

100th Memories Continue to Be Made

by Bob Alcorn, 397-2B

Laurie Alcorn, daughter of Bob Alcorn, 397-2B, sent us these letters. She says, "The first letter is from 1944 (Dad was 18 years old) that we found as we were cleaning out our parent's house a few years ago. After Dad died, some friends in California sent us the second letter that he had recently written them. It shows what a large part this family of 100th Division brothers meant to him."

January 11, 1944
France (still)

Dear Dad,

About 2 weeks ago I wrote and told you that I had missed my Christmas dinner, but I couldn't tell the complete story until two weeks after the incident. Well, here it is.

Christmas Eve day they came up from the C.P. and told nine of us to get our stuff packed as we were going up on the line as a machine-gun section. Our platoon has two .30-cal light machine guns. We were to go up on a certain hill with one other company from our battalion. We were just in a building (defensive) position and at that time no action was expected. We got up there at about 1300 and selected a position on the edge of a woods overlooking No Man's Land. Incidentally the other side of No Man's Land was "Homebase" Germany.

The gun I was on—there were four of us—had our foxhole fairly well dug by dark. After dark we crawled in our hole and opened a 10-in-1 as we had not had chow that night.

About 2000 Christmas Eve they came down and told us that in a small town over to our right there were 500 infantry supported by tanks. Also over to our left front, there were some more Krauts. Furthermore, they gave us orders that when we saw or heard them coming we were to fire a burst from our M.G. and withdraw through the woods and over the hill. Naturally we were all pretty excited, however we lasted out the night without incident. The next morning we still didn't get any chow but we nibbled some more on our 10-in-1.

About 1300 (Christmas Day), the rest of the platoon came up to set up some trip flares in front of our position. At 1330 a reconnaissance outfit (one armored car) on our left flank spotted the Jerries coming through the woods. They fired on them and then took off, thus leaving our flank exposed. Immediately we grabbed our equipment and also took off as ordered.

We got through the woods and were starting to load our equipment on our truck when some Company F lieutenant came running up and told us to go back and cover his company's withdrawal.

We went back through the woods, carrying only our guns and ammo, to a position where we had a squad of riflemen in support of our guns. This was not, however, our original positions. We set our gun down where we had the best possible field of fire and waited. In about five minutes we could hear the damn Jerries coming through the woods. After they got fairly close we opened up on them. They had "Burp" guns, which are automatic weapons and fire much faster than anything we have. When we started firing they calmed down for a few seconds. We could hear them jabbering among themselves. All of a sudden they started yelling and firing like mad. Then they jumped up and started toward us. Our machine gunner opened up and I saw him cut one guy right in half about at the waist. All this time I was firing at forms through the trees but I don't know if I hit any or not.

Things calmed down some and as I looked around to see where our rifle squad was I saw the last one taking off through the woods. This left our right flank fully open. I moved over about fifty or sixty yards and lay behind a log with another GI. I told him to get out of there and I would cover him, which he did. While I was laying there I saw a Jerry trying to crawl forward. Then he got up and started to run forward. I fired and he went down, after he fell I saw him jerk once. I am positive his fighting days are done.

From my position I could see them out in the woods and it looked as if they were trying to encircle us. I yelled up to the boys on the M.G. and told them to get out and I would follow them in a few minutes. I

couldn't see them through the trees but I waited a few minutes and then left. I don't guess they heard me because they didn't follow me for a few minutes.

At the edge of the woods was a long sloping hill down to a town. It was about a mile down to the town. As I came out of the woods I looked down the hill and you could see GIs running for town as hard as they could go. It was sure one funny sight. Here at the edge of the woods was our Christmas turkey. They had unloaded the meal from the jeeps and hadn't had time to load it back before they took off.

With the Heines on my tail I wasn't one bit hungry. Knowing me as you do, Dad, you may think that strange, but I was in too big a hurry.

While I hesitated there the Jerries suddenly started firing and yelling like mad again. I didn't need anyone to say go. I started down that hill like greased lightning. The speed I made going down that hill would do justice to the best race horse in the States.

All the time, I had on my fur-lined parka. I was really sweating when I reached the bottom. Everyone got off that hill and no one was injured.

I was almost in Germany and had to leave but I am going back as soon as things get straightened out up north and this time I am not coming back until I hit Berlin.

Your loving son,
Bob

The 2004 letter to his California friends:

August 9, 2004

Hi,

I had a really great month of July. It started out by meeting Armer and John [Bob's grandson and son], at JFK on the 5th along with twenty-five other people to board our flight to Frankfort for our battlesite tour. We were met by our bus and drove to Bitche in the Vosges Mountains of France, a fortress town on the Maginot Line that we liberated in 1944-45. We stayed in a motel there and made day trips. Our routine was: up at 7, eat breakfast and on the bus by 9. A historian, Lisé, set up the visits at many towns that we liberated. They all had receptions for us. In little towns there were two, ending with beer, wine, and champagne, free flowing, but with my medication I couldn't join in. Every place turned out the mayor, city council, band, and honor guard from the fire department or vets' group.

On VE Day we were in Wingen and they had a WWII re-enactment group there for the parade. There were twelve trucks from WWII. Armer rode the parade in a half-track. He was thrilled. The lunches that our guide Lisé set up were fantastic. More food than we could begin to eat.

In the town of Rimling, we had had a hell of a battle in 1945, house by house. There was a little girl, Marie. She walked around town and would come and tell us where the Germans were. She still lives there and came and ate with us.

One day Armer left the group and went with two men, one of whom was looking for his foxhole. With the help of a map and good memory, they found it. Armer wandered all day with them and loved it. I could have never made the trip without Armer and John. At every stop they were out of the coach and had my wheelchair set up and ready. It was really a great trip.

We left Frankfort at 6am on Sunday and got to our house at 9 on Sunday. I can usually sleep on the plane. This was the exception. I slept all night Sunday, all day Monday, and until 8 am on Tuesday.

I repacked and on Wednesday we went to Debbie's. We went to a Red Sox game on Sunday with her, Mark, and Cori. She got a handicapped spot for me and it was perfect. I looked down at homeplate, the pitcher's mound and second base all in a row. And, the Red Sox won which made Betty very happy.

We came home on Tuesday, repacked and headed south to DC. We had a Division board meeting and twenty-five of us had tickets for the WWII Memorial dedication which was fantastic, especially the musical program at MCI Center on Friday night.

I heard it so much, that I guess I am one of the Greatest Generation. For awhile I thought I was part of the lost generation.

Please excuse my writing which is getting worse and worse and my spelling which does not improve. I have also been having eye problems. When I read I see double and the print is blurred. The doctors are working on it. Reading is one of the things I could do besides sleep and watch TV. They also stopped me from driving.

All in all a fantastic month. Hope you are keeping well.

Love, Betty and Bob

Dad went to his last 100th reunion, which was held in Boston, that fall.

July 2011 Association Newsletter