

## **XVI. A PURPLE HEART**

Now we return to Bud Stimes, writing letters home from the hospital:

### **LIFE IN THE U.S. ARMY 23<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL HOSPITAL**

“... My official diagnosis was SFW, penetrating left thigh, incurred in action 13 November 1944 in France. SFW means shell fragment wound. I know the fragment hit the bone. The surgeons removed the fragment from a second incision which left me with two deep scars. After surgery in the 27<sup>th</sup> Evacuation tent hospital I was carried to the 23<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Army General Hospital at Vittel. The hospital had just been established in Le Grand Hotel which was a deluxe resort hotel with a casino and mineral water baths. 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group headquarters were based in another hotel. I was assigned to a fifth floor room facing west. My bed was next to the window. The six other patients in this room became my squad for several weeks. I was able to resume my letter writing with stationery and pencils furnished by the American Red Cross. My hospital bed in this surgical ward was my duty station until December 22, 1944 when I was transferred to a medical ward in the same hospital. These excerpts from my letters back home to northern Illinois detail my hospital duty.”

Nov. 21, 1944. “They gave me a Purple Heart... The Red Cross has sent it home so you will receive a fine medal... I am in a swell hospital now... I will be as good as new in a little while and be back on the old job... You made me laugh when you said how glad you were that I was safe in England. Everyone in the company got letters to the same effect... I am in a swell hospital that used to be a hotel, but I don’t know where we are... I can get around a little... Our food is

OK and I have no complaints whatsoever about this bed. It has been over a week now and for 5 days I was taking penicillin shots every 3 hours. A needle has become so commonplace that I think nothing of one. My equipment has been strewn all over... I was lucky and just got a nice little piece of shrapnel in the leg... I might catch up on my writing here, but it tires me just to write this... (In June 1995 I remember how the ward nurse, Miss Virginia, said you are costing the taxpayers \$50.00 each time she stuck the needle in my buttocks. Penicillin was scarce and French Morocco wounded soldiers in the next room were treated with sulfa drugs.)”

Nov. 24, 1944. “We had a delicious (Thanksgiving) turkey dinner with all the fixings here in the hospital... I hope the ones up front who deserve it can have what we did. I am willing to bet that they enjoyed K-rations and rain... [*Bet lost, but maybe we'd have been just as well off without the rich food in K-Ration attuned stomachs.*] We have Italian ex-POWs in here as handymen and they can't do enough for us. In the kitchen they have French women so we are exposed to a variety of languages... Our chow is excellent... All of it was good even if the spuds were dehydrated, the peas canned, and the cranberry sauce without the berries. We had pie and pineapple salad so you can see that they really treated us swell. I am mending fast, but they still have to sew me up. We are back on the old routine now and they had some of us boys making bandages, I do a lot of reading, some letter writing, and we do a lot of talking. Most of our talk is about home and food. (This hotel bedroom had seven hospital beds with six wounded infantrymen from the 100<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>, and 79<sup>th</sup> Divisions and a 45<sup>th</sup> Division tanker with appendicitis.) We are in a French hotel and it is some experience to discover these strange plumbing and electrical fixtures. I can get about and I am planning to walk downstairs in the near future and get a haircut. My locks are so long the boys in the room are beginning to call me Abe Lincoln. I am also called Slim... None of our mail has reached us... We have butter here, but we have a craving for ice cream, and I sure would love some milk. [*Ice cream! I can't recall having any whole milk from the time I left the troopship in Marseilles until I got on another troopship to come home almost a year and a half later. I wonder why. We never had much fresh food of any description: powdered eggs and potatoes, canned goods, and if fresh meat I don't recall it.*] Yesterday afternoon we even had cake so we are being pampered... They serve a lot of fruit for dessert when it is possible. I have lived on crackers and cold meat so I guess I have some good food coming to me... I want to write everyone back home, but we have a limited supply of energy, but mostly the shortage of stationery. I was lucky to be able to buy some airmail stamps.”

Nov. 27, 1944 “... I was feeling quite spry a few days ago, but since then I have been sewed up. It keeps me in bed and consequently I am flat on my back... Those three meals a day brighten the monotony... I have read several books... Letter writing is quite fatiguing. Whenever I get some mail I will hit the ceiling three times at least... I had no idea yesterday was Sunday. We get chicken in the middle of the week and for Sunday dinner we get hash. I eat any and everything with no complaints... I hope my previous letters arrive before you get the War Dept. telegram. You'll probably be worried if the telegram comes

first... We read the "Stars and Stripes" and now I see we are going in high gear... I have a wonderful view of some level farmlands from my window... Yesterday a French soldier was in to visit us and he spoke good English. Some of these boys really have it in for the Krauts and you can't blame them... Keep things going on the farm until I come marching home... (The War Dept. telegram to Mrs. Doris Stimes, R2, Capron, Ill. was dated 12-7-44 and said, 'Regret to inform you your son was seriously wounded in action in France thirteen November.' A new army postal office of 640 was given in the telegram.)"

Nov. 29, 1944. " ... Last night they brought me over 10 letters and I was the envy of the room... I hope my boxes reach me because we can enjoy them now ... that stack of letters last night helped me more than penicillin shots... I am sewed together and it keeps me down these 5 days. I can attend to nature's call... I have been eating any and everything and maybe I will gain some weight... They are opening a patient's PX and we are looking forward to it... What I need and want now is a haircut. Today we received a partial payment so we can do a few cash transactions... Yesterday we all made surgical dressings size 4 x 4... This invasion currency may interest you so I am sending some. I have passed by enough war souvenirs to fill a box car, but all I have now is the clothes on my back. Somewhere in France I have a duffel bag, pack, rifle, and tent, but the Lord only knows where. That's why it doesn't pay to have too many valuable personal articles..."

Dec. 2, 1944. "I am out of stationery again so I will have to use this V-mail... In a few days my stitches come out so it will be a break in the monotony. We are getting a chance to get PX supplies... what do you think of a PX without a comb for sale? ... If you so desire I could eat some peanuts and maybe you could send me some. Each day we look for our Xmas boxes..."

Dec. 4, 1944. "... My purpose in life now is to take it easy for a while and get well. It is sort of difficult to do after such a rough and hectic life I had been living ... now I can get around a bit. There are 7 of us in a room with a connecting bathroom. However, I still spend most of my life in bed... The day I can walk around will be a gala event. There are some pine trees outside my window that remind me of home. I have heard from home with the mailing date the 16 of Nov. So you can see we have good mail service..."

Dec. 6, 1944. "Happy day! They pulled my stitches out last night and I can move under my own locomotion now... I am weak as hell from being in bed so long. Every time they work on me I have seen what it is all about so I am learning. It still isn't a pleasant sight to behold and it will be some time before it is healed. The other day I was a little worried when I had a touch of the scours. Recovery was rapid after we took the medicine. It is made from licorice, chalk, goat dirt, and a base made out of furniture polish... All I can do now is get well and add some meat to my bones... Things are green out in the fields, but I can't tell about the weather... I can see a steeple chase track out our window. I know the name of this place, but I don't know where the location is... Things must be looking like winter back home by now. I have been in snow over here so I haven't forgot what it looks like."

Dec. 7, 1944. " ... The other night we showed some snaps to our Italian (ex-POW and ward boy) friend and he thought our house was a palace. In a way he is right and you are the one who cleans it! They have these Italians doing handy jobs around here and we like this fellow (Guisenne from Milan) in particular. It is fun to see and hear them cuss Mussolini and Hitler. I walk around a little now and now I am in a chair. My travels will be limited because I know when I am not perfectly well..."

Dec. 8, 1944. " ... Two of your Christmas parcels arrived... The hard candy came in good condition and I pass it around to the boys after each meal... There must have been a mixup in Doug's and my box. I got a box from the Hub (Chicago men's store) with a toilet articles kit and a card addressed to Doug from Mom and Dad. The box was crushed like a tank run over it. The boys in here needed the articles so much that I kept it... I can walk a short ways. The view looks beautiful out my window and it makes one yearn to get out and enjoy it... Your razor found me and it is an amazing little device. It gives a good shave and fits right in the watch pocket. Of course now we don't wear pants. Our uniform is 2 pieces pajamas with robes and shoes if we move about... In our room now we have a Frenchman just a little older than me. I wish I knew how much longer the Germans can hold out..."

Dec. 10, 1944. " ... There are church services in the near vicinity, but it is too far for me to travel... Today we have baked ham for dinner ... They feed fairly good meals except breakfast. Every day we can plan on bread, coffee, mush, and powdered eggs. The other meals make up for it... We are all looking for our Xmas boxes for that little something extra..."

Dec. 12, 1944. " ... Today is PX day... They sell us 4 candy bars a week... This morning I had a pleasing experience of soaking my feet. We have a big pan and warm water so what more could I ask. My feet looked almost like a pair of shoes. We have a nice bathroom and once in a while we get warm water so we really have it fairly nice. Dinner is done and the trays have been carried back. We had spam, beans, kraut, bread, pudding and coffee. It sure is an improvement over K-rations... I have been sleeping well which is more than some guys can. Last night the doctor looked me over and put some silver nitrate on my wounds. I can't determine whether it tickled or burned me the most. I will have some scars, but no complications developed so I have nothing to worry about. It can always be worse so I am grateful for my position in life right now... I would appreciate some homemade jam or jelly. The only preserve we get here is orange marmalade..."

Dec. 16, 1944. " ... This morning the whole hospital was treated to fresh eggs. I had two soft boiled eggs and enjoyed them without the benefit of pepper and salt. You can remember when I had to be coaxed to eat eggs back home. Yesterday we also had beefsteak, but it sure was tough. I like the food here and it is improving every day... (About this time I was issued a pair of combat boots size 12 D as I was anxious to walk around in shoes. My size was 11 1/2 AAA and I slopped around in these oversized boots well after the end of the war in Europe.)

Dec 18, 1944. "... I am wearing the identification bracelet and it sure is classy. My only complaint is that my wrist is so thin that it keeps sliding about. My watch is the same way and it used to fit tight so I guess I have lost a few pounds... I can walk around now after a fashion and I feel a little like a baby. Today I saw my first movie since the states: Wallace Beery in "Barbary Coast Gent." Best of all was when I found my sergeant in another ward. We were both injured the same day and just a few rooms from each other yet so far away when we couldn't get to see each other..."

"In late June of 1995 I remember vividly three other incidents in this hospital room in Le Grand Hotel, Vittel, France. 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group commander Lt. Gen. Jacob Devers was scheduled to visit our ward to present Purple Heart medals to wounded soldiers without them and inspect conditions. A soldier in the closest bed to the door and with a scrotum wound and the other six of us were instructed by the head ward nurse to lie at attention when the general entered the room. Not all of us could follow that order.

"When I first left the room in my hospital pajamas to visit the Morocco soldiers in the next room, I noticed they wore their daggers and belts over their pajamas. In sign language I asked one to show me his beautiful dagger. He smiled brightly and nicked his finger to show me his dagger with his blood on it. Their daggers were drawn only when blood is shed. Obviously I was considered a friend and an ally.

"The winter war and the German Ardennes offensive created a high rate of infantry casualties. Medical officers were pressured to return infantrymen to combat units as soon as possible. I remember two men discharged from our room with instructions to stop at their battalion aid stations to have their stitches removed.

"My stay in the medical ward after December 22 and then to a rehabilitation ward until March 4, 1945 in this hospital is a separate story."

#### FROM A SURGICAL TO A MEDICAL WARD IN THE U.S. ARMY 23<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL HOSPITAL

"My next assignment was in a medical ward in the long garret of the annex that formerly housed hotel employees. Both wards were located in Le Grande Hotel in the same city as the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group headquarters. Thousands of Allied wounded and sick were treated in this deluxe hotel and spa. Few of us soldiers could have afforded the peacetime room charges."

Dec. 22, 1944. "... Today I have been transferred from a surgical ward to a medical ward. I am still in the same hotel only in a different wing. We walk downstairs to a messhall and more or less take care of ourselves. In the other room we got to be a close group of friends, but now we are split up... It amazes me to see how quickly the Christmas boxes are coming through at one time... All the rooms are decorated in the customary Yuletide fashion. There are several Christmas trees in the hall with red flannel and white cotton for trimmings. The windows are also decorated and the inside of the rooms are strung with decorations. We even got mistletoes hanging from the light fixtures..."

Christmas Day 1944 "... I have had a pleasant holiday... Last night the Red Cross opened their new rooms and we had all the hot cocoa and cake we could eat. After that we sang carols in the mess hall for over an hour. We even had our stockings filled. The Red Cross gave each of us a GI sock filled with apples, candy, and cigarettes. Everyone is busy trying to match some other guy for a sock mate. Today's dinner was superb and was all the newspapers say it was. We had roast turkey, spuds, dressing, cranberries, fruit cocktail, and pie plus the fixings. For supper we had some good old dependable spam and macaroni salad... One day I helped sort mail in the APO here and it sure is some job... I got your Nov. 27, Nov. 23, and Nov. 17 letters in that order so it shows how topsy turvy the whole situation is. It is a good idea to enclose the stationery like you have been doing. Once I leave here it is impossible to carry a box of stationery, while a stamped envelope is O.K. It is impossible to carry paper long before it gets wet in your pockets. I met two more fellows from my company and one was the bearer of good news... Steve is up in the hot sector (1<sup>st</sup> Army) and I hope we will stop the Jerry counterattack... When addressing my envelopes, please write small because chances are several addresses will be stamped on before it reaches me. I am slacking up on reading so much and now I am back to the good old rummy and casino games that we used to play at home. I have even learned the fine old game of solitaire. Today has been far from an unhappy one... Every GI thinks of home today more than ever..." *[Ha! I'm not even sure Bud's buddies who were still on the line were aware when Christmas was that year. One day was much like the rest.]*

Dec. 27, 1944. "Today is the first day I have worn a suit of clothes. I have been transferred to a convalescent ward and we wear clothes instead of pajamas... I am feeling well now, but it still bothers me to walk. We have movies now so it is something to look forward to... the biggest pastime is batting the breeze and beating our gums."

Dec. 28, 1944. "I read where Margaret Ballinger's brother was killed in the Pacific. There is going to be more before this is over. The (Boone County) Courier papers are from the weeks of Nov. 2 and Nov. 9. Old news is still good reading for me. Every week there is some guy wounded, killed or missing in action. In the room I used to stay in is where I spend my time. I am in a place that is quite dull and boring. My old room has my friend Sam Pablano... There are also three wounded Frenchmen in my room and we like them O.K. I have a lot of fun giving them my cigarette rations and food from my packages. Tonight they gave me some French bread and cheese. You can't beat French bread anywhere and the cheese was the best I ever tasted. These French soldiers are about the world's best and they have an awful time trying to keep them in bed. They all want to go and get some more "Boche"... Every other day I have my dressings changed with sulfa powder for a disinfectant. I wear clothes now and walk around so I am in fairly good shape..."

Dec. 30, 1944. "Your Christmas box arrived and you sure hit the spot with that cheese and crackers and can of fudge. I gave most of the soap to my favorite nurse... You need not worry about me getting sick because there isn't much left after a box is passed around... I saw Katherine Cornell and Brian

Aherne in the "Barretts of Wimpole Street." There is a swell theater here and I was right in the bald headed row. It was an excellent show and no movie can ever compare to these actors in the flesh. I met another good friend – my former sergeant (Carmelo S. Paratore). He was hit with me (on Nov. 13) and I didn't see him since. Right now he is awaiting evacuation to England..."

Jan. 1, 1945. "... Lorraine wrote that you received the (War Dept.) telegram before my letter. I wanted the letter to arrive first and save you a lot of worry. By now you ought to have my Purple Heart. Maridell said that Scotty (future brother-in-law) was burned by a Jap bullet. You see some close shaves around here and some that aren't so lucky. Living through a battle is being in the right place at the right time. I was in the wrong place... I never felt much pain... According to my records my wound was moderately severe... my old sergeant still has his arm. These doctors around here can do wonders especially when I see what they had to work with... The kid from Sharon (Delos Lowell) got it the same day as I and he was close by me also... I have some swell buddies in the infantry and after all everybody else in the war supports you with rifles and bayonets..."

Jan. 10, 1945. "... We have snow here now, but the weather isn't too severe. The language problem is getting more complicated every day. We have a Porto Rican (sic) soldier here who speaks Spanish. He has several friends who visit him and they carry on in Spanish. We already have French and Italian workers here plus German prisoners. (51 years later I still remember our success in getting Giuseppe from Milano, a former P.O.W. ward boy friend who spoke some Spanish, to instruct the Puerto Rican soldier to furnish a stool sample from his bedpan so the ward nurse could check his appendectomy recovery. It took an Italian speaking GI to fully communicate with Giuseppe.)... About once a week we have fried eggs and bacon for breakfast. I have to sweat out the other six meals of powdered eggs to catch the real treat... So far no fruitcake, but I am still hoping..."

Jan. 14, 1945. "... As you guessed we left New York (most of this page was cut out by the censor where I wrote details of our ocean voyage to France)... We were part of the sanitation crew. Life on a troopship is crowded, we had a "restricted" deck to clean so we had lots of room to ourselves... Today we had a good GI variety show. There are two theaters operating here and I take it all in... They also made the casino here into a big rec hall..."

Jan. 19, 1945. "... Aunt Alice said you got the telegram on the 8 of Dec.... Right now I am receiving Sept. newspapers and letters... The Russian offensive has everyone thinking here and I bet A.O. (my father) is busy with his maps & book... The paper situation over here isn't too good so I sort of have to ration my letters... I'll sign off and get at my solitaire game..."

Jan. 26, 1945. "... Several new divisions have arrived here in France and I suppose all the extra mail clogs up the system... The professional photographer is a GI who charges 100 francs for 5 pictures and does a good job... Sammy and I like the Red Skelton in "DuBarry Was a Lady" and we saw it three times... The Russians are really going full speed and everyone hopes they don't stop... All the fellows around here listen to every news broadcast possible and sweat out the

"Stars & Stripes." We don't get much domestic news but plenty of war news. The Yanks are really going places on Luzon. Living in a world of soldiers gets quite boring. I shouldn't complain because I know lots more boys are worse off than me.

Feb. 1, 1945. "... All my former room mates have left this hospital. In the army you always meet new fellows and sooner or later they get shipped somewhere. I am enclosing a picture I had taken of myself. (The photograph shows me in a new field jacket with no insignia and an OD shirt and tie delivered to 25 in Section A.)... As yet I still haven't received a fruit cake and I know that I have them coming from 3 different sources."

Feb. 2, 1945. "My pen is dry again so here I am back using my old pencil... These French chickens are so scrawny they hardly flavor the stew... I have found a late copy of the Readers' Digest and I read every word. A late magazine is anything under 3 months old. We get a few Life magazines and the Satevepost. Everyone is counting the miles of the Russian offensive. All the snow here is turning to mush and mud... When we landed all we got was mud & rain and it was weeks before I ever saw the sun... I am getting to be a whiz at solitaire."

"Fifty one years later I still remember walking through the large, unheated trenchfoot ward on the first floor on the way to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor ward to the ground level messhall. We held our noses and passed through as quickly as possible to avoid the smell of swollen feet uncovered with blankets. The orthopedic ward in the grand ballroom contained many severely injured soldiers. We usually passed through the yellow jaundice ward and the patients always offered us some of their hard candy from the well-filled dishes at their bedsides. French, Italian, and German workers did all the KP and cleaning chores. We ambulatory patients were somewhat like guests in a grand hotel. Permanently disabled soldiers and those with need for more extensive surgery had been evacuated to English and stateside hospitals.

"My next letters are from the large rehabilitation ward behind the hospital. Our days as patients and hotel guests would be over and we would be preparing for our return to duty as active soldiers. Only we wouldn't be furnished with any weapons."

#### THE REHABILITATION WARD AT THE U.S. ARMY 23<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL HOSPITAL

"A major purpose of this hospital was to return soldiers to their active duty units in the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> and French 1<sup>st</sup> Armies. Mine was as a rifleman in the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon of Company G, 399<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 100<sup>th</sup> Division on the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Army front. This rehabilitation ward were army tents mounted inside the boarded up, columned arcade leading from the rear of Le Grande Hotel to the ornate spring building."

February 5, 1945. "... While cleaning out my wallet I found something that might be of more interest to you than the trash box. One is a meal ticket used on the ship (George Washington) and the other is an old PX ticket from the hospital here. The whole town here is full of internment camps. The town is just a little



larger than Harvard (3,000 population) and has 25 hotels. Right now I am living in what used to be a bath house and looks like Union depot (in Chicago). We are heated by Jerry furnaces which goes to show the fortunes of war..."

February 10, 1945. "What do you think of this classy stationery? Anyhow I paid a classy price for it. The genuine French article... It is better than using airmail paper... Yesterday we had an all French variety show and all the performers were civilians. The juggler is the world's best... The best of all were the girl vocalists. A tremendous improvement over some GI with a mop wig and a brassiere. They sang in French and a few songs in English. I get quite a kick out of them speaking English. All our slang phrases don't quite fit in with the English they were taught. They sure received a tremendous ovation from the soldier audience... I guess you realize that I am on my second year in this army... How is the draft affecting Boone Co.? There are some local dogs around here that capture my fancy, but they can't hold a candle to Wimpy."

February 16, 1945. "I am listening to the radio here in the Red Cross center... Bob Hope was on a few minutes ago and he sure is tops with me. Right now I am listening to a fast folk dance by the AAF orchestra... Most of the time it is the BBC and the English comedians sure can't compare to Hope & Co. The radio is of German manufacture and isn't too good but it is better than nothing... You would be surprised at how large some of these French farmers' horses are. Some of the wagons look strange, but they have good horses..."

February 19, 1945. "... You had better start using my old address now. I will be going back there anyhow in a few weeks. Today I started on this reconditioning program. It lasts two weeks and then if I am ready I go back to duty. We have calisthenics, lectures, hikes, and games. Nothing difficult about it and it passes the time as well as builds one up... Tomorrow makes three months in this hospital. It is too bad that Newell lost his heifer at Christmastime. Think of some of the farmers over here who lose everything. What few chickens they have left the soldiers eat and the same for the rabbits. We are all waiting for spring... There are some pretty views here and this used to be quite a showplace... I have to fall out in a few minutes..."

February 22, 1945. "... I see where you are writing to the old address (Co, G, 399<sup>th</sup> Infantry, APO 447) and according to my calculations it took two weeks. That is speedy service compared to some of this 10 weeks delivery (through the European central delivery service)... Some of these letters I get are ancient and yellowed with age, but I read them over & over again. Life is a series of aches and pains for me now. This reconditioning program is stiffening me up but eventually I will loosen up. We have calisthenics, games, and hikes and we are all getting used to them. Yesterday we had a softball game and did I ever goof off. A flight of bombers was passing over and as I was watching them the batter knocked one right at me. I wasn't the only one sleeping as the whole gang was except the pitcher & batter. (I saw two old movies) Both were full of heel-clicking Nazi spies. I notice that there is only one blot. Perhaps this is a better pen than I think it is."

February 28, 1945. "... You and Aunt Mae both enclosed the same clippings out of the (Harvard) Herald. I was at the induction center (Fort

Sheridan) with Dooley (Harvard barber) or else it was his partner, Sharp. I don't know them, only their names. Our regiment relieved his outfit last fall and that sure was a good description of those woods... Today I saw the doctor and I will be discharged to duty on Sunday... I have no serious after effects. Just 2 scars, one is 2 inches and the other about 3 (back of upper left leg). I'll never get rid of them, but I am proud of them in a way. These past few days I have been playing softball and taking hikes. We are having nice weather and it makes me wish I was doing farmwork... The war news is encouraging today, but there is always that Jerry counter-attack coming... I helped a friend eat a fruitcake. He is 26 years old and has four boys and a pretty wife. We must be hard up when we have to take men with that much responsibility. This morning we had hardboiled eggs and it is the 5<sup>th</sup> time for me in the ETO. (A strange comment from a writer who hasn't eaten a hard boiled egg in 51 years.) So far I haven't had any milk except the canned milk... Also send me little boxes with a pair or two of socks in them. Just any old socks as long as they are clean. These things are expendable so send along my old work and dress socks. Time to close as I am washing out a pair now."

March 2, 1945 V-Mail. "... I am leaving here the day after tomorrow... From here I go to a replacement depot where I am sent from there to my unit. This reconditioning program has me in a fair physical condition. Today I played some strenuous volleyball games and yesterday we had a hike of 9 kilometers. The physical training we have every morning helps also. March is here and the beginning of spring I hope. Anyhow I saw an old timer digging his garden. I sure hope we have an early, dry spring so the tanks can roll..."

March 2, 1945. "... I saw something the other day that all the farmers would be interested in. A 1-2-1 formation of four horses pulling an empty wagon. They don't have reins to guide them but shout commands. You hardly ever see a team, but usually one ahead of the others. The horses look as good as any horses back home... Over here we have these pocket editions books and I have read dozens of them."

March 5, 1945. "Well I have finally been discharged from the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital. I am at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Depot now awaiting shipment back to my unit. They reequip us here and issue rifles. While walking down the street I met three fellows from Co. G. One fellow has been to England and back. I can never understand why I didn't get sent there. A general hospital is just supposed to keep them a month. I got your letter of Feb. 15 and the bad news about Del Lowell (paraplegic)... Last night I went to the movies here and saw "Christmas Holiday" with Deanna Durbin & Gene Kelly. The place here is a soap factory or something and I am in a warehouse. We have blankets aplenty and army cots. Things can't compare with the hospital, but the next change from here will be for the worst. I really got to like it at the hospital and met a lot of fellows... I told the company mail orderly to hold my mail so I will get them when I go back..."

"Fifty one years later three other incidents are remembered that weren't specifically mentioned in my letters. On a sunny, warm February day I was sitting outside the Casino with fellow patient Sam Pablano and remember counting the B-17s flying toward Germany and losing count at 300. Some six months later I

learned that Pforzheim, our later station in southwestern Germany, was almost completely destroyed in this heavy bombing attack. [*I wonder about this. The calendar time seems about right, but I recall hearing that the attack came at just before dawn, and that it was carried out by the British RAF. If that's true, Bud could not have been right.*] Sam was with me on a shopping trip to downtown Vittel. We had been in the hospital long enough to receive soldiers' pay in occupation francs. The lavender colored stationery I began using February 10 dates this excursion. I purchased a small folding pair of scissors that is one of the few souvenirs I carried home from wartime Europe. The Italian former prisoners of war, who served as wardboys, invited us to their messhall in the village for a spaghetti dinner. Their cooks drew army rations, but cooked them Italian style and sang Italian songs while dining. The hospitality offered by Giuseppe, Pietro and others from Milano to an Illinois farm boy and a New Mexico Zuni is still remembered."

#### FROM HOSPITAL PATIENT TO RIFLEMAN DUTY

"My hospitalization stay for my left leg deep wound was almost four months. The Army promised to return patients to their original units where their comrades were. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Replacement Depot was located in Épinal."

March 6, 1945. "... I left the hospital two days ago and now I am at a reinforcement depot. In a day or two I will be sent back to my unit. We have been issued new equipment and also they give us rifles. Yesterday we fired them on a range to set the sights. Replacements fresh from the states come through here and are assigned to divisions. I am staying in a warehouse and the whole setup is a (soap) factory. We have cots and straw mattresses so we aren't so bad off. At night we can go to the movies here in a theater... The Red Cross operates a snack bar with coffee and rolls for sale. This place may seem quite crude to fellows from the states, but it sure beats living in a fox hole..."

March 6, 1945. "... Back in the hospital spring was in the air, but here it looks and feels like winter with all this sleet and mud... The war news is encouraging and I hope it ends soon. All the armies north of us have pushed off and now I suppose it will be our (U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Army) turn next..."

March 10, 1945. "... I hope my letters arrive in the order they were written. One has to read between the lines and do a lot of guessing if the preceding ones haven't arrived. I bet pa really deciphers every syllable and according to your letters he does a lot of wild guessing. The past few letters from you have had postcards in them. I've given several away to friends, mailed several, and I still have a few left. Tomorrow makes a week that I have been here at the reinforcement depot. Most fellows stay only two or three days but another 100<sup>th</sup> man and myself are here after a week. I met a fellow from my company and he left and he didn't come in until after me. I don't run the army and I don't pretend to understand everything. They have showers here and I use them. In my first room back at the hospital there was a tub only I never got to use it. There was showers though and I really love to shower... Since I have been in the army I have never bathed in a tub. I don't know whether I'm bragging or complaining... (movies are) the only recreation here and the joint is packed for every show...I

read in the paper that they don't guarantee to send airmail by plane any more. When I write you I will mix them up with V-Mail..."

March 12, 1945. "Here goes for a few lines providing this candle holds out. The lights are on the fritz that isn't too unusual here. I have made another jump (to Sarrebourg) nearer my outfit. Before I left the last place I met another boy from Co. G. There was six of us there, but we never all got together... They have the movie set up in a cavalry stable. Wherever the GI's go they try and get movies to them and they sure mean a lot to us... Today we hiked to the range and fired our rifles again. I have another rifle now so I didn't waste my time. The pussy willows are budding and I guess that is a sure sign of spring... I'll never forget those forests last fall. It never did get totally light and the nights were almost 16 hours long. Anyhow I passed through the town (Baccarat) where I was hit (Nov. 13, 1944) on the way to here. Tomorrow makes four months since I left the old gang. My candle is almost kaput and the lights are still on the fritz..."

"51 years later I remember this. I rejoined Company G comrades March 16 in the late forenoon of a warm spring day. The company jeep brought me up the road and dropped me off at the "Splinter Factory" on Reyersville Ridge. The Wehrmacht was driven away and our casualties had been evacuated. My close comrades had survived the difficult winter campaign outside the fortress city of Bitche. They were in an at ease formation and happy to see me again. I took my place in the 1<sup>st</sup> squad of the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon and we moved out with slung arms into the city of Bitche. That night we slept in a French, then a German, barracks. The Maginot Line was ours and I had served one day and the last day in the Bitche campaign. The Siegfried Line awaited us a few kilometers northward. When my wife and I visited Bitche on the 1978 100<sup>th</sup> Division reunion tour, we were hailed as liberators and heroes by the mayor and civic officials. As I drank the choice champagne, nibbled the lady fingers, and ate the gourmet dinner, I thought deeply of the G Company guys who really got the job done. The trees were in full foliage as our tour bus passed the Splinter Factory."