

Heidelberg



The Rhine was green, white-capped, and only 200 yards wide where the 399th went across on a water-level pontoon bridge the last day of March. All the Joes kept a wary eye on the high range of mountains to the east behind Heidelberg. After passing through levelled Mannheim, however, the advance drifted south away from the mountains. The 399th stopped for the night in Brühl and an SS barracks with big Red Crosses on the roofs to fool the bombers. No Geneva believers, the Germans.

Easter Sunday, April 1, the Regiment kicked off east of the Rhine. Pushing through the 63rd Division between Brühl and Schwetzingen, the 399th struck south parallel to the Rhine. The Red Battalion's Easter Parade consisted of flushing out five miles of woods before Reilingen, while the White Battalion drove ahead with tanks to grab

Hockenheim. Patrols quickly contacted the 397th Infantry on the left and the French 2nd Corps on the right. The Blue Battalion went back to Mannheim to guard Corps.

"Why does the infantryman sit down in an easy chair with a big shot of schnapps on April 1st?" quipped one of the Paddlefeet.

"I dunno, Oswald, you tell us."

"Because he's completely beat out, having just finished a March of 31 days."

A company of dusky French Moroccans trudged good-naturedly through Reilingen lugging huge ammo bags, huger packs, .50 calibre machineguns, bazookas, 81 millimeter mortars.

"Whew, lucky thing we weren't drafted in Africa. Those guys don't need any trucks."

"They're probably Rear Echelon troops hauling supplies up to the front line troops, which are also themselves."

The French took our next day's objective to the South and the 1st Battalion moved over to Waldorf, birthplace of John Jacob Astor. The land had become rolling pasture, meadow, and orchard — a treat for the doughfoot.

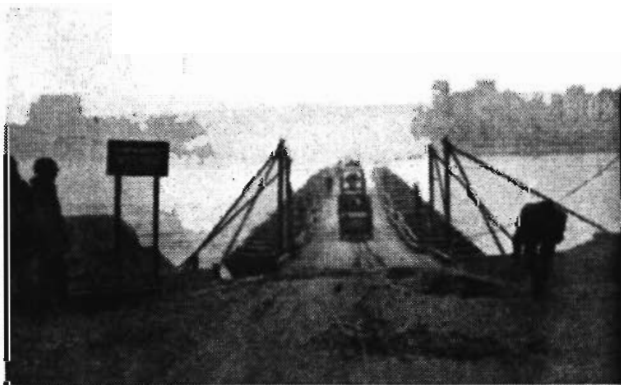
April 3rd the Red Battalion made a long armored advance over dusty roads and cross country hillsides in the wake of the blitzing 10th Armored. This was tank country. Steinsfurt fell at twilight to the 1st Battalion while the 2nd Battalion jumped off in attacking armored echelon and pushed from Wiesloch to Sinsheim. The enemy was fading, we never saw him any more. American Shermans tearing across the landscape looked like giant pincushions, with rifles, BARs, machineguns, and doughfeet protruding haphazardly in all directions.

Some of the Joes were a little suspicious of straddling the 76 gun and riding the tanks like a bunch of animated clay ducks in a shooting gallery.

One of the boys showed the tank driver the Mauldin cartoon where the tankman is saying to the worried infantryman "What're yuh worried about, we've got six inches of armor."

The tanker looked at the cartoon and chuckled "Great guy that Mauldin."

The war was practically over — *unbedingt*. The Air Corps rode herd over Germany all day long, the French were rolling somewhere on our right, we hadn't fired at a Jerry in ages. Up north



Bridgehead via a bridge... the doughboys felt like tourists

"... the infantry dove for the ditches"



six armies were slicing Germany into thin strips. How many days, how many hours? Some of the doughs inwardly wouldn't have minded if it did last a few more days, because this searching towns for Jerries that weren't there was fast becoming good sport. How far was Czechoslovakia, anyway?

April 4th the Big Boys looked at their maps, grunted with satisfaction, and laid out Schwaigern, Schluchtern, and Grossgartach as the day's objectives. It looked like another day of good hunting. The light tanks tore through Reichen and Ittlingen and Gemmingen. Only 5 kilometres to Schwaigern, 1st Battalion objective, the sign said.

Schwaigern is a small city on the main drag between Mannheim and Heilbronn. From Gemmingen the highway rises for a mile, goes through a thick wood, and descends again to the neat valley floor with Schwaigern two miles beyond. The deep tank ruts of the 10th Armored had skirted the Gemmingen-Schwaigern woods and barrelled through to Heilbronn. The krauts had opened wide to let the armor race through: then they shut the gates.

The armored column started up the grade toward the woods when distant machineguns started rattling. Thousands of tracers sliced up the morning gray, the infantry dove for the ditches, and the tankers opened up with their pop-gun 37's. A covey of Thunderbolts came over to help, but a skyfull of flak drove them off. Then Jerry started throwing in artillery from the hills off to the right where the French were, theoretically.

"The Frogs' liberating technique consists of using up one town and then moving ahead to take another town."

Came the inevitable call: Infantry up! Able and Charlie moved into the woods. Charlie Company



Charlie Company on exposed right flank of the Western Front "It was no honor"

was the right flank of the 1st Battalion, 399th Infantry, 100th Division, 7th Army, AEF, and Western Front that morning. It was no honor.

For eight hours the Germans threw all kinds of heavy stuff into the Schwaigern Woods — regular 88's, overhead time fire, and self-propelled stuff that tore off the treetops. Hidden machineguns opened up every time somebody tried to find a better gulley to sweat out the shells. In mid-afternoon Lt. Samuel D'Arpino's 1st platoon of Able with three tiny tin tanks ran the two mile valley gauntlet into Schwaigern and captured an entire German company.

The 2nd Battalion fought through to Massenbach and Schluchtern and Fox Company struck out for Grossgartach, last big town before Heilbronn. Grossgartach fell to Fox and tanks at night after a torrid four hour firefight. April 5th White motorized patrols pushed up to the Neckar to contact the 10th Armored and the French.

At Schwaigern the krauts had let the armor through and then shut the door. The same thing happened at Heilbronn. The 398th crossed the Neckar up north and was driving down toward Heilbronn. The 397th was closing in from the West. The 10th Armored then crossed the Neckar right in Heilbronn and took off due east to Crailsheim 40 miles away. *The trap slammed shut and the Germans waited for the 100th Infantry to arrive.*

0045 of April 6th the 1st Battalion left Schwaigern in the blackness and convoyed to Böckingen, right across the Neckar from Heilbronn. In a column of shadows the Red Battalion edged into Böckingen's black streets.

Spring and the 399th arrived together in Heilbronn the enemy was waiting



"Sh-h-h. Walk softly and cut out the gab."
"Whasa matta, Lootenant, yuh noivus?"
"Nope. It just happens that we're now taking this town."
"ooh."

The Battalion set up in houses along the Neckar looking across at enemy held Heilbronn and Sontheim. 500 yards flat trajectory.

Dusk of April 5th the Frolic Red Battalion of the 397th had crossed the Neckar in assault boats. All day of the 6th they were counterattacked in the factory district by waves of Königstiger tanks and Wehrmacht assault troops. Sledged back to the banks of the river, the embattled battalion sent out a feeble radio call "Send us another company!" Charlie Company, 399th, answered the call.

Charlie-Am-Neckar . . . the wise unlaced their shoestrings



"Everyone was fairly jittery from Schwaigern, as it was, and they'd been shelling the West side of Heilbronn where we were all day long with really heavy stuff. That didn't help but this was the payoff. Don't let anybody tell you he wasn't scared in the boat. Hell, it was broad daylight, no smokescreen, and those hills up back of Heilbronn where the Jerries had all their beaucoup artillery were staring right down our necks. I know some guys who unlaced their shoestrings."

Charlie landed, assembled in a brewery, and soon had the situation well in hand. Attacking in the twilight to relieve pressure from the imperilled 397th, Charlie Doughs took a Sugar Factory and grabbed off a few houses along the river. Lebensraum, Hitler called it. Came the dawn, there was a trenchful of krauts dug in exactly in the middle of Charlie's slim bridgehead.

"From the top floor of the brewery we could see the entire terrain along the Neckar, and the attack on the infiltrators unfolded like we were watching a movie thriller. In a shallow hole about 30 yards from the Heinie trench, Sgt. Charles Ufen was heaving grenades at the Jerries. With each burst the guys on the roof would yell as though they were watching a pitcher at a baseball game. Then Sgt. James Harte and his squad came around like something out of a training film. They edged up to the trenches and the Heinies opened up with a stream of automatic fire which we thought must have sliced the whole squad, but it didn't. The M-1's won out. Two krauts were dead and eight came out of the ditch Kamerading. At this point the guys on the roof started screaming 'kill the b-----, kill 'em, kill 'em!'"

That morning of April 7th the Germans threw their big bid to smash the 100th Division's flimsy bridgehead. Shortly after dawn came the No. 1 counterattack. Four King Tigers with 75 Heinie infantry moved against the Sugar Factory. Charlie was driven back to the CP house on the bank of the Neckar. With backs to the wall Lt. Vaughan Calder led the 1st and 2nd

platoons to counterattack the counterattack, recapture the Sugar Factory, rout the big tanks. The krauts attacked after lunch, again after supper. Charlie held—and won an oak leaf cluster to their Presidential Citation, first rifle company in the Division to win that honor.

The Battle of Heilbronn. What do you think a battle is, anyway? Two waves of soldiers with bayonets charging each other with shells exploding all around them and tanks firing, and combat engineers fixing things?

Three Pfc's were in a high observation tower behind Bockingen on the west side of the Neckar. Below them lay Heilbronn and behind it a massive amphitheatre of hills semi-circling the city. Crowding the eastern Neckar bank were tall grain elevators, fat squat factories with huge surrealistic streaks of green, black, and yellow camouflage paint, gigantic cranes, railroad yards. Somewhere down there must be Charlie Company and the 397th and 398th. An artillery F/O came up into the Tower to zero in his batteries. Black sponges of smoke on top of buildings followed by the full-bassed crash of Corps artillery marked his progress. Four Shermans rattled down through Bockingen to the Canal, lined up, and started whanging away at Heilbronn. A flash of flame, a recoiling tank, a drifting black puff across the River, and two Whoom-Boom! explosions.

Word got around about the Tower. First came Looies and Captains and Majors, and pretty soon General Tychsen climbed the circular stairs with Colonel Maloney and Colonel Zehner.

The Big Boys decided Heilbronn looked one hell of a lot like Cassino. Somebody said, "Why not infiltrate a battalion of infantry to that high ground behind the city at night and when dawn comes see what happens."

"Yeah, and where'll you be when they're up there on the hill?" one of the pfc's whispered to his buddy.

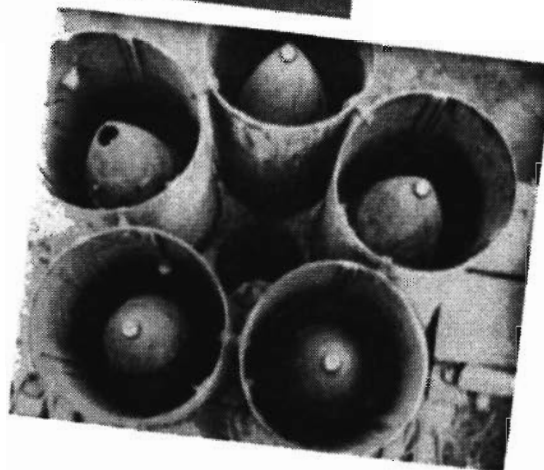
All the officers looked through the telescopic glasses and gave the F/O more targets to dump his Corps freight on. A dozen Thunderbolts appeared in a twinkling over the city and like a rehearsed dance team began their long sweeping bomb runs. After all the P-47's had dropped their 500 pound calling cards they went into ten more tobaggan slides with all eight machineguns thundering and throbbing. Then the 'Bolts swept into a compact bunch and rode off into the sunset. A giant smokescreen seeped up from the bridgehead area and spread a thick fog over the Neckar battlefield. Artillery puffs walked up the highway winding into the hills behind Heilbronn.

Heilbronn was the biggest battle going on in the world on April 7, 1945, yet not a single soldier was visible to the observer all day. That is what a battle is.

Along the river front Able and Baker had anti-tank guns on the front porch, machineguns sticking from under a curtain in the bedroom window — fighting in style. Sniper and machinegun duels crackled across the low green delta. During black morning hours of April 8th the 325th Engineers threw a pontoon bridge across the Neckar. At 0800 Sherman tanks and Hellcat TD's thundered across. At 1130 Baker and Able crossed.

"Remember now, you dash up out of this cellar, straight across the yard, through that pile of rubble, under that iron fence, around the building to the right, turn left when you

A black and white photograph of a large industrial building, possibly a factory or power plant, with a large plume of smoke or steam rising from it. The building is situated near a body of water, and a bridge or dam structure is visible in the background.



Nebelwerfers . . . sky-rockets with a scream



Aerial view of Heilbronn . . . on the left bank beyond the broken bridge sought the 399th

[illegible]

"Dough by dough, hit and run, run and hit"....for some, it was a living



"Here come the Meemies!"....not everyone had a cellar to sweat out in.

come to the water, turn right onto the bridge, run like hell, turn right off the bridge, up the cinder path past the brewery, turn left into the coalyard, go around the Sherman, follow the railroad cars to the big sugar factory, second door on the left side of the building, turn right and down into the basement. Ehrmantraut left 16 seconds ago. You've got 4 seconds. There'll be snipers watching for you to slow down on the pontoon bridge. Ready?" *Guys with Zero IQ's remembered every detail.*

Black crashing 88's saturated the bridgehead area and their roar was magnified in the big hollow factories. Somebody yelled "Here come the Meemies!" and even the Joes in cellars tried to crawl under something. The sky was filled with a metallic shrieking which increased in intensity until the 15 rockets burst like thunder among the factories. *Then all was quiet except the 88's.*

The Meemies and 88's punctured the pontoons and the bridge sank. Half of the Red Raiders swarmed across in assault boats, and Baker and Able joined Charlie in the Sugar Factory. Dog Company heavy machineguns got up on the roof and began sweeping the city as the rifle companies jumped off to expand the narrow bridgehead. Factory to factory, house to house, room to room fighting. Platoon by platoon, squad by squad, dough by dough, hit and run, run and hit, over dead krauts and under barbed wire — sweating, firing, throwing grenades, charging into blazing houses, shooting through floors.

Giuseppi Peri of Baker Company was a Technician, 1st grade. In Ludwigshafen he escaped from the German slave gangs and hid out in the rubble till Baker Company rat-raced into the city. Then the handsome Italian boy joined up with Sgt. Armando Persiani of Baker and went to Heilbronn in the 399th Infantry.

Baker Company's 3rd platoon was blasting through Wehrmacht troops in Heilbronn when Sgt. Persiani lugging the big 538 radio got hit by a sniper. The enraged Peri became a one-man Army and charged forward shooting up plenty of Germans, capturing 30. Captain Harry Flanagan said "Now don't beat up those prisoners," then looked the other way.

A long-nosed BAR of Robert Jones of Able stuck itself out of a tiny fissure in a blank brick wall, jiggled off 20 crashing rounds. Three krauts running up a burning street 200 yards away folded up. After a dozen small attacks the companies were on their objectives — Baker along the Sontheim—Heilbronn RR and Able along the grassy lawn separating Heilbronn from Sontheim.

A German Jaguar tank came storming into Baker Company's advance houses in early morning of April 9th. Pfc Arthur Grimm jumped into the open with his bazooka, fired one rocket to bring the tank reeling around to attack him, two more head-on rockets to stop the panzer, and one White Phosphorus rocket to set the tank afire. The 2nd platoon took care of the crew escaping from the dead Jaguar.

The Battle of Heilbronn was a battle of supply boats and communications, coun-



Dead German Jaguar . . . one infantryman and one bazooka

terattacks and house to house battles, panzerfaust teams and automatic weapons, snipers and Screaming Meemies, King Tigers and Hitler Jugend. The food situation was never pressing: the doughboys dined on French fries and bottled cherries.

Every morning at 1030 the Meemies would come screaming into the bridgehead and the bridge would go. Two tanks sank in the narrow Neckar. The Engineers rigged up a motor-propelled assault ferry which carried infantry and armor into the ever expanding bridgehead. Pfc Leon Januszewski of the Medics performed numerous deeds of gallantry around the bridgehead for five days when killed by shelling.

April 10th Able made a local attack to sever Sontheim from Heilbronn.

"The two scouts went out the door and were promptly riddled by burpguns from the next house not 30 yards away. Sgts. James Amoroso and Gilbert Moniz went out into the yard firing into the windows of the Heinie house to drag in the two badly-wounded men. Fred Mattson made a dash for the fortress house and a civilian dropped a grenade on him out of a second story window. A Sherman tank was called up to blast holes in the house, and the enemy filed out kamerading—three soldiers and one civilian. We sent all four of them back to the rear under guard, but only the three soldiers reached battalion. I can't imagine what happened to the civilian."

At 0300 of April 11th the Jerries were supposed to counterattack with SS troops and King Tigers holding their Sontheim—Flein MLR and 12 Grenadier companies lining the ring of hills behind the city. The counterattack didn't come off, so Charlie slugged through the residential section right up to the edge of the Schlieffern Barracks, a big cluster of SS buildings with Red Crosses on the roofs.

"There's a Jerry hiding in the orchard between here and our left flank house. Call those guys up and let 'em know."

The Jerry appeared breaking out of a hedge and running across the 200 yard smooth lawn toward Sontheim. Every M-1 in Able Company opened up, kicking up clouds of dust. 25 yards, 50 yards, 75 yards—and down.

"Jesse Owens couldn't even have made that 200 yard stretch and he's better than any German."



"Every morning at 1030 the Meemies would come screaming . . ."

Thunderbolts gave the Schlieffern Red Cross Club the works on April 11th, shoving their tons of aerial coal down iron shutters to tear apart the SS buildings. Some of the Joes stuck their heads out the window to watch the fun and the rocking concussion pushed them back in.

Smokescreens turned bright day into eerie night. German civilians crawled out of cellars in the hazy smoke-screen to dig graves for their soldiers while the battle raged around them. A fantastic and weird city, Heilbronn.

Through the fires of Heilbronn...



Have you tried being *Lucky lately?*





Fox Company mopping up along Adolf Hitler Strasse . . . "Give me five years and you will not recognize Germany"

Fox drove down the Railroad and Heilbronner Strasse to Adolf Hitler Strasse. By 0515 Easy had overrun the Sportsplatz and were mopping up along Wilhelmsruhe.

At 0400 in the wet gloomy pre-dawn, Charlie and Able started climbing toward the looming black shadow of the high ground behind the city.

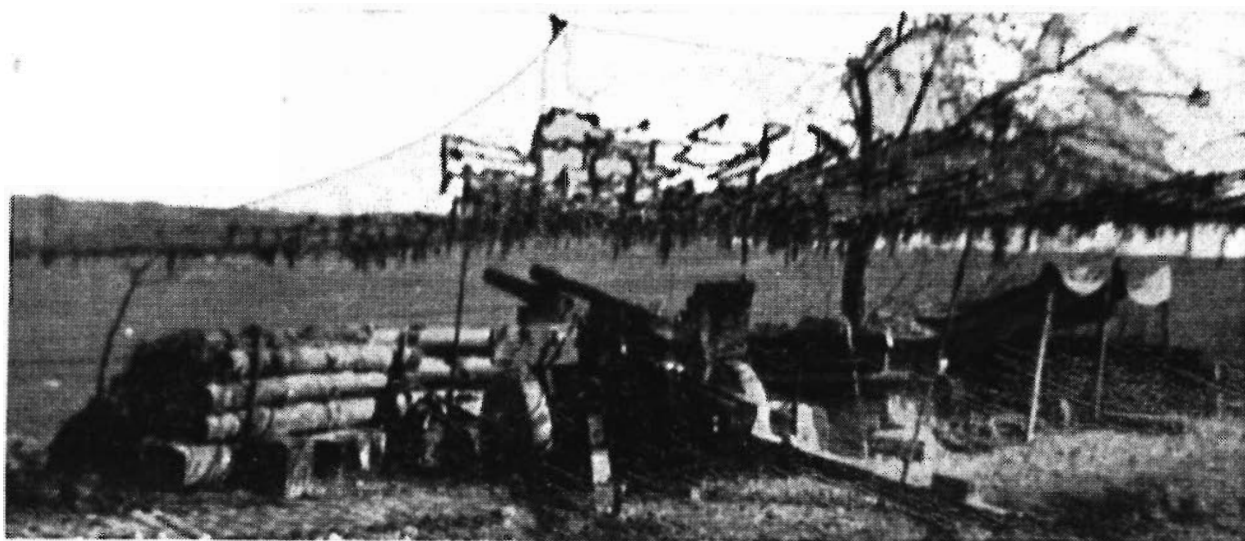
"The guys who remembered it was Friday the 13th didn't bother to remind their buddies. Doughfeet are smart."

S-2, after an all night session, announced that the high ground would be defended by armor but probably no infantry. Joes who knew S-2 used their heads and figured that if Intelligence said "tanks but no infantry" it would probably be "infantry but no tanks". Which it was.

First scout Manford Baker of Charlie Company used the glow of burning Sontheim down below in the Neckar Valley to guide him up into the blackness. Suddenly he fell into a German outpost foxhole, killed the two occupants with Sgt. David Swift's help. Charlie pushed over the hill.

Able jumped off up the winding highway which went into thick woods at the crest. Lt. Charles Stanley's 3rd platoon silently bypassed a chain of machineguns lined up on the woods' edge commanding perfect fields of fire to any point in Heilbronn. Scout David Van Norman led the platoon behind the German MLR, when suddenly the machineguns opened up to pin the rest of the company along the road below. Attacking from the rear, Van Norman got one kraut gun and Sgt. John Hambric knocked out two nests to win the DSC.





"Cannon Company blasted the SS-Tiger Line..."

"It was raining and the woods were thick and visibility was less than 30 yards and there was a kraut behind every tree and it was Friday the 13th and the woods had to be cleared. We plowed through in skirmishers and shot up one Heinie for every one who surrendered. Sgts. Sigmund Christensen and George Klein ran into a blind ambush leading the 2nd platoon, and Chris was killed wiping it out. When we finally got through that mile of woods, Frank Maltese came up from Battalion and told us President Roosevelt had died. That was a black Friday."

Baker was pinned by machineguns and artillery outside Flein when Lt. George Everett and Russell Leahy charged into the town to rout 25 krauts out of their trenches and capture the strongly-defended hinge town of the Flein—Sontheim MLR with no casualties. Lt. Everett won the DSC as he manned the ack-ack .50 machinegun atop a Sherman as Baker pushed through Flein to the high woods beyond under Meemie and White Phosphorus barrages.

Tank-borne George doughs busted into Horkheim-am-Neckar at 1300 and kicked off toward Talheim to the South. Easy Company pushed across open ground toward the high ground capping Talheim. Captain William Smith, Lt. Roland Watson, William Achatz, Jesse Slaughter and Joseph Wallace led Easy into the teeth of the Flein—Sontheim SS-line. Machineguns sprayed the bare slope and Meemies kicked up huge geysers of earth as Easy slugged relentlessly ahead to overrun the German positions until completely pinned down under fire from a hilltop fortress house.

Pfc Robert Pearson was George's lead scout as they attacked across rolling open ground toward Talheim under heavy fire. Two camouflaged pillboxes with surrounding bunkers stopped the company cold, when Pfc Lonnie Jackson charged a bunker full of nine firing Germans with a Thompson sub and took it single-handed. Sgt. Frederick Drew led the attack on one of the pillboxes and shot up the defenders.

When Lt. Alphonso Siemasko got hit, Sgt. Vincent Kelly took over the 3rd platoon while carrying a BAR and radio. He held his platoon together under withering enemy fire, led

them forward to capture a pillbox when he was killed by a shellburst. Kelly and Jackson were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Charles Zierman, Donald Fernback and Daniel Ahearn set up their 2nd Battalion anti-tank gun on the fire-raked open ground and poured 55 rounds of assault fire into the fortress house pinning Easy Company. George Company pushed the attack to Talheim where they saw the Germans all lined up with their hands raised in surrender. At the last minute the krauts ran back into Talheim and opened up. George pulled back from the ambush and dug in to sweat out the shelling with Easy.

"I'll tell you what kind of a guy that George CO, Captain Millard Hayes is. Mortars and Meemies were plastering the whole battalion and everybody was clawing the ground just waiting for the one with his number on it. I look over at Captain Hayes and there he is sitting up with his radio man Robert Fraser timing the mortar shells with his watch so he can locate their positions." *Friday the Thirteenth the 399th won four Distinguished Service Crosses, dozens of Silver Stars, and took 270 prisoners — not scared troops anxious to surrender but out-battled SS and Grenadiers. Many 399th men fell that unlucky day.*

"I could look at dead krauts all day long and never bat an eyelash. But one GI lying there tears me apart. One million Germans don't add up to one American."

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