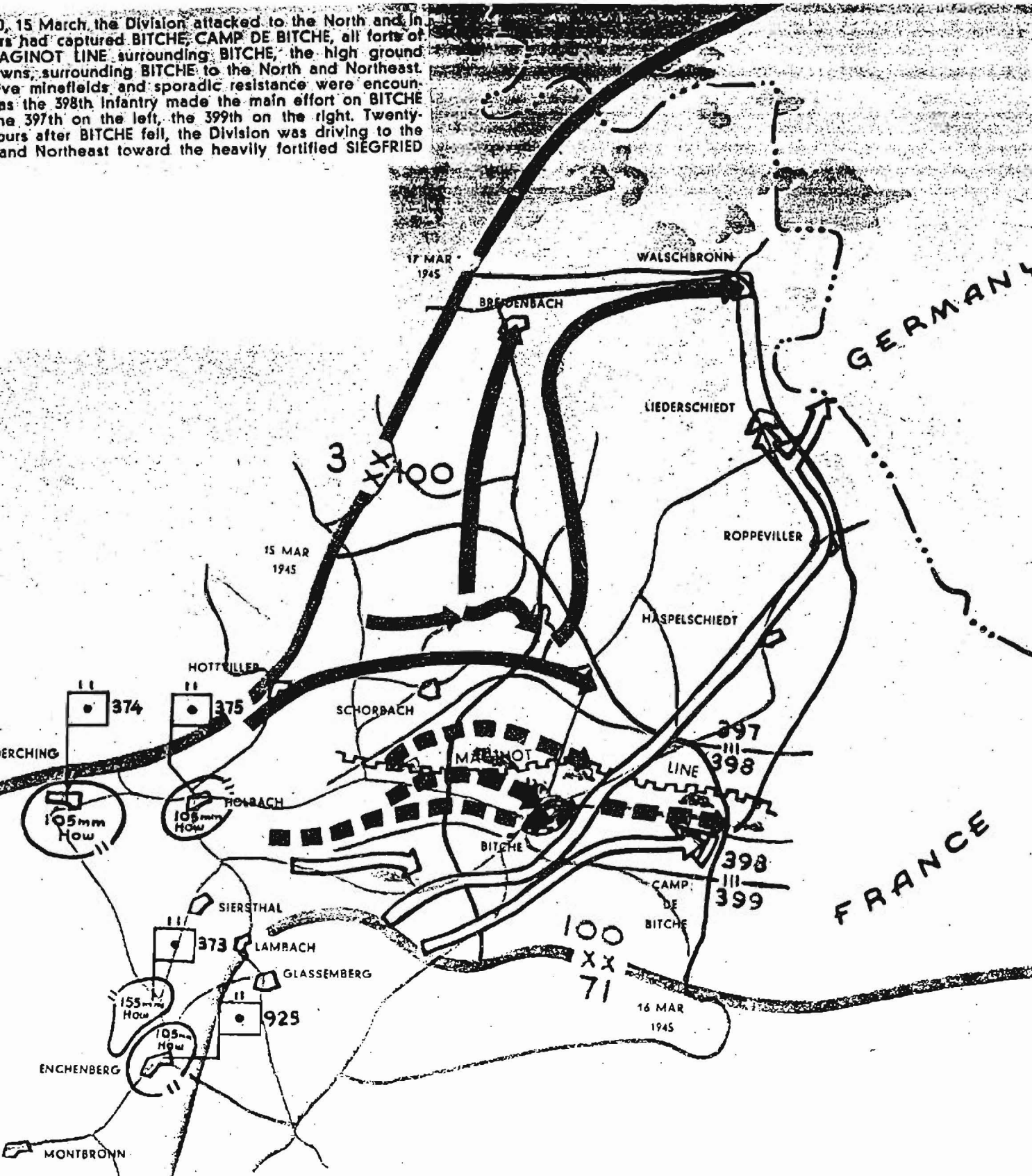
Dear Folks,

I'm not in a foxhole this time writing, but in an old house. It's about to fall to pieces and I'll be glad to get back to some hole again. Last night I received 10 letters, five from Dad, one from Mom and Gertrude, one from Walda and two from Jean. You asked quite a few questions so I'll try to answer them. In the letter of Feb. 22 you guessed right about being north. While at the rest camp, I got some air mail stamps. I'm sure looking forward to having a watch. About digging holes, everyone digs his own including the lieutenants. Once in awhile I stay in the command post, which isn't a bad deal. Tonight I got the gloves and are they swell, just what I wanted. (The gloves were soft leather with rabbit fur lining which I really needed in January when the temperature was zero) I wrote Shorty a letter yesterday. So far you received all the money I sent except the \$55 and \$75 which was just sent. In you letter of the 27th you were right about being in the same place. Sometimes having a rating is easier, but then again, it may not be so good. As a rule it is better all around. I'm also close to what you mentioned. Just in front of it. That was good news to me about sitting tight. That may all be but you never can tell. Tell Helen to be good. I doubt whether I'll be able to wire home until after this is over. Bye, Lester

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At daylight of March 15, 1945, the artillery and mortars of the entire 7th Army began to saturate the German positions with high explosive shells. The 7th Army front extended over a period of some 30 to 40 miles as I recall. On this day we heard our artillery launch shells by rocket launchers for the first time. As the rockets were launched in rapid fire, the whistling sound gave you a very eerie feeling of fright.

As the artillery advanced to our front, we formed a line of advance as we continued to advance northeast through Hottviller. I recall having dug four foxholes this day and walking many miles. We received no direct shelling in our vicinity as I recall. Our artillery fired so many shells this day that we could not tell the enemy from ours as we advanced.

On 15 March, the Division attacked to the North and in the morning had captured BITCHE, CAMP DE BITCHE, all forts of the MAGINOT LINE surrounding BITCHE, the high ground surrounding BITCHE to the North and Northeast. Heavy minefields and sporadic resistance were encountered as the 398th Infantry made the main effort on BITCHE. On the left, the 397th on the left, the 399th on the right. Twenty-four hours after BITCHE fell, the Division was driving to the North and Northeast toward the heavily fortified SIEGFRIED



Late in the afternoon of this day, an artillery observer or spotter from division came up to our platoon with his portable radio on his back. He was ordered to our location because division intelligence believed that a pocket of Germans were off to our front in a valley. This valley was located about a quarter of a mile to our front. The observer talked to the company commander, and requested that one of our men accompany him to the front to try to locate the enemy positions so that he could direct the artillery and mortar fire on the enemy. Lucky for me, I was the chosen one.

The observer had a map with location coordinates. We both looked at the map and decided on a course of travel. Our platoon was near the edge of a woods overlooking an open field. The plan was for us two to cross this open field. The open field appeared to be about two city blocks across. If we were able to cross the field, we would take up an observation position in the woods on the other side. The company was to cover our advance.

We crossed the field as quickly as possible without any shots being fired at us. After we arrived at the edge we waited and listened. We both picked up the sound of German voices in the draw or valley below us. Since we could hear talking, we knew we were too close for comfort. We retreated back a few yards to the edge of the woods pondering what to do. About this time, the most awful sound that both of us ever heard, came streaming right over our heads. The German troops launched a barrage of rockets. The rockets went right over the top of the trees and over our heads. We were frightened like never before from the eerie sound as the rockets whistled and roared through the air. The rockets landed behind our company somewhere. The Germans must have placed us further back from their position as they missed their target.

When the last rocket passed over us and we could think rationally again, we realized that we had to get out of this exposed position. The spotter and I decided that we should call in our artillery now before they moved or launched another barrage. The spotter relayed our position to the artillery C.P. and requested that one smoke shell be fired at the coordinates he outlined. We listened for the artillery shell to be fired and then we waited for the shell to land. The shell landed near what we perceived as the target area. The spotter then requested and directed that barrages of artillery fire be laid down in this general location. As soon as he radioed his message, we ran back to our company position like scared rabbits. We were aware that artillery shells often fell short of their target which could mean that our own artillery would be coming into our present location.

We had retreated a short distance from the woods from where he radioed his message, when the artillery shells started coming into the German positions. Fortunately, all the artillery shells landed in the target area. After the barrages, we received no more shelling. Shortly thereafter, we received orders to move to another position where we stayed for the night. Therefore, we never found out what happened after we called in the barrages.

After this encounter, we learned that many Germans surrendered as we continued our advance towards the Rhine River. The advance was by foot, on tanks and on trucks as the Germans retreated to the other side of the Rhine River. Our company did not come under fire during this advance. The 7th Army was prevented from crossing the river because all the bridges were destroyed.

While the Generals were planning our next advance, we rested and waited in houses which we took over from the Germans. When we arrived in a town and stayed for any period of time, the commander simply told the people to get out or be shot. In many cases they were forced to leave as they were. I presume other Germans whose homes were not occupied, gave these people shelter until we left. The atmosphere was tense and forbidding because some G. I's were killed by civilians or soldiers dressed as civilians. The law of survival was our only concern in this hostile environment.

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During this advance there were lulls in which I was able to write a few letters home.

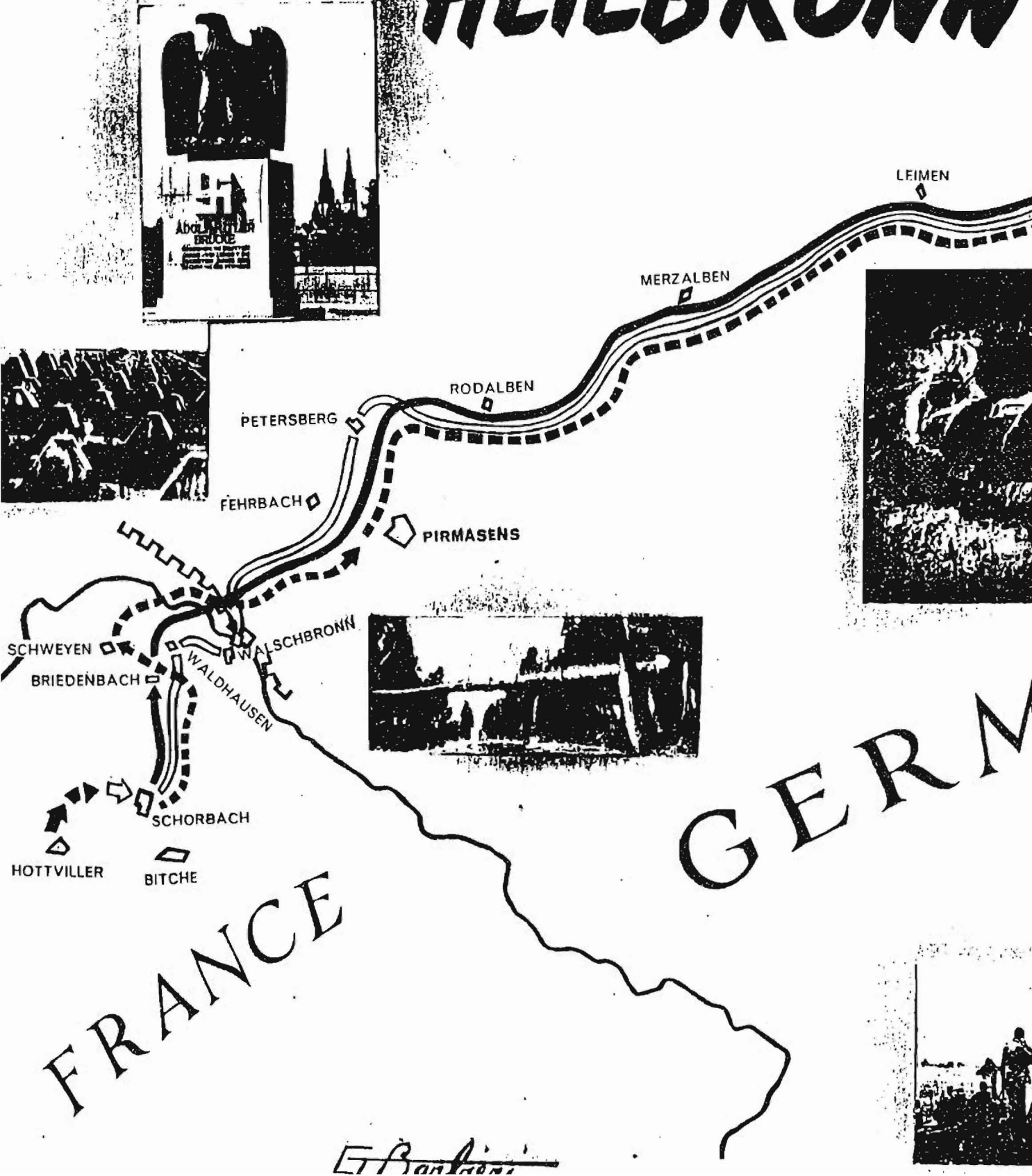
March 18, 1945 (Received March 27, 1945)

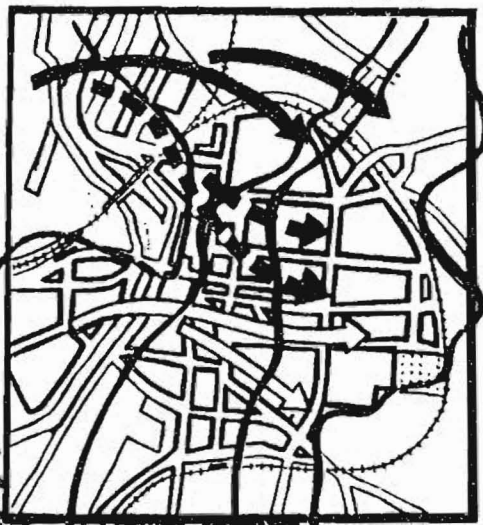
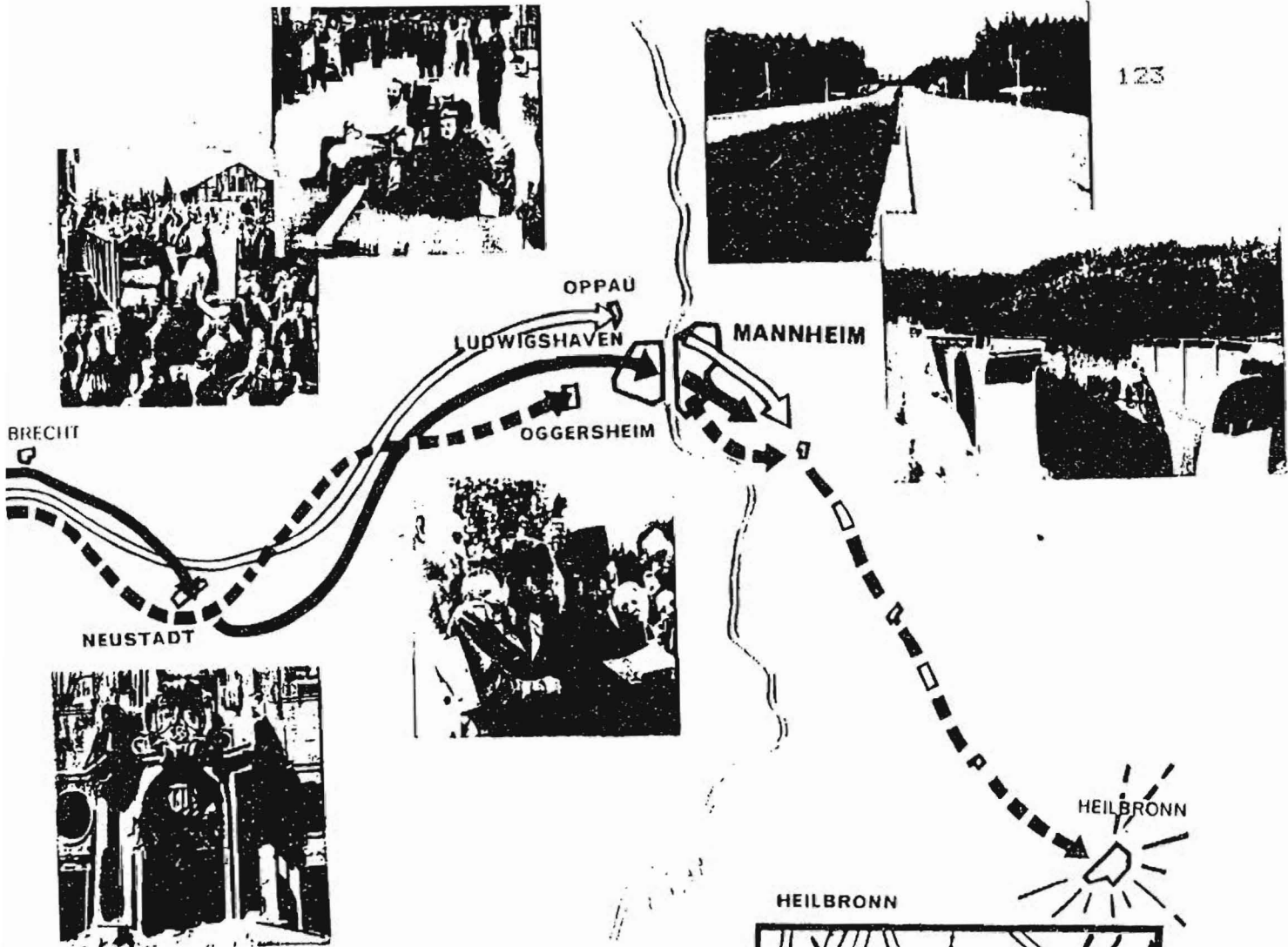
Dear Mom, Dad, Gertrude and Helen,

I missed out writing you for several days now. (The big spring offensive of the 7th Army to end the war began on March 15th, which was at that time the same date that you filed your income tax return) The last letter I wrote was dated a day ahead of time. Don't expect too many letters from me now for awhile. The other night I sure was tired. I dug four different foxholes in one day besides moving around. I'm sure glad we are having some nice weather. If we always have good weather it isn't too bad on us. The other day I got Mom's and Helen's letter. I got a big kick out of Helens letter. Some of the words were hard to make out, but I managed to read it. It's a good thing she didn't write V-mail. There isn't much to write today. I hope you cut out the clipping in the paper about our army. Don't worry too much about me. Bye, Lester.

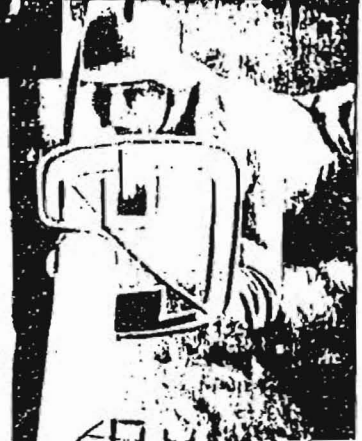
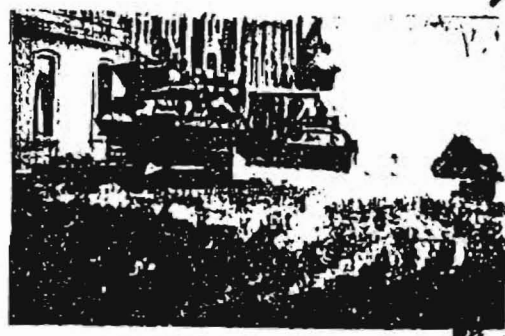
[In retrospect I now know that my advice to not worry was probably exacerbated by my suggestion.]

# the race to the Rhine, across the Neckar to HEILBRONN





NY



March 19, 1945

(Received March 30, 1945)

Dear Folks,

While I'm sitting here by my hole waiting, I thought I would write a letter. I wrote you a letter yesterday, but missed out several days before that. If you read the papers you know the bit of work we are doing. Aunt Amelia sent me about four and three V-mail sheets. I got a kick out of Aunt Amelia's letter. She wrote on all the blank spaces of Velva's and Glenna's letters. That's one way of saving paper. I'm going to send you the pictures which you sent me as soon as I get hold of an envelope. I have several more I want to send besides that. They were taken at Bragg (Fort Bragg, N.C.) last summer. I bet you have to laugh when you see them. If things keep up the way they are, I won't be in France no more. I believe we got the Jerry on the run again. Bye, Lester

March 20, 1945

(Received April 4, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I am enclosing the pictures you sent and several that I had with me. They were taken at Bragg last summer. Joe Drozs was in the same hole I was in when he got hit. The last I heard he was in England. This morning I got the wrist watch and a package from Aunt Amelia. The watch is just what I wanted. (From October 1944 until March 20, 1945 I had no watch to tell the time for the guard duty shift. Unless a buddy was near to inquire as to time, we all just guessed or changed when we became too tired to stay awake.) I just hope nothing happens to it now. If it were possible I would send you a .32 automatic pistol that I now possess. I got it off a prisoner which me and another boy took. They don't allow us to send weapons home. That is my prize souvenir. This is all for today. Bye, Lester

(Dad's typed copy of my letter to Armin D. Hotz, the town undertaker. I worked part time for him in the undertaking and furniture business while attending high school.)

March 20, 1945

Dear Shorty,

I believe I owe you a letter so today I'll write a few lines while I'm waiting. That's what we usually do, wait to do most anything. I sorta lost track of things the past week and I don't remember when I got your letter, but I was glad to hear from you. In your business you don't have half the trouble we have in getting people out. By people (dead) you know what I mean. You (Shorty) try to handle them as nice as possible, but here no care is taken. Sometimes they can't even be gotten out. According to the Vandalia Leader the farm boys are being drafted. How tough! Four months and they will be over here with me. I wish just for a minute you could be here and hear the 88's going over.



What a thrill. You just feel like you want to get that little rock out of the bottom of the hole so you will be lower. There isn't room for the two of us. The other week I drank some French beer. The stuff hasn't any kick to it. Let me hear from you soon. Bye, Lester

After a few days rest, we walked to a location where we boarded trucks. The trucks took us to the outskirts of the German city of Mannheim, (Oppau) where we then proceeded on foot to the banks of the Rhine River. Our foot route took us through one of the large chemical plants that was located on the river edge. The smell from the destroyed plant was terrible. The city of Mannheim was a frequent target of British and American bombers throughout the war. This plant was nothing but burned rubble and twisted metal caused by the bombings.

When we arrived at the rivers edge we dug foxholes overlooking the river toward the German positions. The river seemed wide and we could not imagine how we were going to cross to the other side. The plan was for the engineers to build a pontoon bridge composed of large flat bottom boat, laced together, with ramps on top of the boats for trucks and tanks to cross. While the engineers were building the bridge, we were to watch for a sneak counter crossing. Early in the evening, as we settled in for the night, the most concentrated artillery shelling of the war began. This shelling continued all through the night as the engineers built the bridge across the river. The artillery barrages were like one continuous rumble after another, hour after hour with no break in between until our troops were across the river. By daybreak, we saw troops and tanks crossing the river on the bridge. Sometime later we walked back and boarded trucks which took us over the bridge and further into Germany. Now that we had crossed the Rhine River, we all thought the war must be about over. Little did we realize what the future held for us.

**THE STARS AND STRIPES**  
**Editor, April 1, 1945**  
**Editorial: Storm Beasts**  
**Reached From Editor**  
 NEW YORK, April 1—Some of the small boats in which American troops crossed the Rhine last New York Post of March 30, less than a month ago, that Gen. Homer H. Groninger, post commander, disclosed today.  
 Groninger said that the boats from the post to the since Jan. 1 included hundreds of small boats, outboard motors, scores of bridges and thousands of tons of their stream-crossing equipment.  
 Nearly 700 of the 16-foot 2-inch plywood storm boats used for the Rhine crossing were still in production in Florida, Michigan and Minnesota, when no request for them was received from the ETO, Groninger said.

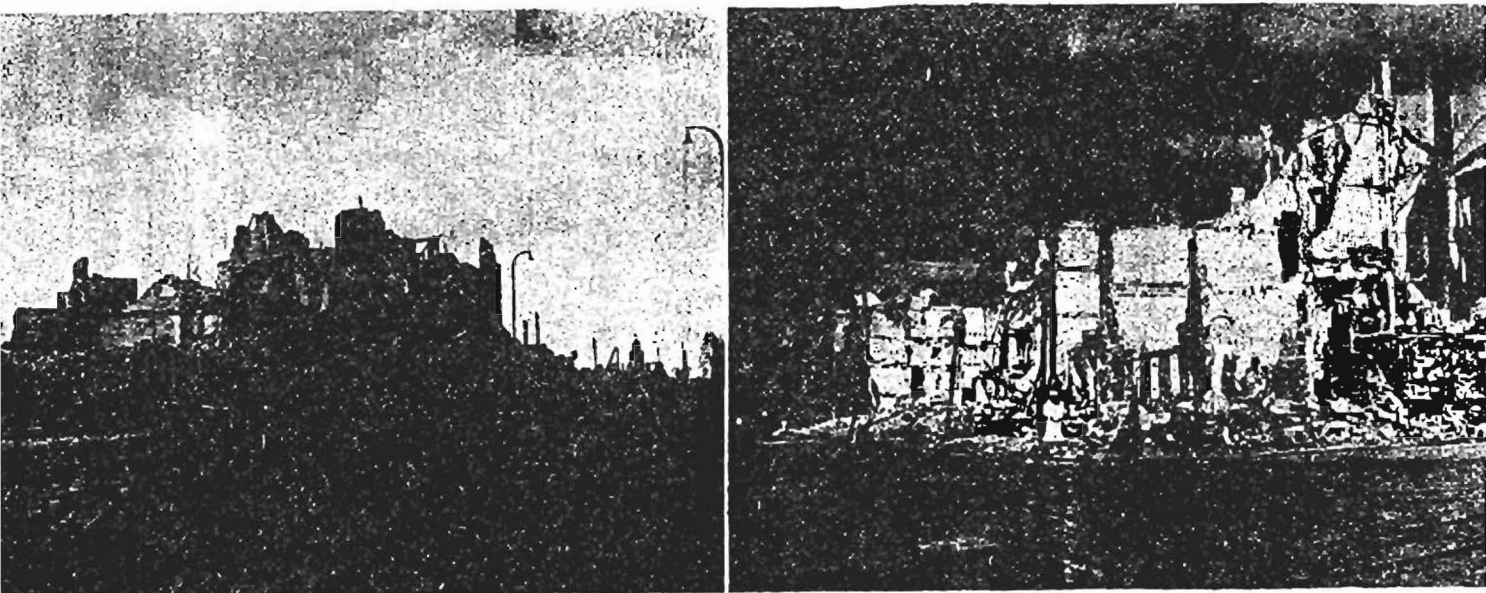


As we advanced into Germany, we generally followed the main roads. We passed through many towns where the people gave us no welcome. The people appeared to be defiant, dejected, and resentful from our presence in their homeland. Our advance was slowed by occasional rifle fire either from soldiers or civilians and by roadblocks. The Germans destroyed all bridges. Our engineers would rebuild a temporary crossing as soon as possible. In the meantime we would advance while the bridges were bridged. When the bridge was repaired, tanks and trucks with supplies would follow our advance. If we met opposition, we would wait until the tanks could catch up with us. After the tanks would fire a shot or two, the token opposition would vanish. We were of the opinion that the opposition soldiers who were left to hinder our advance, often vanished into civilian clothes as we advanced. These soldiers were generally older men in their late forties and early fifties and young boys ages 14 to 16. They had no real incentive to continue their losing cause, but only to escape with their lives.

This advance which extended over a week, covered many miles. At the time it seemed like it would never end. We would retrace our route at times and take alternate roads because of road blocks and village searches. We continued advancing to Frankenkach where we waited to cross the Neckar River into the city of Heilbronn. During this advance to Heilbronn, we took many prisoners. A white flag of surrender would greet us as we reached a town. In most cases the flags were civilians and at other times a soldier or two would surrender. John and I were each able to remove a pistol from a prisoner. We were very glad to have this personal protection.



*Advancing through battered Rohrbach, the battle-wise infantrymen avoid bunching up. This is a far cry from close-order drill.*



*The industrial city of Mannheim on the east bank of the Rhine had been badly battered by constant air bombardment.*

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 Even during this extended advance by foot, trucks and by hitchhiking on tanks, I was able to write a few letters at night by candle light.

Germany March 23, 1945 (Received April 4, 1945)

Dear Mom, Dad, Gertrude and Helen,

The other day I finally walked on German soil. It took awhile to get there, but I made it. Where I was it didn't look any different than France. Both countries are no good to me. You should see what the people use for shoes. They wear house slippers in wooden shoes. Some of the kids can sure run in them. Others have leather shoes with wooden soles. I received the letter you wrote last week. I picked up some pictures the other day so I'm enclosing them in this letter. I now have another pistol. As yet I don't know what I'm going to do with it. One is a .30 and the other .32.

March 24, 1945

I had to stop writing yesterday and didn't get to finish the letter. Always on the go, that is. The watch keeps good time and I sure like it. I'm not eligible to be issued a G.I. watch. Only platoon sergeants and officers get one and then it may be a

month or so before they get one. I am enclosing a few coins in this letter. Bye, Lester

March 27, 1945

(Received April 6, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I received three letters last night from you, two V-mail dated March 7, 12 and Mom's Easter greeting. The outfit you mentioned in your letter of March 12 was on our right at the time, but not any more. Too many changes have taken place since then. I also got another package last night with two boxes of cookies and several candy bars. Those cookies sure are good. The fellows think so too. I've been doing a lot of hiking now. It was so long since I did much walking and now it is pretty hard on me. I can take it better than most of the guys though. Boy did I sleep good last night. I slept in a real bed for a change. The bed was so soft after sleeping on the ground all the time. I'll close for now. Bye, Lester

March 28, 1945

(Received April 11, 1945)

Dear Mom,

I'm sitting here at the table eating some of the cookies you baked. I think the best ones are the oatmeal with the chocolate and peanuts. You should see the house we are staying in. The people had to move out before we came in. This is fixed up pretty nice. We even got running water, but no electric lights. The power is shut off someplace. The reason we are here is because the outfit is back for a rest. I don't know how long we will be here, but it can't last too long. Right now is a good time to be back with everybody pushing forward. I wouldn't be surprised if the war will end in about a week. I just about didn't notice the pipe that was in the package. I tried it out this morning and it suits me okay. My old one is just about worn out. Thanks Mom for all the packages you have made up for me. Love, Lester

March 28, 1945

(Received April 11, 1945)

Dear Dad,

At noon today I received four of your letters dated March 3, 6, 9, and 14. I wrote Mom a letter this morning already, but you asked several questions so I'll answer them. In your letter of March 3 civilians were near us, but about a mile in back of us. Alvin had a lucky break. I don't believe I wrote you that I also had a piece to glance off my helmet the second day of combat. Since then I was only hit by dirt. In your letter of March 14 your guess was right. I worded it that way and you guessed it right. Yesterday I went to church service in one of the churches in town. The chaplain conducted the service and only G.I's are allowed to attend. We can not attend a service where German civilian are present unless we get special permission. I'm stay-

ing in a nice house and sleeping in a bed at the present. Before we came to this town, people were living in this house, but they had to move. I feel sorry for some of these people, but that is the way they should be treated. Bye, Lester

March 30, 1945

(Received April 12, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

Last night I received three more letters from you dated March 2, 10 and 13. In one letter you inquired about the makeup of a rifle platoon. In my rifle platoon, a 2nd lieutenant is in charge, then a tech sergeant, then the staff sergeant. The tech is the platoon sergeant and the staff platoon guide. The three squad leaders are also staff and their assistants are buck sergeants. A rifle platoon has around 41 men. I can remember the time when we were down to half strength. That was the time I had the write up about me in the Leader. Experience sure has helped us a lot since then.

I'm still living in a house like I was the other day. I could spend the duration plus six if they would let us. I saw another show this afternoon and I also took a shower. The last time I took one was when I was at rest. (March 6) Some of the guys had not had any in over a month and half or even had a change of clothes. It won't be long and payday will be here. This time we are going to be paid in marks instead of francs. I believe 10 francs are worth 1 mark or 20 cents. The only marks that are good are the ones that are dated before 1922. If the other marks were good a lot of the guys would have a lot of money. One of the guys had a 1,000,000 mark note the other day which was no good. I am enclosing a couple souvenirs (German postage stamps) I got today. The flag (Nazi) is what I've been wanting to send home for a long time. Bye, Lester



Artillery Shells Ludwigshafen, Ger 61-11

## CHAPTER 11

### THE CAPTURE OF THE CITY OF HEILBRONN

#### INTRODUCTION

Heilbronn was our last major engagement of the war. Those of us who were there can never forget the fire fights from building to building, from one street corner to the next. The crossing of the river in Jon-boats, under a smoke screen supported by artillery, mortar and rockets screaming over your head, was frightening. The foot soldier was about to enter another enemy no-man's land whose shore was hidden by our shield of smoke.

Our immediate assignment was to cross the Neckar River, secure the east bank, take the factories, and ultimately occupy the entire city of Heilbronn. All bridges were destroyed. The infantry foot soldier was alone in this situation until reinforcements could be brought across. The Neckar river took on the width and depth of the Rhine as we crossed.

It was here that the enemy was to make their last major stand as they observed our movements from their high mountain vantage point to the east. Their guns were zeroed in on the river and the major intersections. Where in the recent past the Germans retreated, here they methodically planned to defend their home and factory. It seemed that any open terrain was covered by their machine guns. The windows in the battered large buildings enabled the enemy to spot our movement. The burning fires of the buildings cast the night into an eerie reddish daylight scene, while the enemy was hidden in the dark spots of the buildings. For some G.I.'s, food and water were but wishful thinking.

It was eight long days before the city was ours as we fought against crazy German kids, mad women and fanatical German soldiers in their fight to the end. The gutted and shell pock-marked buildings would remain as the physical evidence of the encounter. In the end approximately, 450 G.I.'s were either killed, wounded or were missing from this action. After the war, there was the feeling by a few that our casualties were low

considering the tenacity of the enemy and his position. This view was not shared by the foot soldiers who survived.

The official record reads as follows. "One of the bloodiest battles fought by the 100th Division was the battle for Heilbronn, key railroad and defense metropolis in the heart of Germany. The battle began on 3 April when the 3rd Bn, 398th Infantry was attached to an armored division as Infantry to establish a bridgehead, for armor. A change in Corps plans necessitated a frontal assault across the Neckar River by the 397th Infantry and later by the 399th Infantry when the armored division was taken from the area. Building by building, block by block, the doughs advanced supported by magnificent artillery and air support until on April 12 at 1530, the city was declared cleared." (Map G-3 100th)

After the war, a vivid account of the fighting in the city was published in the book **The Regiment of the Century** on pages 228 through 230. In some aspects, the second platoon of C Company had a similar experience. "For when we had taken the ruins of one house it was the same job to do over again on the next and the next and the next. Likely as not when night came there would be a counterattack that gave back to the enemy the last two or three houses we had taken. It was impossible not to give back a little when the mass of enemy infantry and armor came right at you, firing like hell and just coming and coming. Nothing to do but fight back for what was lost.

It would be sheer folly to attempt an enumeration here of the different single acts that, when all tied in together, made for our ultimate victory. A partial idea can be gotten from the cold list of names at the end of this chapter. But a list of names can never show the bloodshed, the heartache and the actual bitter tears of exhaustion and determination. They can never show how a man went out on a catwalk to replace a battery in a radio was killed. Nor how the medic who went after him was killed by the same sniper. Although these individual deaths might not have contributed at that exact moment to success, it was the culmination of all these heroic deeds and all that blood which spelled our triumph.

We find it hard not to mention names if we want to tell about the platoon in a building which was suddenly counterattacked and how they stayed in the building firing from the gaping walls even when the roof was blown in by rockets, staying even when the enemy got close enough to throw grenades through the holes in the walls, staying when artillery hit direct, and staying, as dead bodies, when the building was set afire and fell in on them. Should they have gotten out when they could to be more



helpful to us alive? But they gave us precious added seconds to regroup and come back right after that and pull the same trick on the fanatic enemy."

#### THE ATTACK ON HEILBRONN

"At 1400, (April 5) the First Battalion received an oral order to move from Frankenbach, clear that portion of Heilbronn west of the Neckar, then cross the river and resume the conquest of the city. By 1700 reconnaissance had been completed and Company C was ordered to negotiate the river. Company B was to achieve the mission on the west bank and Company A was to follow Company C into the main part of the city. At 1830 the first wave of Company C (2nd Platoon) with a platoon of heavy machine guns from Company D crossed the river under a smoke screen and only two casualties resulted. Upon landing, the group moved north capturing a brewery building after a terrific fight. The Krauts fought frantically to contain the bridgehead, but two hours later 125 had been captured and evacuated."

It was during lulls in our two day advance to take Heilbronn, that I was able to write two letters to my parents.

March April 3, 1945 (Received April 14, 1945)

Dear Mom, Dad, Gertude & Helen,

I keep forgetting that it is April already and here I write March before I think about it. You haven't been getting any letters from me now for several days as I've been on the go so much. A few weeks ago I was back in France and now I'm at the front in Germany. Part of the way here I walked, the others I either rode on tanks or trucks.

Last night I slept in a soft bed and the night before in a foxhole. I don't know where I will sleep tonight which is always the case. I am enclosing part of the Stars and Stripes issue of April 2, 1945 by the PUPTENT POETS. The poem just about describes the situation. I received the letter Mom wrote of March 12. Write more often will you Mom. Bye, Lester

#### " Very Dull Day

What to write, just what to say...  
To tell the folks what's new today.  
Censorship often blocks the way.  
To what's in our hearts, the answer's nay.

The ruins of cities, the bestial war,  
The gaping children, weak and sore--  
There's all of this, and even more...  
But for the lack of things to say,  
I'll write, 'Nothing new--Very dull day.'

Would they understand of each man's toil;  
 Of our seething emotions brought to a boil;  
 Of American blood reddening the soil?  
 Can't really think of what to say,  
 So it's, 'Nothing new-Very dull day.'

Could I properly tell of the grime and the dirt;  
 Of bodies that say, yet with minds alert;  
 And of my soul, where I'm mortally hurt?  
 There's all of this, and more to say,  
 But it's, 'Nothing new-Very dull day.'

Shall I tell of the shells that just miss my head  
 Of my comrade's shirt, now sticky and red;  
 Of the ghostlike melody of singing lead?  
 In spite of this, I'll act gay,  
 And it's, 'Nothing new-Very dull day.'

Should I write of the corpses on battle's lawn;  
 And of the eerie stillness of the stillborn dawn;  
 And of the rotten stench when the cold is gone?  
 No! The proper thing to say,  
 Is, 'Nothing new-Very dull day.'

Back home, they shan't know-perhaps they may,  
 Of the fantastic price we've had to pay,  
 It's between the lines when we say,  
 'There's nothing new-Very dull day.'  
 Pfc. Shiky Kops III

April 4, 1945 (Received April 16, 1945) Dear Folks,

I had the opportunity to do some writing again today so I'll write a few lines. I'm always glad when we stop for awhile then I can write letters, sleep and clean up a bit. I received a letter from Grandma last night and a V-mail from you. Tell Grandma I'll write her before very long if things keep on the way they are. Those buildings she mentioned (Mannheim) are built to last, but they can soon be knocked down. I saw that in a couple large cities I went through about two weeks ago. I was lucky again last night I slept in a bed. The only thing wrong was that we didn't get supper till 10:30 and I didn't get too much sleep. Someday I'll catch up on all the sleep I lost over here. Bye, Lester

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 The city of Heilbronn was devastated by British and American bombers. As we advanced into the city, which was located on both sides of the Neckar River, we received an occasional barrage of German 88's. We knew our "good times" were about to end. In retrospect, the city of Heilbronn turned out to be the largest



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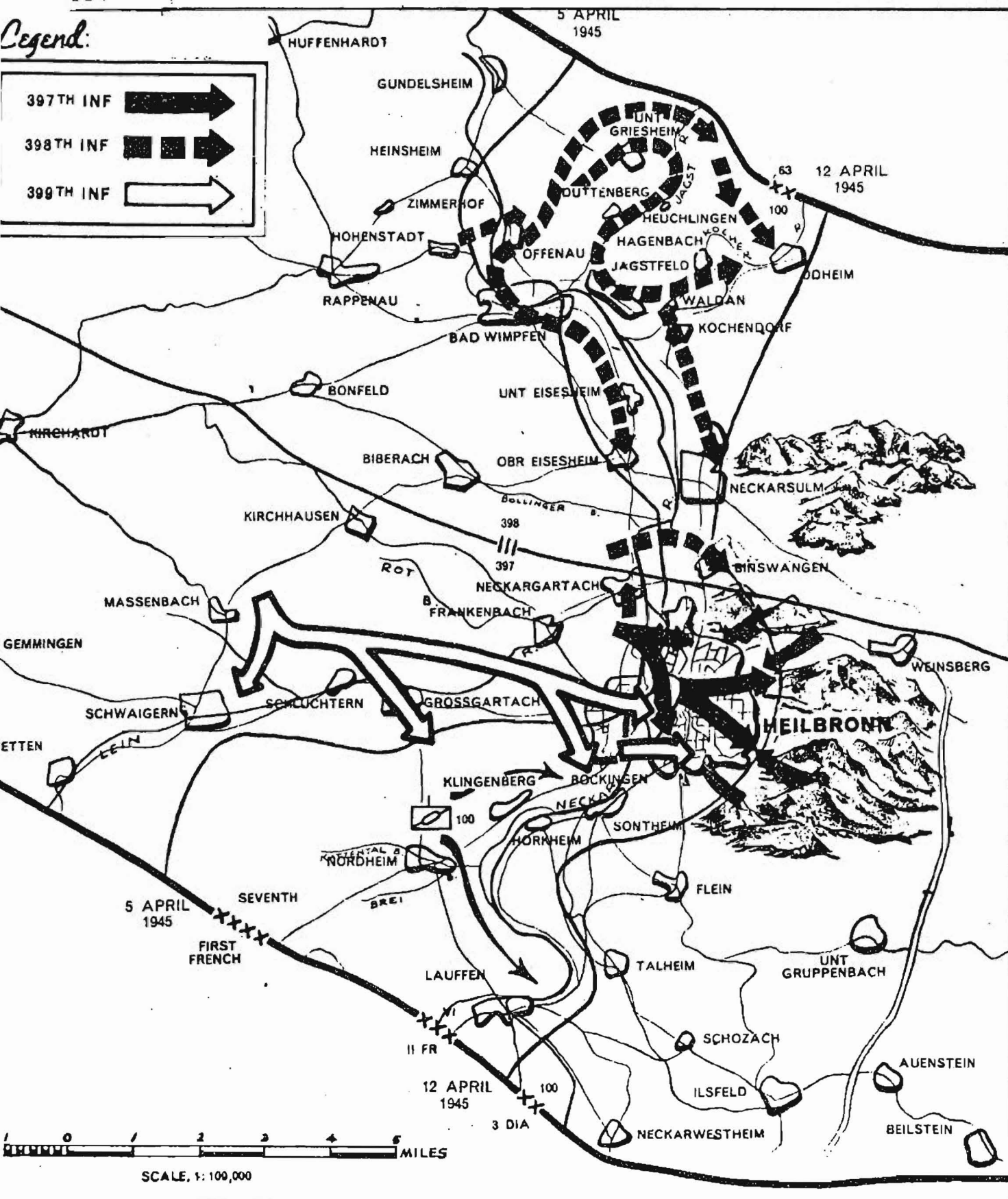
397TH INF



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Legend:

135

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11 APRIL 1945 12 APRIL 1945

1,000 500 0 1,000 YARDS

SCALE 1:25,000

city that our division captured. The original population, before the bombing, may have been in excess of 100,000.

On April 4, 1945, we reached the town Frankenbach which was west of Heilbronn. I seem to recall walking for many hours into the city. As we approached the Neckar River, we halted as the bridges were all destroyed. Occasional artillery fire would land in our area while we waited. We soon observed that our engineers were passing us with large flat bottom boats. We had no idea of the width of the river in front of us or what lay on the other side of the river. As usual, we knew nothing of the plans for our future. We just hoped that someone else would go first and we would be last. Our heroic days had long since passed and survival was our only concern. The general feeling was that the war was about over and no one wanted to be the last guy to get hit by a stray sniper shot or their last 88.

Late in the afternoon, as darkness approached, we received orders to go to the rivers edge where we were to board boats. As



*Loading into an assault boat for the hazardous Neckar crossing.*

we advanced to the river, our artillery and mortars opened up with a tremendous artillery barrage to the other side of the river. The German artillery was now coming into our area in greater frequency, but without any real hindrance to our approach to the river. As we approached the rivers edge, we observed that the whole area was engulfed in smoke. The smokescreen was to hide our planned crossing.

The 2nd Platoon Company C was the first to cross the Neckar River in the center of the city. We boarded boats with a squad per boat. We paddled across the river, which appeared to be deep and about one third the width of the Rhine River. Our crossing was uneventful, but frightening. We had no life preservers. We would have been unable to swim with all of our clothing and ammunition should our boat be hit. The smokescreen probably saved many of us because the German artillery was unable to zero in on our position. Later we learned that the bridge which our engineers constructed at this location was destroyed on several occasions.

By the time we crossed the river, it was nearly dark as a consequence of the screen of smoke in the area. We cautiously advanced up the bank to the other side to a series of bombed out buildings. One large building (the brewery) in particular looked suspicious through the haze. As I recall our platoon advanced toward this building without any fire being directed against us. As we approached the building, we found a large well used door which appeared to lead to a bomb shelter. We fired our rifles into the door. Cautiously the door was pried open. To our surprise, out marched about 50 soldiers each carrying a white flag, with hands held high in the air. The German soldiers outnumbered our platoon by two to one. We now had a problem, what to do with all these prisoners. After a quick search of the prisoners, I assigned two or three men to guard and return the prisoners to the rivers edge. Our platoon continued to advance into the ruins of the bombed out city.

By this time we knew we had to find a place of cover to stay for the night. John and I advanced through to a devastated area as did the others members of our platoon. We continued until we came to what appeared to be a basement of a destroyed building. At this time we were all separated from one another and we had no idea of who was with us or as to the location of any other troops. As John and I cautiously advanced, a shot was fired at John. John screamed, "I am hit, I am hit." We both fell to the ground. I seem to recall firing my rifle at the open window from where the fire originated. I then crawled over to John where we examined the penetration. John was hit in the chest area and was knocked down by the force of the bullet. John was incoherent and





in a state of shock. We examined his chest area and to our surprise, we found that the bullet had hit the pistol that we had removed from a prisoner several days earlier. The slug hit between the chamber and the cylinder, but did not penetrate the skin. John was only bruised and shook up from the experience. When he learned that he was not injured, he regained his posture and we advanced to the basement. By this time the enemy departed. We took up a defensive position here and waited till daybreak. We had no bedroll so we slept as we were on the rubble as best we could. It was two hours rest and two hours watch until daybreak.

The next morning (April 6) we noticed that more G. I's were coming towards us from our rear. We waited and learned that they were from our company. Apparently John and I had gone out further than the rest and were out in the middle of nowhere by ourselves.

The 1st Battalion newsletter dated October 4, 1945, reported the following action beginning on this date (April 6). "Company C, on 6 April, pushed out two blocks to the main road which leads from Heilbronn to Fleib. At 1230 the 1st Platoon hit stiff resistance consisting of machine guns and rifle fire coming from several fortified buildings. Three attempts to take the strong points resulted in the loss of four men and the pinning down of a complete platoon which was later withdrawn to a defensive position under cover of smoke. At 1315 an enemy attack against the center platoon with a force of approximately 100 infantrymen was beaten off.

At 1520 the same number of hostile infantrymen, accompanied by two tiger tanks, attacked again. To clear a field of fire, a bazooka-man fired one round through the one standing wall of the house on an opposite corner. Then, firing through this hole on the first tank, he knocked out its turret gun. The Artillery FO with Company C now had "eight inchers" shelling the tanks with such accuracy that they were compelled to withdraw. By 1900 all signs of the counterattack had ceased and the line remained intact.

Company B, most exposed and nearest to the German barracks was hit the hardest. Two tiger tanks, flanked by approximately two platoons of infantry, came up from the south toward the men. A light machine gunner killed between twenty and thirty. Direct fire from the German tanks, within 150 yards, and the German artillery falling on the positions was so terrific that the Company Commander ordered a withdrawal so the entire right flank of the Battalion would not crumble.

During the night of 6-7 April, Company C, 399th Infantry crossed the river and was attached to the 1st Battalion, 397th Infantry. This company spent the remainder of the night in the brewery and moved out to take position in the vicinity of the Knorr Works to protect the right flank of the Battalion and expand the bridgehead in a southerly direction.

At 1430 On 7 April, a platoon of enemy was observed advancing toward Company A's 1st Platoon position from the north and another enemy platoon was advancing from the east threatening to cut off an outpost of five men. Riflemen of the 1st and 3rd Platoons fired on the advancing enemy simultaneously, succeeding in the wounding or killing of approximately fifteen and forcing both columns to withdraw. Immediately after withdrawing, two hostile platoons advanced once more. They worked their way between the main body and the outpost.

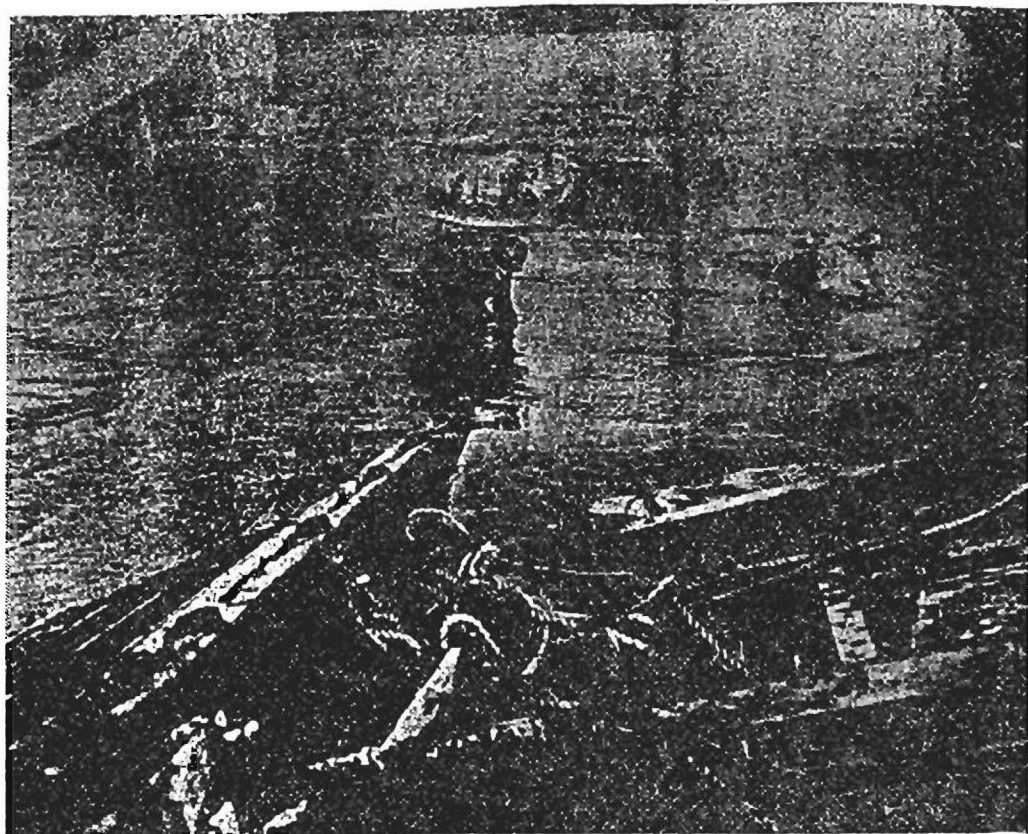
At this same time the right flank of the 1st Platoon of Company A was attacked by a platoon of German infantry, causing the platoon to withdraw from the triangular block. A superb counter maneuver by our troops resulted in driving the enemy from its positions south of Kilianskirche. That afternoon, this town was pounded by German selfpropelled guns, cutting off from the

remainder of the 3rd Platoon, who fired constantly from the church and dropped grenades from the windows on the infiltrating enemy. By evening the Germans had retreated and all three platoons of Company A were again in contact with each other. The enemy throughout the entire night harassed the company with artillery, nebelwerfers, and panzerfausts. Snipers infiltrated through tunnels. Throughout 7 April, Company C held its lines, the action limited to sharp sniper fire and enemy patrols which tried unsuccessfully to infiltrate through the company's positions, causing several casualties."

As I recall the events of April 6, we continued to advance under enemy fire until we took up positions in a series of buildings which had not been completely leveled. Here we set up our platoon headquarters while we watched and waited for reinforcements. The building where we headquartered was a 5 or 6 story building which gave us a prominent view of the front. I remember going up to the top floor where I observed German soldiers and tanks in the distance. I hurried down to the first floor and discussed the situation with Bill, our platoon officer. Bill sent one man back to Battalion Headquarters to report this information. Soon we heard our artillery coming into the German positions. In the meantime several members of the squad accompanied me to the top floor. We could see German soldiers near the tanks. Even though they were a good distance from us, we fired our rifles at the advancing soldiers and tanks. We fired several hundred rounds from our position until the Germans retreated. I guess our rifle fire in combination with others of the Battalion and our artillery, prevented this attack from continuing and driving us back.

The platoon took up positions in several buildings while Bill and I along with a couple of men from the platoon remained in the large building. While we were at this location, we assumed that our engineers were building a bridge over the Neckar River. Little did we know that as each bridge was completed, German artillery knocked it out again. Later we learned that this treadway bridge was destroyed on three different occasions. From our position, we could hear the artillery shells going in both directions. Since the artillery was not coming into our specific area, we were not concerned. We would have been concerned had we known what was happening at the river. Fortunately for us, we did receive our rations, water and more ammunition.

"On 8 April, the Regimental AT Company crossed the Neckar River without 57 mm guns, suffering seven casualties from the observed artillery fire which had been pounding the crossing site constantly since the initial crossing of Company C of 5 April. The AT Company was ordered to clear all cellars in the rear of

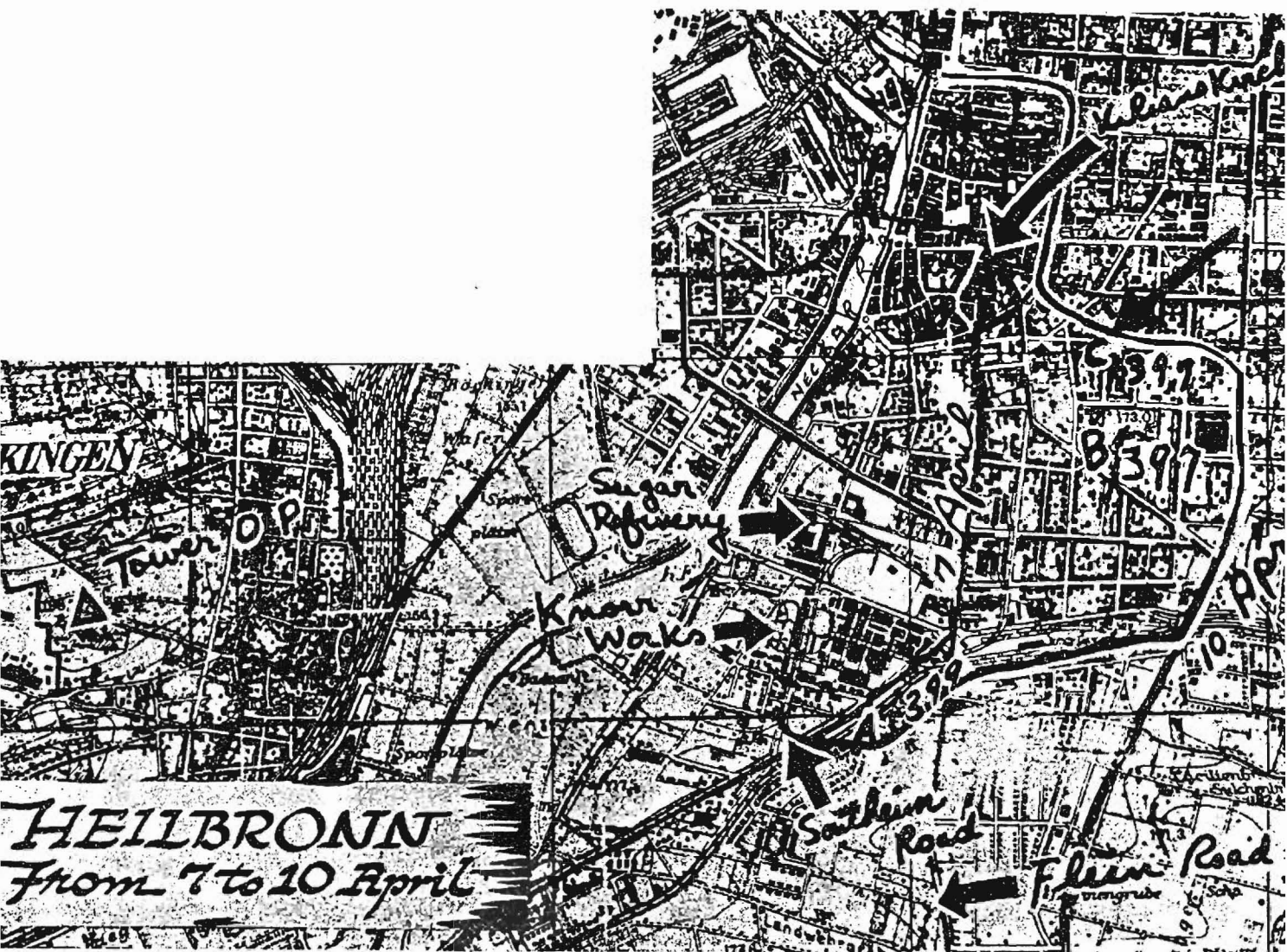


***An engineer probes for wreckage of short-lived treadway bridge.***

the Battalion's positions. the company was then ordered to fill the gap between Companies A and C. Two platoons were used for this, while the other two continued mopping up the rear. At 0615, 8 April, the engineers completed a rubber pontoon bridge across the river, slightly south of the initial crossing, and the platoon of tanks from Company C, 781st Tank Battalion. The bridge was sunk at about 1100 by the artillery which had been falling constantly.

After assembling, the following assignments of the tanks and TD's was made: two tanks to Company A, two tanks to Company C, two Td's to Company B, and two Td's in mobile reserve in the brewery yards. One tank, assigned to Company A, while approaching Kilianskirche from the west and on the street immediately to the south of the church, was hit by panzerfaust fire which destroyed its tracks. As the tank members left the tank, a machine gun from an undetermined origin further to the east fired on the men. This machine gun, with other automatic weapons and panzerfausts, stopped four attempts during the day, of the 1st Platoon of Company C to move into the triangular block across from Kilianskirche."





After the war, I mailed the 1st Battalion newsletter **Heilbronn** and another paper to my parents. In my letter, I related my participation in the above encounter. "Be sure to keep the one, **Heilbronn**, as that is what occurred to the 1st Platoon of Company C. I was over with the first platoon when they tried to take the one block. They were short of men, so three others and myself went over to help. On several occasions there were more Germans behind us than in front. We never knew what was the score. The poem in the newsletter was written by our platoon runner who always slept with us in the platoon CP. The three names mentioned in the poem were well known to all of us and were great soldiers. Lindle was our platoon medic and I slept in the same hole with him for about a month before he was killed. All three were killed a few weeks before the war ended."

What Has Become Of Our Comrades

by

Pfc. Harry Hillers, Company C.

What has become of our comrades?  
The boys that we all knew so well,  
Who, once filled with the joys of living  
Are now dead, from bullet and shell--

Who helped us fight many a battle  
Thru the mud and the slime and the dirt,  
And who gave their lives a bitter fight,  
That peace might rule the earth.

How well I remember their faces,  
As in memory they go marching past,  
And the line seems never ending  
Of those who gave their all to the last.

There was McCord from "Ole" Alabama,  
Whose scouting was quite renown--  
He died in a ditch by the roadside  
Where a machine gun cut him down.

I remember the death of "Ol" Skinner--  
Whose commission was made on the field  
He was always admired by everyone,  
For his courage and fighting zeal.

And then there was Lindow, the medic,  
Who was always quite unafraid--  
He was shot in the back by a sniper,  
While heeding a call for aid.

There are all of these, and Oh! so many,  
I can't recall anymore--  
Who fought, fell and sampled hell,  
In a long and bloody war.

But now - what had become of our comrades,  
Whose bones now hallow the earth.  
Why, we pray to God, that their spirits  
Have returned to the land of their birth.

Or perhaps to the halls of Valhalla,  
Where all good warriors reign,  
And we fervently pray to heaven above,  
That their sacrifice wasn't in vain."

"During the afternoon of 8 April, the 1st Platoon of Company C, with two tanks, started advancing eastward. Enemy panzerfaust fire and A/W fire made the advance costly. The route was receiving heavy panzerfaust and machine gun fire. " The account continues with the stories of many, many fire fights which ensued for the next two days. "A fierce attack on the morning of 10 April, preceded by an artillery preparation of amazing proportions for approximately fifteen minutes duration, was driven off after three hours of most vicious fighting. Companies B and C moved in a well-planned attack. "

It was during this period that the Germans attacked our platoon which was located in the foremost part of the area. One German bazooka shell hit the building and knocked a large hole in one wall. Our platoon just so happened to be in the other part of the building at the time and no one was hit. After this sneak attack from the side which was unprotected, our platoon was alerted to this new danger. The platoon located the soldiers and a fire fight continued for several hours. Several of our guys were injured in this fight, but I have no specific recollection of who and how many. At such times, I was able to put aside the negative aspects as nothing but a bad dream. Our firing stopped the German advance. Prior to this attack, an artillery observer had joined our position and he was able to direct artillery and mortar fire into the German position.



Picture of wounded GI  
on stretcher by river

After this attack, an uneasy calm set in while we waited for additional tanks and reinforcements to cross the river. Our artillery fire continued to fall among the enemy all during this period. During the days preceding the final capture of Heilbronn on April 12, we would peer through the open windows of the top floor and watch for signs of the enemy. On many occasions we observed soldiers moving about to our left, right and to our front. Many shots were directed at these moving targets over a period of approximately five days.



100th Enters Heilbronn, Ger Sig C 61-13



Remains, Heilbronn, Ger. Sig C 61-12

It was during the darkness of the night that the stress of the fighting took its toll on the men. As we holed up in the cellars and basements of the rubble of ruined buildings, the men who stood guard at night, experienced the eerie feeling of endless enemy movement. Some of these movements were real, others were nothing more than a rat scurrying for cover. The most welcome sound was the recognized password of your buddy, who had come to your relief so that you could sleep. We were all a bunch of tired G.I's who were weary of fighting an enemy that seemed to be everywhere.

At night, our orders were not to shoot unless we were absolutely certain that the noises were an advancing enemy. Some of the squads placed booby traps with wire and fragmentation grenades placed at strategic locations rather than use additional men as guards. The strain on your eyes from peering through the darkness of the night caused your eyes to burn and water. The two hours of guard seemed endless. You felt alone even though your buddies were only a few feet away. At the same time, you were responsible for their safety. When the daylight of the morning came, the daytime house to house clearing was in some respects a welcome relief. Even the occasional fire fights of the day, provided you with the knowledge that the enemy was slowly being driven from his nighttime haunts.

The fighting continued off and on throughout our capture of Heilbronn. On one day as I was looking out the top floor windows for movement, I observed civilians entering and departing a hole in the center of the leveled city block next to our building. After discussing this situation with Bill, he requested that I take one man with me to investigate. Upon arriving at the hole, which obscured a large door, I could see that it was in use. We cautiously opened the door. We heard voices. The human stench that emanated from the hole was sickening. I shouted "aus, aus, aus" in German. This brought forth a voice and an elderly man who shouted "nicht sheesen" which translated means "don't shoot." After a feeble attempt to communicate in German, I gathered that he was the leader of the civilian people who had taken refuge in what was a "bomb shelter." He attempted to assure me that no German soldiers were in the shelter. Reluctantly, I knew I had to check out his story. He led me to where the people were located. Women, babies, children and a few old men were everywhere. I guessed that several hundred civilians had been holed up here for over a week and by now they were in a desperate condition with no place to go. Anything that moved above ground was fired on by us or by German soldiers. I returned to our platoon headquarters and reported on what I had found.

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The day before I became sick, I wrote the following letter.  
April 10, 1945 (Received April 20, 1945)

Dear Mom, Dad, Gertrude & Helen,

I have not written for several days and you probably are worried about me. I've just been too busy to write. If you read the papers you know why and know where I am now. By the time you receive this letter though most likely, I'll be someplace else again. I haven't had any mail for several days now so I don't know what is going on at home. Yesterday I read a Stars and Stripes and saw where we were mentioned. Maybe the Tribune has something in there about us. It is about 2 in the morning now and I didn't have anything to do except to watch the phone and I thought it was a good time to write a letter again. The last letter I got was from Glenna. In my last letter I forgot to mention that I got another package with fruit cake and candy bars. Bye, Lester

-----

On April 11, we received orders to advance. By this time, tanks, reinforcements and supplies had crossed the river and the division was about to complete the capture of Heilbronn. The division which now was about one half the original men after fighting the defending Germans for about a week. This was the last major fight for the division.

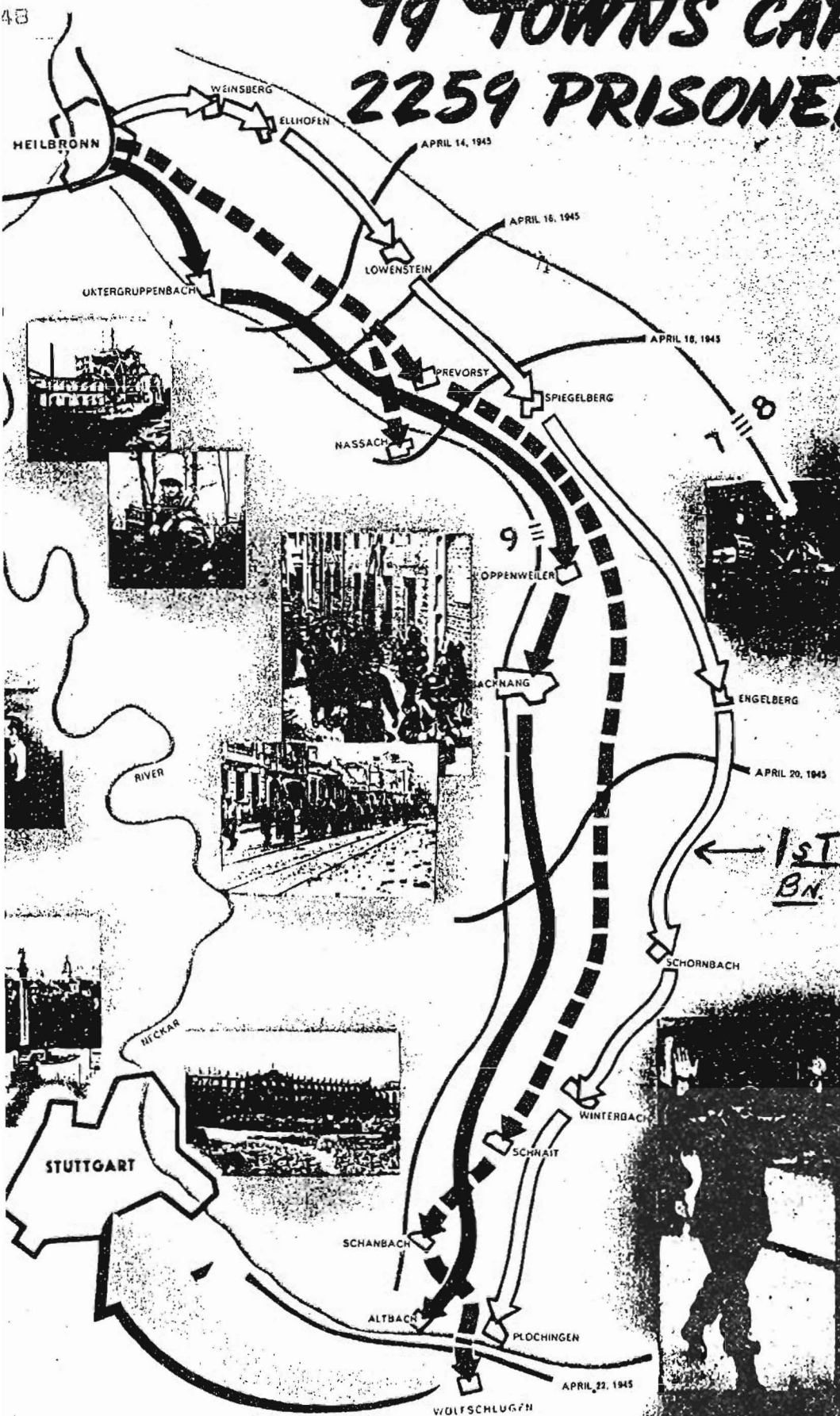
As we advanced out of Heilbronn on April 11, I became very weak and nauseated. After a short walk, I told Bill (Lt.) that I was unable to go any further in my condition. He told me to go back as best I could and hopefully find a first aid man. Lucky for me, I came upon an advancing first aid man who was following our advance. He helped me to locate a jeep which took me to the battalion aid station. I was unable to move any further on my own power. I remember lying on a stretcher in a drowsy coma condition for sometime. Later an ambulance took me to another rear aid station. From here I was taken by ambulance to a clearing station. About an hour later, I was carried onto an ambulance which took me to an evacuation hospital. I remained here for a day. I was then taken to another clearing station where I was then carried onto a C-47 cargo airplane which took me to a hospital in Nancy, France.

I had developed a case of hepatitis (yellow jaundice). After all this time and drinking who knows what, the bugs caught up with me. The war was finally over for me. I remained in the hospital for about six weeks when I was transferred to a rehabilitation hospital located in Rheims for further treatment. About two months later I was returned to the company as part of the army of occupation. Even though my combat experience was over, the war continued for my buddies.



# LIBERTY APRIL 14-23

## 79 TOWNS CAPTURED 2259 PRISONERS TAKEN



### 1ST BATTALION

HEILBRONN  
WEINSBERG  
ELLHOFEN  
DENNBRONN  
VORHOF  
LOWENSTEIN  
SCHMELLENHOF  
HIRRWEILER  
BERNBACH  
BOCHELBERG  
NEUFURSTENHUTTE  
OBERFISCHBACH  
GROSSHOCHBERG  
SPIEGELBERG  
GROSSERLACH  
SIEBERSBACH  
KLEINHOCHBERG  
BERWINKEL  
LIEMANNSKLINGE  
ESCHENSTRUET  
ZWERENBERG  
EULENHOFLE  
WALTERSBERG  
HORSCHHOF  
ROTTMANNESBERG  
SECHSELBERG  
EBERSBERG  
LIPPOLDSWEILER  
DAFERN  
HOHNWEILER  
ALBERWEISSACH  
SALACH  
UNTERE MUHLE  
MICHELAU  
ASPERGLEN  
METZLENSWEILERHOF  
SCHORNACH  
ENGELBERG  
WINTERBACH  
HOHENGHEHREN  
BALTMANNWEILER  
REICHENBACH  
PLOCHINGEN

### 2ND BATTALION

OBERHEINRIET  
UNTERHEINRIET  
HOOPHBACH  
FARNERSBERG  
ETZLENSWENDEN  
KAISERBACH  
BILLENBACH  
MURRHARDT  
JETTENBACH  
KLINGEN  
STOCKSBERG  
PREVORST  
NASSACH  
KURZACH  
SIEBENKLEE  
SCHNAIT  
AICHELBACH  
SCHANBACH  
KRUMMHARDT  
AICHSCHEISS  
DEIZISAU  
WOLFSCHLUGEN

### 3RD BATTALION

3rd Battalion  
OBERGRUPPENBACH  
UNTERGRUPPENBACH  
STANGENBACH  
GREUTHOF  
ALTLAUTERN  
HEILAUTERN  
JUX  
REICHENBERG  
OPPENWEILER  
BACKNANG  
UNGEHEUERHOF  
HEININGEN  
ALLMERSBACH  
KONNIGSBRONNHOF  
REYTERSBERG  
OPPELSBACH  
HOSSLINSWART  
ROHRBRONN  
HEBSACK  
GERADSTETTEN  
GRUNBACH  
BEUTELBACH  
MANOLZWEILER

E. Barber

The advance continued at a fast pace as the war was about to end. The men would often ride on tanks and trucks until some resistance was encountered. This required the infantry foot soldier (doughboy) to dismount and attack the token resistance. Occasionally, this token resistance was more than was expected. Two such incidents were recalled by Charlie Meyers, a member of the 3rd platoon. As the platoon was advancing outside the city of Heilbronn, the platoon leader S\Sgt. Fred Droste was killed. The platoon was pinned down by a barrage of 88's on a hill overlooking a railroad line and a tunnel. Fred had the platoon dig in along the railroad embankment after which he went into the tunnel with one squad. The tunnel itself was filled with civilians who were only seeking shelter from all the shelling and gunfire. Fred tried to get the people back further inside for greater safety. About this time one lone 88 came whistling straight down the tracks and exploded just inside the tunnel entrance, killing Fred and several civilians.

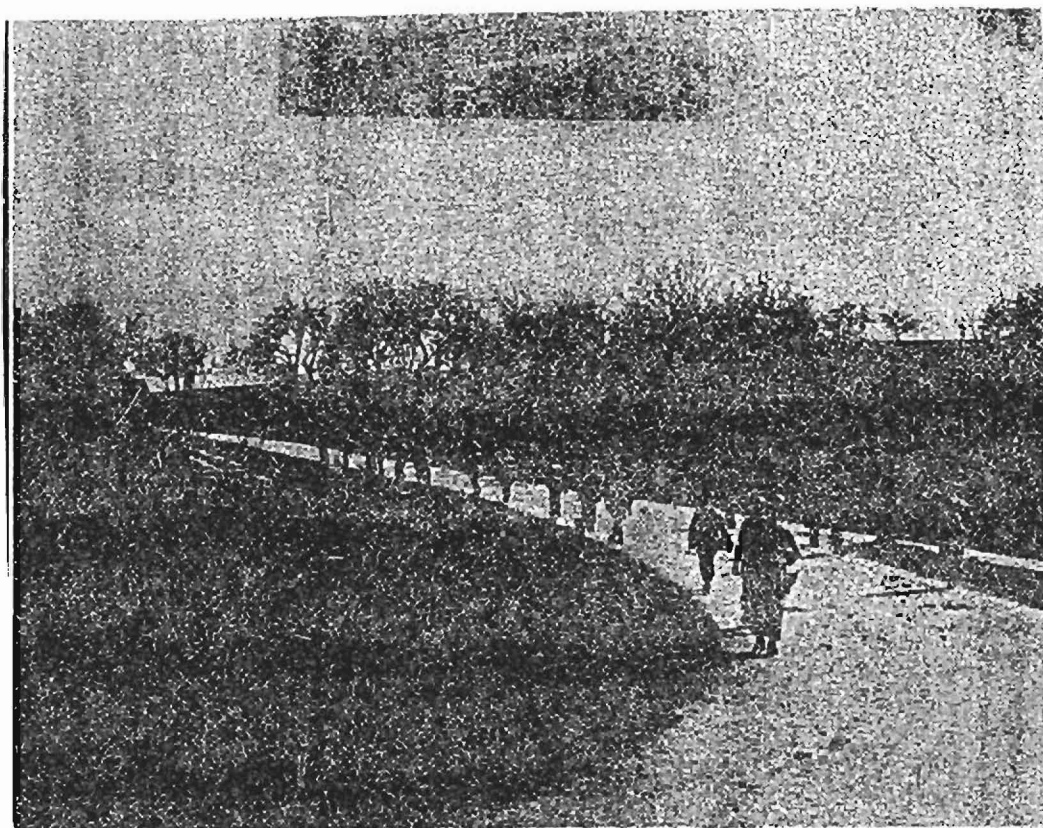
It was about a week later, the 3rd platoon was advancing down a road in open countryside. A TD (tank destroyer) was assisting the platoon in this advance. The 3rd squad rode on the tank while the other squads walked along side and in back of the tank. It was a bright sunny day--late afternoon and all seemed to be peaceful. Charlie was sitting behind the turret and his buddy Herb Coe was sitting next to him to his right. All of a sudden the platoon heard one of the tank men yell, "over there." Just as the turret started to traverse to the right, there was a tremendous bang as an enemy shell hit the turret.

All of the guys on the tank went flying through the air. As Charlie regained consciousness, he found himself lying in the middle of the road without a steel helmet, gun and entrenching tool and unable to hear. The explosion had blown these away. Over his shoulder he saw the TD zigzagging down the road aflame and out of control. As he regained some hearing, he could hear machine gun fire, but he could not tell if it was ours or the enemy. Slowly he rolled over to the ditch by the side of the road for protection. Other G.I.'s came backwards as they crawled towards him in the ditch. They continued crawling in the ditch for some time when they headed back to an old farm house for regrouping. By then it was getting dark and they bedded down there for the night. Aside from some headaches and dizziness, which seemed to lessen through the night, they were okay. Herb Coe, who was sitting next to Charlie was missing along with the two tank men.

A patrol was sent out during the night to look for them, but they could not be located. The next morning as they moved out and down the road again, they passed the burned out TD. The two



tank men were not able to get out of the TD and were burned. Herb was laying in the road up against the tank treads. They were unable to determine if the shell or the flames killed Herb as the shell went through the turret. In all probability, it was both. Poor Herb, he had just gotten back from a period of (R & R) rest and relaxation in Paris when this had to happen to him. The men who experienced this ordeal can never forget this incident.



*A column of 397th Inf. dogfaces swing through the budding orchards on the outskirts of Fischbach, Germany.*

The Altbach map which covers the advance to this town indicates the increasing rate of progress as the Germans withdrew or surrendered. The 397th Regiment had by now captured or accepted the surrender of 4778 prisoners since March 15. It was now becoming very evident to the foot soldiers that unconditional surrender was not far off even as a few of the enemy tried to inflict one more casualty on the advancing G.I.'s. Actual combat operations came to a standstill by April 24 at which time the company went into holding and patrolling situation. Even though the end of the war was in sight, the G.I. had to be alert for possible sabotage as a defeated soldier or civilian may try to get his revenge.

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After four days in the hospital I was able to write a short letter to my parents telling them of my good fortune in coming down with hepatitis. I know that this was the most welcome news they could have received from me at the time.

April 15, 1945

(Received April 25, 1945)

Dear Folks,

I suppose you have been wondering why I haven't written in a week. The unexpected happened and I got sick with a case of yellowjauntis. It isn't serious, but it takes about 5 weeks to clear up. I've been sick now for almost six days, but today is the first day I felt like writing. I've been having headaches, feeling tired out, can't eat much and I have a yellow color. I am a long ways from the front. I rode halfway by ambulance and the rest by plane. That was something new for me. By the time I get out of here I hope this war will be over. I still have to use my old address for awhile yet. I am in a bed of a general hospital. Bye, Lester

## CHAPTER 12

### THE OCCUPATION

On May 5, 1945 Major General Burress, commander of the 100th Infantry Division issued 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.

At 0001 hours May 9, General Eisenhower announced the unconditional surrender of all German land, sea, and air forces in Europe. The war was now officially ended. I heard the good news from my hospital bed where I was recuperating from a case of hepatitis. As far as I was concerned, the war ended April 11.

My hospital stay was uneventful. The recuperation period was primarily one of diet and bedrest. I was located in a ward with many other patients who came and left. One of the scuttlebutt topics of us patients was to speculate as to when we would be sent to the Pacific to fight the Japanese. A few G.I.'s would continue to feign sickness in order to avoid further combat.

On several occasions the beds next to me were occupied by G.I.'s who had been captured by the Germans and were later released as their captors were captured. In my letter to Dad of April 30, 1945, I relate one such story. "The fellow in the bed next to me has been telling me what all he went through after his capture. Right after he was captured, he was forced to walk three days straight with no food. Then they were given some soup and put on a train. They car was locked and they went without food and water for five days. When the Russians started their drive into the heart of Germany, they were forced to walk 36 days straight. Right now he is doing okay and is gaining about a pound a day." After hearing these stories, I was fortunate in not being taken a prisoner.

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A series of letters written after the war.

On May 14, 1945 my parents received a letter from the mother of one of my buddies, Bill New.

Dear Mr. Gluesenkamp; Strange to receive word from you that your boy has been hospitalized for yellow jaundice. Our boy was taken out of combat March 25th and sent back to a hospital in France-yellow jaundice. Wednesday of this week we received a letter from him written on April 27th it stated that he had completely recovered and was awaiting orders to return to his outfit.

To-day, May 11th, I received a Cablegram from him - Greetings for Mothers Day. Said also that he was getting along O.K. I suppose that now they will see service in the Pacific Area.

I had meant to write you a letter this week to tell you that our boy had spoken of Lester in letters received recently-he told us that Lester had been recommended for Officers Training and added that he was a grand chap and would make a fine officer. I think he values Lester's friendship, refers to him as Glu. We Appreciate your writing to us and hope that the boys may be together. Sincerely yours, Mrs John New. May 11th, 1945

May 17, 1945, Dear Glenna and Guy,

The other day I received fifty letters and today I received eleven more. For the past two days now I have been trying to answer them. Five of the letters were from you so I guess I owe you a few. I'm getting a little tired of lying around here at the hospital doing nothing except read magazines and listen to the radio. According to the papers all men who have never been overseas will go. A troop transport home sounds good to me. I must have been in the right place at the right time to have ended up in the hospital. Bye, Lester

June 9, 1945

(Received June 25, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

Tonight I heard that we would be moving in a few days, but where to I don't know. I heard the 44th Division was going back to the states. They came over about a month before we did. We were usually together at the front, if you remember.

When I came back to the company, I learned that Bill New is on furlough in England. He will be back in about a week. He came down with yellow jaundice several weeks before I did and he was gone about the same length of time.

The OCS (Officers Candidate School) is over now that I went to the hospital and the war is over. If I would have stayed, I might have gotten a battlefield commission, but as it turned out I am satisfied as I am. I believe I'll stay an enlisted man whether it be a sergeant or private. The one reason I wanted OCS was to get away from the front for awhile.

Sometime ago I wrote that I thought the point system was all right. (For the return to USA) I don't think so now that you don't get 5 points for every month in combat. As it is the fellows in the rear echelon who were behind you and never in combat, receive as many battle stars as you do. You receive more points for the Bronze and Silver Stars, but if you do get them, you usually deserve them. I know myself though that all the guys that deserve it don't get it. As an example all the cooks received the Bronze Stars for bringing hot chow to us twice a day once in awhile and the guys that stayed there practically day and night were never rewarded. The whole system is unfair to the guy who is risking his life day after day and his deeds are never exceptional, but still he was there all the time. There are only two guys who stayed in the platoon and in combat all the time, except for a four day rest about every two months. At the time I left I was even with them in days of combat. The three of us were the only ones who hadn't been hit or got sick out of the original platoon. Bye, Lester

June 27, 1945

(Received July 18, 1945)

Dear Mom and Dad,

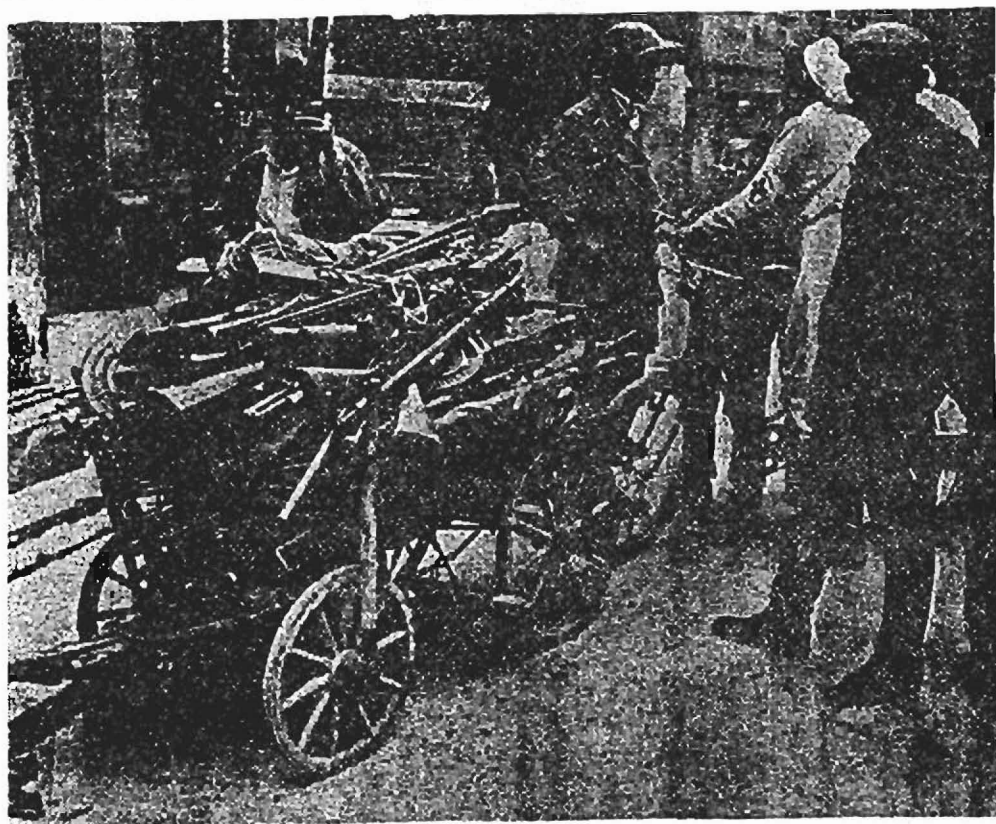
I am enclosing several pictures which I accumulated. The picture of myself was taken the day before we went into Heilbronn, only we didn't know at the time we were going there. (See picture of author on page v.) This is how I looked most of the time with all the gear I carried. I wish it was clear, but the day was cloudy when it was taken. You will notice that I have two blankets rolled up and tied with a rope which is slung around my shoulder. Usually I carried only one blanket when we started off in March. The two shiny objects are 8 round clips of ammunition which I stuck on the bandoleer to make it faster to get to. I have on two bandoleers of ammunition, 48 rounds to a bandoleer, which are the cross straps in front. Above the shiny objects you can see a fragmentation hand grenade. The grenade has a handle on it which I always slipped down in a button hole in the jacket. It was always handy that way. My top left pocket on the jacket has a bulge which is where I always carried my stationery. The other two pockets are where I put my K rations. Here you can see all the junk that I carried. The shovel is tucked down in my cartridge belt, but it can't be seen. One of the fellows took this picture and sent it home and he just got it back yesterday.

It rained all morning and we stayed inside. This afternoon we had NCO school so I went to mechanic school. All non-commissioned officers had to go. Show the picture of myself to Adell Rubin. She wanted to see what I looked like. I had others taken, but they did not turn out. Bye, Lester

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On May 24, 1945, I was released from the hospital and I began my journey back to the company through many replacement depots along the way. On June 5, I rejoined Company C. in the town of Mietingen, Germany located approximately 25 miles south-east from Ulm. The new faces in the company made me feel like I was in a strange outfit. So many old faces were gone, while other old faces did not look the same after the removal of the dirt and beards. The change from dirty combat clothes and gear to the wearing of new uniforms without guns added to this strange feeling.

The company was stationed in a small German town where no fraternization with the civilians was permitted. Now that the war was over, the resentment and hatred which was evident as we entered Germany, seemed to have lessened. Each town that we occupied, we searched for weapons. The prize discovery in each search was the local schnapps distillery or anything of a similar nature which provided fresh contents for our canteens. After several weeks of search and occupy, we were relocated to the town of Reichenbach which was about 25 miles east of Ulm. It was late June before I sewed my sergeants stripes on my shirt. The infantry foot soldier wore no stripes or bars while in combat for fear that the ranking sergeants and officers would be picked off first by the enemy. The officers turned their bars under their collar so that the bars were not visible.



*After capture of an enemy town, arms were confiscated and civilians questioned. This scene was in Waiblingen, Germany.*

On or about July 9 we moved to the town of Renningen located about 15 miles from Stuttgart. It was here that we spent several days searching the nearby woods and fields for minefields, duds and guns. Our search paid off as we found a minefield and one dud. Nearby was a German airfield with many wrecked planes including one RAF plane. In the wrecked RAF plane we found parts of the pilot, including his dog tags. We turned these into the graves registration unit.

On one day we pulled a surprise inspection on the town as we searched every home and building. The civilians were ordered out of their homes while my men searched. I kept a watch on the civilians while this was underway. We found some ammunition, bayonets and many pieces of Nazi propaganda. All this confiscated material was destroyed. On July 28, we were relocated and stationed in a German army barracks located in the city of Stuttgart. We remained here until we left for the states in mid December.



3rd Platoon Co. C.

While we were stationed in Stuttgart, the U.S.O. presented performances in the soccer stadium before an audience of about 10,000 G.I.'s. On one occasion we saw and heard Bob Hope, Billy Conn, Gale Roberts and Jerry Calons. On another we were treated



to a show by Jack Benny, Ingrid Bergman, Martha Tildon and Larry Adlers. At other times we watched football games between Regiments and Division. I was able to attend the NCO club where we played cards, read and drink schnapps. Our daily activities usually consisted of reveille, calisthenics, drill and schooling. I attended NCO school and a school for mechanics.

In November as we were preparing to return to the states, I was given the assignment of supervising a German civilian work crew of fifty men as they worked around the barracks as K.P's, janitors and laborers. My ability to speak German had improved and I was able to communicate with the men. The mayor of the town, who is called the burgermeister, assigned the men to me as needed and he determined their rate of pay. We paid the men wages which in retrospect was more in the nature of a token dole than a wage. In one of my letters I had written as follows, "Last week the highest paid worker received \$10 for 94 hours of work and the lowest received \$3.80 for about 60 hours of work. I suppose their pay was based on a judgment of family needs."

On November 18 we pulled another "tally-ho" raid on the city of Stuttgart. "Tally-ho" was the code word for a search of each house and building in the city for munitions, arms and weapons of any kind. This search extended over two days. On the following Sunday, we checked all identification papers. Those without papers were put in a stockade and held until they could be identified. Many deserters and criminals were located in this manner. On December 9, 1945, I made a 300 mile trip to the towns where Company C was stationed after the war in order to secure a release of damage from the burgermeister. I remember listening to a lot of sad tales, but in the end I came back with the release. In December we were alerted to prepare for return to the U.S.A through the port of Marseilles. We arrived in the states in mid January and I was honorably discharged January 30, 1946.

A few general statistics, may be of interest. In my letter to my parents dated July 1, 1945, I wrote the following, "The other day I figured up how many casualties our platoon suffered during our combat period. We began with a total of 41 men, but our usual platoon strength was about 30. As near as I can determine and remember, approximately 30 were wounded, 5 were killed, two were captured, four came down with trench foot and about 12 went back for sickness, shock and for transfer. The 12 does not include cases like mine. Only two of the original stayed with the platoon all the time. I was the third until I became sick." Out of the original 41 men in my platoon only three of us returned to the states as part of the original group. Something happened to all the other men including many replacements. I tried to learn the exact totals from company records, but they were incomplete.



The 397th Infantry Regiment originally comprised approximately 2,500 soldiers of which approximately 1700 were riflemen. Approximately 500 men were in the weapons platoons manning the machine guns and mortars which supported our advance. Even though the riflemen may have been in front, the enemy artillery and mortars would frequently land among the men who were in support, as the riflemen were too near the enemy positions. Approximately 383 soldiers of the regiment were killed, but many of those killed were replacements so that no ratio can be calculated. About 1300 men were injured in the fighting and another 298 men from our regiment were captured by the Germans or were missing in action. I would estimate that up to 2,500 replacements were added to our regiment during the period of combat.

The official records of the division lists seven names from the 1st Battalion of the 397th as having been captured by the Germans. The names of the two who were taken prisoner from the hole next to mine were not included. The first battalion of the 398th Infantry Regiment list 190 names (approx. 20%) as having been captured. The 1st Battalion of the 398th lost most of these men in the fighting around Rimling on New Years day.

The regiment captured 6700 German soldiers during all the fighting from November 1, 1944 until May 5, 1945. At Heilbronn the regiment captured or accepted the surrender of 3600 German soldiers. The 1st Battalion took approximately 63 towns from the Germans. We walked a total of about 200 miles as the crow flies. We did not fly as crows, but walked or crawled like groundhogs and ants back and forth, from left to right, and right to left to somewhere in order to locate an enemy, to dig another hole, to seek shelter from the cold rain or snow, or to escape the German mortar and artillery shells that always seemed to zero in on us, no matter how deep the hole.

I am thankful to have had the opportunity to finish this story and to be able to tell this story to my children and grandchildren. My children and grandchildren are also fortunate to have the opportunity to be able to read about their Dad's and Grandfather's war time experience.

Sometime after the war I was awarded the Bronze Star Medal. The citation reads as follows:

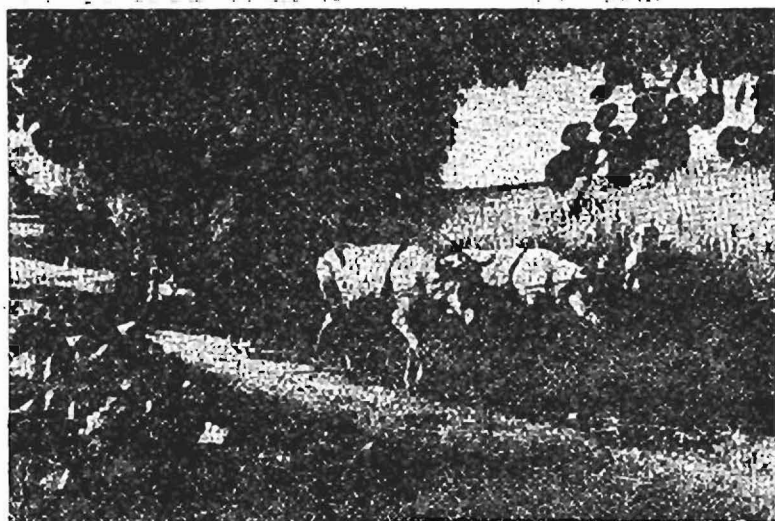
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LESTER O. GLUESENKAMP, 16120602, Staff Sergeant, 397th Infantry Regiment, for meritorious achievement in action during the period 1 March 1945 to 10 April 1945, in France and Germany. Sergeant Gluesenkamp performed his hazardous duties with outstanding skill, courage and initiative during this period of combat operations. He especially distinguished himself on 3 April 1945, near

Ittlingen, Germany, When after voluntarily leading a night patrol deep into enemy lines to neutralize known German mortar positions, he and his men were fired upon by an enemy automatic weapon. Realizing that if he called for an attack on this menace he would disclose his patrol, Sergeant Gluesenkamp approached the mortar weapons from a different angle and after leading an attack on them in which three Germans were killed and the mortars destroyed, he proceeded to lead an assault on the automatic weapon which was neutralized and two Germans were captured. Entered military service from St. Peter, Illinois.

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The award was appreciated. In a letter home, I wrote that I thought the award was for going out on a night patrol behind enemy lines and taking prisoners which gave us valuable information. The particular event took place about two days before we entered Heilbronn. The writer who prepared the award glamorized the event with additional details in order to reward my cumulative efforts during my period of combat and to secure official approval.

The fortunes of war leave much to be desired or better yet to never happen in the first place. The only fortune of war is to have survived in one piece.



PEACE AGAIN. First choice of the Judges in this week's Photo contest was the entry of Pfc Robert Bruner, 398th.

*Rec. Aug. 21, 1945*