AN IMPROBABLE MACHINE-GUNNER

- Second edition, 1997 (rev. March, 2007, June, 2008)

PROLOGUE

"War talk, by men who have been in a war, is always interesting, whereas moon talk, by a poet who has not been in the moon is likely to be dull."

- Mark Twain: "Life on the Mississippi," chapter 45 (1883)

A beautiful spring day in 1975: Thirty years since the ambush at Beilstein Hill. My daughter asks, "So what's this about April 18th?" When I tell her about that day, she says, "Dad, why don't you write it all down. Then we'll know where you went and what happened." Her request is reason enough to start this story for our grandchildren and for their children - and to share the ghosts that haunt us forever.

Once started, memories pour onto paper, like junk falling from Fibber McGee's closet. Numbers branded in memory, trigger vivid recollections whenever they appear unbidden in daily life. Each is a key that opens a picture; Fire Engine Company 13; Scout Troop No. 86; Streetcar No. 32; the 100th Division; the 399th Regiment; and the German 88 mm cannon. Days that haunt are also numbered: December the 7th; November 15; and April the 18th.

The "famous letter to Sharon" fills 35 crowded single-spaced, typed pages. One copy, resting on my shelf, acquires a life of its own as it accumulates notes in the margins. Letters and stories arrive from other men of Company M. "The book" grows, as we try to recapture, or remember, the strength and arrogant swagger of our youth.

Retirement, twenty years later, brought time to consolidate notes, exchange letters and visits. The 35 pages expanded to 120, in an attempt to unleash this little story, dwarfed by the complex factors and millions of people, swept up by World War II.

The 200 copies of the first edition were printed in August of 1995, and "sold out" within a year. It brought many favorable comments, ("Couldn't put it down!"), a dozen corrections, and enough new material to justify a second edition, revised herein to incorporate a few corrections and minor additions.

What little I garner here is dedicated to the men of Company M who did not

come home, and to the survivors who have served the country well in war and peace. Many family members responded; "He never talked about it, and now, from your book, I learn about what he went through. Thank you!"

Company M went to war with a Table of Organization strength of 166 men. My research indicates that during the near- 6 months of combat, the Company suffered 17 killed in action, 2 captured, about 150 wounded in action, and an unknown number lost to trench foot, frostbite, hepatitis, and other causes. "The List" of men who served in Company M includes some 350 names. While the 100th Division was in training in "The States" it provided replacements for combat divisions, and a few volunteers went to Airborne Divisions. There is no way to count the number of these men who left the Company before we went to France.

Our Army came home and scattered to the four winds. Now the old veterans think back often on the glorious days of their youth. If it is to be shared, it must be done quickly, for our ranks are thinning rapidly. More than half were already dead when I wrote this, in the summer of 1997. Now, in June of 2008, 3/4 of them are gone.

One old soldier put it this way:

> "I listen vainly for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll. In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange mournful mutter of the battlefield."
> - Douglas MacArthur's Farewell Address -

Now, we hear only two bugle calls;
"First Call" - at the racetrack, - and
"Taps" - at our Memorial services.

1. THE PAUSE, 1933 to 1937

1933: Two new leaders promise to remedy the great depression in their separate nations. In January, one is "appointed" as Chancellor of Germany. The other is inaugurated as President of the United States on March 4th, 1933. Each leader takes a different approach to the problem, and neither anticipates the coming conflict.

In Europe, the effects of the depression are multiplied by the crushing First World War reparations which siphon away Germany's capital, year after year, since 1919. Adolph Hitler leads The National Socialist party as it centralizes power, eliminates the constraints of the Reichstag, arrests labor leaders, breaks the unions, and blames the Jews. Hitler starts a massive road construction program and prepares Germany for war.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ("FDR" in the news headlines) moves quickly to break the grip of the worst economic chaos that had ever savaged his country. At home in Baltimore, we know about the depression. Jobs and taxes dry up; salaries are cut; my $15 and my parents' savings both vanish when the bank closes. Friends and relatives are out of work. We move from our own home to a rented house after the city cuts the firemen's pay.

Unable to find work, Uncle Walter lives with my Mother's parents. Six days a week, Grandfather drives a bread truck to the towns northwest of Baltimore, and sometimes brings us day old bread, sweet rolls, or a rare treat; cheese cake.

On Sunday, after driving a truck for six days, Grandfather packs us in his car and drives "out to the country," - to a dairy farm owned, "as a hobby," by a local brewery tycoon. We wonder if the farm was bought with a bootlegger's profits during the recent prohibition, but we gratefully buy 5 gallons of cheap fresh milk, poured into our own jugs from the big milk cans in the spring house.

President Roosevelt starts a series of new and controversial programs to end the depression, - or, at least, to remedy some of its most paralyzing effects. In spite of setbacks in the Supreme Court and strong political opposition, thousands of Americans are helped by a series of programs known by their acronyms, notably; Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Public Works Administration (PWA), National Recovery Act (NRA), and Works Projects Administration (WPA). FDR has no way to know that actions by Hitler and Tojo will soon lead to the end the depression in the United States.

2. A LEGACY OF HEROISM

In this same year of 1933, my eight-year old world is suddenly clearer

through new glasses. Reading is easier and fun.

I wonder at the adventures of Kipling's "Soldiers Three;" And “Ghunga Din.” The audacity of Sergeant York and Admiral Farragut. I envy their boldness. We visit Fort McHenry, Gettysburg and Antietem. The battlefields bring to life Henry's doubts and fears in "The Red Badge of Courage."

Glasses seem to limit the future while they help me to read about other folk's adventures. One needs good vision to join the Army or Navy. The Marines, of course, are out of the question. Their football team from Quantico beat the Baltimore Fire Department team, after we boys ran around a block and through an alley so that we could see Dad twice as he marched with the firemen in the pre-game parade.

Still, I cherish the memory of the Marine's precision parade into the stadium; the long column moving as one man, all those khaki-clad arms and red stripes on blue trousers, swinging in unison like the drive rods on the wheels of a really long steam locomotive.

Soldier, sailor, streetcar motorman, fireman and fireman-machinist; Dad spent most of his life in uniform. His infantry training was completed in time for Armistice Day. Later, in the Navy, he trained and served as a machinist.

The Great Depression sweeps around our little island thanks to Dad's steady job as a fireman. His Engine Company No. 13 is a busy station in an old tenement section of downtown Baltimore. For Dad, these are 13 years of danger, of routine 12 hour (or longer) days, broken by 24 hours-on-or-off duty when the 2 shifts rotate every 10 days. He says little about rescues from fire ravaged tenements, but there are times when he will not eat meat. He is injured when a fire hose kicks over his ladder and again when ammonia fumes seep into his gas mask. We regard him rightfully as a hero.

Dad's Navy machinist mate training qualifies him for a transfer to the Fire Department's Repair Shop in 1938. Now he works only 44 hours a week; a reprieve from the grueling 12 hour shifts at "13 Engine." We think he is safer, but Mom has second thoughts a few weeks later when an emery grinding wheel blows up and wounds him in the shoulder and groin.

Both Honorable Discharges hang in frames in the parental bedroom. According to Dad; "Every young man owes his country a couple of years of service; a payment for the rights that are guaranteed by our Constitution." We take this seriously, but I wonder where one can serve while wearing glasses.

The shadows of the first World War extend beyond the two discharges on the bedroom wall. We play Dad's records; "Over There," "Keep Your Head Down Fritzy Boy," Sousa marches; ragtime and ballads. Mostly peppy stuff. My brothers and I play them over and over, on the family's hand cranked record player. We drag out Dad's uniforms from his old foot locker; his Army campaign hat is piped in infantry blue, his Navy shirts are bracketed with machinist mate's stripes.

More books bring heroic tales of places with strange names; "Under Topsails and Tents," "The Charge of the Light Brigade." We learn of bold adventures and death "overseas;" - the Crimea, Belleau Woods, the Marne, Ypres, Gallipoli, and Verdun. Heroics by Americans at Chateau Thierry, and the traditions of the "Ladies from Hell," the Black Watch. Tales of Sgt. York and Blackjack Pershing.

History courses change our play. Toy soldiers drive a flanking maneuver behind the Shenandoah-Mountain-couch to amaze the Yankee defenders at Manassas or Gettysburg, - by the dining room door. In the backyard we dig little trenches and duel with artillery simulated by Erector-set axles sprung from suction-dart guns. The little armies threaten Paris, raze small towns, invade the Christmas garden houses and stop the yellow-orange American Flyer passenger train. Small soldiers ride in the mail car.

We advance to the World War (there is still only one) and the scale of it dwarfs our toy soldiers and our backyard battlefield. As teens, we spend less time at home, and give up imitating such carnage. We are sure that the War to End All Wars is the ultimate horror, never to be repeated. But it is only a prelude.

3. PREPARATION

At the beginning of my eleventh summer, on a day off, Dad takes 10-year old brother Ray and me for a grand adventure. We walk several miles to the park, past the zoo, to the big swimming pool. He pays the admission; a dime for Ray, a dime for me, and a little more for himself. He shows us how to use the lockers and showers, and demonstrates the basic swimming strokes. That night, despite the

family's chronic shortage of funds, he leaves an unheard-of pile of dimes on his dresser. "Every day when it is not raining, take one dime for each of you and go swimming. Go as often as you can! And practice the strokes that I showed you!"

Rain is scarce this summer, so almost every weekday, Ray, John Weiss and I walk to the park, swim and dive from 9 until noon; eat our sandwiches (and sometimes an apple); and walk home by way of the zoo or the boat lake. To my amazement, the little pile of dimes is replenished several times. By the end of the summer, Ray, John and I are good swimmers. It was a beautiful extravagance from Dad; the gift of a skill that has served a lifetime. I remain grateful to his memory.

The day before Easter is my twelfth birthday, the 27th of March, 1937. Easter egg dying is left to my brothers when Grandfather gives me a Boy Scout Handbook. During the next week I read it from cover to cover, at the expense of most other activities, including school. Friday night I go to a Scout Troop meeting with neighbor George Black, the Silver Fox Patrol leader.

Troop 86 meets in a large room in the basement of our Walbrook Methodist Church. Troop officials sit behind a table at one end, two of the four patrols line each side. We visitors sit at the other end. The Scoutmaster, an assistant, or a visiting instructor stands before the head table and conducts the meeting; - the ceremonies, training, and games. Patrol Leader George sits at the head of the Silver Fox patrol, to my left.

I pass the Tenderfoot tests and join the Silver Fox Patrol a few weeks before George is promoted to Senior Patrol Leader and moves to the official's table. Part of the cost of my uniform comes from my earnings (cut the lawn, wash dishes, mind the baby). Scout uniforms are good quality and well made; Mom is not used to spending so much money for clothes. A year later, brother Ray and John join the patrol.

Scouting teaches us to live in the woods, to cook, to pitch and drain a tent. We carry our gear and food to camp for two or three days in pup tents, miles from a road. We learn to dig smooth depressions for our shoulders and hips, and to use a waterproof "ground cloth" to stop the dampness from the ground.

While camping on Bean Hill over the Labor Day weekend, our patrol competes with the other three patrols. We enter individual events according to our best skills. The new patrol leader, Jack Tschantre, makes short work of the cross country compass course and the map-making events. Tall, broad shouldered and

unassuming, handsome Jack reflects the virtues of his industrious Swiss parents. Marion Insley tackles the first aid and signaling events with good results; I win the knot tying and place second in "fire building." We win the competition and are awarded bronze medals on blue ribbons. The medal reads:

"Troop Field and Scouting Champions, 1938."

An old plastic bugle, found in the Troop's camping gear, sparks an interest. I learn to play it, buy my own brass bugle, memorize most of the Army's bugle calls from a record, and become the Troop Bugler. Later, I play my new bugle in the Forest Park High School Drum and Bugle Corps.

Scouting is more than just fun. We learn and grow as our levels of responsibility increase. I advance to First Class, (with one lonely merit badge) and pass through the ranks of assistant and patrol leader, to Junior Assistant Scoutmaster.

The ethics of service to God and Country are combined with the skills needed to survive, to serve, and to lead effectively. We find great adventures, and prepare for those we never dreamed of, in Scout Troop Number 86.

A few years later, Tschantre is killed in Italy when an errant two-and-a-half-ton truck, (the legendary “deuce-and-a-half”) invades a blacked-out bivouac area. Insley becomes a medical doctor and serves in the Air Corps. John Weiss joins the Navy, and improbably, beyond my wildest dreams, I become a machine gunner in the Infantry.

Ray and I ride the streetcar three miles from our home in Walbrook, to Garrison Junior High School. When the weather is good, we take our roller skates, and skate home - mostly downhill. We each save the nickel carfare, and the ten cents buys a pound of jelly beans or orange slices or gum drops. Soon enough we move on to separate high schools; Ray takes the accelerated "A" Course at Polytechnic High, a boys school located a half hour streetcar ride from our corner. When Ray graduates, his "A" Course enables him to enter the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at the second year level. He studies hard and long, and gets good grades.

Life is more fun for me at the nearby high school where there are twice as many girls as boys. Unknown to me, Spiro Agnew graduated from Forest Park High the year before I start; and his wife-to-be, Judy, is already a senior.

One summer afternoon, Bill Wright looms over me, his hands just above my eye level. He seems huge as he shows me again how to fold a newspaper so that it can be thrown from the middle of the street, over a lawn to a waiting porch.

The bundle rides in the strap under my left arm, a small toss frees the newspaper next to my ribs allowing the paper to be pulled out and folded for my first short successful throw. The route that Bill turns over to me takes forever at first; - juggle the route book; retrieve papers that fly apart and search for wayward throws. In a few days I can whip through the route without an error and consult the route book only to make changes - and from the sidewalk, I can land a paper on each porch.

Brother Ray and I have parallel routes. We progress to longer routes, then Sunday morning routes. On Saturday morning we help with the collections. Our incomes rise from the starting dollar and a half to a majestic five dollars a week.

Sometimes we can double our income as we baby-sit, mow lawns, tend furnaces, and shovel snow. Big money for high school boys in the years 1939 to 1943, when a man is lucky to make twenty dollars a week.

The round trip to my high school is two and a half miles, on foot or bike. Every weekday afternoon and Sunday morning we walk some three miles on our paper routes, our straps carrying as much as 30 pounds of papers. Every day there are games on the golf course; football, soccer, baseball - anything except golf. On Friday nights we walk, ride our bikes, or take the streetcar three miles to Scout meetings in Walbrook. Every week, or two at most, we walk or bike two miles to the library. We have no idea of how well these activities are preparing us for the Infantry!

The new income allows me to purchase a used bicycle for two dollars. Dad checks the coaster brake before he lets me buy the old Monarch with high pressure tires. I add saddlebags and a basket to carry books to school and the library, and to fetch groceries. Eventually I replace every part except the frame.

High school college preparation courses are supplemented by shop courses, clubs, and the Drum and Bugle Corps. In the mandatory music appreciation course we rehearse for our commencement and we listen to a lot of good music. I build a crystal radio set, and drift off to sleep, listening to the golden age of the big bands which are still popular, almost seventy years later.

On a bonny afternoon, the first day of September (1939) I crouch, twist the pliers to break the wire from a bundle of newspapers; and scan the big black headlines: **"GERMANY INVADES POLAND;**
BRITAIN AND FRANCE DECLARE WAR!"

4. PEARL HARBOR

Pat and I are strolling back from the Gwynn Oak Amusement park on a lovely Sunday afternoon; when her parents call to us; "The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." I hurry home and the family gathers in stunned silence around the radio. Hawaii is so far away. At sixteen years and eight months, I can do little about it.

School goes on at a new pace. We are assembled in the auditorium to hear FDR ask Congress to declare war. Some of the older boys join the State Militia and the Civil Air Patrol which actually patrols in Piper Cubs over the Chesapeake Bay, looking for submarines. Soon I am a messenger for Civil Defense, riding my bike through blacked-out streets. Later I train as an Auxiliary Fireman. We are unpaid volunteers, but we ease the load on the Fire Department, as men leave for service or more lucrative defense jobs.

A special exam at school is followed by a notice that I am qualified for the Army Specialized Training Program. Thanks to an accelerated program, I graduate in February, 1943 rather than in June. Pat and I go to the Senior Prom on the streetcar, in a snow storm!

A German army of 330,000 men is also in the snow, surrounded by the Russians. Ordered by Hitler not to surrender, two-thirds of them die before their commander, General Paulas surrenders. The survivors form a column, several miles long, and trudge into captivity through the far off snows of Stalingrad, on February the second, 1943. Very few return. (Paulus spent long years in Soviet POW camps, and returned to Germany where he died on February 1, 1951.)

By the end of February, Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel's attacks have been thrown back by the combined American and British forces in North Africa. In spite of his victory at Kasserine Pass, Rommel sees disaster approaching in North Africa, as the US 1st Armored, 9th and 34th Infantry Divisions become skilled at desert warfare.

In the same month, the Japanese impose control over all Europeans exiled in

Japanese occupied China. Most are Jews from Germany; their brief freedom is lost again.

I work in the laboratory of a paint factory, and plan to go to college at night. On my 18th birthday, March 27th, 1943, already a veteran of 2 months in the paint lab, I register for the draft, and volunteer for induction. New registrants are usually not called for about 6 months, and it seems better to get the physical before starting college in the fall. Between bad teeth and poor eyesight, I expect and dread rejection, and am anxious to get it over with. Going in the service seems an impossible dream. What happened amazes me to this day.

5. INDUCTION

The draft board gives me a "preliminary physical" on April 23, 1943. They note that I am breathing, have a pulse, the requisite number of working extremities, and a normal temperature. They recommend a "final physical."

Thursday, May 27, 1943: An older friend and I report as ordered. We are both named Frank; he is a fellow church member, a ball game buddy. We ride the streetcar on a lovely spring day and wonder how far we might go together in the Army. At the Armory we are sorted alphabetically and I do not see him again for several days.

Surrounded by strangers, we follow a serpentine course, clad only in shorts, through the maze of the examinations. A man in khaki says: "Sit here." A blank wall is 3 feet in front of me. The voice goes on, now behind my left ear: "Take your glasses off, cover the right eye, and read the smallest letters that you can see."

"What letters?" "On the chart!" "What chart?" A finger in front of my nose points to the right where 25 feet away the blur of a letter chart is tacked to a wall. I can read the first letter. We check both eyes. Then with glasses on, I read something near the bottom line. I know that will be "corrected to 20/20." My examiner confers with someone standing behind me; "What do you think of this?" They leaf through my records, already several pages thick. "Lookee here, a volunteer! He'll make a better soldier than either one of us." I am directed on to the next step in the maze.

The day wears on, mostly waiting. Finally dressed, we are ushered into a separate room. Flags line one wall. An officer appears and informs us that we have passed the exam and he promptly swears us into the Army. "Raise your right hand and repeat after me..." We are told to go home, to wait orders which will arrive a few days later. The words echo in my head: "I will defend..." Exuberant, amazed, and a little terrified, I find a pay phone and call home to report the news.

I am giddy and dizzy with the prospect. It is impossible to imagine that I could be actually going into the Army. Euphoric and delighted, I float on an adrenaline rush, and think of the rookie's fears and doubts in The Red Badge of Courage. From the streetcar window, the familiar streets show no hint of the coming adventure; - where will I go, what marvels to behold, and when - or if - I will return. All those folks, in cars and on the streets, in the houses and shops; they are all are living predictable lives as I had been, and now, something very special is going to happen to me. I continue to float in a dream state, down the steps from Streetcar Number 32 and over three blocks of sidewalk to our house.

The news stirs little fuss at the paint lab. My boss and coworkers expected it, although it is still an improbable surprise to me. An elderly mill operator wishes me luck; "Bring me a button from the first dead Jap you see!"

Saturday night I take Betty to a dance at the Dixie Ballroom in nearby Gwynn Oak Park. We had played badminton in her church's lighted court where we were a close match, splitting games as often as not, (or maybe when she was generous). She is quick, athletic, graceful and fun, but never dated me before.

The night goes smoothly. I wonder if she is just being nice to one more departing schoolmate. Never much of a dancer, I am amazed to find that we are gliding smoothly through some great big band tunes. We walk back to her house and watch the moon as it moves along with us above the telephone poles. I say: "Wherever I go, I will think of you when I see the moon above telephone poles." At her door, she kisses me quickly on the cheek and disappears into the house.

I walk and whistle: "You made me love you, I didn't want to do it," - while the moon follows me home, soaring along over a long row of telephone poles. The scene comes back often during the next three years; and during the next seventy - and more years...

Sunday, at church, we learn that our friend Frank was classified "4F" because he had a perforated ear drum. (Seven years later, Frank was drafted for the Korean War.)

Monday morning, June 10, 1943: The big old yellow streetcar lurches through the dark cool pre-dawn of a hot day. Little familiar scenes flicker in the shadowy street lights. Our church, the schools, library, friends' houses, - and the stores all melt away in the dark, just as they did in years of Sunday morning paper routes and in the eerie dark of air raid duty. On this trip, the streets are saying good-by.

The image persists; Dad, shaking my hand, a brief hug, and an admonition; "Don't stick your head up where you don't have to. It was a lot of diapers to change for it all to go to waste."
Mom kisses me good-by, and turns away, shielding her feelings. They watch from the porch as I walk up the dark street carrying an overnight bag; a change of clothing, shaving gear, comb and brush. I leave home for the first time.

6. THE RECEPTION; JUNE 1943

Our first hurry-up and wait begins predictably when twenty five nervous young men report to the draft board at 6 in the morning. We sit on a hall floor for two hours before we are herded onto a chartered streetcar that takes us to the train station. A short hot train ride, with windows open to the coal smoke, brings us to Fort Meade where the midday sun bakes the seats of the waiting trucks.

The Reception Center at Fort Meade is a different world. Profanity, unheard at the draft board and on the train, is the universal language. Privacy is a fond memory, shattered by the long lines of double bunks, toilets without stalls, and gang showers. Lunch is a thrill; a chow line in a huge mess hall; the food cooling quickly on the stainless compartmented trays. Noisy and confusing, but satisfying. After a lifetime of cereal for breakfast, and a sandwich for lunch, 3 hot meals a day is a luxury. I eat everything they serve.

We shuffle through a maze in a large, crowded warehouse where our single

file stops every few feet for a different item. T-shirts and shorts, socks and two pairs of shoes; two sets of khakis and two sets of "OD's" (olive drab wool shirt and trousers) and one OD "blouse" (the dress jacket). The "OD" color does not match the "OD" that we produced in the paint lab.

I adjust the webbing suspension of the plastic helmet liner to fit my head and tighten the leather chin strap over the small protruding bill. The light-weight helmet liner provides remarkable protection from sun and rain. I wonder when we will be given steel helmets. The helmet liner turns out to be the only thing that goes everywhere with me for the next three years.

We are soon back in formation in our one set of new fatigues, GI ankle length shoes, leggings, and the ever present helmet liner. There are instructions as to how to make a bed, polish shoes, store clothing. "Hang shirts, jackets and coats with left sleeve showing!" (The left sleeves will later sport our unit insignia.) We hang the duffel bag on the wall. There is a place for everything.

Orientation is fast and thorough. We understand that corporals and sergeants are surely prophets of God, commanding instant respect and obedience, but they do not rate a salute, and they will tell you not to use the word "sir" with each response. Officers are to be saluted and "sirred." Any officer; from the lowest second lieutenant all the way up to the President.

The pay for a private before deductions, is $50 a month. After several "individual briefings" by officers and noncoms, it appears that everyone signs a deduction slip to buy bonds.

By morning, we realize that we will live every day in our one set of fatigues; a baggy uniform, with huge pockets in the shirt and trousers. So far, my "set" is clean enough to wear again. This day, we stay clean as we face batteries of tests and interviews.

An officer asks: "Would you be willing to fight for your country?" "Yes sir." "Do you have a girl friend?" "No sir!" He hesitates, "You don't have a girl?" "No sir." A nearby officer looks up, and then joins us. "Tell us about it." "I date several girls, not just one." The officers confer. My single status seems suddenly unique, one says something about "...young - still playing the field..." (I think - “Shy, and not so good looking or rich.”)

More physical exams; "Fall out in your raincoats and helmet liners, shoes and socks!" "He didn't say that, - did he?" But the command is repeated: "ONLY

SHOES, SOCKS, RAINCOATS AND HELMET LINERS!!" We learn new terms: "Short Arm Inspection." "Milk it down!" - and most embarrassing: "Bend over and spread your cheeks!"

Bare arms are targets for a barrage of shots; typhus, diphtheria, and small pox. Both arms are sore, and we suffer mini-attacks of the diseases being prevented. The baggy fatigues feel strange during the day. Each evening, when we "stand retreat" in our new unwashed khakis, we look like rows of "sad sacks."

Civilian clothes are shipped home. Sorting things out, I find the ASTP notice that I brought from High School, and give it to a sergeant who is amazed that I had not produced it earlier.

The barracks are never quiet. Throughout the night someone is always visiting the latrine, or returning, stumbling into the unfamiliar furnishings. When everyone is settled in, an occasional snore breaks the silence. The first few nights, I hear a few muffled sobs.

I think: "So far, so good. Not that much different from Scout Camp, but I won't be going home next week." It is a melancholy feeling, being lonely among so many others.

7. KITCHEN POLICE

My name is called for kitchen police duty to start at four the next morning. At first, KP seems not too tough except for starting at 4 A.M. By late afternoon, sitting and peeling potatoes is a luxury after mopping miles of mess hall floor. A corporal watches us for a few moments, and picks me, no doubt, as the least efficient potato peeler.

The corporal instructs me and another man; "Load those garbage cans on that truck!" Working together, we heave the 20 gallon cans onto the truck. Each can weighs about 160 pounds, - some 15 pounds heavier than I am. We are surprised that we could lift them at all. Then we ride among the sloshing garbage cans, in the back of the smelly truck to a farm several miles away.

In the dark, the truck backs up to a pig sty. Dimly lit by the driver's flashlight, we pour the slop over the tailgate and over a fence, into a black void. The garbage splashes onto the backs and heads of unseen pigs, squealing and snorting in their feed trough. The heat, humidity, and stench are overpowering.

Back at the barracks, lights are already out. We wash our stinking fatigues in the latrine sinks under the night lights.

A few hours later, before dawn, we pull the wet fatigues back on and turn out for the Reveille formation. Shivering from the wet and cold, I hear my name called. Four of us are to ship out by "Ten hundred hours - That's 10 o'clock to you Rookies!" The orders are for basic training with the Corps of Engineers at Ft. Belvoir. The mystique of the Corps intrigues me; fortifications at Yorktown, Ft. McHenry and Vicksburg; the sappers of the first World War. The Corps makes the waterways navigable; now it is building our defenses and demolishing "theirs." The Engineers often lead the way; "Essayons" - "Let us try." It is a good place to learn how to make a living and sure to be more fun than the infantry.

Best of all, Ft. Belvoir is close to my Baltimore home and the District of Columbia, - a favorite soldier's playground.

I pack with every expectation of going to Ft. Belvoir and becoming a part of the elite Corps of Engineers. Both things will happen; but Ft. Belvoir waits seven months and the Corps waits 35 years.

We report as ordered, and carry our duffel bags to a waiting weapons carrier. A sergeant checks a list as each man loads his bag and climbs into the truck. All except one; I stand in the street amazed, as the truck leaves without me. The puzzled sergeant checks the list again, and takes me to the orderly room where the first sergeant finds that my Ft. Belvoir orders were canceled.

8. SURPRISE VISIT

I take this opportunity to ask about replacing a broken hinge for my glasses. Incredibly, the "Top Kick" gives me an overnight pass to go off base to an optical shop. While "they" sort out my new orders, I go home via buses and street cars; stop at the optical shop for a quick fix; sleep in my own bed, and visit my high school before heading back to camp the next day.

The rumpled, baggy dress khakis are a poor fit, and devoid of insignia. My

friends ask; "What kind of uniform is that?" Khaki shirt and trousers, matching tie, civilian brown shoes, limp, unadorned overseas cap. It is not impressive. Some are skeptical; "I'm in the Army." - "Oh yeah, sure!"

A younger brother has already moved into my room. There is no going back. No longer a civilian, I do not feel nor look like much of a soldier.

9. HELICOPTER, STARS AND SOOT

Inevitably, orders come, even before another tour of KP. Five of us are going to Fort McClellan, Alabama. We board the train to Washington DC Being first on the alphabetical list, I am "senior member" in charge of this “travel detail."

We compete in finding landmarks for first time visitor, Private Ness. At Union Station, we have a one-hour layover. Private Ness and I trot south on broad Delaware Avenue, up a gentle slope to Capitol Hill.

We are astonished to see a small helicopter hovering over the Capitol, as if on cue, waiting for us. We blend into a crowd of dignitaries and watch the strange new machine land in front of the Capitol steps. The pilot gets out and shakes hands with Army officers and gray haired men in tailored suits. Then the pilot climbs back in and the strange machine blasts us with its down draft as it pulls itself up, over the Capitol, and out of sight behind the dome.

Delayed by the distraction, we race back down the avenue to Union Station. We skid to a halt to avoid bowling over an elderly officer; a hasty salute and - "Sorry Sir, we have to catch a train!" - we address the first four-star general that either of us had ever seen. He smiles, returns our salute, and pauses to avoid blocking our hasty retreat. (We nearly knocked down the former Chief of Staff of the United States Army - from 1926 to 1930). The next time that he and I exchange salutes, I will know him as General Charles P. Summerall, Commanding Officer of The Citadel.

The train is crowded with servicemen, mostly soldiers. The day is hot, and the old steam engine pours smoke and soot through the open windows into the cars. We find seats or sit on our bags, and look over our fellow travelers.

At Lexington, Virginia, we are joined by soldiers wearing uniforms that fit. These fellows are very aware of their big new gold rings, each with the same bright stone. One of them tells me that they are ROTC Juniors, so they may wear their VMI rings. I think back to our living room Civil War battles where Stonewall Jackson left the Virginia Military Institute for glory - and death. The VMI Juniors are also going to Fort McClellan. Theirs will be an abbreviated basic training before entering Officer's Candidate School (OCS).

The Shenandoah Valley vanishes into the night as dawn finds us in Tennessee. Our late afternoon arrival in Anniston, Alabama is a liberation from the heat of the crowded sooty day coach. The VMI boys form up sharply, shoulder their duffel bags and head for the trucks. The rest of us struggle to follow their example.

Crowded into big trucks (the famous "deuce-and-a-half") we ride 10 miles up the highway and into the receiving area at Ft. McClellan. The breeze through the truck bed is a welcome change from the crowded, sooty train.

Noncoms (non-commissioned officers; - sergeants and corporals) sort us out. I am among a group of strangers, standing in the hot sun, in front of a row of "hutments." It is a big camp; rows and rows of wood-frame hutments. They have wood floors; plain wood siding up to about 5 feet from the floor; then continuous screened windows which provide much needed ventilation. This is IRTC; the Infantry Replacement Training Center.

10. IRTC

We "fall-out" in the standard trainee's uniform; helmet liner, our one set of fatigues; green shirt and trousers. Trouser legs are "bloused;" that is, tucked into the canvas leggings, and pulled down just enough to hide the top of the leggings. The fatigue shirt is more like a jacket than a shirt, with black metal buttons and large pockets. Similar three-grenade-size baggy pockets are on each side of the trousers. Each legging has a webbing strap that extends under the ankle length brown "GI." shoes.

The sun seems to be everywhere. It fills the sky. Heat and glare reflect from the gravel of the formation area, from roads and sky. Heat radiates from the hutment walls and roofs. The heat and glare pursue our every move, we squint and hide beneath our helmet liners. But the sun pales under the intense bright blue eyes glaring at us from the shadow cast by the brim of Sgt. Muir's helmet liner.

A wiry buck sergeant in immaculately pressed khakis, Sgt. Muir assigns us to squads, and sorts the twelve men of each squad in order of height. I am in the middle of the squad, and sure enough, 5 feet 10 inches is the average for this Army. (Soldiers of WW I averaged 5 feet 8 inches tall.) We are the third squad of the third platoon. The tallest man becomes the acting squad leader, and wears a black arm-band with three olive drab chevrons.

Sgt. Muir introduces himself: "You will address me as Sergeant! You will not speak unless spoken to! You misbegotten sad sacks will become soldiers in the next thirteen weeks, and I'll be there to see that you do! You will pay close attention, because your lives will depend on what we will teach you. Do not expect any free time from now until the end of this cycle!"

The Sergeant herds us through the basic training cycle; assisted by a couple of corporals, supervised loosely by a lieutenant platoon leader, and directed by the Company Headquarters; Top Sergeant, Exec Officer, and Company Commander.

Rumor has it that Sgt. Muir was an accountant in a Boston bank, where he mysteriously stayed wonderfully conditioned. No taller than I, he seems to be made of coiled steel springs. We gather that he has been through this training cycle many times, and that IRTC training is as rough as any; equal to the Marines' boot camp; on a par with OCS.

Sgt. Muir adds to our fears: "If you screw up, or if you are sick for more than three days, you will go to another battalion and start the cycle all over again." We quickly discover that this is not something that a sane man wants to do, and it could mean missing the ASTP schedule.

At "Orientation by the CO," the Company commander, First Lieutenant Reese, expounds on the Infantry Replacement Training Center. Most "graduates" go directly overseas to infantry divisions already in combat. "You think you are going to ASTP, but you'll be wise not to count on it!" Lt. Reese goes on, and on:

"There are three ways to do a thing; the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way. You will always do it the Army way! The Army has been training men for more than 150 years, and we learned how to do it from people who had been training soldiers for centuries. It may not be clear to you why we do some things, but there is usually a very good reason." (We grow increasingly skeptical about the "very good reason.") We conclude that First Lieutenant Reese is "bucking for Captain" and will sacrifice our comfort and leisure in pursuit of a second silver bar.

The officers and non-noncoms (known as "cadre") are overtly contemptuous of our anticipated assignment to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). They know that we passed the Army General Classification Test (AGCT) by a score of at least 115 points, while 110 is enough for OCS. Our motives are suspect, and they tag us, with exquisite irony, "the whiz kids," a word play on the radio show, "The Quiz Kids." The cadre sets about tearing down our egos; humbling us into pliable forms which might be molded, as much as possible, into soldiers.

There are twelve men in a squad, four squads to a platoon, four platoons in a company; and four companies in a training battalion. The first three companies are potential ASTP cadets. The fourth, mostly VMI juniors, are getting a crash basic training; eight weeks compared to our thirteen, before going on to OCS. Thanks to their ROTC training, the fourth company makes us look like the rookies we are, as we drill, march on the parade ground, and march from one training area to another.

Processing and training areas are far from our hutments and we march everywhere. A few miles, at first, then more and more miles stretch forever in front of us. Each session brings us back to the hutments wringing wet with sweat.

We each buy a second set of fatigues from the post exchange (PX). These one-piece coveralls are lighter in weight than the issue fatigues and not nearly as durable. But we wash one set every night and sometimes have an almost dry set for the next day.

A week later we are issued additional sets of fatigues and there is time to send them to the Quartermaster laundry. The laundry fees are low, and the accumulated fees are deducted from one's pay at the end of the month.

11. RIFLES

"THE RIFLE" is issued in a special ceremony. The Army is entrusting me with a very expensive and lethal weapon. The serial number is duly listed with my name and my Army Serial Number (etched in memory: ASN 33 725 901).

THE RIFLE is to be handled reverently, carried everywhere and guarded with my life. THE RIFLE is cleaned and oiled every night; the wood stock is oiled and rubbed at every break. Mine is a much used Garand M-1, accompanied by a bayonet, scabbard, and cartridge belt. There are not enough M-1's for all of us; a few men drew 1903 Springfield rifles.

The Garand Rifle is one of the world's heaviest. Empty, and without the bayonet attached, it weighs nearly 9 pounds; a full pound heavier than a gallon of milk. It seems a lot heavier after only a few minutes on my shoulder. Balanced in my hand, it feels like a cannon compared to the 22 caliber rifles at the shooting gallery in Carlin's Amusement Park.

The wooden stock shows a history of abuse and subsequent care; scratches and dents, oiled and polished. The worn brown leather sling is punctured by two rows of holes whose scars and stretch marks betray the favored positions of the brass claws.

At "shoulder arms," the taut sling cushions the stock of the rifle against my shoulder. When loose, the sling allows the rifle to be carried on either shoulder. The command "Sling Arms!" means to hang the rifle barrel up, behind your right shoulder; where the right elbow holds it in place. Otherwise, the command is "Sling Arms to the LEFT!" Slung barrel up on the left shoulder, the bolt handle digs into my ribs. Barrel down on the left, the bolt handle points out into my left elbow. Fully extended, the sling allows the rifle to be carried across one's back (unless a pack is in the way). This frees both hands. We are told that the sling will be used as a marksmanship aid.

One man in our squad is issued a 1903 Springfield rifle; easily distinguished by its "single" barrel, long thin bayonet, and long chrome bolt handle. The Springfield is a "single action" rifle; it holds a 5-round clip, but each cartridge is fed into the chamber by working the bolt. We learn that the "03 Springfield" with a telescopic sight is an effective sniper's rifle.

A corporal pulls a recruit from the ranks and guides him into the position of "Port Arms!" With suitable gestures, the corporal specifies: "This is your RIFLE, and that is your gun, the RIFLE is for shooting, and the gun is for fun!

Do not call your RIFLE a gun!" He grabs the rifle away from the hapless trainee, and threatens a court martial for any man who so easily yields his weapon.

Using the borrowed rifle, the corporal demonstrates the manual of arms. "At the command 'FALL IN!' You will come to the position of 'PARADE REST!' Place the butt of your RIFLE next to your right toe; hold the stock in your right hand, below the barrel. Push the RIFLE to the front, spread your feet about 12 inches apart, and place your left hand in the small of your back. At the command, 'AH - TENN - HUT!' - you will snap the RIFLE back to the trouser seam, and simultaneously pull the left foot to the right foot. Make those heels click! At the same time, slap your left hand down so that the thumb touches the trouser seam. With your heels together, spread the toes at a 45 degree angle and place the front of the RAHFUL butt next to and in line with your rat toe!"

Corporal continues: "At ah-ten-shun, yer hay-yed will be up and back, chest out and gut in! Now let's try it! - FALL IN!" (We snap to parade rest.) "Detail, Ah-tenn-HUT." Amazingly, each of us snaps to the required position.

He shows us how to allow an inspecting officer to take the weapon from the recruit standing at inspection arms. "Be sure to let it go when he slaps the stock. If you hold on too long, the rifle will pivot in your hand and the butt will kick you in the balls."

Demonstrating each action he explains: "Release the bolt after pulling it part way back and it can take your thumb off! Pull the bolt all the way back until it locks in place. Then close the bolt by pushing the bolt handle back with the side of your hand while pushing the cartridge follower down with the right thumb. Then let the bolt handle push your hand - and thumb clear!"

The bolt handle, on the right side of the rifle, has to be released quickly by the right hand while the thumb is still in the receiver; a hazard for anyone, but worse for a southpaw. We try it. The bolt closes with a tremendous whack against the chamber housing.

Corporal inspects the "bore" or inside of the barrel by cocking the bolt back, and placing his thumb, in harm's way in the chamber, so that light reflects from his

thumbnail through the chamber, while he peeks down the muzzle with one eye. We follow suit, as instructed. It seems a suicidal position, but inside the bore, one can see the spiraled grooves, clean and bright.

An officer explains how the rifle works. The Garand rifle has what looks like a second barrel, sealed at the front end and tucked beneath and a little to the rear of the actual barrel. A pull on the trigger releases the firing pin, a spring drives it forward to strike a small primer in the middle of the bottom of the cartridge; the primer explodes and sets off the powder; and the expanding gas forces the bullet up the barrel. Some of the gas enters a tiny port into the second barrel where the gas pressure moves a piston to push the bolt back. As the bolt moves back, it pulls the spent cartridge out of the chamber and ejects it through the now open receiver. A spring moves the bolt forward, loading a new round into the chamber and locking the bolt shut. It sounds simple enough.

The clip holds eight rounds; eight shots as fast as one can pull the trigger; once for each shot. It is possible to load a ninth round in the chamber, closing the bolt without removing the first round from the clip. Not a good idea as an impact might fire the rifle.

We learn the rest of the manual of arms, and later, how to field strip the rifle. Eventually we start marksmanship lessons with no ammunition. We will wait longer than we expected before we fire the rifles.

At the lunch break, back at my cot, I find that the little door in the rifle butt conceals twin cavities; one holds a combination tool used to disassemble the rifle.

The other cavity contains a clever cleaning kit; a length of cord with fittings and a wire brush which allows the brush or cleaning patches to be pulled through the barrel. I use the tool to remove the lower barrel retainer, slip out the barrel assembly, and remove the trigger assembly.

The three pieces of precision machinery lay in my hands like sacred objects; the stock, barrel and trigger assemblies. The trigger assembly looks like clockwork; it is so complex that only an optimist would take it apart. I am relieved when my three parts fit together again easily. The mysterious mechanisms belie the simplicity of the operating theory. But there is no doubt about how to load and operate the rifle.

12. MISFITS AND TRAINEES

The training cycle is violent and exhausting. Early morning calisthenics may be followed by a run through the obstacle course, forced marches and double-time to classes; hand-to-hand combat, bayonet drill, marksmanship, and training films. We doze through films on the evils of venereal diseases and the worldwide menace of the Axis nations. The numbers of pushups, chin ups and sit-ups increases and the marches grow longer and faster. I appreciate the muscles developed during four years of carrying newspapers.

A few men can not keep up. Several can not leap or climb an obstacle, nor run for more than a few steps. Some are simply overweight and out of shape from years of easy living. They are grouped into a special squad that works when we work and works when we rest; it is a special hell for them.

One man is totally uncoordinated. He can not step over a small obstacle, he can not run or climb. In spite of his best efforts and one-on-one coaxing by the cadre, it is painfully obvious to us that he can not do what we have to do. He disappears after the first week, destined for limited duty or a discharge. The rest of the special squad continues their long hours.

We strain to avoid losing face from not being able to keep up, and the special squad works hard to catch up. During the first few weeks we sweat and strain, but the special squad puts in extra hours, and diets. They lose 20 to 30 pounds in fat and gain about half as much in muscle. After a few weeks, they rejoin our ranks and we face the toughest challenges together.

The trainees are a diverse group. At 18 years and 3 months, I am a year or more younger than most of them. Many have finished a year or two of college. We exchange stories.

Lamont, a muscular handsome 22 year old, was a professional ballroom dancer. He joins a small group "from Hahvahd," playing bridge at the other end of our hutment. "Blackie" is from the same Virginia home town of my young friend Pat. "Oh yeah, I know her - She's easy laid!" I resist an urge to slug Blackie, and then realize he is putting me on. Pat is only fifteen and has been away from her home town for five years! No need to challenge him.

Floyd Hancock from Hagerstown is only 18, and already a newlywed. He yearns to be back in bed with his bride, on Sunday mornings when he does not have to go to work. We share the same initials and last name, so when a registered- or insured-mail notice comes at mail call, we have to decide which one is to walk the mile to the post office to sign for it, for the post office never bothers with first names and will not allow us to sign for each other.

Kashansky is a philosopher, certified by a degree. No matter, the Army expects him to become a rifleman, along with the rest of us. At "sling arms" his

Springfield rifle dangles, sloping back from his shoulder while his shoulders slope forward in perpetual weariness. I ask him why he does not hold the rifle upright as we are required to do, and he tells me this story:

> "Once at a social event, a lady asked Ben Johnson how he could be so calm after he had spilled his tea. Johnson said that he simply asked himself how the event would appear when considered a year later. So, how I hold this rifle today will not be important, a year from now."

His response is unsettling. I wonder where we will be, "a year from now."

13. FIX BAYONETS

My bayonet is about a foot long, and sharp on both sides of the thick stubby blade. I sharpen the point and edges to ease entry into the straw dummies. The Garand rifle bayonet looks like a short broadsword compared to the longer rapier-like bayonet of the Springfield rifle.

Saturday morning review; the band plays Sousa marches and we parade onto the field in our starched khakis, leggings, helmet liners, cartridge belts with canteen and first aid packet - and rifles with fixed bayonets. At the cue for the Star Spangled Banner, the Battalion Commander bawls out: "Preee - sent ARMS!" The command is relayed to us by the Company Commander.

I snap the rifle up and in front of me, the bayonet scratches my right cheek, as my left and right hands smack the stock smartly. Listening to the National Anthem, I look past the offending bayonet, now held rigidly a few inches in front of my nose while a trickle of blood seeps down towards my clean shirt. I see the distant hills simmering in the summer heat, and wonder if that will be the last injury to be caused by my bayonet.

Bayonet drill looks like fun, but turns out to be tough. We learn the techniques: "On Guard!" "Long Thrust - Withdrawal - HO!" "Short Thrust - Withdrawal - HO!"

The formal motions are derived from classic fencing positions; with the stock in your right hand, extend the bayoneted rifle, the left hand under the barrel. The left hand and left foot both move forward as the bayonet is thrust at the dummy. It is the reverse of a throwing motion where the left foot and right arm move forward. The movement imparts a strong force on the bayonet, and one must

move quickly to regain balance, especially after missing the target.

I think the bayonet is useless as long as I have any ammunition, and with an empty rifle it would be foolish to press an attack. The idea of a bayonet attack remains far-fetched, but then, if it is "he or me" - the survivor may be the one best trained, and most determined.

The bayonet course is a series of straw filled khaki dummies and obstacles similar to the obstacle course. Some dummies have a stick on a swivel which must be parried before one can approach the dummy. We run from one dummy to another, yelling like Banshees, stabbing each dummy in turn; - long or short thrust, withdraw, and then an uppercut with the rifle butt. It is fierce, naked violence. Each stroke must be done just so, and the penalty for a poor performance is to run the course again.

We run the bayonet course several times a week. The last run is on a hot afternoon after three molars were pulled only an hour earlier. The dummies seem to be dodging, and the entire course sways before my bleary-eyed charge. But the performance is acceptable.

My bayonet draws blood once more a few weeks later. Carrying the rifle in my right hand, I jump across a small stream just as the man ahead of me slips back down the stream bank; his calf is scratched by my fixed bayonet. He accepts my apology.

In a war dominated by firepower, the bayonet seems ineffective, and I wonder if we are wasting our time. Yet, to this day I might be able to fend off an attack if I am only armed with a broom stick, a cane, or an umbrella.

Machine gunners and ammo bearers are armed with pistols and carbines respectively. Officers and runners carry carbines. They all carry trench knives, not bayonets. However, 16 months later at St. Remy, I see that a line of riflemen advancing with fixed bayonets is a most intimidating sight.

14. MARKSMANSHIP

Under the trees, we practice the standard shooting positions; stand, squat, sit,

kneel, and prone. Standing is the least steady, even when the rifle is supported by the sling wrapped around the left arm, across the body, and around right shoulder. The instructors are quite specific:

"What Ah'm telling yew will hep yo' a lot! Hol' yo' rat elbow high! Et'l hep yo' keep tha rahful stidy!"

Away from the non-noncoms, we get a lot of mileage out of "hep yo a lot!" as the mimics repeat the instructions with satirical asides.

The instructors have a lot more to say:

"You may not place an object under your arm to prop the rifle when firing for qualification. Some WACS have been known to use their natural parts for this purpose, but you men are not so equipped!"

"When you assume the prone position, you should be comfortable and stable; the book says that the legs should be spread according to the conformation of the man. This instruction must be revised when the students are WACS!" It takes a while, but we laugh.

I peer through the hole in the rear sight; the front sight is a vertical blade which must appear centered in the hole with the target resting on top of the blade. I sight on the “bull's eye” (known as a "bull"). It is a black one inch circle on white paper, mounted on a wooden box about two feet high. "Take a deep breath, sight below the target and let your breath out slowly while you take up the slack in the trigger. When the bull appears on top of the blade in the center of your sight, stop exhaling and gently squeeze - do not jerk - the trigger."

Half the class sits on the little boxes with a marker on a stick; the other half sights on the targets on the boxes and does the trigger squeeze exercise. The rifleman calls out where he thinks the sights were actually aimed when the trigger clicks and the man on the box moves the marker to that spot. It seems a little silly, but I become aware of where the rifle is aimed when the trigger clicks. It is a welcome respite from bayonet drill and forced marches.

15. WATER

"But when it comes to slaughter
You will do your work on water..."
(as Kipling wrote, in "Gunga Din").

The fighting in North Africa is winding down, and the "lessons learned" are still in the training program. Every morning, and after lunch, before we "move out" to our first exercise or class, we must hold up our canteens, upside down with their tops dangling on their little chains. Non-noncoms check to see that each canteen is empty. We get no water for 4 hours in the sweltering Alabama sun. "They" call it "water discipline," and tell us it will prepare us for desert fighting. Since the fighting is winding down in Africa, we call it damn foolishness, and suspect that the Army just wants to demonstrate complete control of our lives - or maybe the training schedule lags behind the current events?

A typical four hour sequence might include an hour each of calisthenics, close order drill, a training film and a five mile forced march. When we return to the "Company Area" we stand at attention in one more formation for a 10-minute eternity while announcements are made by the C.O. Finally, we hear: "DISMISSED" and we race to the oasis; the wash racks and sinks in the latrine. We ignore the warnings about drinking too much too quickly, and seem none the worse.

After supper we quench our thirst in the PX; sodas outsell beer. I eat a quart of ice cream, and still want more, but the full containers feel light in weight as if air is whipped into the ice cream. One Sunday, three of us actually get a pass and visit a café in Anniston. We each order - and consume - a whole apple pie and a quart of milk.

In later years, the "experts" find that drinking plenty of water improves resistance to heat and sun. Ball players are allowed to swallow water instead of just rinsing the mouth. However, we will see more than enough water before our training cycle is over.

The focus of the fighting turns to Sicily, and "water discipline" is dropped

from the training programs. The whole idea never made sense to us. (One veteran tells me later “The Army did that because they can; to show us who is in control.”) We find our endurance improves when we are again allowed to carry water. The timing is appropriate, for thirst and dehydration would not be helpful during rifle marksmanship qualification.

16. INSPECTIONS

Every day in every way there are inspections. Even in the one hundred degree heat, shirt sleeves must always be rolled down and the cuffs buttoned. Rifles, (or "side arms") are checked at nearly every formation. At Retreat, and when leaving the Company Area, one must wear khakis with a matching “overseas cap,” - now with blue piping, indicating infantry. The necktie is required, properly tied; ends tucked into the shirt between the second and third buttons. Off duty, one is allowed to wear low-cut plain brown civilian shoes.

I yearn to discard the necktie, unbutton my collar, and roll up my sleeves - or even discard the shirt in the Alabama heat. Sweat-drenched uniforms are a way of life.

Most infamous is the so-called "short arm inspection" mentioned earlier. About once a month, after a full day's work we shower, and fall out dressed only in raincoats, helmet liners, socks and shoes. We march to the clinic and file through the building pausing only long enough to respond to a medic's command; "Milk it down!"

The full field inspection is a lot more trouble. All of the gear which is officially prescribed to be in the "full field pack" must be displayed, spread on the ground on the shelter half (half of a pup tent). Each item has to be positioned in its exact specified location. The comb must face just so, teeth down, and small teeth on the left. The shaving and tooth brushes must be dry. Shaving soap must be new, never used. A spare pair of socks is rolled into a tiny compressed ball and placed exactly. A set of new underwear is folded and laid just so. The mess gear is polished and in its assigned place, open, with handle pointed in the exact required direction. Every item must be perfectly clean and located with absolute precision.

For all of its idiocy, the full field inspection has a point. When the pack is assembled, we have everything we need to survive "in the field." We lay out the shelter half, fold it around the folded blanket, and roll it up while kneeling on it; then tuck the roll into the shelter half's flaps. The roll is amazingly tight. Sgt.

Muir throws mine high in the air; it bounces on the ground and is still tight. The pack is strapped around this "bedroll." On top of the pack, the mess gear fits in a pouch and the entrenching tool is strapped on below that. It makes a sturdy package, and it weighs more than twenty pounds - dry. The entrenching tool is a little combination pick and shovel; light and compact, but it makes for slow digging.

We get a Sunday treat: a "clean and dry rifle inspection." The rifle must be absolutely clean and dry; not a trace of oil; another bit of idiocy, for we must drench the parts in oil right after the inspection or the rifle will rust, especially the bore which has no protective bluing. The theory is that the oil may hide some speck of dust. "The Word" is not to worry about uniform, shoes or personal appearance, only the rifle is to be inspected. I scrub and wipe; the bore is bright and clean, not a trace of oil or lint can be seen in any part of the rifle; even the trigger assembly is clean and dry, although it is unlikely that the inspector will "field strip" my rifle.

Since it is Sunday, we fall out for this special inspection in fatigues without leggings, but helmet liners as usual. I anticipate no problem, even though Sgt. Muir berates several men before coming to me. He sidesteps to face me and I snap the rifle to "inspection arms." Mercifully, the bolt locks open on the first attempt. He slaps the rifle from my hands in the approved manner, peers into the open receiver, turns it end for end and examines every inch of surface.

I sweat an eternity while he leisurely checks the receiver, stock, butt plate, and finally holds the barrel to his eye and reflects the sun from his thumbnail in the receiver. I KNOW that rifling is SHINY BRIGHT and dry. In one smooth movement, he drops the rifle back into my waiting hands. His blue eyes twinkle as they acknowledge a good job well done. Then they drop, surveying me from head to toes and back. He speaks to the attending corporal: "Dirty finger nails!"

Most of us find ourselves on the corporal's list. We return to our hutments, oil the rifles, and put them back in the rack. We feel betrayed; "they" did not follow their own conditions for the inspection. Many men are needed for the "sod detail;" and one excuse is as good as another. We grow more skeptical of the Army's sense of fair play. I find some consolation in the fact that "my" rifle passed this tough inspection. Always near, it becomes a trusted friend as the weeks go by.

After Sunday lunch, we chosen-many spend the afternoon digging sod from a nearby meadow. We haul it in wheel barrows and plant it as directed. Through the sweat, I am haunted by the words; "Only the rifle will be inspected." First Lieutenant Reese wishes to be a Captain; he will have grass next to the Company

Headquarters walkway.

Friday night we are promised another big treat: a "GI PARTY!" We haul every cot and footlocker out into the Company Street; we move everything off the floor. I play a tune on the harmonica while big GI shoes pound out a Virginia Reel. Then we soak the bare board floor in GI soap and water, form a line and scrub it down; flush the soap away, mop it dry, and let it air a bit. Everything goes back in place; we do not walk on the floor in shoes; and the next morning's inspection finds an immaculate floor, worn a little thinner, again.

17. THE SHARPSHOOTER

The big day finally arrives, hot and clear; about halfway through the training cycle. We carry rifles, full canteens and "light packs" (raincoats and mess kits). In high spirits, we hike the five miles to the rifle range. We are divided into two groups; mine goes first "to the pits." Standing in the target pit, I look up at the big target; maybe 6-foot square, white paper on plywood, an 8-inch diameter black bull's eye sits in the middle of several larger circles on the face of the target.

The first shot comes as a surprise; the bullet slaps the target just before the sound of the rifle blast arrives. It is almost a single sound. Now we know what a shot sounds like when a rifle is fired in our direction.

After each shot we pull the target down into the pit and place a marker on the bullet hole to show where it hit and to indicate the score. When a target is missed, the "pit crew" waves a red flag known as "Maggies drawers."

There are many erratic shots; we hear the thud of bullets hitting the dirt in front of the pits, some ricochet and whistle over our heads. One spent ricochet bounces off the target and falls on my shoulder. It does no harm, but when I pick it up, it is too hot to hold. The bullet is nearly flat, opened at the nose and peeled back; its copper jacket is laid back from the lead. It becomes a souvenir; the only bullet to hit me during the war. Shrapnel is something else.

Our turn on the firing line brings the purpose of this game into a sharper focus. We watch Sgt. Muir demonstrating the use of the sling. His position is rock solid and he fires consecutive bulls from all five positions; stand, kneel, squat,

sit, and prone.

The range is operated as safely as possible. We hear and respond to commands from a megaphone in the control tower near the middle and behind the firing line: "Lock and Load!" I check that the safety is on; push the clip with its 8 rounds of "ball" ammunition down into the open breach; the bolt rides home carrying the first round into the chamber.

"READY ON THE RIGHT?" A non-comm to my right raises his hand.

"READY ON THE LEFT?" A hand appears in that direction.

"READY ON THE FIRING LINE!" A non-com checks each trainee.

"FIRE AT WILL!" Later, of course, the Company clowns wonder which one is "Will," but everyone is deadly serious on the firing line.

At last, we fire at targets from 100 to 500 yards away. The first task is to find the "zero" position, by moving the rear sight either horizontally or vertically, depending on which knob is rotated. One knob sits on each side of the rear sight. We start in the most stable position, prone, with the sling rigged to lock the rifle into our shoulders. We fire a practice round to get used to the "kick."

When the rifle is fired with the bull in the sights, and the marker shows a hit outside of the bull, then the sights are adjusted to bring the next shot into the bull. With luck, further adjustment can bring a shot close to the exact center of the target. One must also consider the wind, when there is any.

The kick of my first shot brings appreciation for the shoulder pad in my fatigue shirt. I am astonished when the target reappears with a mark not far from the bull. After each shot I adjust the sights until I hit consecutive bulls..

One must remember where the "zero" is. The only way to locate it is to count the number of "clicks" that can be heard and felt when moving the sight from the zero position to the left stop, as far as it will go, and again, to one of the vertical stops. Then, to reset the "zero" one goes back to those stops and counts the "clicks" back to the zero position. The Springfield sights are marked with range distances and seem easier to "zero."

Once the rifle is "zeroed" we get a few practice shots, and then fire "for record" in each of the five positions, first without using the sling; then using the sling. In the "squatting" position; my heels will not touch the ground, so I dig little holes for my toes.

A few men hit the wrong targets. This takes a little shuffling of firing orders by the cadre to sort it out.

As we move to longer ranges the bull's eye gets much smaller. At 500 yards it is a tiny speck sitting on the middle of my front sight. I picture a helmet, about the same size.

Qualification scores fall into three grades; Expert, Sharpshooter, and Marksman. I qualify as a Sharpshooter, and enjoy the medal; a Maltese cross with bull's eye and concentric target rings. The Marksman medal is a plain Maltese cross, while the Expert's is decorated with a wreath around its bull's eye and target rings.

A few men fail to qualify on their first try; they go back again until they do qualify. We wear our medals on our khaki shirts on a Sunday pass to nearby Anniston. It supplements the new infantry blue piping on our caps.

18. ROUTE MARCH

An officer talks about walking. "If you march at 120 steps per minute, with a 30-inch stride, you will go about one mile every fifteen minutes. To do this, and carry a full field pack, rifle, steel helmet and ammunition, you cannot waste any effort."

A noncom demonstrates an effortless glide. The officer points out that the gentle roll of the noncom's hips serves to extend the length of his legs. They do not explain that the arms, swinging in opposite directions, accumulate kinetic energy, until at the end of each swing, the energy is uncoiled, thus helping to bring the arms back, counter-balancing the movement of the legs. As each foot pushes back, toes straight ahead, the body weight rolls smoothly over the ball of the foot, thrusting the soldier forward. The lead foot comes down gently, rolling the body's weight from the back of the heel, smoothly forward again, over the ball and pushing off from the toes.

Then the noncom walks the same route with his toes pointed out - and again with toes pointing in. It is obvious that "duck waddle" and "pigeon toe" gaits waste a lot of energy moving from side to side, and the body weight will do damage as it rolls over the side of the foot. The object is to carry the center of

gravity straight ahead with no bobbing or weaving, while rotating the extremities, balanced around the center of gravity.

We march away in "route step" which permits us to try different styles of walking. I try the exaggerated arm swing used by the British. Sure enough, it helps to build momentum and to balance the motion of the legs, as contrasted to the stiffness of our prescribed six inch arm swing. The lessons have instant application.

Every morning and afternoon we leave the Company Area marching four abreast. The first platoon follows the CO or one of his officers and trainee Arbuckle, the Company guidon bearer. Arbuckle was so honored because his name starts with "A" and he is tall enough to already be at the head of his squad in the first platoon. He is well built, and his task is to carry the small dark blue company flag, or guidon, which marks the head of our column; the officer on the left, the guidon on the right, followed by the four first platoon squad leaders in one line.

Arbuckle gets a little ribbing because he carries the guidon in place of a rifle. Even the Springfield rifle is heavier than the guidon. I picture the color bearer as THE prime target in "The Red Badge of Courage" but we are far from any combat.

On the back roads, we proceed in two files, one on each side of the road. When any distance is involved we may be allowed to march at "route step." This allows each man to take short or long steps, rather than "stay in step." We may talk and sing and make ourselves more comfortable by carrying rifles at "sling arms" on either shoulder. Slung upside down on my left shoulder, the rifle’s offending bolt handle points away from my hip.

Passing a headquarters building, a flag, or an officer, the column is told to: "Sling Arms to the RIGHT!" And then a call to: "AH-TEN-HUT!" We sling the rifles, barrels up on our right shoulders, straighten our lines and pick up the step. Then: "Dresss-right, - DRESS! - HUP - HUP - HUP - TWO - LEFT - RIGHT - LEFT - RIGHT - ..." We pick up the step and close ranks.

Finally, "EYES - RIGHT!" All heads turn right except those of the men in the right column. The officer in charge of the platoon salutes, Then "FRONT!" - and if we are lucky, once more, "ROUTE STEP!"

At first we march leisurely to one training site and then another, further away. (I am in a minority that can describe the pace as "leisurely" thanks to conditioning from the paper route.) Later we retrace the five miles to the hutments in one hour.

A few days later we "double-time" most of the five miles back, covering the distance in about 45 minutes.

A song comes to mind; "Hayfoot, straw foot, five miles more! Where in the heck, is this mechanized war? Come on doggies, don't get sore, Get HEP HEP HEP to the step!"

As the cycle progresses we venture farther from the hutments. Finally we face the longest forced march; over "Baines' Gap" near the reservation boundary. The day is hot, we carry full field packs, rifles, and full canteens. We march eight miles at a fast pace and climb a long steep slope for about a mile, up a small mountain, pounding the dirt in a desperate effort to keep up. The distance between men grows a little; then as the lead platoon goes over the top they bunch up and resume their assigned distances apart. Far ahead, I see the men speeding up as they move over the crest and start down hill.

Our platoon tries to maintain the spacing, moving faster as we climb. I can't quite keep up; the man in front of me pulls away a few feet while I go as fast as I can. It seems hopeless when suddenly we are at the crest and take our turn rushing down the hill to close the gaps. Near the bottom, the column is halted after marching exactly 10 miles. We get a strange order: "ABOUT -FACE! -FORR -WAARRD - HARCH!" And we start back up the hill.

I congratulate myself for being in the third platoon; the fourth is leading us up the hill; and now the second and first platoons, behind us, have trouble keeping the spacing as we coast over the top.

We force ourselves to resume the pace back up the hill, Arbuckle suddenly appears between our files. He must "double-time" to carry the guidon back to the end of the column which is now leading our way to water and rest. I no longer envy his light burden. We return to our Company Area in the same quick time to a rare congratulation from the CO because no one fell out, and even the few stragglers made the entire march.

My feet are building calluses that fill the square corners of my boots. They

appear to have square edges!

19. NIGHT MARCH

The problem is simple enough. The Company will cross a wooded area at night. The CO leads the way, following his luminous compass course. There is no moon. Even the distant lights of the Fort and the dim light of the stars are masked by the trees. It is so dark that each man must hold onto the entrenching tool on the back of the pack of the man ahead of him. In single file, we plow through the brush, through the woods, through a small stream. We stumble over a barbed wire fence.

This night is too dark for the best night vision. Perhaps the old Boy Scout night adventures helped; I am sure that we are drifting off to the left of our original course. Nothing I can do but hang onto the handle of the little shovel of the man ahead, out of sight, leading me blindly on. The march is scheduled to take one hour; the minutes drag on forever.

After two hours we break free onto a road; our objective. We gather around our platoon leader. He became aware of a break in the line ahead of his position and he lead us out of the woods. But the first and second platoons are nowhere in sight.

The Lieutenant sends scouts in each direction on the road. To the right, about half a mile away, they find the first and second platoons which had followed the CO's compass headings directly as planned. The left scouts are recalled, we join the others and wait, sleeping on our packs. Part of our platoon and the fourth platoon are lost.

Several hours later they burst out of the bushes into our midst. Their story is simple. A man near the end of the third platoon lost his grip and fell when he hit the barbed wire. He stumbled on in the dark until he found what he thought was the man ahead of him, grasped the welcome tool handle and followed as before. After several hours, the fourth platoon leader fell out of line, feeling that he had

been through the same obstacles before. He wanted to see if he had any stragglers; but the end of the line never came. He became aware that the same men were passing him again.

They had been following blindly in a circle for hours.

20. WEAPONS

We are introduced to more of the infantryman's arsenal. Every rifle squad is equipped with grenades, grenade launchers, bazookas and a BAR; the famous Browning Automatic Rifle.

Light machine guns and 60 mm mortars are assigned to each rifle company's weapons platoon. Carbines are carried by officers, ammo bearers and messengers. The water cooled 30 caliber machine gun and 81 mm mortar are left for the heavy weapons companies.

I throw dummy grenades until I can throw one almost as far as I can throw a football, maybe 40 yards. It may not be far enough to be out of range from the grenade's shrapnel.

Next, we are to throw a live grenade from a trench. I hold the grenade in my right hand with the handle secure against my sweating palm, gingerly pull the pin with my left hand, heave the grenade at the target and in one motion, duck down in the trench.

Relief pours through me when the throw is a good one; panicky trainees have been known to drop a live grenade. When it leaves my hand, the handle springs free setting off the fuse. Three seconds later, while I am crouching in the bottom of the trench, the explosion shakes the ground and leaves my ears ringing.

The instructor tells us: "Grenades are useful at night because they do not reveal your position like a rifle's muzzle blast will!" Sounds like a good thing to know, but I learn later (in combat) that it is not true. The burning fuse streaks a trail of fire through the dark!

We are shown how to "field strip and reassemble the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR)." It looks complicated. The BAR holds a clip of twenty rounds which can be fired fully automatic. It is the rifle squad's machine gun. We each

fire a few shots with and without the bipod on the ground. The biggest men in the rifle squad are often assigned to carry the BAR which weighs 20 pounds. They also carry as many 20-round clips of ammunition as they can for this gun has a high rate of fire..

The 30 caliber M-1 carbine is a welcome change since it weighs less than 6 pounds. Compared to the rifle, the carbine is small; the ammunition is also smaller, and the clip holds 15 rounds. I fire a few rounds and learn that the carbine has less range and is less accurate than my M-1 rifle. But the rifle clip holds only eight rounds. The carbine offers fifteen shots as fast as one can pull the trigger! It weighs about half as much as a Garand Rifle, and carbine ammunition is about half the weight of rifle ammunition. We are impressed.

The 45 caliber Colt semi-automatic pistol is clumsy and heavy. I can't imagine firing it at anything more than 50 yards away.

We fire the 60 mm mortar with practice loads; first, mounted on the base plate with sights and charge set for a target a few hundred yards away. We fire a few rounds holding the mortar tube against the ground, without the base plate. The target needs to be not too close; a breeze can bring the shell back to the mortar crew if the tube is close to vertical.

We see the 30 caliber air-cooled machine gun field stripped, reassembled, loaded and fired. We each get to place a belt in the gun, load it, and fire a few rounds. Short bursts work best because the first shot will move the gun and it then needs to be re-sighted on the target.

Finally we sit on a hill behind a battery of 105 mm howitzers. Their explosions are deafening; we can see the rounds whispering through the air, then four rounds explode almost simultaneously some 10 yards apart and 20 feet above the target; a neat trick of the new proximity fuses recently developed by the Harry Diamond Laboratory in Washington DC

The variety of our arsenal is impressive. There is still no hint that I will be a machine gunner in a heavy weapons company.

21. INFILTRATION

The infiltration course is next: "You will crawl under live machine gun fire. Explosions will simulate artillery shells hitting near you! Do not let them panic you. There is danger if you panic; DO NOT STAND UP!"

Perhaps the course is scheduled towards the end of the cycle so that men

who might panic could be sorted out. It even follows the exercise in which we don gas masks in a building full of tear gas; a sure inducement to claustrophobic panic.

Machine guns, we learn in weapons training, must have barrels replaced after prolonged firing because the rifling wears away and eventually the enlarged bore will allow the rounds to fire in ever widening circles. This, we are told, is not allowed to happen on the infiltration course. Machine gun mounts, if not tight, can collapse, dropping the barrel. On the infiltration course, the guns are blocked into place to be sure they will not drop.

Naturally it rains earlier that evening. We slosh through ankle deep water in the trench approaching the course; there is not much talk. Non-coms urge us "Over the top" as we climb out of the trench and slither along through and under barbed wire. The black sky is ablaze, streaked with tracers overhead. No need to look up; just watch for the path worn by all the men who had gone before, through the obstacles and wire. An explosion throws dirt over me from one side and behind; then another ahead on the other side reminds me to keep moving.

There are two techniques permitted: "creeping," with arms and legs splayed and torso hugging the ground; and "crawling" on hands and knees. Crawling moves one more than a foot higher; it is not a desirable option as the tracers light the ground around me. Creeping is slow, hot, muddy work. Maybe we are better off in this "cool" 85 degree night, rather than the 100 plus degree days of August. The fatigue uniforms turn from green to red-brown; almost black, darkened by water and mud below and by sweat pouring from above.

We are spaced so that the man ahead is well through the course; it is ever more lonely as I get closer to the firing guns. An eternity passes in the space of little more than an hour; every muscle aches and I can't see the end of the course.

The pathway swerves to the left, now I crawl faster as the thunder of the guns falls away to my right and then behind. A non-com helps me to my feet after I fall into the trench that marks the end of the course. We did it!

The relief is palpable as we hike back to the hutments. I feel much older. There will be no forgetting the sound of a machine gun, firing in my direction.

22. BIVOUAC

"Final exam" for the training cycle is a two week camping trip. What fun! We hike South, away from Ft. McClellan, sweating under rifles, full canteens and full field packs, including a single "K-Ration." A few trucks pick up men from the rear of the column and advance them a few miles. Thus the column is shuttled and marched deep into the Talladega Forest.

We eat the "K-Ration" lunch beside the road somewhere "en route." Supper is supplied from a field kitchen a few miles yet from our bivouac area. We arrive exhausted as the last light of dusk fades away. My buddy and I feel fortunate to find a small clearing for our tent.

About 2 in the morning we are awakened, not by the rain, but by a small stream flowing through our tent. We create a little island in the dark and barely get back to sleep when we are roused out for the start of maneuvers. We wash down cold eggs with warm coffee and then track an invisible enemy through the soggy woods. Our first night is our best; from then on we simulate combat. We are constantly on the move; day and night are all one.

Sleep must be grabbed between moves, after we "dig in" and then only in shifts, one hour on, one hour off; wrapped in a wet blanket and shelter half, wedged into a slit trench or foxhole. The days and nights become a blur of movement and fatigue.

A tank rumbles over my foxhole, Goliath, rumbling and clanking, passes over David who smugly rises from the hole and throws a simulated grenade (rock) at the back of the tank. "Maybe you'll be lucky and the grenade will knock a track off!" But I think: "Maybe he will stop, and turn his turret back on me?"

We learn a new way to look at things. "The enemy to fear the most is the one close enough to hurt you!" This good advice serves a lifetime for hazardous duties such as driving - anywhere, or walking a dark street:

"Look FIRST at the ground, at the brush and trees nearby; look for mines and trip wires, watch for spider nests (camouflaged fox holes); look for snipers in trees. Look beyond to the middle ground, all around; then the distant ground. Watch that distant tree line; it can hide a main line of resistance. Or maybe just a sniper. Check your left and right and watch the rear."

We move out on patrol, spaced 10 yards apart to avoid presenting a group target. The point man moves slowly, quietly. At any sign of life he signals and the rest of us freeze. The man at the rear walks backwards and scouts are out to left and right. At every stop we set up a picket line; outposts watching in every direction.

The patrol finds all of the expected dangers. A simulated mine explodes like a firecracker! Booby traps are found - or set off. Targets pop out of the ground and from behind trees. Machine guns fire blanks from hidden bunkers, catching us in the open.

The friendly beauty of the woods is distorted into a nightmare. Still, the Talladega Forest scenery is not lost on me; it swims in the water flowing off of my helmet liner. We are standing in formation, waiting for a briefing on our live fire attack on a mock village. Most of the "problems" have been solved; this will be our last "exercise." The rain persists and has long since penetrated through my raincoat; even my spare socks are wet, hidden inside my shirt. There is no hope for an end to the wait and the wet.

In a clear tenor voice, McSpadden, the bridge playing "Hahvahd" man, sings from the rear rank; every verse of a very catchy new "hit" song. I have never heard it before; it plays in my mind as I race through the village, firing at targets a and bayoneting dummies as they appear. The picture of that rain washed hillside will flash before my eyes for the rest of my life - every time I hear - - "Singing in the Rain!" (The movie came out a year later.)

Back from bivouac, we clean up our gear and uniforms, and wind up the training cycle. The mess hall supplies watermelons; one to every two men, and we march out into the woods to eat them. No mess in the mess hall. A few days later we pack up, load our bags on a truck and march one last time to the main base. Buses carry us to the coal burning train that hauls us off to Charleston, South Carolina. "I've never heard of this Citadel!" "Hell, y'all nevah hud uf da West Point of da Souf? Wot a dum' damyankee!"

23. THE CITADEL

The barracks look like a row of white concrete forts, three stories high, punctuated with arched entryways, barred windows and gates. Each has a single main entrance; the "sally port" which is the only way in or out and that way is under constant guard. West Point, I remember from the books, is gray granite sprouting on a plain by the hills over the Hudson. These stark white buildings sit on a plain by the Ashley River. They contrast sharply with the bright blue sky, the green parade ground and the palm trees along the street.

My room is on the third floor of the "Murray Barracks;" the farthest from the gate. My new roommate's exuberant accent rolls over me as he pumps my hand: "I'm Bob Katzenson, yer noo roomie. Where ya from, kid?" ... "Wherinell is Balmor? ... Oh you mean Baltimooah! Down blow Philly, rye? Ah'm fum Brooklyn. I wuz goin ta en-why-yoo win' the draft gomee. Ya shudda seen da place! It wuz crawlin' wit' broads!" I ask: "What's a en-why-yoo?" He says: "Ya nevah hoid a' NooYawk Unavoisity?" It is different from the Baltimore slang, but I learn to translate. Lucky for me, he is a good student and congenial companion.

After supper, as required, we are in our rooms studying; every night except Saturday; and some of us are playing "catch up" then. The pace is furious, the courses are accelerated and we carry a heavy schedule.

We rejoice in the snug rooms, three hot meals a day; and a chance to get an education. The routine is rigorous and restrictive. But we do not forget the foxholes and slit trenches of the Talladega bivouac. We understand something of the holes which are being dug and lived-in, in places like Italy and Tarawa.

We wear khakis, then change to OD's in the few months of cool weather. Otherwise we live as the cadets do, except that we get no rifles (we had our rifle training at IRTC); and we are spared the plebe hazing which the Army (and I) view as counterproductive. Of course, there are no ASTP upperclassmen.

There are four barracks, each occupied by a battalion of four companies. The men in the first barracks (closest to the gate) recently graduated from the Army Air Corps' basic training. They wear Air Corps piping on their caps and, when marching, they demonstrate that they were not trained in the infantry. The rest of us continue to wear Infantry blue piping.

The biggest barracks, next to ours, is occupied by some 700 ROTC cadets; all that is left of The Citadel's proud Corps which ordinarily numbered three or

four times as many. The rest have gone to the draft, to OCS; some to accept commissions - or to work in a defense industry. Maybe some are in the ASTP battalions. There are very few seniors.

Cadet uniforms are gray cotton in summer and blue wool in winter. Year round, they wear a blue cap with black visor. They carry 1903 Springfield rifles on review and at retreat ceremonies. On special review days the cadets wear formal uniforms; dress gray jackets, starched white trousers, and plumed shakos with shiny black chin straps that are too short to reach the chin. They make a beautiful picture, carrying their rifles at a stiff "right shoulder arms."

The barracks are shaped like hollow squares; in the middle is the checkerboard quadrangle where we fall in to formations; reveille, mess, class, retreat. We march to every meal (except Sundays) and to every class. In short order we have "cadet" sergeants, lieutenants, captains and a battalion commander. The faculty consists of Army officers and civilians. Even the civilian teachers wear uniforms and have an ROTC status equivalent to officers.

The Citadel Commander is the aging 4 star General Charles P. Summerall; the gentleman that we nearly bowled over a short lifetime ago in Washington DC.

Nearly every Saturday morning we "pass in review." The entire student body marches around the parade ground. We wear comfortable khakis or OD's with the orange and blue student lamp ASTP patch on our left shoulders and marksmanship badges above the left shirt pocket. The enrollment drain has affected The Citadel's excellent band; one of the trombone players is a faculty member. His khaki uniform stands out in the line of blue and gray cadets. We march past the band while they play "The Washington Post Light Infantry March," I think: "This is marvelous; we are so `light' that we are not even carrying rifles!"

From Saturday noon to Sunday supper we are free to explore the Charleston area. One afternoon, I take a bus to Sullivan's Island. At the bridge, a pair of MP's check papers of all men in uniforms. I tell them that I'm from The Citadel on a weekend pass by VOCO ("Verbal order of the Commanding Officer"). I expect to get hauled off the bus, but they recognize my ASTP shoulder patch and move away. On the island, batteries of big guns cover the approaches to Charleston Harbor.

The window of our room overlooks the Ashley River; we can see the railroad bridge. Every night after lights out a passenger train leaves Charleston, the lights in the car windows reflect from the black water as the train crosses the river to the West. The engine's lonesome whistle calls back to us from the far side of the river. We'd like to be going North; back to our homes. We wonder where and when we go from here?

There seems to be only one girl on the campus; we linger in the commissary to admire her striking good looks. Ralph Reeves thinks of her as "the Regimental Doll."

Seven of us find that we can check out a racing shell in the free time between last class and supper formation. We row across and up and down the river. One day we have a little extra time; we race downstream against a Coast Guard crew in a lifeboat and leave them far behind. We head out into the harbor. The coxswain says: "Do you think we could go to Ft. Sumter?" The Fort is a thin line on the horizon, as we continue down the river. Half an hour of rowing brings us into rougher water; we are moving very fast as we approach a point of land projecting from the South shore. We turn into a little harbor; the quarantine station for the Port of Charleston. Ft. Sumter is still a long way off, and the water is getting choppy in the freshening offshore breeze.

We rest and then head back to Charleston. Now we know why we arrived so quickly. The tide, the river current and the wind are all heading down the river and out to sea. We pull hard and steady; the shell's bow breaks every wave and little splashes of water slosh over the sides. The coxswain bails and steers; the rest of us pull as hard as we can, for we are moving very slowly against the combined forces and the incoming water is gaining on the coxswain.

We approach the nearest pier in the Charleston Harbor just in time; only a few inches of the shell remain above water and we are exhausted. We tie-up to the dock, bail the water out, and rest. A guard shouts: "Get off this dock! This is private property!" We shout: "As soon as we can get this boat bailed out!" It only takes a few more minutes and we have an easier row back upstream, sheltered by the river bank.

Katzenson and I go to the YMCA or Catholic Church dance on Saturday night. One night, getting ready to go, Bob says: "I hope da goil I met las' week comes; she really toins me on; I need a cast iyon jock strap when I dance wid 'er.

One slow dance 'n der'd be shrapnel all ovah da place!" I'm laughing, as he goes on: "I kin see da hedloins now! Fitty goils and foity soivicemin kilt by mistree bomb!" It is funny, but I know how he feels.

My radio-phonograph and records are sent from home. We listen to Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw and others. We have little free time, but in the few minutes waiting for a formation, sometimes five or six fellow students gather in our room, listening to a Big Band. The big new 33 rpm records have six songs on each side. We listen to classic swing: "Boogie Woogie," "Moonlight Serenade," "Begin the Beguine," "String of Pearls," "You Made Me Love You," "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now." I wonder who Betty is dating now.

A fellow student sings a new verse to "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" - "Take down your service flag Mother. Your son's in the ASTP!"

Christmas day I ride a bus to North Charleston. The big shipyards look like the ones in Baltimore near the Fire Department Repair Shop on Key Highway. At the North Charleston Methodist Church, two girls invite me to Christmas Dinner. We eat in a giant mess hall at the shipyard where they work. It is rather festive; but not like being home.

In the three months from early September to the end of December, we complete a semester of basic engineering plus military science, and inspections and a review every Saturday morning.

The three month semester ends on December 31; we get a 7 day furlough.

The Germans are retreating from Russia, and the Japanese have lost several islands. We do not know that Josef Mengele has already been at Aushwitz for six months. This month, December, 1943, Mengele had a new mother's breasts bound up, and then he spends a few days watching and taking notes, as the newborn baby dies of starvation and dehydration.

Maybe next year we'll all be home. But I doubt it.

24. FORT BELVOIR

I pay $20 for a round trip to Baltimore in a 1934 Ford convertible sedan. We head north, feeling like - (what else?) like kids just out of school. About midnight, the engine runs out of oil. We break into a closed gas station, take four quarts of oil and leave enough cash to pay for the oil.

In the wee hours of Sunday morning the car's lights go out. We follow a bus, through the dark, up old US Route 1, towards Alexandria, Virginia.

Waking, I can only see a little out of my left eye. I have a faint recollection of bright lights and a cry; "Look OUT!"

A nurse's face floats in a white background; "Do you know who you are?" "Sure, I'm Frank Hancock!" "Do you know where you are?" That's a stopper. I should be in the car. "You are in the hospital at Fort Belvoir."

I think: "Ft. Belvoir? Where are the Engineers?" She goes on: "You were in an accident, and the Alexandria Hospital sent you here. You have been unconscious for nine hours. It is two o'clock in the afternoon." "Did anyone call my folks?" "Of course, we always do that."

Tuesday morning Mother and Grandfather appear in my little window of visibility. Mom had been making phone calls all afternoon and late into the night before. She found several Katzensons in Brooklyn before locating Bob. He gave her a list of names of the others in the car. (Smart Bob went home by train.) A few more phone calls and she found one of our riders who had taken a bus from Alexandria to his home in Philadelphia.

I was the only one seriously hurt, although one student was knocked for a loop by the battery which fell out of the car after it stopped rolling. "They" said we rolled three times (in a convertible!) after a car broadsided us when the driver assumed that there was no other vehicle in the dark behind the bus.

Army medics do a great job of salvaging my right eye and sewing my face together. They cannot find why my left shoulder hurts, and they turn me loose to resume my leave after only two weeks. The hospital administrator tells me: "Go, take your week's leave; just let your HQ know what happened and where you are."

It's good to be home, but my scars are not healed, my face is a mess, and I

wonder about the classes which are already underway.

25. CADET'S FAREWELL

The loss of the first three weeks of the new semester is tough to catch up, especially in Analytical Geometry which builds on fundamentals established in the first two weeks. But the pressure makes the time fly.

We march in a parade to downtown Charleston and back. Bands play, cadets carry their rifles, and we march back to barracks whistling "When Johnny comes Marching Home Again." The citizens are enthusiastic; The Citadel is, and always was - the pride of Charleston, even before the Cadets manned the batteries that fired on Fort Sumter. The student lamp emblem on my left shoulder labels me as "One of those soldiers from The Citadel."

A shiny new brass bugle is issued, and Murray Barracks' recorded bugle calls are replaced by my real ones. One morning the first notes of "Reveille" are muffled; and there is laughter a few rooms away. I pull a wad of paper from the bugle's bell. For me, the bugle calls have a special magic. Tattoo, just before taps, is the longest and prettiest. It is one of the two calls that reach down to the fifth note. Almost all other calls are played on just four notes.

In late January there is about an inch of snow that actually stays on the ground all day. All the local schools close except ours. We march to class and the mess hall through the slush and water.

The second semester closes in March with bad news; there will be no between - term leave, there will be no next term; we are shipping out. The night before we leave we get our orders; "Proceed by train to the 100th Infantry Division at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina."

That night we pack our bags and sing: "Thanks for the memory, of higher education, with seven days vacation, The Citadel, a living Hell! A physics prof who is slightly off! We thank you, so much."

Before dawn on the 25th of March, 1944, we stack our duffel bags by the

sally port and march off to an early breakfast. We clean out our rooms, and we each carry a few things in an overnight bag.

We joke and laugh; The Citadel has no more control over us.

A strange sound intrudes upon the familiar formation. A distant drum beat welcomes us as we march out from the shadow of the sally port into the street. We blink in the glare; the sky is ablaze with color from the rising sun; a beautiful March day; birds are flying about in the palm trees as we turn, "Columm - RAT!" towards the main gate.

Across the parade ground we see the band, facing the gate and playing "The Washington Post Light Infantry March." Then, an astonishing sight! On each side of the street, there is a single line of Cadets, spaced evenly, around the corner; all the way to the gate! And each cadet stands at "PRESENT ARMS" - his rifle held in both hands, trigger forward and barrel up, inches in front of his nose and the black visor of his cap.

We fall silent as we pass the stony faced, solemn cadets, watching from behind their rifle barrels. They know where we are going. We perceive, at each cadet, an individual silent tribute; our rite of passage. Approaching the band, we pick up the step, straighten our lines and march through the gate like real soldiers. The rising sun warms our march down the streets of Charleston. I wonder if I am the only one to brush away a tear.

The sound of the band fades while the pulse of the bass drum follows us out of sight; and then we are in the silence of our own thoughts. Our boots scuff on the asphalt, birds twitter in the trees, and the sun continues its remorseless climb. We grieve for the end of a dream and wonder what happens next. I know that I will never be quite the same again.

Perhaps some of those cadets of March 1944 remember that magnificent tribute; their farewell salute to the departing warriors to be.

Forty two years later I visit the Citadel's new museum. It begins and nearly ends with the memorabilia of General Mark Clark who commanded the American Armies in Italy and came home to be President of The Citadel. My opinion of Mark Clark is diminished by the exhibitions of his ego. (Later, in 1990, the Museum was changed to represent the history of The Citadel, arranged chronologically, and now includes a mention of the ASTP, with the emblem, under “The Citadel in world War II.”)

Fifty two years later, I write to the Citadel's Commander, and suggest that it is time to accept women, stop wasting time and money in courts, and stop the hazing. His deputy responds that hazing is now limited, and concludes: "If you wish to contribute to the Citadel's legal fund send your check to...!"

Some folks learn very slowly - the Supreme Court finally convinced them.

26. COMPANY M

Open trucks sweep us away from the Fayetteville's hot train station and into the whiteness of Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The sky is freshly washed to a clean azure blue and punctuated by small white clouds.

At the post HQ we jump down from the tailgates to face a blazing sun. The glare and heat is reflected and amplified by white sand and white two-story barracks parading away to the horizon. Regimented lines are softened only slightly by the greens of tall pines and watered lawns. The air of permanence is a sharp contrast to the temporary hutments and barren grounds of Ft. McClellan.

We are divided into groups and marched away. Ahead and behind us, men turn off into their assigned company areas, until only our small unit continues. We are hot, thirsty, hungry and tired. Ahead, we see open fields when suddenly the column veers and stops in front of the last row of barracks.

A sergeant orders: "Detay-yull - HALT! LEFT - HACE! - At Ee-yuz!" And a few moments later, "ATTENnn- HUT!"

A tall bespectacled captain mounts a stairway in front of us and announces: "Welcome to Company M! I know you are tired and hot, but bear with us while we assign you to your platoons!" The concern for us is a distinct novelty.

Officers and noncoms are solicitous as they sort us out; a sharp contrast to the harassing hostility of basic training. The third-platoon sergeant is taking the biggest men first. The rest of us wait. Someone whispers, "Big guys go to the mortar platoon."

A dozen of us are herded into a barracks by a technical sergeant; 3 chevrons up and two rockers down. We gather around our new shepherd:

"This is the Second Platoon. My name is Alvie Hogan, and I'm your Platoon Sergeant." His face is dark from months of training and maneuvers with the Division; his lean build and Tennessee background remind me of the WW I hero, Sergeant York. While he divides us again, into little groups, I wonder, "Is Sgt. Hogan as good a shot as Sgt. York was?" Turns out he probably is.

Buck Sgt. Revere, our squad leader, leads three of us up the stairs and assigns me to a cot near the middle of the row, in the back of the second floor of the barracks. Sgt. Revere has startlingly blue eyes, ruddy complexion, dark hair and a stocky muscular build. In time, I conclude that he has a special guardian angel, no doubt assigned to him before he left Brooklyn, New York.

27. THE 100th DIVISION

Our 100th Division consists of the three infantry regiments, three 105 mm artillery battalions, a heavy artillery unit and other supporting elements such as MPs, QM, medics, the 325th Engineer Battalion, motor pool, reconnaissance company, and others.

The entire Army is built from the 12-man rifle squads and groups of three, starting with the three rifle squads in a platoon. Every unit of three has one or more supporting units, including a Command or HQ unit. Three rifle platoons, a weapons platoon, and a headquarters platoon make a rifle company. Three rifle companies, one HQ company, and a weapons company make a battalion.

Continuing up the organization; three battalions make a regiment, and each regiment has an antitank company, recon unit, cannon company, and a regimental HQ company. Our infantry regiments are the 397th, 398th and 399th. Each regiment is supported by a field artillery battalion of 105 mm cannon.

The business of threes goes on. The three field artillery battalions (374th, 375th and 925th) each has three batteries of 105 mm guns. In addition, the Division is supported by the 155 mm cannon of the 373rd Field Artillery Battalion.

Each battalion of each regiment consists of a Headquarters (HQ) Company, three rifle companies, and a heavy weapons company. Companies are designated by letters as follows:

First battalion: rifle Companies A, B, and C: plus heavy weapons Co. D.

Second battalion: rifle Companies E, F, and G; plus heavy weapons Co. H.

Third battalion: rifle companies I, K, and L, plus heavy weapons Co. M.

We are Co. M, the heavy weapons company of the third battalion of the 399th Regiment. Our phonetic names are Item, King, Love and Mike. We are the last company of the last regiment of the 100th Division.

I wonder why there is no "J" Company. Maybe because, a long time ago, a code of flags was devised by a British Royal Navy Captain (Sir Home Popham) to send messages between ships. By allowing Admiral Lord Nelson to control fleet movements, the messages helped win the stunning victory at Trafalgar. The economical Popham deleted several letters which he thought were not needed for phonetic communication and "J" became an outcast. More likely, "Jay" just sounds too much like "Kay".

28. PLATOON BARRACKS

John Langley and I are the newest ammo bearers in the fourth squad of the second machine gun platoon of Company M of the 399th Regiment. Not yet (but almost) nineteen, we explore our new world.

Mike Company is housed in the last row of a long line of identical sets of five buildings. Each set serves a Company. At one end, nearest to the main post, is the 399th HQ. Next is the First Battalion HQ followed by Companies A to D; Second Battalion HQ; Companies E to H; and last, at the far end, is our Third Battalion HQ followed by Companies L to M.

Headquarters and the Supply Room for Mike Company are back to back in a one-story building at the north end of our row of barracks. The first, second and third platoons are each housed in their own two-story barracks, placed end to end. At the South end of the row is the one-story mess hall.

In our second platoon barracks, the first and second squads are combined in the first section which lives on the ground floor. The third and fourth squads constitute the second section that lives upstairs.

Section leaders are staff sergeants and share a room, while Platoon Sergeant Hogan has his own room. Each squad has a row of bunks occupied in this order; squad leader (a three stripe or "buck" sergeant); first and second gunners (both Pfc.'s); and ammo bearers. There is no corporal in the machine gun squad.

The rest of our row of bunks is occupied by HQ and mess personnel, the platoon messenger (a corporal); and the "technical ratings:" company clerk, mail clerk, and cooks.

A few signs remain of the previous tenant: the 101st Airborne Division, now training in England for D-Day. We are upwind from nearby Pope Field, so at intervals, day and night, there are C-54's and C-47's taking off directly over our barracks. Some are training flights for glider pilots. We can picture paratroopers riding those same planes a few months earlier.

For the first time, I am issued a steel helmet which fits snugly over the plastic liner that served so well in basic training. The liner's strap fits across the helmet's visor and keeps the liner in place when the helmet is not being worn. I fasten the helmet's strap under my chin, and the two and one-half pounds makes my head wobble. We wear the helmets during all training formations, and I gradually feel my neck muscles getting stronger.

29. SIDE ARMS AND GUNS

The three rifle platoons in a rifle company are supported by a weapons platoon equipped with air cooled 30 caliber machine guns and 60 mm mortars.

The three rifle companies in a battalion are supported by a weapons company, equipped with water cooled 30 caliber machine guns and 81 mm mortars. Compared to the air cooled guns and 60 mm mortars, ours are justly called "Heavy Weapons."

Each heavy weapons company includes the first and second machine gun platoons, and a third platoon of six 81 mm mortar squads. The Company HQ platoon has several 50 caliber machine guns, mainly for antiaircraft. The 50 caliber gun and its ammo are too heavy to carry far from the jeeps.

Each machine gun platoon has four squads. Since we are the fourth squad of the second machine gun platoon, we are numerically, the last machine gun squad in the Division. Only the six mortar squads of the third platoon follow us.

Machine guns and mortars are "crew served" weapons and, at full strength, the crew is a six man squad. The men carry a variety of "side arms" or personal weapons.

The only rifle in our squad is an M-1 Garand with bayonet, carried by the squad leader. The two gunners each carry a 45 caliber Colt "automatic" pistol, Model 1911A and a trench knife. Each of the three ammo bearers carries an M-1 carbine and a trench knife.

The pistol is called an "automatic" but it is really "semi-automatic" since each shot requires a separate trigger pull. Pistols, carbines and rifles each require a separate trigger pull for each shot.

Only the machine gun is "fully automatic." One long trigger squeeze will fire the entire 250 round belt through the machine gun, in about 30 seconds. (We have no Browning Automatic Rifles in our Company.)

John Langley and I are issued carbines and trench knives. We admire the neat little carbines which weigh only five and a half pounds, compared to more than nine for the Garand rifle.

John came to the Division without benefit of basic training and ASTP time, but his father is a "Regular Army" Colonel, now retired in Riviera, Texas. We are in the "Army of the United States" and not part of the "Regular Army." Gregarious John is a natural leader. He sings of the Yellow Rose of Texas, studies training manuals, and introduces me to quiet Bob Howell from the first platoon.

30. GUN DRILL

Our "gun" is the famous "Model M1917A1 Browning Water Cooled Machine Gun," the standard in its class during WW I & II, the Korean War and for some years afterwards. (Several models are exhibited at the Ft. Benning Museum.)

The first gunner, in addition to his pistol, carries the tripod and cradle assembly. The unwieldy combination weighs 53.2 pounds and must be carefully manipulated.

The olive drab tripod has two short front legs and a longer rear leg. Each leg is adjustable so that the gun can be set level on uneven ground, or all three legs can be strapped together to make a more compact bundle for storage or transport. The black cradle rides on top of the tripod, and allows the gun to be moved freely, up, down, and sideways. When the cradle is clamped down, its aiming wheels allow the field of fire to be adjusted up, down and sideways, a few mils at a time.

To lift the heavy tripod, stand it on the long rear leg, hoist it up by the near foreleg, crouch to get the weight to your shoulder, then pivot the tripod onto your back and stand up. The forelegs hang over your shoulders; the weight rests on one's back, or over the pack, and the long rear leg hangs down in back. Not easy.

Once positioned, the adjusting handles usually put all of the weight on a few spots on your shoulders. It is the heaviest and most awkward load in the squad.

The second gunner, also armed with a pistol, carries the gun; a 38 inch long, ugly black monster with a bulky water jacket. The pintle, attached to the gun, fits into the cradle. Gun and pintle weigh 32.8 pounds; seven pints of water or glycol antifreeze in the water jacket brings the total to about 40 pounds. The gun is balanced on the shoulder, usually with the barrel to the rear and positioned back far enough to counter the weight of one's arm, draped over the receiver.

To set up the gun, the squad leader determines the required field of fire, looks for terrain to provide cover or concealment; and tells the first gunner where to set the tripod.

The first gunner drops the tripod in place, the second gunner fits the gun into the tripod's cradle, and the ammo bearer brings up two boxes of ammunition. The second gunner feeds the ammo belt in from the left.

To load the gun, the first gunner's hands go through a smooth series of alternating motions. Left hand raises the sight leaf, right releases the cover latch and raises the cover, left feeds in the ammo belt, right pulls the belt through the receiver, left closes and latches the cover; right pulls back and releases the bolt. A spring slams the bolt forward, carrying a round from the belt to the chamber, and the gun is ready to fire. Left hand grabs the handle, and left forefinger rests on the trigger, ready to fire the gun. The right hand is poised to adjust the aiming wheels at the rear of the cradle. A smooth 3 or 4 second operation.

The gunner fires with his left hand on the single handle and his left forefinger on the trigger. His right hand manipulates the aiming wheels, one on the side of the cradle to traverse left and right, and one below to change elevation. (Only the 50 caliber machine gun has the two handles so beloved by the movies.)

The front sight is a covered blade mounted at the top front of the water jacket. The rear sight is similar, but bigger than the Springfield Rifle sight. It has both aperture and open "U" sights in a leaf about 5 inches high, with a small windage adjustment, and a range of some 3,700 yards at the top of the sight leaf.

I watch the smooth performance of the team in amazement. Then we change places and drill, drill, drill, until all of us are proficient at all of the positions. At the end of our first day of training, we learn a pleasant new ritual; squirt oil on our side arms, put them in the racks, and then we are free to leave the barracks.

Some of the non-noncoms are married and spend the off nights with their wives in cramped, scarce rooms or apartments in the nearby Fayetteville area. This is a happy contrast to the never ending cleaning and extra hours duty in basic training and the dedicated study nights at The Citadel.

In the evenings, Howell, Langley and I take in a movie at the Post Theater, or visit the PX or the service club. In basic training, there was never so much leisure. More astonishing, at the end of the week, after the Saturday morning review, or inspection, we are free from noon until Monday morning's Reveille Formation.

The first free weekend, I ride a bus to Fayetteville where there are 40,000 soldiers from the camp, and maybe 10,000 civilians in the entire town. It takes less than an hour to walk both sides of the main street. The local service club is crowded with GIs. A real milk shake hits the spot, and I reluctantly board the bus,

back to camp.

31. RALPH AND THE CAPTAIN

Ralph Reeves also came to the 100th from the Citadel. He writes as follows:

"I enjoyed the whole Army experience of not worrying about yesterday or tomorrow. Each day was a total concern enough."

"Mom never raised a dummy. At Ft. Bragg, it occurred to me that hiding behind a hill with a mortar was a great improvement over aiming down a machine gun at someone who was aiming back. I recall all of us standing at attention in front of the M Company barracks and the 3rd platoon sergeant was given first choice because he wanted the biggest guys for toting the mortars and ammo."

"I had no choice in the matter, but stood tall as I could and tried to look my cherubic meanest. I was muscular and hard as nails, a medium 175 pounds, but got chosen (assigned to first squad, third platoon). That sergeant and a bunch of old timers were promptly transferred overseas, so I don't recall his name, but the Company Commander was Captain Quentin Derryberry. Man, what a name!"

"I grudgingly learned to admire Captain Derryberry because he could run like a gazelle and led us all on those half-hour chases which I actually enjoyed. I ran cross country a lot as a kid and I loved it. 'QMD,' or 'Quartermaster Depot,' as we called him, was a good soldier and I had a great respect which became tremendous respect and admiration since I last saw this fine soldier."

Sgt. (later lieutenant) John Aughey of the first platoon wrote this story about Captain Derryberry:

"Many years ago, according to Aesop's fables, a village in Arabia was celebrating a feast attended by one Abu Hassan. Abu and the others were seated in a circle on the ground, partaking of the food and wine presented in the center. Abu, being quite full, stretched for yet another morsel, letting fly a fart, loud and terrible! Abu was so mortified that he fled the party and country."

"Some years later Abu returned to the village in disguise. He happened to overhear a conversation between a mother and her small daughter. The child asked, 'When was I born?' The reply: 'Oh my child, thou was born on the very day that Abu Hassan farted!'"

"Abu thought to himself, 'Verily, my fart hath become a date.' And he fled the country, never to return."

"We move forward to an evening in October, 1944. By command of the CO, all NCO's of Company M were seated on the ground for a short meeting before chow. As the Captain prepared to address the group, a distinct fart was heard from somewhere within. The air became even more quiet. The captain paused to gather his thoughts, then asked, 'Who did that?'"

"A sergeant rose and acknowledged the deed, whereupon the captain stated: 'A breach of wind is a breach of military etiquette. Report to the orderly room after this meeting.'"

"What happened thereafter is unknown to the writer who, however, mentally dated subsequent events by the number of days since Sgt._____ farted."

- John Aughey.

(The flatulent sergeant died in France less than a year after this incident. Captain, later Major, Derryberry was wounded and went on to a successful law practice. Ralph Reeves' good opinion of the Captain was not shared by all of the officers who served under him. Lawyer Derryberry died in 1992.)

Aughey's story brings to mind two bits of farmer's wisdom relating to flatulence and leadership:

"A farting horse won't weaken." - and -

"You will never grow rich following a horse's ass."

(I have followed many a horse's ass and sure enough, not to riches.)

Finally, from Dr. Nicholas Senn, professor of surgery at Rush Medical Center, we learn: "Qui crepitat vivat!" - Who farts, lives! (My apologies.)

Ralph Reeves continues:

"Inescapably, any and every mortar man could not help but think about the security of that hill or house in front of him, but no one talked about such thoughts. No one chose his lot in the Army. It was like a drawing of straws or a cast of the dice that decided if one would be a rifleman, machine gunner, mortar gunner, or whatever. Those in more or less safe places could only thank their good luck."

"My great happiness was being permitted to carry a 45 Colt automatic side arm and never carry a damned rifle again. To this day I think I have a permanent shoulder injury from toting the M-1, Enfield and even a Springfield all over Ft. Benning. In fact, given my druthers, I'd rather carry the 44 pound mortar tube or the mortar bipod on my shoulder. Must have been the fit."

"I first was amazed at how lousy I was with a pistol. Couldn't come within five feet of a bull's eye. I became very very expert. In combat mine was always fully loaded with only a thumb safety to flip down. My holster was soft and pliant and I could quickly draw as if the fastened flap was not there. As I drew, my thumb lifted the flap, flipped down the safety and I could fire in a fraction of a second."

"I have never been able to understand the way police carry their weapons sticking out as if begging to be taken; no way to quick draw, but it is easy to take their pistols away from them. Of course later, in combat, my enchantment with the pistol turned to disenchantment in direct proportion to proximity to Germans."

"One day, in mortar training, I fancied myself the best 81 millimeter gunner in all the Army; I set the mortar up in 19 seconds, when 60 seconds made one an expert."

- Ralph Reeves

---

32. PARADES

We sweat for hours in the traditional massed battalion formation that no longer has a place in battle, but is so loved by commanders of every army in all of history.

The misnamed "Company Front" formation is some fifty men wide, an entire battalion in a mass of humanity; wavering in a struggle to maintain straight lines. When turning a corner, the men in the outer end of the line take giant steps, trying to keep to the beat of the drum, while the men near the hub mark time. Squads and platoons are disregarded; each company lines up with the officers in the front rank, then riflemen in order of height, followed by men armed with pistols or carbines.

The 29th of March is clear and warm, a lovely spring day. The Division Band plays as we march onto the parade field in our class "A" khakis and steel helmets. The riflemen, including our squad leaders, carry bayoneted rifles at "right shoulder arms." The rest of the weapons company men are near the rear of the formation where our carbines (carried at "sling arms") and holstered pistols do not break up the lines of rifles.

The midmorning sun warms to the heat of the day as the speakers drone through the qualifications for the yet-to-be-awarded "Expert Infantryman's Badge;" forced marches; infiltration, obstacle and bayonet courses; and qualification with a variety of weapons. It is tougher than basic training. Qualification will bring a $5 per month bonus as authorized by Congress. (Later, The Combat Infantryman’s Badge paid $10 a month.)

Finally, General Leslie McNair presents the very first expert infantryman's badge; the famous EIB. A precursor of millions, it goes to Sgt. Walter Bull. He is the alphabetical first of a small group who have earned the new EIB. About 12th on the list is our own Tech Sgt. Hogan.

We are assured that we will all have the opportunity to go through the same grueling qualification that these men have completed. I wonder if I can qualify. The extra money is a significant amount next to my basic pay of $50 a month. We parade past the reviewing stand in honor of this small elite group of men. Lucky Sgt. Hogan; he will get his five bucks next month, but he'll have to do most of the qualification all over again with us!

Everyone volunteers for the "provisional battalion;" 1100 men will be drawn from all units to represent the Division in a parade in New York City. The odds against being selected are better than twelve to one, since the battalion will be less than one-twelfth of the Division strength.

We expected the battalion to consist mostly of experienced riflemen, so we celebrate when John Langley, Sgt. Revere and I are selected; three of us from a six man machine-gun squad! We are surprised when our two gunners are left behind; they have seniority over John and I.

Newspapers report the invasion of Northern France. Censors barely allow mention of the Normandy beaches. We spend D-Day, June 6, 1944, on a hot train steaming up the East Coast.

From Union Station, Army trucks carry us through Manhattan, across the George Washington Bridge; turn North along the Hudson River, re-cross the river, and arrive at hilly, wooded Camp Shanks, an hour's drive north of New York City.

After the heat of Ft. Bragg, this is a fun summer camp in the cool shade of big pine trees, with rustic log buildings, a neat, well stocked post exchange, - and no training duties.

Several squads are sent to the City to demonstrate the machine gun squad operations while I pull KP duty. There is a reward; an overnight pass.

PFC Bob Howell and I take a train to Baltimore. Bob, a Missouri farm boy, is an eager tourist. "Show me," he says; "I've never been to the East Coast, tell me about it." From the train windows we see the Susquehanna River, the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay; oil refineries, shipyards, and then the streets of Baltimore.

We make a quick walking tour to see some of my friends. The girls seem wistful; they like this quiet Midwesterner. Bob and I look like soldiers now; our bleached khakis are stiff with starch. Blue infantry piping and regimental crests decorate our overseas caps. Bright blue Division patches ride proudly on our left shoulders. Shirts are garnished with new PFC stripes, marksmanship, and good conduct medals. And muscles too, all brand new! Quite a contrast to my first visit in new baggy khakis!

We have dinner with my family. They gather around us, the guests of honor. Bob tells us that he plans to study agriculture, and eventually improve his family's

farm near Fristoe, Missouri. His sister is an Army nurse in England.

On a warm sunny Sunday, June the 11th; our trucks roll across the George Washington Bridge into New York city. The big deuce-and-a-half's and smaller weapons carriers pull up along the north end of Central Park. We form up on Fifth Avenue at 81st Street in starched clean khakis. To my right I see a row of bright blue Division patches, each shaped like a shield with the number 100 in white and yellow. I wear a steel helmet, light pack, pistol belt with ammo pouch, trench knife, canteen and aid packet. The empty carbine, muzzle up, hangs behind my right shoulder..

As usual, we carbineers bring up the rear of the formation. Ahead we see files of rifles and steel helmets. As far as we can see, rows of "bloused" trousers and leggings swing in time to the music. We march down Fifth Avenue, from 81st to 40th Street; the 100th Division Band right behind us, doing full justice to Sousa; "The Thunderer," "Hands Across the Sea," and the incomparable "Stars and Stripes Forever." (Later "The Story of the Century" reports that we marched "up" Fifth Avenue, but I remember climbing down from the truck at 81st Street next to Central Park, and marching south with the noon sun, almost overhead, and in my face. Maybe "up" is South towards City Hall?)

It is a great day to be walking in New York, sunny and not too hot. We join the spectators in thinking of friends, sons, brothers and husbands, on the beaches of Normandy. Emotions are palpable; many spectators are in tears. Our brave appearance and bold music contrasts sharply with the realities of war as reported in the daily papers. Tears are not limited to folks in the crowd.

We march again in the City on Infantry Day; June the 15th. This time, up lower Broadway, to the City Hall. Standing in the marble portico above the wide steps, Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia ("the Little Flower") presents our Commanding Officer with a big gold painted "Key to the City." We give him a cheer and march off to the trucks for the ride back to Camp Shanks.

In a few quick days we return to Ft. Bragg without Sgt. Revere. For 30 days, he is a member of a platoon which has no other duty except to present a retreat ceremony each evening at Radio City Plaza. Tough assignment for Revere, he "billets" at his Brooklyn home, a short subway ride away. He rejoins us in time for the EIB qualification.

More ominous are the empty beds of the first and second gunners, already on their way overseas as "replacements." Langley and I take their places. We move to the first and second bunks next to Revere's empty bunk and exchange our

carbines for pistols. New replacements fill the void we left as ammo bearers. The training intensifies as we begin qualifying for the Expert Infantryman's Badge.

33. THE EXPERT

A step at a time, we fill each requirement, and qualify for the Expert Infantryman's badge. On the firing ranges, we practice with rifles, BARs, carbines, pistols, submachine guns, mortars and machine guns.

We are seated on a hillside overlooking a long meadow as the sun sets behind us. Ten noncoms stand, one at every 100 yard interval, all the way out in the meadow to a range of 1000 yards where the lone sentry is not much more than a speck. Almost invisible in his green fatigues, he waves a signal flag to be sure that we can see him. One can estimate the distance (or range) to each man by his apparent size.

Some of the noncoms move until they are hidden by a small hill. Distances are harder to estimate when part of the intervening ground is hidden by a rise or depression in the terrain; things then seem closer than they really are.

Classes continue at this location until after dark, when the noncoms are posted again. Now they are invisible until each one in turn lights a match. Even at 1,000 yards the match light is clearly visible. The lesson is not lost on us.

I earn the coveted top marksman badge, "Expert;" a Maltese cross with a wreath and a bulls eye target on it; below hangs a bar each for the rifle and carbine. This is an improvement over my Basic Training rating of "Sharpshooter" for rifle only. I also qualify as "first class machine gunner," a rating equal to "Expert," but without benefit of a medal or bar. I am confident that I can hit anything I can see with the machine gun or rifle and, within a shorter range, the carbine. Ironically, my side arm is the pistol with which I make the lowest rating; "Marksman."

One day we line up ten water-cooled 30 caliber machine guns; each on an elevated post which in turn is mounted on a regular tripod. Every machine-gunner in the regiment is lined up behind these guns. Each gunner brings a belt of ammo with 100 rounds in it (a belt normally holds 250 rounds).

Each man in turn steps up to a gun, loads his 100 rounds, and fires one long

burst at a radio controlled model airplane. The plane has a wingspan and fuselage of about eight feet; it is clearly visible, flying in small circles and figure eights; I can see the tracers chasing it, and momentarily expect it to crash.

The firing continues for about an hour. The guns perform well; they get very hot, water boils in some of the jackets and steam bubbles into the overflow cans, but the guns do not burn out. Finally, the firing ceases, the plane lands, and we look incredulously at two bullet holes in the wings. I hope our Air Corps and antiaircraft artillery are more effective.

The EIB qualification continues; some of it similar to basic training; more obstacle and bayonet courses, endless physical training; and on to another night infiltration course under live machine gun fire. After the antiaircraft drill, I feel a little more confident that the gun barrels will not burn out, but it is a relief to finish the infiltration course safely - again.

The final EIB qualification is a long forced march. We start at midnight. After a hot July day, this night is cool as we slosh through a steady rain. The pace is fast; we wear raincoats, steel helmets, full field packs, and side arms. We sing - "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now?" Someone asks, "Where or what is her NOW?"

The songs die down to Langley's last chorus of "The Yellow Rose of Texas." Then he too joins our silence. Each man is exerting himself to a maximum to maintain the pace. It is a very good time to be carrying a pistol, for I am hard pressed to keep up.

About four in the morning after twelve and one-half miles, we go through a hasty "chow line." Rainwater chills the scrambled eggs and soaks the toast. The lot is washed down with a canteen cup full of coffee while I sit on my raincoat tails and rest against my pack. The "breakfast" break is only a few minutes longer than the 5 minute breaks we take after each hour.

Dripping with sweat and the rain, fingers wrinkle and shoes are soggy. Feet lose their toughness, become sore, and then numb as the thick calluses soak and soften.

I play music through my brain; whatever can be recalled; "Piano Concerto" moves quickly to match our pace; Gilbert and Sullivan airs, college songs, Sousa Marches. The sheer boredom of setting one foot in front of the other numbs the

brain. "Hay-foot straw-foot, five miles more, where in the heck is this mechanized war?" "When was it that the Infantry seemed to be the place to be; the Queen of battle?"

In my mind, I am back in high school; I see the towers over the doorways; the white concrete and red bricks. Listen to the bass drum rattling the gym windows at the pep rally! Remember how the Drum and Bugle Corps swings into the stadium at the football games; and a girl friend waits in the stands.

Again, in my head; "I wonder who's kissing her now?" Wish I could sit down on one of those hard stadium seats. Or even on this muddy road.

I climb out of a cab; the nightmare is over, Dad shakes my hand; Mom gives me a hug. A hot bath and my warm dry bed are waiting. The vision fades as the rain quickens; drops of water flow from my helmet onto my nose, down my neck; water is everywhere, I am soaked.

The rain is cold, but we are working much too hard to be chilled. Thank God for a cool night, rain or no, even as the rainwater adds to our loads; wet sand drags at our boots; wet feet grow ever more tender.

At 8 A.M. we are back in our barracks. With our 40 pound loads, we have force marched twenty five miles in eight hours, including time for breaks and a meal. Someone says "That was NO SMALL FEAT!" My sore feet feel bigger than life.

Our new platoon commander, Lt. Scott Witt, joins Sgt. Hogan and a medic as they check the bare feet of every man in the platoon. I admire their stamina; we are lying on our bunks, barefooted; they are still in their wet boots.

My feet have calluses which are almost square; they conform to the inside of the ankle length "GI" shoes. But now the calluses are soft and spongy. There are tender spots, and a small blister. I am in good shape compared to some of the others, but it is plain that wet feet are very vulnerable. Trench foot is a real danger for us, even here, in barracks.

Soon afterwards, we receive our Expert Infantryman's Badges, and the next month, the extra pay. Some of the men qualify later; it appears to me that almost everyone qualified. (Not every company did as well.)

Rivalry between the older cadre and the "Quiz Kids" reaches a peak when two young gunners challenge two sergeants to a "gun drill" race. Both teams start with two men and a dismantled machine gun. At a signal, they race to place the tripod, mount the gun, load a belt of ammo and fire a simulated round.

ASTP gunners, Pfc.'s Aisenbrey and Curley, pull the trigger on their empty chamber a full two seconds before Sergeants Fitzgerald and Tuttle are ready. Rivalry is honed into a new sense of teamwork and competence. The 399th Regiment motto applies to each of us: "I am ready." Seems appropriate, after six years of "Be prepared" - in the Boy Scouts.

34. FROM TACTICS TO STRATEGY

Strategy, we are told, is the positioning of large units. Someone "up there" (maybe God alone?) knows what is happening to units as small as a Battalion. We are concerned with tactics; and this involves moving little units, the platoon, squad, - and me, from here to there, quickly, - and with the heavy machine guns.

Every morning we run a mile or two; yet we feel pampered because Item Company is up and running five miles before we roll out in the cool dawn for Reveille. Item Company Commander, Captain Travis Hopkins, is determined that Item will be the fittest company in the regiment. They earn their nickname, "The Greyhounds!"

Before dawn, three rows of barracks are quiet as King, Love, and Mike Companies try to sleep until first call. But we all wake every morning to the Greyhounds' barbaric running cadences, echoing through the whispering pines.

More replacements filter in; some fresh from basic training, others from units which are being disbanded. A few are old soldiers; it seems incongruous that I am a gunner, while these older men start as ammo bearers. No one complains.

Brunson MacLeroy shares Langley's Texas background, but not his gung-ho spirit. Brunson is justifiably skeptical of the Army's motives since he had been transferred from the Air Corps to our infantry squad. (Both MacLeroy and Langley will become lawyers, after the war.)

No longer threatened by Japanese aircraft carriers, a Panama Canal antiaircraft battery sends Al Bowman to us. Quiet, easy going, and funny, he is probably the oldest man in the squad. Already an old soldier, PFC Bowman makes himself comfortable with little fuss, and shares his peace of mind with us.

In the third (mortar) platoon, a new man wants no part of it; he will not fall out for formations and remains in the barracks. After a series of unproductive interviews with noncoms, officers, and the CO, he is taken away by two armed guards. The next day, the guards bring him to the woods across the street from our barracks. While the guards take turns watching, he digs a hole six feet square and six feet deep and then he fills the hole in. It takes all day and half the night. We are sleeping when he tamps down the final fill, packs his bag and is taken away. We can only wonder at his motives and fate.

Our squad goes through the gun drill, over and over. My original 145 scrawny pounds have grown to 160; I can swing either the gun or tripod easily to my shoulder and carry the burden with a full field pack for miles. We carry the weapons deep into the woods on "field problems." Then we repeat the exercises with live ammunition, firing on targets which pop up from the ground.

As first and second gunners, Langley and I become a team that functions well in a series of "live fire" exercises. We look forward to the indirect firing range where only the squad leader, Sgt. Revere, will see the target, and we will fire over a hill, as he directs. We do it dry, no ammo, over and over until the drill is second nature. Finally we are scheduled for the range - day after tomorrow!

At Retreat, my name is called to go on furlough the next day. I report to the Orderly room and sign my furlough orders; "Two weeks at home!" The orders still need the CO's signature; "They'll be ready in the morning!" says the Company Clerk. Next morning I draw funds from the bank and pack a bag. At the appointed midday hour, I return to pick up the approved furlough. But - all furloughs are canceled. We are “alerted’ for overseas movement. I missed a furlough by only a few minutes!

Devastated, I drag myself back to the barracks, stow my gear and join the afternoon training sessions. Lots of sympathy; especially from those who would have had their turn after me. At sunset, I want to be alone. Soldiers are not supposed to cry! God, it has been a long time away from home! I trot a few miles

to the Officers' Beach on a small lake; swim in the moonlight; trot back to bed; stifle a sob, and sleep uneasily, exhausted.

The next morning we ride in weapons carriers out to the firing range. The jouncing ride is killing me; each bump is a knife in my stomach. When we finally arrive, I fall from the truck onto the ground. A fetal position calms the pain a little. A Major prods my stomach gently; "Can you gut it out?" "No Sir, I can't even stand up!" He sends me back to the barracks in a jeep. An ambulance crew picks me up, and that night my badly inflamed appendix is removed.

After the appendectomy there is a few days' bed confinement, followed by a week of "recuperation." We take short walks each day and do a few light calisthenics. Then I am listed as "limited duty" for six weeks. The Division is preparing to go overseas. My bunk stays in the second platoon, but I am assigned to "light duty" as a "runner" in the HQ Platoon. Near the end of September, I am alerted for transfer from the Division.

I appeal the transfer, and the CO sends me to the Regimental Aid Station. A doctor - a captain, says: "You could be permanently classed as `limited duty' because of your eyes, and now you will need a few more weeks before you can be taken off limited duty, because of this appendectomy. We have been told to ship all of our limited duty men out."

I point out to him that my glasses provide 20-20 correction, I have a spare pair and lenses in my gas mask. I suggest that the Division will be in the States at least a few more weeks; that my strength has already returned; and shipping out would leave me in a Replacement Depot; where I would become a new replacement in a strange unit.

Perhaps he sees the "Expert Rifle and Carbine, First Class Machine Gunner, and EIB" ratings in my personnel record, for he agrees to let me stay, provided that I remain a runner "on light duty" for a few more weeks. The CO is glad to hear it. I stay with Company M, assigned to the HQ platoon on temporary limited duty.

My pistol is exchanged for a carbine, as required for "runners," and I spend a few days on guard duty before we leave Ft. Bragg. One night I guard a small dam on a stream. The post is on a swinging footbridge above the dam. The sergeant of the guard gives me a single round for my carbine and instructs me to watch for anything floating down the stream that might endanger the dam. I wonder what

does one do with a single shot? Would a warning shot scare off a saboteur? Stop a bomb?

We turn in the machine guns and mortars and leave Ft. Bragg; once more by truck to Fayetteville, and by train to the Northeast. I carry a full field pack with a blanket roll. All of my other possessions are in a single duffel bag. We stop for a few days at Camp Kilmer near New Brunswick, New Jersey.

We are issued "shoe packs," peculiar black boots, rubberized from sole to ankle, then leather to mid calf. Inside, the bottoms are lined with removable felt pads. They are comfortable and warm, but do not support the feet and ankles as our ankle length GI shoes do. With the shoe packs, one does not need leggings. They are obviously good for cold weather, - if they can be kept dry.

One more short train ride brings us to Hoboken, where we ride a ferry across the Hudson. While we wait on the dock, Red Cross volunteers distribute coffee and doughnuts.

Finally we file onto a giant troopship; the George Washington. A one-time German luxury liner, it was captured in the First World War.

35. CONVOY

We settle into our "bunks" - white canvas stretched between steel pipe frames and stacked four high; but there is little sleep. We are about to become part of a grand strategy.

My bunk is at the top of the stack, pressed close to the overhead deck. Pipes share my crowded space and limit the positions in which I can sleep. We are not allowed on deck while the ship slips quietly down the Hudson. (Are "they" afraid that we might jump overboard?) From a starboard porthole I glimpse the Statue of Liberty as the ship rocks gently to the first ocean swells.

On deck, we see a thin line of land far behind us. Ships spread in convoy formation from horizon to horizon. In every direction the ocean is full of ships, each a half mile or more apart. On the horizon is a "baby flattop;" a small aircraft carrier, but I see no aircraft. Little destroyer escorts bustle about, taking station at various points; hurrying ahead and behind us, scouting the waters.

I count only 13 ships; perhaps there are more beyond the horizon. We move at the speed of the slowest, about 13 knots.

In the summer of 1940, brother Ray and I watched in horror from the beach at Norfolk, as a tanker burned on the horizon after a U-boat attack. Now, plowing sedately across the ocean, I feel like a sitting duck, waiting for the hunter. I'm grateful that Ray is not with me now.

Our ship, the George Washington, is the largest in the convoy; so big that it carries some 7,000 men; nearly half of the Division. Antiaircraft guns are located at the bow, stern and on each side, amidships. The gun crews run regular alerts and one day they do a little target practice. Our ship rides smoothly while the little destroyer escorts pitch and roll as they scurry around and through the convoy.

We settle into a comfortable routine for old salts like me. Poor mail clerk is paralyzed with seasickness. For those of us with "sea legs," there is a good supply of pocket books, limited amount of "PX" rations (candy and tobacco) and just two meals a day. Every meal includes a dollop of pickles, reported to be good for seasickness. Warm sea water showers are cleansing, but leave us feeling sticky..

Fresh water is reserved for drinking.

After six days at sea we enter a hurricane. Our ship, big as it is, rolls and pitches; the bow digs into a big wave, the stern rises until cavitation allows the propellers to spin free, the engines race, and the ship shudders almost to a stop. Then the bow rides up on the next wave, the propellers dig deep, the engines slow under the load, and the ship surges forward.

To some of us the motion is invigorating; I stand on a forward upper deck and watch the waves crash over the bow and wash the low forward deck. I am humbled and exhilarated by the sheer power of sea and ship.

Many have an opposite reaction. On the bottom level below my bunk, the 42-year-old mail clerk is deathly sick. Probably the oldest soldier in the Company,

his helmet becomes his refuge, the retching nausea leaves him too weak to make it to the head.

Hatches, ports and doorways are kept shut. Below decks, foul air adds to the misery of the sick men and oppresses everyone. Reading for several hours in the stifling air gives me a headache and a queasy stomach. An effective remedy is to go out on deck, watch the horizon, and breathe the cool air.

Destroyer escorts are amazing; they climb vertical walls of water and slide down to crash into the depths; they disappear from sight in the spray behind the towering waves, and bob up again like corks to ride another crest. Yet they persist in their constant patrol, around and through the convoy. Their crews must be black and blue from such tossing about. I wonder if my resistance to seasickness could stand that.

The storm passes after several days; the skies clear, the water quiets, and the air is warmer. Gambling is officially prohibited, but games of cards or craps can be found all over the ship. One of the "new kids" in my HQ platoon prevails upon me to "loan" him ten dollars. It is never returned.

At night the ships are blacked out; there are no lights, not even a smoker's cigarette glows on deck. The ship's wake boils with phosphorescence. I sleep on a hatch cover and watch the stars; suddenly one streaks silently across the sky; a line of light appearing directly overhead; it falls in a second, all the way to the horizon; a disappearing pen stroke arched by an unseen giant hand.

Moments later there is smaller one, a mere speck of light glimpsed from the corner of one's eye. There are more as the ship plows on through the dark, into the peak meteor hours, from midnight to two or three o'clock.

Little strokes of light paint a quick flash and die abruptly. Others pass half way across the sky. Sleep is banished as we wait for the next and the next. A shower of shooting stars must be a sign of good luck.

For the rest of my life this night will never be matched. There are no artificial lights, none from horizon to horizon; and none reflected in the distant skies.

After a few hours on deck, one becomes accustomed to the dark and the stars actually provide enough light for one to see the outlines of the ship. Perhaps, never

again will there be a place on earth where such an experience can be duplicated. It takes a war to put all of the lights out.

The next day we pass little green gems of islands spotted with white houses. The weather is warm and clear, the sky and sea, a cobalt blue. The Azores look like picture post cards!

Another day; I watch the radar antenna sweeping around and around. It stops, looking ahead, sweeps a few more times and then locks onto a target dead ahead.

Soon, in the late afternoon, we see the top of the Rock of Gibraltar. The sun sets behind us, coating the Rock with a rosy glow. The color fades, the Rock emerges from the horizon, turns purple, black, and then, dark as the night, it vanishes except for a little red light that blinks from its summit. We move on into the night as the little red light passes our port beam and fades away to the West.

A German submarine base is said to be still active and not far up the Mediterranean Coast in Spain. Our convoy hugs the African coast. We see the lights of Oran, and later, while we sleep, the convoy turns North to cross the Mediterranean Sea, well clear of the Spanish coast.

Wendall Johnson writes:

"The Rock: Shortly after my Liberty Ship passed this, with Tangiers on the right, the ship ahead of us blew up and went down almost instantly. Some experience!"
And - about Marseilles: "I buried one of my men in a military cemetery here" .

36. MARSEILLES

A shower clears the air, the wind freshens, the sky and sea are brilliant blue, highlighted by whitecaps. The fabled beautiful, turquoise Mediterranean

welcomes us. The French Riviera cannot be far away!

The ship heads for a gap in distant cliffs, again at dusk. Darkness falls as we slip into a wide bowl; the port of Marseilles. Relief from the submarine threat is replaced by a new concern. As the anchor chains rattle through their hawse holes, air raid sirens echo across the harbor, and searchlight beams scan the skies. There are distant explosions and the sound of aircraft.

Until now, we had to fasten our steel helmet chin straps beneath our chins. Now we are told to secure the strap up on the back brim of the helmet. "If you fasten the strap under your chin and then fall, the helmet might break your neck!" It seems better to have it loose in case one falls in the water. For the rest of the war, I wear the strap up on the brim, the helmet loose on my head.

The ship's PA. system shrills a warning from a bosun's pipe, then bellows: "Now hear this! Now hear this! All troops will return below deck and prepare to disembark! The German radio has welcomed the 100th Division to France! - And promises us a very brief stay in France!" I wonder if they have not already missed their best shot; our sitting duck convoy was not attacked!

The ship swings at anchor as we climb, in the dark, down the cargo net ropes to landing craft, unseen below. We carry full field packs with a horseshoe shaped roll of an extra blanket secured to the pack. I wear a steel helmet, field jacket, woolen OD's and the shoe-packs. I carry a carbine, and a canteen full of water. I wonder if I could float with all this gear.

The small craft is an LST, "Landing Ship, Tank." We stand crowded together as the spray breaks over the bow. We make a great target, but the enemy planes are gone. The LST slides quietly onto a beach; the bow door drops to form a runway and we step off onto the sand.

In company formation, a column of fours, we march across the beach, through the quiet dark cobblestone streets, and up the hill to a plain overlooking the harbor. We spread out in a big field and sleep on the ground in our bedrolls.

Morning finds us setting up tents in neat rows. We visit the unscreened 6-hole latrines set up beside the road. Passing French civilians are unconcerned. A few civilians, even a few women, amble over and share our "conveniences."

T-5 Twomey, my tall dark tent mate, appears with a bottle of red wine. He offers to share it, but the taste is vile, and soon he is quite ill. He cleans up the mess and vows to be more careful.

We turn our attention to distributing and cleaning new machine guns and mortars. We open wooden boxes to find the weapons coated with cosmoline. We burn the boxes and melt the black sticky cosmoline by holding the weapons over the open fires.

One night I am "detailed" to a dock in Marseilles. We carry 155 mm shells from pallets in cargo nets to a stock pile, and from there to railroad freight cars. I drop one! It bounces on the cobblestones and falls on my toe. Painful, but no explosion! So much for "limited duty."

We open a crate of "C rations." Dock workers circle us like a pack of hungry wolves, looking for something to eat. One shakes my hand, points to himself and says: "Rooskie - Rooskie!" Very loud, he tries to make me understand.

"Russian?" I ask, a little wide-eyed. He says; "Oui, Maquis!" He opens a coat flap to show me an Army 45 hanging on an empty machine gun ammo belt! The underground, I hope, is on our side, but they are hungry, desperate, and armed. I do not wander off from our group.

Early next morning, we pack our gear and hike a few hundred yards to the waiting deuce - and - a - half trucks; hundreds of them. We load up while the drivers warm their engines. The trucks roar through their low gears, file out of the lot and turn North; engines sounding like the bombers at the Martin plant back home in Baltimore.

As far as one can see, there are trucks before and behind us. The sense of unleashed power is awesome; thoughts turn to our ship convoy (only a small one of many convoys), and to the fleets of tanks and aircraft. We are small cogs in a very big juggernaut of war.

The road snakes along the Rhone Valley, heads north, through Avignon, ancient home of the Popes. Late October leaves are splashes of bright colors and the inevitable browns, contrasting nicely with the greens of crops and meadows. The afternoon sun is warm and the night is cool. Nice weather for a camping trip!

Somewhere behind our HQ truck, in a second platoon jeep, John Langley is sewing on his new sergeant's stripes. He and I will never be a team again.

37. JUNKYARD WELCOME

On each side of the road are lines of wrecked and abandoned vehicles left by the Germans who had been nearly cut-off by the Allied advance from the beaches of Normandy. In their haste to retreat, the Germans were exposed to Allied air attacks and the evidence stretches for miles; burned out trucks, tanks, commandeered civilian vehicles, even horse carts and wagons with no horses.

Every town slows our trucks, for on both sides of the road the population stands, elbow to elbow; shouting, and waving French and American flags. We hear again and again: "Viva La Americains! Welcome!" Schools empty, the children watch and wave; shout and laugh! We float in a carnival atmosphere; a once in a lifetime experience for them - and for us.

We stop by the road; the towns are five to ten miles apart, but farm houses are always in sight. "Piss Call" is embarrassing; a long line of Army trucks and jeeps with men all around them, quietly facing the vehicles.

At Lyon, we roll into a pretty little park in the middle of town. The park is quickly filled with lines of tents and mess trucks dispensing rations. The next day is a repeat; more wrecked German vehicles; miles and miles of them; and more cheering people and crowds of children. We sleep again in a city park; this time in Dijon.

We turn northeast into hill country. Fields are cultivated intensely and neighboring forest floors are bare of underbrush and fallen twigs which are used for firewood. A cold north wind is summoned by the sunset. Suddenly to our right, we get a different chill from the sight of dead horses and cattle lying in a peaceful field. We watch the scene pass in stunned silence. Gone are the cheering

crowds; we see no more people and no traffic but our own.

Somewhere ahead, the Germans are arranging their own welcome for us.

38. THE SNIPER

Every weapon is loaded, and belt pouches are packed with full clips. Riflemen and BAR men carry bandoleers of ammunition. A man with a loaded rifle rides at the back of each truck to watch for enemy aircraft. But we see no aircraft. Thank you, Lord.

Late afternoon; we hike with full field packs into a forest, a few miles up into the hills west of Baccarat. "Dig in and bed down here for the night." In the dark, I find a little clear space and dig a shallow trench through a tough mass of roots. When the trench is well started, I roll up beside it and sleep as well as I can on the lumpy, hard cold ground.

About two in the morning we are startled awake by a tremendous nearby explosion, followed quickly by several more. The sky lights up from the blasts. Our peaceful bivouac is instantly alive with the sounds of shovels and picks working again. My little trench is deep enough for me to hide well below the ground surface when we get "the word" that the explosions are from a nearby battery of our own artillery; big 155 mm guns.

At dawn we turn in our duffel bags; "You'll git 'em back in a cupla' days - we'll be here three days, anyway." We turn in our gas masks; I take the lenses from mine, we are not likely get the same masks back. We move out the next morning and I do not see my duffel bag again for 6 months.

PFC John Khoury, of Company L, writes:

"About November 1, 1944, we were sent into the line to relieve a unit of the 45th Division. We passed through their lines and took up their positions in a wooded area across a road and up a sloping hill from where the Germans were firing at us."

"From behind a tree, I fired my sniper's rifle at anything that looked like the

enemy, but all I could see was forest and an occasional puff of smoke."

"When a rifle shot tore through my tree I looked up and saw a puff of smoke above me. I fired into the smoke two or three times, but I didn't see anything because my 1903 rifle had such a kick that I lost my target area after each shot. I didn't know whether I hit him or not, but there was no more rifle fire from that spot."

"When we later moved on, Lt. Ashbrook came to me and told me that he had seen the German fall out of the tree, and I had hit him."

That afternoon, November 1, 1944, we carry our weapons and full field packs into positions occupied by the famous 45th Thunderbird Division. Originally from Texas and Oklahoma, these men tell us about combat in Sicily and Italy, and the Hell of the landings at Anzio, where they were pinned down by the Germans for weeks before being relieved.

They landed in Southern France only a few weeks before we arrived at Marseilles. We ask questions, listen, and learn from these gaunt tired men. They talk - and we learn - for several hours before they leave.

My regiment, the 399th, relieves the 179th Regiment; the unit from which Bill Mauldin launched his famous GI Joe cartoons.

Mike Company, the last company of the 399th Regiment; the last company in the whole damn 100th Division, is the first company of the Division in combat.

A few days later we move again, and our new command post is a tent with an unwelcome neighbor. Two of us are detailed to "Bury that dead German over there!"

It is clear from his position and the planking in the tree overhead that he was posted in the tree as a sniper. We wonder how many of our guys he hit before they found him. We inspect the dead soldier cautiously for he might be booby trapped.

He is well built, maybe 6 feet tall, with staring blue eyes and light brown hair; the Aryan, defending his native land. A few days earlier he was fighting in occupied France. Today we bury him in "liberated France."

His cartridge belt, first aid kit and boots are heavy black leather. Our belts and aid kits are made of webbing; by comparison, ours look cheap. His gray jacket is buttoned close at the collar, similar to those of WW I. I recall my

Father's gratitude when his fireman's uniform was restyled to an open collar jacket.

The sniper is clean; a sure sign that he has not been sleeping in foxholes. The wound that killed him is hidden by his uniform. In the nearby trees, we find a 50-foot length of loose telephone wire; we tie it to his belt, and pull from behind a tree to roll him over. There are no booby traps. I cut a button from his jacket for my friend in the paint factory. We dig out a natural hollow, roll him in and cover him with a little dirt and a pile of rocks. (I never went back to the paint factory, and eventually lost the button.)

39. LESSONS LEARNED

Ralph Reeves continues (again):

"That very first day my section relieved a mortar team of the 45th Division. Believe me, I gave their big dugouts and their tools more than a cursory glance. In training, all I knew were foxholes, and a couple of those were hard work enough. Nothing prepared me for the shock here."

"I knew these were real experienced pros from way back. Here was a TWO MAN HOLE big enough to slither into and sleep in; all covered with logs and dirt. I figured 'WOW! What's this? Is that what I'm supposed to do?' I thought of that little shovel, (the entrenching tool) hanging on my belt; then I saw the great big tools of real warriors."

"They had what construction laborers use; number 2 Round Point D Handle man-sized shovels. And full size picks. And a logger's big two man cross cut saw. 'Wow, again!'"

"I have wondered why the Army issued toy tools, hardly fit for a dinky back yard garden, to anyone expected to dig massive dugouts such as I was seeing. I liberated some 45th Division tools, rationalizing that (their owners) were going for

rest and relaxation anyway."

"That same day I decided to clean my pistol. I sat on a chunk of wood in an area with dead leaves and a little snow all around and stripped the weapon completely. In training one is taught never to strip the weapon too far. Let ordnance do that."

"Well, I broke the rule, and the first thing you know, BLIP! went the firing pin into the leaves and snow. I couldn't find the damn thing readily; so I sat back and mused; 'Some shit! First day on the front and I'm defenseless because I broke the rules and lost the damn firing pin! Is this real or am I dreaming?" I was horribly embarrassed more than anything else. There was no way I was going to say; 'Sergeant, help, I lost my firing pin!' Instead, I examined every inch around me, every twig and leaf and bit of snow, and after an hour and a half, found it! I never again removed the firing pin during the balance of my European visit."

Back at Company HQ, I am looking at similar dugouts, but larger. The headquarters dugout is big enough for half a dozen men to meet, standing up. I am teamed with another runner in a smaller dugout nearby.

We question our 45th Division counterparts: "Do you prefer a carbine or the rifle?" "The carbine gives you 15 quick shots; but when you need to reach out, use a rifle. I was trading shots with a Kraut hiding behind a little tree. He'd pop out quick enough to get off a round, and my carbine would nick the edge of the tree as he disappeared. If I'd been using a rifle with an armor piercing round, I could have shot through the tree when I first spotted him and he would not have had a shot at me."

"How about the grease gun?" "It will pull up into the air if you fire more than two shots together. The Tommy gun is better. We traded rifles to the tankers for Tommy guns." (Both the little "grease gun" and the Thompson submachine gun fire 45 caliber ammo; the same as used in our pistols. Both are new to us.)

The mortar platoon sets its "tubes" where the 45th Division mortars were; the first shots by Mike Company are from a mortar. The "399th in Action" credits PFC Hartmut Arntz with sighting the mortar into which Walter Meliere drops the first round; if so, it is also the first shot fired by the 100th Division (this distinction is also claimed by at least one other mortar squad and by the 925th Field Artillery

which arrived later. Arntz and Meliere are both dead a few months later.)

Next to the first section of mortars, a chemical company is busy blasting away at the village of St. Die with their 4.2 inch mortars. When PFC Reeves asks about the fuss, a chemical company soldier replies; "We fired a bunch of gas shells by mistake, and now we are trying to cover it up with other explosives and white phosphorous."

Reeves continues:

"Everyone advanced to take St. Die. We toted our mortars way ahead somewhere (I never did see a village), mounted them and fired a few rounds. Suddenly, I think it was Sgt. Winkles yelled 'Let's move out!' Lt. Flaum must have been the forward observer; he may have said 'Move over,' 'Move Back,' or move some other direction, but I'm sure he didn't say 'Move forward!' which is what the Sergeant understood him to say. So we moved forward, and were crossing a barren corn field when the Sergeant said 'Stop!' Something's wrong."

"There we were standing stupidly in this bald spot for all the world to see. It was dusk and I figured we sure as hell won't spend the night here, but a good soldier should do his best to protect himself. So with my freshly liberated #2 round point D handle shovel, I dug furiously, not to camp out, but for the mortar and crew. It wasn't five minutes later and I had a hole six feet across and four feet deep."

"That would have been a half a day's work for many a construction worker. So the Sergeant says 'Move out!' and a few yards later he says 'We gotta shoot!' We mounted the mortar in this bare ass field and looked toward all the small arms shooting going on directly in front of us in a clump of woods. I said 'Sergeant, what do we shoot at?' I was thinking of aiming stakes and markers that the gunner is supposed to use while hidden behind a hill, but Winkles stood close to me, points, and said 'Aim at those tracers coming out of the woods!'"

"A machine gun was firing tracers, and I aimed directly through the mortar sight to the base of the fire. I'm sure I must have mumbled 'For Christ's sake, this isn't in the training manual either!' All the shooting stopped finally and we advanced to the rear this time, to spend the night in some farm house."

"I flaked out in one of those peculiar looking hay wagons in the barn part of

the house. A bunch of us were on there. It was dark and we could see little if anything. I remember my arm landing on some guy's face next to me; he didn't grumble or move. Next morning I found my sleeping companion was a dead German soldier! I figured, 'Wow! So starts another day of combat! So far it has been interesting beyond measure. Is this the sort of shit we do every day?'"

"I wonder if any other mortar gunner ever knocked out a machine gun by sighting directly at it. After the first couple of days it seemed that we were learning some great stuff they should be teaching the new recruits back in the States."

Hidden by the dark, my carbine rests before me on a fallen tree trunk; there is a round in the chamber, 14 more in the clip, and the barrel points down the path approaching the HQ dugout behind me. It is a far different game than watching a dam at Ft. Bragg.

A sound, - and then another; signals that someone approaches. I quietly ease the carbine's safety off. A shadow of a figure is not 10 feet away when I hiss the first half of the password. The noise stops; the carbine is aimed at the dark outline of a man and my finger is tightening on the trigger when I hear: "Uh, uh - Ah cain't remember the password!"

I recognize the voice of the L Company commander, Captain Alphonso. "Pass, Sir!" I whisper the password to him; he gets no salute, but he is safe for a little longer in the dark.

40. ATTACK AT ST. REMY

Rain and the drumbeat of shellfire continues night and day. Rain is our constant companion, and dry feet become a major goal. When trench foot sends a first platoon ammo bearer to the hospital, I am sent to take his place, joining the platoon as it moves through the woods to a new position.

We are issued K-rations, extra ammunition and grenades while we wait through the afternoon.

Under cover of darkness, we move quietly out of the woods along the reverse side of a long, gentle, grass covered hill; we dig foxholes and point our weapons to our left, up the hill. Sounds from exploding shells and small arms fire confirm reports that Germans are in that direction.

Riflemen of Item Company, the Greyhounds, are posted in pairs, about twenty yards apart; their positions extend back into the woods from whence we came, now on our left, and ahead to another woods, now on our right. We quickly dig in to form a long line of foxholes. The other machine gun from our section is similarly spaced between riflemen farther down the line.

The two gunners dig in behind the gun. Squad leader and I dig our hole a few yards away. When it is deep enough for both of us to crouch below the ground level, we take turns; an hour of looking into the dark, an hour to sleep, curled up in the bottom of the hole. My wrist watch has a bright luminous dial, so the man on watch uses it to time his hour. The two other ammo bearers are also paired in a hole to beef up the defensive position.

Occasional small arms fire crackles in the woods to our left. We knew the thump of our rifles, the crack of our carbines and the staccato bursts from our own machine guns and BARs. Now we recognize the German small arms; the sharp crack of their rifles and the roar of the "burp" gun which has such a high rate of fire that it makes a continuous sound rather than a series of individual shots.

All night the artillery duels over our heads. To our left front, flames light the sky; the village of St. Remy is burning in "no man's land." Behind us, German shells burst in the trees. We are hidden by the hill to our front; they cannot know where we are. We hope. Ten, sometimes twenty shells go out for each one that comes in. I wonder how the German troops must feel; they can count too.

At dawn we eat K-rations and send our bedrolls back to the jeeps. We continue standing watches so that we can get a little more sleep. About 11 a.m. the artillery begins a heavy barrage that lasts for an hour. We don light packs over our raincoats, and prepare to move out.

At noon, the riflemen move up the hill; a long line of skirmishers, spaced about 15 yards apart. They have fixed bayonets on their loaded rifles. Briefly silhouetted against the sky, they are a picture from the First World War. I almost

expect to hear; "Over the top!" But the riflemen just say quietly; "Let's go." As they disappear over the hilltop, we pick up our guns and ammo boxes and follow.

At the crest of the hill, we set up our machine gun. I place the ammo boxes next to the gun, take a quick look around, and head back to the woods to bring up more ammo. Firing comes from a line of trees on the far side of a stream about a thousand yards away. The plowed field offers no cover; riflemen throw themselves into prone firing positions, fire a few shots, and run ahead to do it again.

The all night rain helps to reduce our number of casualties. German shells burst deep in the mud; when they explode, the shrapnel goes up instead of spreading a wide radius of destruction. Good thing they do not have our new proximity shells that burst some 20 feet above the ground!

As I leave, our machine guns open fire over our riflemen and into the German positions in the tree line. There is a sense of relief when I am behind the hill, but it only takes a few minutes to find the ammo jeep in the woods. Against my better judgment, I hurry back to the fight with three boxes of machine gun ammo.

From the crest of the hill, the bare field still slopes gently down to the stream and tree line. But now it is a battlefield, strangely quiet. Riflemen are crossing the stream while our machine gun rakes a woods on high ground to our left front. Casualties are walking or being carried back to jeeps behind us..

Captain Travis Hopkins, the Greyhounds' Commander, walks past me, his arm in a sling and his face contorted with pain.

Several riflemen are still on the ground. Nearby, their rifles stand, each with its fixed bayonet in the ground and a helmet on the rifle butt.

We pick up the guns and ammo, cross the field, wade through the stream, and climb up the next hill into a woods. Water in the stream is just an inch higher than the top of my shoe-packs. We slosh, heavy-footed through the woods, set up the gun where there is a field of fire, and dump water from our boots. We dig slit trenches, deepen them into foxholes, and try to get a little rest - only to be pulled out of the woods in the middle of the night. Exhausted, we find ourselves moved into reserve positions; a secondary defense line set up behind the next row of hills. At least here we are not visible to the enemy.

41. RESERVES

When two battalions are "on the line," the third one may be in "reserve" behind the lines. The three regiments do the same thing; so there is a chance of being in battalion reserve 1/3 of the time; and in regimental reserve 1/3 of that time. This arithmetic says that we could be in some form of reserve say, 5 out of every 9 days or weeks; but events drain the reserves back into the lines at unexpected times, there are overlapping assignments, and sometimes, no reserves. From November 1, 1944 to May 1, 1945, we spent most of our days on the front.

For one day and night we are in a second line of defense, in reserve. Our gun sits in front of a shallow, covered pit; there is no indication of which way we are to face in this new forest location. We dig the hole a little deeper and wider and add dirt to the cover. Two of us can sleep while a third stands guard. One hour on and two off; what luxury!

My shoe packs and socks are off; feet are almost dry and the felt liners are drying - a little, - when the First Platoon Lieutenant calls me out of the hole to help free his jeep from a deep mud hole. Dry socks soak water out of the felts in my boots as I approach half a dozen men who are unable to move the jeep.

Ankle deep in mud, the men are being doused in muddy water from the jeep's four spinning wheels. Ignoring an order to join them, I carry firewood from a nearby pile. Several pieces under each wheel enable the jeep to climb out of the mud hole without assistance. Back in our snug hole, we rest a few hours before moving to another "reserve" position.

Three of us are in a little dugout facing a road fork, so again we need to be

on watch only one hour in three. We enjoy the quiet, knowing that we will become the main line of resistance (MLR), if the front line is overrun. Then the evening quiet is shattered by a series of nearby explosions.

A hundred yards to our left front, a 4.2 inch mortar crew is firing - and firing - at targets unseen. This irritates the Germans into lobbing 88 mm shells into the road fork area. We find ourselves hiding in our dugout from a barrage which is aimed at our neighbor - the mortar and its crew.

The 4.2 inch mortar is bigger and stouter than our 81 mm mortars. It is manned by Chemical Warfare troops but used mainly to fire white phosphorous ("Willy Peter") and high explosive shells. When dark falls, the mortar crew packs up and leaves in a couple of jeeps. Our road fork is quiet again, except for the sound of the rain and water flowing down the road, and distant small arms fire somewhere in the woods.

Years later a 4.2 inch mortar crewman writes (confirming Reeve's report): "We inadvertently fired a chemical weapon shell. To cover it up, we threw all the other ammo we had onto the same site. If the Germans had known, there would have been hell to pay."

The guard stands at the high end of our dugout behind the machine gun while an ammo bearer, and I sleep at his feet in the dugout. We wake to find water sloshing on and in our shoe packs; our feet are in water at the low end of the sloping hole. While I'm on guard, the other two go to a nearby stable where they can stay dry. Later, my turn comes to sleep in the stable, close to a board wall. Through spaces between the boards I can feel the warmth from a sleeping black cow. The hour on guard is easier when we know we can return to a dry warm place to rest.

I rejoin my second platoon as a second gunner, carrying the gun through the woods; following the first gunner with his unwieldy tripod. As dark falls, we dig slit trenches and then roll up in our bedrolls. Newly issued sleeping bags, lined with blankets, are better than blankets rolled in shelter halves. Still I cover my head to keep the cold air from chilling my lungs. This night we sleep with only one guard awake in the squad. Four consecutive hours of sleep!

Days and nights run together as we move from one place to another. One night we sleep in a house while the snow falls outside. I hear a milk truck making pre-dawn rounds through the winter's first snow - at home in Baltimore?. Maybe

school will be closed today. The dream fades as I wake and recognize the sounds of jeeps and trucks splashing through the slush covered cobblestones of Baccarat.

My watch strap breaks. It is the only luminous dial watch in the squad so it is used by each guard; passed from wrist to wrist at one hour intervals, every night for two weeks until the strap wore through. Now I carry it in the watch pocket of my OD trousers.

The respite is brief; we hike out of town and back into the woods while the snow turns to rain. Again, we sleep by our slit trenches in the woods.

The platoon is roused in the dark before dawn; "SADDLE UP; - C'MON! LE'S GO !" Snow covered packs are frozen stiff; numb fingers can hardly move the rigid straps to secure the bedroll. We pause to eat a cold "C" ration; one can of stew or hash; another can with biscuits and a packet of coffee or lemonade powder.

All night there has been sporadic firing of small arms and artillery in the distance. For a little while now all is quiet. We hike along a smooth black macadam road, winding along through the forest, up into the Vosges foothills. The pine trees look like ghosts on both sides of the roads; shrouded in mist and fog.

Once again I marvel at the clear forest floor. For centuries, nearby people gleaned twigs, brush, and fallen branches for fire wood. The Germans have cut off coal supplies, and the traditional gleaning of the forest has become very intensive. Earlier, we saw women and children carrying loads of faggots back to the villages. Now, where we are, the population has left the forest to the tender mercies of our heavy guns.

To the right, down the hillside we see an open field surrounded by tall pine trees; a large cemetery with rows of uniform little white crosses. The wide iron gates are topped by a wrought iron arch with iron letters: "American Expeditionary Forces Cemetery 1918." We feel a chill that is more than cold weather as a battery of 155's fires from behind us.

We move into the hills towards the exploding shells. Soon the shell fire is much closer than the guns.

It is Armistice Day, November 11, 1944.

42. ATTACK AT RAON L'ETAPE

The rain stops and starts, and the cold mist penetrates our clothes. Snow flakes are added to the mix. We move and dig in; hike some more, and dig in again. The evening of November 14 finds us digging reserve positions - yet again.

After dark, a jeep brings us a hot meal. And fruit cocktail! I am so hungry! Cook pours a pint of the sweet fruit mixture into my canteen cup and I gulp it down.

At dawn, the artillery is closer and louder; big guns are at it again. We move through a narrow valley; and approach closer and closer to the impact area where shells from the big 155 and 240 millimeter guns are bursting in trees and digging holes in the forest floor.

Shells burst in the trees up the hill, in plain view to our left. Suddenly I have to leave the column; I move into the woods to our right, dig a hole behind a tree and experience a severe attack of diarrhea. The discomfort sets me wondering; the living conditions are terrible, the water and food are suspect; I don't need a case of dysentery now; or maybe it is caused by fear? Those big shells are really stirring up a ruckus nearby. Moving so close to the bursting shells is terrifying. But the discomfort passes quickly and I recall the big canteen cup full of fruit cocktail. The same thing happened to me at home when I ate a whole can of that stuff.

Our squad joins a rifle company; we are hugging the ground and hiding behind trees. Ahead we see riflemen from another battalion in their foxholes; they are staying low; watching and firing. Beyond them I see a formidable stand of barbed wire stretched in a pattern from 6 inches to waist high, it covers an area 8 to 10 feet wide and runs out of sight along the tree line to left and right.

Beyond the barbed wire is a stretch of meadow; then a black macadam two lane highway, and beyond that higher ground. At the tree line I see a long trench.

This is a key barrier on the road to Strasbourg on the Rhine River; a gateway into Germany.

The big shells have been bursting near the trench; now they are hitting farther back up the hill in the woods. The poor trees take a beating. Abruptly we move out. I carry the machine gun as we pick our way through a gap in the barbed wire. Later I learn that our platoon runner, Corporal Roy Kaminske was wounded while cutting that opening in the wire. He earns a Purple Heart and a Silver Star.

Just beyond the wire a dead American rifleman lies face down. He seems to be sleeping, very still. His GI shoes and leggings suggest that he is not from our Division (since we are wearing shoe packs).

We run across the field, over the road and up the hill beyond. A short jump and I'm over the trench; but lying in it is a young wounded German soldier; his gaunt face is pale and drained, his blue eyes plead for help but there is no stopping. Poor guy, he was defending his homeland; this is Alsace-Lorraine, most of the people here speak German, and the Germans have claimed this land with varying success for centuries. He was defending the land they had "recaptured" in 1940.

We follow the riflemen's charge on into the woods, over the hill and halfway down the other side. The trees are a solid cover above, but there is no underbrush. Walking, we can see only a few trees ahead but we can be seen from a long way off by anyone in a foxhole or trench at ground level. To our left the riflemen begin to fire. Just as we get our gun set up, the firing stops when the riflemen recognize they are firing on one of our own units.

Riflemen on both sides of us form our MLR (“Main Line of Resistance”) and we prepare for an expected counterattack. The first gunner and I set our gun up on the edge of a shell hole which reeks of cordite explosive as we dig deeper to make a foxhole.

The Germans counterattack briefly on our left. We see distant figures flitting through the woods but they vanish before we can identify them. A volley of small arms fire from our left stops the attack.

We eat a K-ration and I store the tropical chocolate candy bar in my pack to help make the night's guard duty pass; a piece every fifteen minutes makes an hour go a little easier. We continue to dig.

Our hole is nearly waist deep when a German 88 mm gun fires from our front; the shell bursts high in a tree, perhaps a 100 yards to our right, a little to our rear and well behind the riflemen's positions. The next shell hits some 20 yards closer to us; the Germans have not guessed where we are - yet.

The next shell burst is closer again; and then closer yet again. I tell the first gunner that the next one will be very close; we duck down into the hole at the sound of the shell approaching.

As the shells get closer, there is less warning sound, so there is almost no warning whistle when the explosion in the tree above lights up the dirt in the bottom of our hole. We duck, crouching as low as we can.

My right knee feels like I might have hit it on a stone in the bottom of the foxhole, but there is a small rip in my trouser leg; on the inside and above the knee. I pull the trouser leg out of the shoe pack and see another small hole in the trouser leg near the boot top. Pulling up the trouser leg reveals two ugly wounds; one above and one below the knee on the inside of my right leg.

As I crouched in the bottom of the hole, the muscles above and below the knee were bunched up; a small shell fragment missed my head and shoulders; penetrated the trouser, laid open the two wounds; exited again through the lower part of the trouser and then buried itself in the dirt beneath us.

The first gunner calls a medic; I climb out of the hole, sit on the ground and open my aid packet. Never saw the inside of one before. Since we each carry one, someone must be expecting us to get hurt.

The medic applies my aid packet bandage and another from his kit; one to each wound. I walk back up the hill, back across the now empty German trench. A jeep is carrying a wounded man on a litter and several more on the seats. The driver seats me on the hood; my feet on the bumper and a red cross flag in my hands.

We cross the nice smooth road and turn down a rough path; then bounce onto a narrow dirt road to a temporary aid station nestled in a curve in the road, sheltered by the hillside and the big trees. I watch a Chaplain heating adhesive tape over a little gasoline burner (usually used to heat rations) while I pry my fingers loose from the red cross flagpole. My hands are black and stiff; the cold is bone deep.

The ambulance heater warms us; I sit crowded on a litter with others who can still sit up. We look at three racks of litters, each carrying a man who cannot sit up. Another loaded rack hangs close above our heads. The ambulance jounces on shell-pocked roads and our wounds respond with new pains. I am not aware that the ambulance also carries our third squad gunners, Andy Aisenbrey and Jim Curley.

Years later I learn that Andy is wounded in his left wrist, left foot, right hip and both buttocks; - and Jim has shrapnel in both legs and in his chin.
That same day, Shrapnel splits open the helmet of Don Galles, leaving him stunned, but not hurt.

43. THE SHOWER

We are delivered to a temporary field hospital, set in tents, with operating rooms in a nearby house and barn. My trousers are cut away; the wounds are treated with sulfa powder and redressed. Snug in new pajamas and a warm cot, I ask, too late, if someone can find my watch. Next day another ambulance carries me to a "hospital.".

I am in an Epinal schoolroom on the second floor. By the head of my bed, to the right, is the entry door and an aisle; then a line of beds alternating head and foot to the wall and the aisle.

Across the aisle to my right, only 4 feet away and pointing at me, is the bandaged stump of a leg, suspended by a pulley. I sit up, and look over the stump. The owner's face is lean and dark; I tell him my name, he says: "I am Margarito Comancho from New Mexico." I ask, "What happened to you?"

"We were patrolling a mile behind their lines; then all I remember is the explosion; they told me I stepped on a mine and walked out, the whole mile. I did not know my foot was gone."

Wearing pajamas and a light cotton robe, I limp down a flight of steps, and

cross the open cobblestone school yard through a light snow to the school's unheated latrine. Cold wind sweeps through substantial gaps above and below the doors. The tile floor is lined with holes at regular intervals. Raised tiles on each side of each hole are obviously to keep one's feet off the wet floor. It is no place to tarry, and I hurry back up the steps to my warm bed. It is the first "old European" toilet that I have ever seen.

We are fed the "B" ration; canned stew or hash; dry, hard biscuit-crackers; powdered eggs and oatmeal with powdered milk for breakfast. I hope the first gunner finds the candy bar in my pack. I cannot get enough to eat. An hour after "chow" I am famished.

A medic takes me to a shower and tells me not to worry about the bandages; they are to be removed soon. The hot water sluices dirt from my blackened skin and turns muddy when I lather my hair. My hands begin to show white skin again. It is my first freshwater shower since we left New Jersey, 6 weeks ago.

Salt water showers on the troopship left a sticky salty residue; I can feel it washing away; the final cleansing after the layers of grime are gone. This shower is one I will never forget. For the rest of my life, every shower will remind me of this one.

The wounds are closed with stitches in a routine operation. When I wake from the anesthetic, I hobble back down the steps to the latrine. The next day the dressings are changed; the stitches did not hold. I am again on the operating table. This time the wounds are closed with skin grafted from the front of my right leg just above the knee.

The ward radio is playing Strauss Waltzes as I drift back to consciousness from the sodium Pentothal anesthetic. I seem to be floating; there is no pain; no weariness; no care or worry. Heaven must be so sweet.

A few hours later the anesthetic wears off and now I have three sets of bandages; three sources of pain, But I remember those waltzes.

This time I am restricted to bed for several days. Finally the bedpan routine is replaced by a pair of crutches which allow me to walk, to climb down the steps and back, to visit the latrine and mess hall, without using my right leg.

Snow drifts into the picturesque streets of Epinal, and I wonder at the fate of Company M - somewhere in the cold forests of the Vosges Mountains.

While I hobble about on crutches, Company M continues the drive to the Rhine and Strasbourg. About November 20, Company M is hit hard. Unknown to me, Don Galles, whose helmet was split open on November 15, is not so lucky this time. Shrapnel breaks his left femur, and he is carried to safety by Lt. Scott Witt. Our friend Bob Howell is killed.

We listen to the Armed Forces Network and the British Broadcasting Company. At every hour, the BBC broadcasts the first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: da-da-da- booom. Dot-dot-dot-dash; Morse code for "V" for Victory!

I am so Hungry! Again I think of the chocolate bar in my pack; no doubt the first gunner found it. He needs it worse than I do. I beg, and the mess attendant gives me a box of hard wheat crackers. I get extra rations; more dehydrated eggs, oatmeal, bread and stew. I eat ravenously for three days, and finally am sated.

After a week, the eating binge and restricted movement kills my appetite and I am not hungry for the really big Thanksgiving feast that the hospital lays out.

The hospital staff has accumulated a record number of days overseas. They landed in Central Africa before the African invasion and traveled overland to join our troops in Algeria. They followed along, picking up, and patching the pieces of men, - through Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Southern France to this little school house in the Vosges foothill town of Epinal. How could they work so hard, after all these years?

These nurses and doctors have been overseas 3 years already!

To my left, a few feet from my bed, a rifleman is using a wire coat hanger to scratch his leg inside a large cast. Disturbed by his moaning, I finally drift off to sleep. The next morning he is gone. A nurse says 'He died and was taken out while you slept."

Strasbourg is captured and a patient from a German hospital is moved into the empty bed. Since he is a prisoner of war, we are ordered not to talk with him. His name is Carl Haase and he speaks some English. I ask him to teach me a little German. He says: "Why do you want to learn German, you are going back into

the sea!" But he says it without much conviction.

I learn that he is an organist from Strasbourg; his wife and children have been evacuated into the Black Forest because of the fighting near their home, and he is worried, for the air raids are heavy on all the roads. I learn; "Ein, Swei, Drei" and a lot more.

We are listening to the first Glenn Miller broadcast from Paris. They introduce Glenn's newest tune: "Little Brown Jug." It is really great, the ward is fairly jumping. But Glenn Miller is missing.

Years later I read of a bomber crew's debriefing. When they jettisoned bombs over the British Channel, a tail gunner saw a bomb hit a small plane heading for France, - on the same day tht Glenn Miller's small plane vanished. The debriefing was classified and tucked away in closed files for years.

My wounds heal quickly as I walk and exercise. I wonder if the Doctors are delaying my release until after Christmas. There is an old piano in the mess hall; we gather and sing carols and dream of home. Christmas dinner is another feast of turkey and "fixings" and several kinds of pies.

I meet a studious, pudgy young PFC from another division and wonder at the fates that took him away from his campus. He shows me a slug from a German sniper's rifle. It is smaller in diameter and longer than our 30 caliber rifle bullets. The slug hit him in the chest and followed a rib around to his backbone. It was given to him by the surgeon who had removed it very carefully to avoid damaging the spinal column.

A supply clerk gives me a clean uniform and new size 9 combat boots. Very good! Since I wear an 8, there is room for two pairs of socks. Combat boots support the feet and ankles better than shoe packs. Walking and standing is easier.

I find a German utensil; a folding combination fork and spoon, and carry it tucked in a boot top for the rest of the war.

New Year's Day finds me on KP in a Replacement Depot ("Repple Depple") in Saarebourg. While scrubbing a sooty pot, I get a black smear on my shirt. A cook assigns me to wait tables in the Officer's Mess. Relief comes quickly when the dirty shirt offends the mess sergeant. I'd rather wash pots than wait on officers. In the back of the kitchen we mutter to each other; "Where do they get this shit;

treating those guys like kings while we live in foxholes - and scrub pots."

I think back over the stay in the hospital; the fellow who died, the stump of a leg pointing at me for days and nights; the nurses; American women; overworked surgeons; the sniper's slug, - Thanksgiving turkey and Christmas carols - and the shower. Oh the shower!

Armed with a new a rifle and cartridge belt from the Repple Depple, I stroll up a cobblestone street in beautiful Saarebourg to find Division HQ.

Beyond the old houses lie silent wooded hills; the beautiful Vosges Mountains. Fields are covered with snow; the hardwood trees are skeletons; black against the white snow; interrupted seemingly at random by stands of green pine.

44. BAD NEWS

At the town square, I am astonished to see the Division Band standing to the evening Retreat Ceremony. The Star Spangled Banner never sounded so good.

Standing at "Present Arms," I look past my rifle barrel and marvel at the contrast of the gray town, the distant wooded hills and the smartly dressed bandsmen. Their blue division patches, polished boots and white scarfs boast of the power of our Division; our Army; our Nation. It seems an extravagant way to wage a war; but the bandsmen double as a HQ security force.

A trumpeter looks familiar. As the band scatters, I fall in beside him; Walter Jones from the Citadel! He invites me to his room for a glass of wine, and later, dinner with the band. As we leave the mess hall, we meet young Lieutenant Eubanks; recently a PFC in Mike Company's first platoon.

We greet like old friends in a strange place. He sports a new mustache, a clean uniform, and a bright new gold bar on his collar. He looks ten years older. We avoid the awkward salute and I congratulate him on his new commission. He has just completed a crash indoctrination for new officers.

I ask about our mutual friend Bob Howell. Eubanks says; "You didn't hear

about it? A shell tore up his leg. I was with him, and we got him back to the medics pretty quick; he was in good spirits, and getting good treatment. They said he ought to make it. But a few hours later, he died. I really can't understand it." The New Lieutenant is shaken by the telling and I do not press.

I ask about the commission. "It may get to be more dangerous than being a machine gunner, but it got me off the lines for a couple of weeks, and maybe I'll get a lucky assignment." I often wonder what happened to him.

Later I learn that Howell was killed when an 88 mm shell hit in his dugout while the first platoon was being run over by a German assault. They stayed with their guns while casualties piled up like cordwood in front of their positions. It is one of the few such instances in the story of our company. The Germans are usually more careful of their resources.

45. ATTACK ON LEMBERG

While I loafed in the hospital, the Third Battalion ran into a hornets' nest. Again Ralph Reeves reports:

"The mortar platoon's first section became more of a communication section, as several of us strung wires or carried radios for the forward observers. I carried the radio for Sgt. Tim Timmerman who was forward observer for the day.

We took off early with L Company on a high contour of some kind of hill, and promptly received all kinds of shell fire. A tree burst sent shrapnel through Tim's helmet and wounded the top of his head."

"He took off to the rear (and rejoined us a few weeks later), but there I was wondering, 'For Christ's sake, what do I do now?' I mused that it was only my job to carry the radio for the sergeant, but he was gone. I wasn't hit, so it seemed absolutely chicken to leave, so I figured, 'Oh well, I will take his place the best I can, and stay with the riflemen.'"

"A few moments later I found out what an 'ashen' expression meant. Several of us were in a little group, including Lt. Ashbrook (who later was killed) and the L Company Commander (Captain Alphonso?), and also a medic named George

Demopoulos who really looked very visibly upset like I had never witnessed before. George had just patched up some guys, and had amputated a hand, and that really got to him."

"We were pinned down just below the crest of the hill by a pair of 20 mm guns using explosive shells. For the 20 mm guys, we were sitting ducks and pretty soon we advanced across a small clear space and were at a two story farm house about 50 feet from a railroad embankment, and maybe twice that far from a railroad underpass. We got no farther that day or night. Everything was near suicide from the tracks and beyond to the first few buildings of the town."

"That farm house cellar was the L Company CP for the night. There must have been ten of us, including say, four wounded. The roof and second floor got all shot up with mortars. No one slept, and in the middle of the night we got word that some L Co. guys were captured on the other side of the tracks."

"The Germans damn sure didn't want us in that town. That night a guy died who had been brain shot earlier at the tracks. Luckily, some other unit attacked about dawn straight up the Lemberg Highway (I understand) and the Germans took off in our neighborhood. The L Co. radio man and radio had been hit too, so one of the officers borrowed mine and I hot footed it back to my platoon, sans sergeant and sans radio."

"Sometime later Sgt. Timmerman returned, after recovery from his head wound. We were sharing a cozy little dugout just off the road to Lembach from Reyersweiller."

"Four mortars were set up in positions we occupied off and on for weeks. We did a lot of shooting into Reyersweiller and surrounding woods, mostly at night. Snow was thick all around but our dugout was cozy. It had a sort of "L" shaped entry tunnel which we covered with shelter halves and blankets so no light could escape."

"We had all the comforts of home meaning a telephone to platoon CP and a light. When a battery was too pooped out for the radio phones there still was plenty of juice to light a flashlight bulb. So I wired a bulb to a dead battery and voila! There was light!"

"Tim answered the phone one evening and in a little bit he burst into uncontrolled laughter like he had heard the funniest joke ever. Later he explained that he had been offered a commission as second lieutenant."

"I figured, 'Hmm, that's not so funny. Seemed like an honor (he was a buck sgt. transferred from some outfit that had buck sergeants). Tim went on to say that lieutenants were wanted for rifle platoons and he wanted no part of that. That made sense."

" Several weeks later I get a call from Sgt. Roman, our platoon sergeant. 'Reeves, do you want to be a lieutenant?' I said 'Thanks for the flattery, sergeant, but no thanks.' No peals of laughter from me and I felt a little regretful, but the experience with Tim rang in my ears. I figured too they must have run through a lot of guys before they asked me. So I was still a PFC when I left the Army after my five months in the hospital."

Ralph Reeves

---

46. THE ESCAPE

By the end of December, unknown to us, the 398th Regiment is moved north towards the Bulge and the 399th is left to cover the entire 100th Division front with only some 1,500 men.

After the Germans were turned back in the Battle of the Bulge, they turned their attention and considerable forces to a back-up plan known as "Operation Northwind." To spearhead this drive, breakouts were attempted through the thin

line held by the 100th Division and through the gap between the Seventh American Army and the French to the South.

A few days before and after New Year's Day, the thin lines of the 399th are hit by a large German force; some 20,000 men, several hundred tanks and a group of flak wagons. They attempt to break through our lines and recoup their losses at Bastogne.

Sergeant Roland Tuttle writes:

"I began New Year's Day with a 'BANG!' We were in a dugout when a German officer shot three of us. I was shot through my right ankle (FCC Ascalsis). It shattered the ball and socket joint taking parts of the heel and ankle bones as the bullet splintered, entering the calf of my leg in five places."

"We left the machine guns. As we left the hole, Reyersweiller was down below. I read that there were 65 of us, but I can't imagine there being so many there. I left on the back of PFC Frank L. Willis, as he trudged through the snow back to Siersthal. We were challenged as we came to the building where Willis dumped my carcass, for which I am ever grateful. Never could have made it out alone."

"Lt. Peeples tells me that I begged to stay with the platoon. Realizing, after the ambulance ride back to Miracourt, the agony I suffered from that ride, the shock and trauma told me that I would not be chasing any Krauts after that."

Roland Tuttle

All day long a rifle company and the Company M Second Platoon listened to German troops moving around them. They could see artillery pieces being moved on their right flank. They were surrounded. That night the order came to evacuate the positions on foot; the heavy machine guns must be left in place with their bolts removed.

The column moved quietly through the snow, barely illuminated by the starlight. Suddenly the lead scout returned to report sighting a German sentry. He was sure they had been seen. The men hugged the ground, shivering in the snow and expecting small arms, mortar or artillery fire.

Scouts advanced stealthily until they could watch the foolhardy sentry who seemed to be standing still in the middle of a clearing. They crept closer, expecting to trigger a booby trap or to be challenged, but nothing happened. Suddenly a distant flare brought enough light for them to recognize that the sentry was a 6 foot high concrete shrine housing a stone cross.

Breathing easier, the column filed past the shrine. No one laughed until they were safely back behind our new lines near the village of Siersthal.

Staff Sgt. John Aughey reports that the first platoon was less fortunate. New Lieutenant John Langley is with the first platoon when their positions are overrun by the German offense. Aughey, as section leader, ordered Pfc.'s Oscar Peck and Don Shaffer to move back with the retreating riflemen. Then Aughey moved to the other gun and retreated with them back to Siersthal. Peck and Shaffer did not show up and were later found to have been captured.

(Fifty years later Shaffer stops in Madison, Alabama to get a copy of the first edition of this book. He cannot remember what company he was in, but knew it was the 399th Regiment. Later, John Aughey told me about the capture, and Shaffer was reunited with his old section leader.)

Shaffer reports: "We were to go out with the riflemen, but they did not leave. We had a two-man hole behind the gun, and a larger hole in back where we could sleep. We were doing two men, two hours on the gun, and then two men, two hours sleeping back in the bigger hole. I had just come off guard and was sleeping pretty good when the Germans attacked."

"Now I think I should have gone back up to the gun, but if I had, I would have been killed. We were cut off and being attacked by more Germans than I ever saw. I fired my pistol by sticking it up over the edge of the hole. Then I shot at a German rifleman who was running at my hole, just as he fired. We both missed, and he stopped with his rifle pointing at my head.. I gave him my pistol; it had two rounds left. He would have killed me, but an officer stopped him. They wanted some live prisoners."

Four months later, when Shaffer is liberated by the Russians, his weight had fallen from 145 to 90 pounds.

Ralph Reeves continues:

"A couple of weeks later I suffered my one wound of the psyche, vanity, or what have you. But first let me tell you about the burning of the Citadel of Bitche. Lt. Flaum and I were on forward outpost detail in another two story farm house with woods behind us and clear farm land ahead and between us and the Citadel. We had a perfect view of my first castle, and I thought it was beautiful. We could see into the town a bit too where school buildings stood to our left front."

"We were in the attic where we could peer out of a window or lift roof tiles to look out. All of a sudden the biggest damn bombs or shells we ever heard were exploding all around us and I just knew I would be dead in seconds. I had visions of railroad guns; heading for the cellar didn't make sense; too late, and if whatever it was hit the house, the cellar was no protection."

"It took only a few seconds to determine that a self propelled 155 mm cannon had pulled up behind the house and was busy shelling the Citadel of Bitche with white phosphorous to burn it down. It seemed a shame. We had no clue whether there were Germans inside, and word was that our guys were burning the place just in case. I often wondered if there were any 'for real' targets inside that place, and how much damage was done. It was spectacular, but certainly no thrill watching it happen. Those big shells must have cleared our attic by inches. It is for sure that being a few yards in front of big stuff like that is enormously loud and frightening when you don't know what is happening and figure you are being shot at."

"We were there several days and I was summoned back to the platoon CP. I want to relate how gung ho, GI, wired tight I was as a soldier. Walking back, I wondered 'What did I do now? Did I goof or something? Why would Lt. Collins want to yak with me?' Turns out Sgt. Bruno Marino had been bitching on my behalf, saying I had too much outpost detail, and he had bitched to the Lt. to call me back. I was surprised and a bit mortified; I had done no bitching at all, myself. Lt. Collins said: 'Reeves, Sgt. Marino thinks you should be relieved and brought back. I'll do that, and put you in another section. What have you to say?'

"I was shocked numb and offended too, but wasn't lost for words very long. I stood straight as I could and said something to the effect: 'Sir, thank the sergeant for me (he was standing right there) but I am a soldier and I try to be a good

soldier. It is not the job of a soldier to complain about his assignment and I have no complaints whatever. Also, given a choice, I would never ever transfer from first section to one of the other sections. 'If there is nothing more, Lieutenant, may I return to my outpost?' Back I went, and within a couple of hours I was to get a big chuckle out of all my gung ho talk. Word went around that we were to attack across the empty field in front of us the next morning - presumably to charge the Citadel or the town.

"I figured 'Oh boy, Reeves, now you have done it! Opened your big yap to the Lt. with all that good soldier stuff and tomorrow morning you meet your Maker for sure, crossing that 500 yards or more of open field of fire for the Germans.' I guess I wasn't really funny, but I did laugh at myself, calling myself Big Jaw and less polite names."

"Instead of attack, we pulled back and ended up on Spitzburg Hill, or some damn hill from which we retreated pell mell on New Year's Day morning with bursts of shell fire about a 100 yards away. We went to Glassenberg, a tiny village atop a ridge, where we spent much time off and on that winter."

"I mounted my mortar (none of that 'leave the gun behind' bullshit) behind a house in the middle of the village. From the back yard of that house, in pretty much of a straight level line was the top of Signalberg Hill and a signal tower of some kind. I could have mounted my mortar in the backyard and sighted directly at the tower, or anything around it, but I had been through that shit at St. Die."

"One bit of tomfoolery that went on from that yard was mortar sniping at a German soldier digging in on our side of the crest near the tower. I forget the range, but let's guess 800 yards or so. Minimum range for the mortar is 550 yards and that is at an 89 degree angle. I defy anyone to distinguish between 89 degrees and straight up plumb, which I did on New Year's morning around 2:00 a.m. when we were said to be surrounded by the bad guys. When that tube is pointed at 89 degrees, you worry about the wind. There was none, but I was saying, 'Wind, don't blow now!' In soft ground, the base plate of the mortar might bury itself several inches after one round and this increases the angle of the tube."

"I would shoot one round at this German soldier digging on top of Signalberg, This dude's antics developed an audience on our side. The sound at the barrel got to the guy in a second or two and he knew he had half a minute before the shell came back to earth, possibly on his head, so when he heard the gun

he would dig furiously for a few seconds and then jump into whatever he had dug. This went on for a half dozen rounds, and to this day, I do not know what happened to him. I don't think we got him. I hope not, he was a helluva man, digging and dodging out there where the whole American Army could watch. He deserved to live and play touch football with his kids someday. I think he got bored and wandered off over the hill - or maybe we ran out of ammo. The 550 yards was the real problem, for we soon hauled ass out of there and back to our old spots on Spitzberg from which we retreated but fast a few hours later."

---

47. THE REUNION

A series of trucks carry me to the Company M HQ in the snow covered mountain village, Siersthal, France. Not too long ago it was known as Siersthal, Germany. The people speak German. The territorial conflict is ancient.

HQ for Company M is a crowded little farmhouse in the middle of town. Another soldier and myself are welcomed by the mail clerk and cooks, we are just in time for supper, and a letter is waiting for me. Later, we are sitting on the floor in the large front room when the Acting Company Commander, First Lt. Keeling, comes in and welcomes us back: "In the morning we are going to have a party and go after some high ground that we lost last week. Do you guys want to play too?"

Startled; I respond: "That's what they sent us back for, Sir." He fastens a map to the wall and shows us the positions: "We are here, and they are there. Tomorrow night we should be there and they should be gone."

The "party" looks risky to me. To the North and East of Siersthal I can see there is high ground overlooking the road to the German fortress at Bitche. The platoon leaders and platoon sergeants arrive and are briefed on the coming attack.

I leave with Lt. Witt and Sgt. Hogan; they are old friends who have survived on the front while I languished in the school hospital in Epinal. Now they look a lot more than 6 weeks older. Sgt. Revere, I hear, is back in the hospital again, this time with a minor ailment, after having been there several times with minor wounds. His guardian angel has been busy, and he is warm and dry - and safe!

The second platoon is billeted in a typical village house; the first floor is a stable; a huge manure pile occupies an open concrete enclosure in the front yard; the second and third floors are living areas.

We sleep on the hard wood floor. The latrine is an open block structure built around a hole in the ground next to the rear of the house. Not luxurious, not even comfortable, but we appreciate being warm and dry. I exchange my rifle, bayonet and cartridge belt for a gunner's pistol, trench knife, and pistol belt.

Tonight we take new belts of ammo and replace the tracers - every fourth round - with "ball" cartridges. Tracers show where your rounds are going; but they also show the enemy the exact location of your gun, as described by Reeves, earlier. I wonder what the supply sergeant does with all those tracers. More to the point; tomorrow I will be a gunner again, in another attack.

At midnight I am standing guard in front of the platoon house. The wind driven snow is decorating the village anew; even covering the steaming manure piles in front of each house. I hear the crunch of boots in the snow, and challenge an approaching soldier: It is John Langley; with new gold bars on his collar! We greet each other like the old friends that we are, and cuss each other affectionately. He wishes me luck and vanishes in the dark.

I spend the next hour wondering about all the things that have happened to him. And wishing that I could be counting the minutes on my own watch with its bright, friendly luminous dial face. The snow is already ankle deep, and still falling hard when my relief arrives.

Before dawn we wake, already partly dressed. By candlelight, we add layers of clothes for cold weather; "Long Johns," wool OD shirt and trousers (that we slept in) two pairs of socks; an OD sweater with a high snug collar; water resistant over trousers and field jacket, and a loose knit wool OD scarf. Under the helmet is a wool cap; the "beanie" with its little visor and a snug band that folds down and wraps the back of the neck and the ears. We look like big children in cruddy overstuffed snow suits.

We leave the light and warmth of the old stone farmhouse and join the rest of the second platoon in the snow covered street. The cold, predawn light reveals that my old friends have changed, and the ranks are sprinkled with new faces. Everywhere I see hollow sunken eyes, dark shadow beards, and a lethargy of

fatigue from the continuous night watches.

There are a few parkas; in one I recognize Staff Sergeant Fitzgerald. Last summer he was a rotund first sergeant, now he looks like Mauldin's cartoon of GI. Joe; his normally heavy beard accents the hollowed eyes; his paunch is replaced by the bulge of his parka, gathered into his rifle belt which sags under the weight of a full canteen and full ammo pouches. He is again, lean and hard, but now he is also a veteran of two months of combat.

Old friends greet me. Sgt. Waller, always lean and supple, now seems cadaverous. His constant good humor has worn thin, but his Oklahoma accent persists. "Hancock, ain't yew got bettah sinse then tew cum beck heah?" The logic is inescapable, but I mimic him: "Hail no! Ah never been heah befoh and Ah jist figgered yew guys would need a lil' he'p this mawnin'!"

48. "LIGHT RESISTANCE"

My new squad leader is Roy Kaminske, the heroic corporal of Raon L'Etape, now a veteran sergeant. His boyish face is haggard and haunted.

I am second gunner; the first gunner is personable Laddy Keblusek; round face and high cheekbones mark his Polish ancestry. He looks better fed, and not as tired as the others; he is younger, and has been with the platoon only a few weeks and has already earned a Bronze Star.

Next to these men, I feel fresh and ready to go in spite of (or because of) the past 6 weeks of inactivity. The feeling stays with me only for a few hours this morning of January 8, 1944.

In the predawn dark, we move out. Laddy carries the tripod, and I carry a "light" air-cooled 30 caliber machine gun, borrowed from a rifle company. A week earlier, our "heavy" water-cooled guns were abandoned in the woods behind the

German lines.

We head East from Siersthal on a dirt road covered with packed snow; then we turn left, North, and follow a path into the woods where the loose snow is over a foot deep.

Two tanks rumble past behind us on the road. We look for them to support our attack, but they roll on down the hill to our right. Gradually the rumble of the tanks fades away.

Riflemen spread out ahead of us and move cautiously from tree to tree. We break new trails through the snow, and the advance goes quietly for about a mile. I try to step in the first gunner's footprints; German mines are in our path.

As dawn breaks, the quiet is shattered by small arms fire ahead of us. I burrow into the snow, hugging the ground. From under my helmet I watch the first gunner snuggling up to a tree; and beyond, a standing rifleman is firing from behind another tree. The sky changes from a rosy dawn to a cold cobalt blue while the riflemen fire at a position straight ahead of where we lay in the snow. We cannot see what they are shooting at.

Mortar rounds slip through the trees and burst in the snow near us. One round explodes close to my left, fortunately on the other side of a big tree trunk. I had been too busy to think, but now I think of Bob Howell, and I see the image of Margarito's leg stump pointing at me. There are worse things than death. I recall the boredom at the hospital, and how I yearned to be back with the platoon. Now the warm safe hospital is a very good place to be.

Cold fear falls like a blanket over my unprotected back. It envelopes me while the firing continues, it penetrates and links with the cold from the snow. Mortar shells fall a little farther away. We do not have a field of fire for the gun; our riflemen are between us and the enemy. There is nothing to do but lie still and wait. And be chilled by fear and cold.

Distant shouting is echoed by closer calls; "CEASE FIRE!" The riflemen stop firing and move warily from behind their trees. We pick up our weapons and follow them. German soldiers file out of a large dugout; hands on their bare heads. They have abandoned their helmets, their uniforms are clean; they look freshly scrubbed, well fed and happy to be leaving the war. A POW camp will be safer than where we are going.

As we pass their dugout I look back; it is cleverly built into the reverse side of the hill. Parked between dirt walls, almost inside the rear entrance, and covered with camouflage netting, is a strange little car; a military Volkswagen. Years later we learn that our little force of 52 men took 99 prisoners that morning.

Continuing the advance, we follow a path that bends to the left along the crest of the hill. To our right are valleys and hills, to our left, dense woods. We stumble onto a series of dugouts, almost hidden by the new snow. They are the same ones that were abandoned a week before. Our squad moves into one; it is covered with logs and dirt and snow. A big water-cooled 30 caliber machine gun is still there. We find no booby-traps or mines, no tracks in the snow but our own. We have recaptured Spitzberg Hill.

The gun is ready to use; the water jacket is full of antifreeze. The bolt works. We load a belt of ammo and fire a few rounds to test the gun. I borrow the squad leader's binoculars and stand hidden by a tree a little higher on the slope, behind the gun. Scanning the hills, I see a column of Germans hurrying through the woods; but when I get down behind the gun, they are out of sight.

Lt. Witt checks our position and I show him where the Germans are still moving through the woods. They must be a half mile away; little figures in the woods; we can barely see them without the binoculars. Lt. Witt picks up the water-cooled gun with its tripod and ammo (easily 115 pounds), moves to where he can see the Germans, and fires a half a belt while holding the gun at his hip. He sets the gun down in front of my hole, checks the field of fire, and then leisurely walks away. We retreat into the dugout as mortar rounds burst in the trees around us.

After dark we take turns going back through the woods and down into a little draw where our jeep brings a hot meal and our bedrolls. That night, we have three men in the hole; one hour on and two off! What luxury!

Bill Eckard of Co. H, 397th, writes:

"I was hit in the left leg as we attacked Raon L'Etape, spent a week or two in the Epinal Hospital until December 26; worked my way through the Repple Depples, arriving in Rimling on January 6. ... I fired more rounds and did more

damage during those few days (January 8 & 9, 1945) than the rest of the war. John Barnes was there and drove me and my prisoner out - I had a sprained foot. Jack, as we called him, doesn't remember much of that final act at Rimling. It's odd, but it will stick in my mind forever - Jack trying to start a jeep in the early night - it had not been started for about 4 days - we couldn't get out of the house because we were completely cut off. Anyway, it all worked, thanks to him. After Rimling we went to the town of Forbach, I think it's west of Bitche."

The Germans gamble heavily against the 100th Division, as described by Eckard (above) and the following Presidential Unit Citation. Reportedly, Co. H, 397th, is the smallest unit ever to receive this citation, which reads:

"Co. H, 397th Regiment is cited for outstanding accomplishment in combat on 8 and 9 January, 1945, in the vicinity of Rimling, France. Under the pressure of a savagely prosecuted attack by numerically superior hostile forces which forced back adjacent elements, Company H staunchly held its ground, threw back assault after assault, and by its gallant and unyielding defense prevented encirclement of the battalion by the enemy. The initial hostile attack in the night by infantry mounted on tanks was dispersed by the deadly fire of the company's heavy machine guns and mortars, and subsequent daylight tank infantry attacks were also repulsed with heavy losses to the enemy. Attempts at infiltration by hostile soldiers wearing American parkas were thwarted and the opposing riflemen killed or forced to withdraw. Sixty three prisoners were captured ... and an estimated four hundred casualties inflicted upon the attackers in the heroic action ..."

(Eckard was evacuated with yellow jaundice after the March 15 attack.)

January 9; We scan through the trees, expecting a counterattack. Artillery shells from both sides pound the woods ahead of us, behind us, to the right and left, and, too often, burst in the trees overhead.

At mid morning I am on watch behind the gun when riflemen to our left begin firing. I glimpse German troops, through the trees to our left front. Their white camouflage is marked by the black lines of their weapons. They walk, crouching, and firing towards our lines on our left flank. Their white suits blend with the snow but mark them against the black tree trunks. I sight our heavy

machine gun and fire a burst. The Germans disappear as they hit the ground or retreat behind the trees. The firing stops as we look in vain for any further sign of the enemy.

Fifty yards to the left front of my gun is a poorly built dugout, open to the front and rear, and now manned by a lonely rifleman. The rifle platoon leader asks us to send someone to share the hole, to beef up our line of resistance. I take the light machine gun and a box of ammo, Roy brings the tripod and another ammo box. We set up the machine gun, I load it, and Roy scrambles back to his dugout which he shares with an ammo bearer. The rifleman is both younger and more frightened than I am.

January 10: from behind us, a fresh battalion sweeps through our lines; riflemen with fixed bayonets; followed by machine gunners like ourselves. In the woods to our front they are caught by a barrage of our own 105 mm shells. The shells have proximity fuses and burst in the air or in the tree tops scattering shrapnel into the troops.

We hear German burp guns and the deeper cough of M-1 rifles and BARs, dueling, unseen in the woods. Then the battalion is pulled back; they bring some of their casualties with them and continue past us to the rear. German mortar shells and machine gun bursts follow them.

Now the enemy mortar shells fall around us. We hear the coughs of the distant mortar tubes, then shrill whines and the explosions. The closer they come, the shorter the whine. There is not much warning of a near hit. The rifleman panics; "We'll be killed if we stay here!" I try to soothe him; "We'll be OK in here! Stay back in the corner! - The logs and dirt will stop the shrapnel!"

I am not so sure myself; - a direct hit would collapse our shelter, and the two openings leave us doubly exposed to stray shrapnel. Firing continues from unseen German positions ahead in the woods. I only see the trees, and survivors of the shattered battalion may still be out there.

The decimated battalion is barely out of sight to our rear when our own artillery shells burst around us. A white phosphorous shell explodes in the tree above my machine gun. Burning pieces of phosphorous dance and sizzle in the snow, so close that we could reach out and touch them. The rifleman picks up his rifle and starts out of the rear opening; "I'm getting outa here!" I grab him, pull him back into the hole, sit on him and shout into his ear: "It's safer here!" He

squirms and whimpers, and stays.

The evacuation of the stricken battalion resumes, occasionally marked by familiar cries; "MEDIC! Over here, MEDIC!" "MEH-DICK -HELP!" At dark we still hear the cries while we take turns slipping back behind the hill for a hot meal. All night the cries of agony echo through the woods; "MEDIC! OOOH MEDIC! - HELP! -HEELLP - MEH-DEEK!" We are ordered to stay in our holes; patrols have found that the Germans are calling for medics, and shooting at anyone who responds.

After dark, we watch for patrols. Ours and theirs are both out there in no man's land. The woods grow quiet and so cold that the trees make loud cracking sounds; perhaps the sap is freezing. Each sound stirs a new desperate alert. In our hole, the man on watch has a pistol, rifle and machine gun, all loaded, cocked, safeties off; ready to fire.

The rifleman and I alternate watches, but we get no respite from the cries that continue through the night. Far behind us the night is aglow from giant floodlights; "artificial moonlight." Still it is so dark that I hold my cocked pistol ready when I am on watch. There is no way I could move the machine gun or the rifle if someone were to fall upon me in the dark. At intervals, a flare falls in the woods ahead of us; we freeze motionless in the glare; searching, moving only our eyes, looking for intruders.

Before dawn we abandon our lonely outpost and the rifleman rejoins his platoon. We turn in the light machine gun to the jeep driver who brings breakfast. Back at the heavy machine gun position, a field phone is installed in our hole; and we learn that snipers have hit several riflemen. We are told that regardless of calls for medics, there are no more of our troops to our front.

This day is a little quieter. We listen for the distant cough of the mortars and move back in the dugout to escape shrapnel when the rounds hit the trees overhead. We know the sounds: our 105 mm artillery and 60 or 81 mm mortars; their 88 mm cannon and 50 or 80 mm mortars. The ratio seems to hold; about 15 to 20 rounds go out for each one coming in. Firing continues all day. Some of our rounds fall short; a 105 mm shell hits the edge of our dugout; I am sitting inside when it bursts, not more than 2 feet from my head. My ears ring from the concussion, but the frozen dirt and logs stopped all of the fragments.

We use empty C-ration cans to catch and dump urine, but defecation involves dangerous exposure; usually reserved for night. To leave the hole in the daytime, one rolls quickly over the back opening; crouches and runs for cover in the woods. No one in our holes uses a helmet as a chamber pot, as reported by others in the Vosges.

After dark and before dawn we take turns going back to the sheltered little valley for hot food and hot coffee. A pipeline of hot coffee and a hot shower would be heaven! Again, machine gun bullets whisper through the tree limbs overhead. "They" seem to know where the mess jeep is, and when it comes, but the bullets do not drop into the sheltered draw. The jeep driver is anxious to leave as soon as everyone is fed.

We hang a blanket to separate the covered dugout from the opening by the gun. Now there are three of us; one hour on and two off. Not bad! The two sleepers are so crowded that they must turn over at the same time!

I am roused from sleep by the man I am to relieve; he lights a candle while I bundle up and put on my pistol belt. I crawl over to the hanging blanket and whisper: "Put the candle out!" He shields it with his hand and I slip under the blanket. A light blinks over my shoulder.

Furious because I think the light came from the candle, I move quickly behind the gun, and my foot strikes something in the bottom of the hole. I pick it up; it feels like a metal goose egg with a raised seam around it. I hold it inside the blanket. "What the Hell is this?" "IT'S A KRAUT GRENADE! GIT IT THE HELL OUTA HERE!" I turn and throw the grenade, blind, in the dark, remembering where there is a gap in the trees. Nothing happens.

"WHERE IS HE?" The woods are silent. Nothing stirs while I strain my eyes and ears. All night I ponder; "How could he have gotten so close? What would have happened if it had not been a dud? Why did my buddy take time to insert "THE HELL" in the middle of his warning?" The half second might have been fatal if the grenade fuse had been alive. Maybe the candle light killed my night vision.

The next evening near dusk I venture out again, and peer out from behind the tree above the dugout. With the binoculars I see a column of Germans lined up at what looks to be a horse drawn mess cart. I pick out a tree which marks their location and then scramble down behind the gun and sight it on the tree.

A twig snaps behind me and I whirl with drawn pistol; it is our old Company Commander, now acting as Battalion commander. I give him the binoculars and show him where the Germans are still busy dishing chow. I tell him about where the gun is sighted. He looks, then hands me the binoculars and says, "Well, what are you waiting for?"

I crouch behind the gun and fire about half a belt, maybe a hundred rounds, while traversing the gun around the tree landmark. Then I look back to where the Captain had been standing, and the forest is quite empty. I duck back into the dugout as mortar shells burst in the tree above us.

The other gunner asks: "What was that all about?" And when I tell him, he thinks it is pretty funny that the Captain vanished so quickly. It is the first, but not the last time that I see Captain Derryberry at the front.

That night I return from the chow jeep to find a new neighbor. During my absence of a half-hour or less, a rifleman has killed a German soldier, not 20 yards away from our gun. In the commotion of men going to eat, our gunner did not see the German approaching our hole, but a rifleman did. I wonder if it is the same man who dropped the grenade in our hole the night before.

Trees move in the wind and their moonlight shadows shift across the figure lying still in the snow, so that he appears to move. I know that he is quite dead, for the medic checked him. We will not jeopardize a recovery team to bring a fallen foe from this exposed position. He will keep well enough in the bitter cold.

To the left of our dugout, we see 3 or 4 dugouts, spaced 40 to 50 yards apart and manned by riflemen. Beyond them, out of sight, is the dugout housing the other gun of our section. To our right we look down a steep wooded hillside with no more friendly positions in sight. We seem to be at the end of the line. So at night, any sound on the hillside below is assumed to be hostile. And one night I hear a scrape - scrape sound, like someone walking.

The grenade was touted by our training instructors as a good weapon to use at night since "there is no revealing muzzle blast." I pull the pin from a grenade and lob it down the hill in the direction of the sounds, ducking down in the hole in one motion. To my amazement the grenade fuse leaves a trail of sparks from my hand to the explosion which I see only as a flash of light against the trees. Then the quiet returns, broken only by the distant sounds of gunfire and artillery. At dawn I look where the grenade exploded; a tree limb, broken by shell fire, is swinging in the freshening wind; the sound is suddenly very familiar.

Not far from us, PFCs Paul Costello and Charles Wunderlich are carrying hot food containers across a bare field when shells hit the edge of the field. One bursts right in front of them; Charles jumps into a ditch on top of a mortally wounded German soldier and Paul is felled by numerous shrapnel hits. Seeing Paul lying exposed, bleeding and unconscious on the ground, Charles picks him up and carries him to the jeep. Only then does Charles see blood oozing from his own pants leg, and they both wind up in the hospital. Paul recovers and returns to the front, wondering what happened to Charles (who was sent back to the States). At a 1987 Division reunion, Paul is amazed to find that Charles is still alive, and finally thanks Charles for saving his life.

Sgt. Roy Kaminske is fighting an illness. Finally, the medic orders him back to the hospital. Before leaving, he confides: "I've been pissing blood in the snow!" He has yellow jaundice. I turn over my pistol to an ammo bearer who becomes the new gunner. Roy takes the ammo bearer's carbine to the rear. I am acting squad leader, complete with Roy's rifle. Scattered sniper, mortar and artillery fire keeps us in our holes until the night of January 15 when the first battalion relieves us.

Back at Siersthal we get showers, clean clothes, mail, and the "Stars and Stripes;" the Army's newspaper. The lead story tells about a major breakthrough by the Third Army, and then near the bottom of the page: "The Seventh Army moved to straighten the front lines against light resistance." It seemed pretty heavy to me.

49. THE VILLAGE

Somehow, we spend about two weeks on the front and only two or three days in reserve. No doubt the other three battalions have the same problem, and maybe part of the problem is that a battalion cannot leave until the fresh battalion is in place; so both battalions count that day as a day on the front.

Those few days in reserve are like heaven, walking in the streets of Siersthal; getting showers and clean clothes, three hot meals, and sleeping indoors, warm and dry. After a night or two inside, my hips and shoulders get sore from sleeping on the hard floor. In the dugouts we smooth little depressions in the ground and we

are padded with winter clothing.

We talk with the villagers. The native language here is German. A few of us are from German parents or studied German in college. Ironically, our Jewish soldiers can translate, finding that German is similar to Yiddish.

A barber is cutting my hair when I learn two new words from a watching schoolgirl; "Dicht und schmutzig!" "What did she say?" "She says it is THICK and DIRTY!" Well, I did understand the "und!" And she's right about my hair: "sehr (very) dicht und schmutzig!"

We are walking to the "mess hall" late in the afternoon. Overhead the blue sky is speckled with returning American B-17's heading for England, and threading a maze of antiaircraft fire. Siersthal is so close to German positions that their antiaircraft shells are bursting, maybe 15,000 feet ABOVE US!

One bomber is hit and peels away to the west, safe behind our lines, if they get out before the crash. A piece of antiaircraft shrapnel lands near where I am standing, watching the incredible tableau. The jagged piece of metal, about as big as a half dollar, sizzles in the snow.

Bigger pieces must be falling; we go on to chow, but not until the last bomber is out of sight, the firing has stopped, and a lazy trail of black smoke appears where the stricken plane vanished.

Late afternoon, we pack to return to the front that night, well after dark. I show the squad how to put a new barrel in the machine gun. The old barrel looks pretty good, but someone has decided to replace it; maybe because it sat out in the woods for weeks without being oiled every day. Then too, it was not cleaned after Lt. Witt and I had fired a total of several hundred rounds through it. And I have no idea how much this gun has been used in the last two months!

The new gun barrel is full of Cosmoline; a black preservative. More like asphalt than grease; it is hard when cold. I warm the barrel next to the stove and finally get a ramrod to carry a cleaning patch through to the chamber.

One of our ammo bearers watches me install the barrel, and moves close to my side. At 27 he is the oldest man in the squad; maybe the oldest in the platoon. A recent draftee, he is good-humored, and well liked. Quietly, he says: "Frank, I'm not going back with you." Amazed, I put down the gun barrel; "What?" This is unheard of; what will they do to him?

"I'm not going back. I've got two little girls at home, and I want to live to

see them again. I want to get back to them with enough of me left to be able to take care of them." He shows me their picture. Little charmers!

I think how lucky I am still to be single; the thought of leaving a family; or worse, coming home crippled, to be a burden - but I say: "I can't do anything about it, you'd better talk to the Lieutenant."

I install the packing around the gun barrel and fill the jacket with antifreeze: "GI" Prestone, in cans painted olive drab. My mind follows the ammo bearer; men have been shot for less! We miss him later that night when we move out to relieve another battalion on the front.

I need not have worried; our understanding Company Commander assigns him to permanent KP for the rest of the war. Our kitchen is seldom out of artillery range, but it is almost never hit and has few - or no casualties. He also serves ... - - and what he did that day was an act of courage and love.

In the middle of the night, carrying our guns and bedrolls to the front, we are almost to our new positions when we pass a dead white horse and trees, splintered by shell fire.

I think of the options, of going home proud of my service; in shame as a deserter; or more likely, disabled or not at all.

The kitchen seems like a good place to be.

50. HOT CORNER

Before dawn, in the darkest hour of the night, I stand a lonely vigil while the gunners go behind the lines for breakfast. When my turn comes, I roll out of the dugout on Spitzberg Ridge; scramble back into the woods; wade through the snow, and pass the dead white horse.

The mess jeep is a few hundred yards behind the lines, hidden by the dark trees. The cook dumps oatmeal, powdered eggs and toast into half of a mess kit held in my left hand. The other hand holds a canteen cup full of hot coffee.

The rifle strap tries to slip off my shoulder while I lean against a friendly tree and slowly slide down to sit in the snow. Thank God - and the cooks - for the

heat from the coffee. The rifle leans against the tree - and the coffee cup perches in the snow while I eat and gulp the coffee before it gets cold.

Warmth flows from my middle, out to every limb. The sense of well being defies the sound of random German machine gun bullets, once more whispering harmlessly through the trees overhead.

The jeep also brings cans of "C" rations for lunch; and little wax-filled cardboard boxes called "heat blocks" that we burn to heat the ration cans. The cook presents us with a box marked "Mother Smith's Doughnuts." The fried cakes are still warm. Thank you Smitty, the Cook.

The first light of dawn reveals our machine gun, sitting on top of the dugout; exactly where the previous tenants had their gun sitting before their hasty departure last night. It is pointing in the direction from which we came, and from where I stand in the firing pit, the gun can only be fired into the woods, to our flanks or to the rear. No doubt our predecessors sat the gun there to speed their quick departure; but they failed to tell us where it belonged, or where the Germans might be. In the dark, that remained a mystery.

Now we see that the dugout is nestled between trees at the edge of a field. The edge of the woods is our front line. The field is no man's land. To our left, Item Company riflemen occupy dugouts, concealed in the woods near the field. The nearest one is barely in sight; perhaps 50 yards away; a big gap to think about at night. Worse, once again our right is guarded only by a steep hillside dropping through the woods to a road below.

We move the gun to face the open field. In the distance, two lines of trees mark a snow covered road that passes behind the buildings of the Freudenberg Farm, now occupied by the Germans. Near the farm are mounds in the snow; dugouts like ours, but probably hiding hostile occupants.

The far tree line curves around our right side until it blends with the woods on the steep hill below our right flank. About 50 yards to our right front, a break in the trees slopes down the hill to a pill box almost hidden by the trees. The gray concrete structure is some 12 feet high and wide; part of the Maginot Line. The "firebreak" is a good field of fire for our gun; - or perhaps for a German gun mounted in the pill box.

We dig the gun a little deeper into the ledge at the edge of our dugout and hide the dirt in the snow. No one is in sight. The woods are empty all the way around us. Almost hidden in the trees to our left, we can see only the outline of a mound of snow; the first of the series of dugouts, each occupied by two riflemen.

White parkas with fur liners have finally arrived for everyone, and we place a piece of a white sheet over the gun to blend (we hope) with the snow.

The newly connected field phone brings an unusual order from the rifle company commander; "TEST FIRE ALL GUNS!" We hesitate, reluctant to attract that kind of attention. Each of the riflemen in the holes to our left fires a few rounds. Scattered shots reveal positions much farther to our left. Silence on our right means that once again we are anchoring the right end of the Division's line. It is time for our "test fire."

The ammo belt is already threaded into the receiver. I turn the gun to face the pill box, aim the sights at its menacing black slit, pull back and release the bolt, and pull the trigger. The hammer falls with an empty click. I yank the bolt back, release it again; another empty click.

Two unfired cartridges are ejected from the gun. A little Cosmoline on their shoulders tells the story; the barrel is clean, but the chamber is still lined with Cosmoline, and this is no time to take the gun apart.

A rifle cleaning tool does not budge the frozen Cosmoline in the chamber. I move the ammo belt back into its box, eject the third cartridge, and hold a burning heat block in the open receiver close to the chamber. Black, molten Cosmoline drips into the snow under the gun. I drop the heat block, thread in the ammo belt, pull back the bolt and slam it shut as far as it will go, but it still does not seat.

Again, the heat block flame warms the empty chamber until more Cosmoline melts into the snow. At last, when I force the bolt forward, a round seats in the chamber. A pull on the trigger fires the round, but the cartridge case, caught in the Cosmoline, holds the bolt closed.

The bolt is forced back again, and the cartridge ejects reluctantly. I slam the bolt home, fire a second round; and force the bolt back, again and again, for 5 or 6 more rounds. Then the chamber clears and a single pull on the trigger fires a burst of six rounds, fully automatic. I enjoy a big sigh of relief.

A firing machine gun draws attention. A hunch, perhaps a sixth sense, or

maybe just a little caution, drives me to sit down in the hole. Just as I sit, a burst of machine gun fire riddles the tree behind our hole; in line with where my head had been. The sound is higher pitched than that of our guns; and fast; more like a roar than individual rounds. The famous "burp" gun was pointed at me, but missed by a split second and a few inches. A few minutes later mortar rounds burst in the trees around our dugout while we huddle, almost safely underground in the back of our dugout.

(I was doubly fortunate; a round not properly seated in the chamber can explode in the gunner's face.)

We try not to think about what might have happened if we had been attacked at dawn while our gun was still fouled with Cosmoline. There is only room for one man behind the gun, but he can reach a rifle, a carbine, a pistol, a half dozen grenades, and the gun. But the gun, our primary weapon, was not working until mid morning.

We listen to firing from German rifles, machine guns and mortars. They are hidden in the farm buildings and fields in front of us, in the pillbox to the right front, and in the woods to our right. Once again, to leave the dugout in daylight, one must roll quickly over the back edge, crawl into the woods; and then stay out of sight behind the trees.

The afternoon passes in relative quiet. We watch from behind the gun; no one stands and no one leaves the hole until dark. At intervals, mortar shells land in the trees nearby while the man "on watch" takes cover with the men in the back of the hole. There are a few rifle shots to our left from both sides of the front. A BAR and a burp gun duel for a few seconds in the distance.

Mortar and artillery fire is nearly continuous; a few mortar rounds hit the trees around us, a random type of firing, answered by our own mortars and artillery somewhere, well out of sight behind us. The ratio continues in our favor; one round comes in, ten or twenty go out. Again I think, "If life is this tenuous on our side, what must it be like for them?"

On watch, I am startled by a sound behind me; and whirl with a carbine ready to fire. A lieutenant colonel is standing by the tree behind me and he is looking over my shoulder through a pair of binoculars. The silver leaf painted on his helmet looks like a target.

I caution him about snipers and point out the bullet holes in the tree close to his knee. He moves a little behind the tree but continues to survey the fields, the farm building, the mounds in the snow and the pill box in the fire lane. I turn back

to the gun and continue my own surveys from a much lower position. When I look back again, he is gone.

A few hours later, a weapons carrier pulls a 57 mm antitank gun into a clearing to our right rear. The crew jumps out, unlimbers the gun, and fires a dozen rounds. I cannot see where the shells land. (Are we pretending to have a right flank?) Then the crew hitches the gun back to their truck, loads up and drives away hastily. Seconds later, German artillery and mortar shells fall, searching our woods and the area the gun had just vacated, while we hide in the back of our dugout.

To the front I hear distant tanks moving in the dark. We have no defense against tanks except the artillery, somewhere far behind us. But we see no tanks. Germans have been known to broadcast the sound of tanks through public address systems.

Every night we wait and watch as patrols of riflemen probe enemy positions in front of us. Sporadic flares briefly light the fields and woods. Far behind us, searchlights generate artificial moonlight. Shadows in the snow are "spooky."

While the patrols search, I am grateful to be a machine gunner in a snug dugout. Most patrols consist of a single squad, under-strength at 5 or 6 riflemen. They are "ordered" - (sometimes "requested") - to advance until they reach their objective; or hear enemy sounds, or until the enemy opens fire, or until they bag a prisoner. Only then are they to return. Some patrols go only as far as their courage will allow.

Days are tense. Nights are terrifying. The snow is almost two feet deep, and it is so cold! In the coldest part of the nights, we again hear loud cracking sounds, almost like pistol shots as the sap freezes in the trees. We remain in the dugout, occasionally under fire from the Germans.

One night I am standing my hour on guard, exposed to the weather in the firing pit behind the machine gun. The wind bites through parka and scarf, through the layers of clothes. When relieved, I crawl gratefully back into the dark dugout to sleep; but sleep is fitful - I am so COLD! The end of the hour is SO welcome.

The cold follows me, back in the sleeping bag. Suddenly I am walking into our warm living room at home. Mother is sitting, waiting for me, with a shawl lying across her lap. I fall on my knees and put my head on her lap; I can feel the shawl on my cheek. "It's so cold out there!" She says: "It will be all right soon."

Her hand reaches out and instantly I am back in the dugout.

I pull my jacket over my head to hold the heat from my breath. My teeth stop chattering. As I drift off to sleep, I feel that she sensed that touch from so far away. Years later, my brother tells me. "She did."

Lt. John Langley is wounded in the hand and gaily rides off with his "million dollar wound." He returns to the mortar platoon, three weeks later.

My squad has had no casualties here, but the lines of riflemen are thinning. Our mortar crews send some of their men to fill out the rifle positions.

Pfc.'s Charles Wunderlich and Hartmut "Foos" Arntz are equipped with rifles and sent to a riflemen's dugout, a few hundred yards to the left of our machine gun position. Late in the evening, a sniper's bullet goes through Arntz's helmet, clips a hole in his wool cap, and cuts the hair on the side of his head.

That night at the chow jeep, Arntz shows the damaged helmet to the driver and says; "I'm going to keep this and show it to my grandchildren!"

Next day Arntz and Wunderlich take turns, using Wunderlich's watch to time their hour on guard, occasionally peeking above the edge of their dugout, trying to find the sniper. Wunderlich warns; "Make it quick!" But a shot hits Arntz, killing him instantly. He falls on top of Wunderlich, who finds only a small hole in his friend's cheek. Wunderlich recovers his watch from his friend's hand, and leaves as the troops move out of those positions. He does not return to that dugout. ("Hartmut" is defined as "hart; strong;" and "mut; courage." Arntz's Mother emigrated from Germany in the early '30's. His Father was an SS Captain.)

The mortar platoon suffers additional casualties when a gasoline stove blows up in a house and ignites stored mortar shells . PFC Melieire, Sergeants Zinanchek (?) and Patton are killed, and several men suffer injuries which take them back to the hospital. Sgt. Evan Miller wins the Distinguished Service Cross when he rescues several men from the inferno.

A few days later, a boil develops on my cheek; maybe a whisker, infected from not being washed for a week. A medic tells me, on the field phone, to walk back to the aid station and get it lanced. I roll out of the hole, crawl a few feet and run into the woods to a different world.

There are no German positions in sight; no companions rubbing elbows,

climbing over me in the crowded dugout. The sky is a magnificent blue; the mountains stretch away; the snow contrasts with the dark green pine foliage and black tree trunks. "GOD! You made a beautiful world!"

A medic at the aid station quickly drains and dresses the boil. The pain eases and I head back to the dugout. The beauty of these snow covered mountains is overwhelming. Dazzling whiteness contrasts with thick stands of tall green pines. I can see for miles through gaps in the trees. While I search for enemy positions in the distance, the path narrows under my feet and I am suddenly rolling down the mountain. Caught by a shrub, I sit in the snow, clutch my rifle and watch my helmet roll down the mountainside.

I enjoy the time that it takes to recover the helmet and climb back to the path; a welcome delay, even though the location may be visible to German positions. I tumble back into the dugout just in time for my turn on watch behind the gun.

When our relief arrives, we take care to point out the enemy pillbox and the sinister mounds in the field ahead. And we show the new squad where to set their gun. Then we carry our gear and the guns back to our jeep.

We wonder at our great good luck. For two weeks, we were under fire from snipers, machine guns, and a continuous barrage of mortar and cannon fire. Nearby riflemen were hit, and several were killed, including our own Hartmut Arntz. Yet, our little section of eight men is not touched. Amazing!

A single jeep with a trailer carries nine of us (including the driver) along with two machine guns, ammo, bedrolls and sidearms, through the snow covered woods. In four wheel drive, the jeep plows through the foot deep snow, pushes down brush and small trees, and finally breaks free onto the road back to Siersthal. I am really impressed by this little vehicle.

Another short rest in Siersthal; showers, clean clothes, and time to clean our weapons, indoors.

A gunner in my squad ejects the magazine from his pistol; pulls back the slide and releases it. This should eject any round that might be in the chamber; but then he points the pistol down and blows a hole in the wood floor next to his foot.

Dr. Donald Fernbach writes:

"I had the advantage of being just a shade to the rear as an antitank cannoneer (2nd Bn. HQ Co.). We dug many a defensive position, but never encountered a moving German tank. One of our guys fired his pistol, as yours did, in a tile kitchen - the bullet bounced around a few times, but missed everyone. At Lemberg we test fired our 57 (mm cannon) and heard a click instead of a blast. The firing pin must have been jogged loose. Sickening feeling when we learned we had been sitting on a useless gun, thinking we were ready to protect the free world. To make it worse, the 50 caliber machine gun jammed after three rounds when it was tested. Our platoon had no KIA or WIA; my guardian angel was exceptional."

We move out to another part of the front where new perils await - but I am happy to be far away from that “hot corner” on Spitzberg Ridge.

51. THE PILLBOX

We march on a narrow paved road, to new positions to the northwest. We are short-handed; I trade the rifle for a pistol as I am now both first gunner and squad leader.

Aircraft engines roar and machine guns fire along the road behind us as we flee uphill into the woods. I look back in time to see an American P-47 strafing the empty road. Rumor has it that Germans had captured a few P-47's; - we'd like to think that this is one of them and not one of ours!

We relieve another regiment; our new position is in a Maginot Line pill box with thick concrete walls and a firing slot just right for our gun. From the slot we see the right flank of the Freudenberg Farm. The road from behind the Farm passes through our field of fire and then close to our left.

In earlier positions we were isolated from the other gun of our section. Now

the other gun, manned by Sgt. Beckett and his gunners, is about fifty yards to our left on the other side of the road. .

At dusk, a gunner in Beckett's squad (PFC Lindsey) runs out into the field in front of our guns, fires his pistol repeatedly in the direction of the Farm and yells: "Come out and fight you yellow bastards!" Perhaps he has been drinking.

We live in crowded intimacy; every man is armed with a loaded weapon; a round in the chamber and often the safety is off. We are careful of the weapons and I think we are very polite to each other.

The pill box is dry and protects us from the wind except for cold air coming in through the firing slot. We rig a stove from an oil can and salvage enough stove pipe to run it out through the door in the rear. Dry and almost warm; it is nearly comfortable, compared to the dugouts. Soon the smoky stove coats us with soot.

As dark nears, the field phone alerts us to the passage of rifle patrols. Through the night, flares light the fields and the Farm; artificial moonlight casts a glow to the southwest. The artillery and mortars duel at intervals. We see no one.

On the third day, the rifle platoon leader instructs us, by field phone, to aim our guns at a designated clearing in the field near the Farm where they have seen the Germans muster every night. The patrol has a phone line from an outpost where they can watch the clearing and tell us when to fire.

By chance, I am on watch about midnight when the field phone rings. I pick it up and hear the rifle platoon leader say: "OK, Beckett, open fire!" Beckett's gun begins firing. I wonder when they will order my gun to fire; it is loaded and ready, safety off.

My left index finger rests on the trigger while my right hand clamps the phone to my ear. Beckett's gun suddenly stops firing. The silence is overwhelming. A flare casts a big circle of flickering light on the snow in the middle of the field, but there is no sign of its occupants.

At breakfast, the rifle platoon leader congratulates us on hitting the German formation. "They took some casualties and moved out of there fast." I ask why he did not ask for our gun to fire too. He says: "I thought Beckett was the section leader, and he would order both guns to fire."

Our orders were to fire when told to, and for my gun, the order never came. A few unfired rounds will hardly lengthen the war, but getting that gun into the

right place at the right time involved a terrible cost; all the way from our early training, through the battles of the last three months, to the recent magnificent efforts of the rifle patrols. I wonder, "Who did I spare, so inadvertently, that night? Will he fire at us one day soon?" Fifty years later, I still wonder.

Ralph Reeves writes:

"There was a wooded hill near Glassenberg village, near where Hartmut Arntz was killed. The forward rifle guys were entrenched at the edge of a clearing, maybe 100 yards wide, and then more woods beyond was German territory. In the clearing, which was no man's land, was this stash of German 80 mm mortar ammunition. A detail of us mortar guys went up there and grabbed it. No one shot at us until we had collected every last round. Then long range machine gun fire went rattling through the trees around us, sounding like woodpeckers, but no harm done. I also found a few rounds of French 81 mm shells."

"Our forward observer stationed himself where no harm could be done to himself or anyone else, and we developed a rudimentary range table simply by shooting the 80 mm shells (in our 81 mm mortar)... "

"Mortar Gunnery in combat was quite different from how we were taught. In training, the observer directed so many mils left or right of an aiming stake, and how far ahead or back to shoot the next round. In combat we ignored the stake after the first round and directions were simply 'half turn left,' 'half down,' or 'one turn right, one turn up and fire.' The observer knew from experience how much a turn in any direction meant as to where the shell would hit next."

"The German 80 mm could only shoot 2,600 yards versus our 3,150 yards, so the only thing to do was to shoot a couple of rounds and use that as a reference. It worked fine until we ran out of German ammunition."

"About that time I ran across the chemical company again, and they gave our squad one of their mortars and a bunch of shells, mostly white phosphorous. The story was that they had been issued new mortars with stronger tubes because the first tubes tended to unravel with heavy use and heavy charges. They didn't give us any of their heavy shells that could have killed us, and they advised against long range with heavy charges. Fine, we shot up a storm with what they gave us.

A week or so after that, the jeep driver got rid of the 4.2 mortar, and we began to receive more 81 mm ammunition."

"One of us read about a strike in the States among some workers at ammunition plants. We were very unforgiving of those workers."

"I recall an abandoned area that for many years had been a no man's land between the old Maginot and Siegfried line. Our whole platoon was lazing around in some field enjoying a rare bit of nice weather. Myself and some dude decided to explore and walked off."

"We came upon a barbed wire fence with the warning sign 'MEINEN GEFAHR' or something like that. The keep-out warning was perfectly clear so it was our challenge to enter and look around, figuring 'Phooey - this isn't dangerous if one is careful!' I shortly had a comeuppance; I tripped or kicked a wire, but just lightly, for nothing happened. It sure got our attention. We found the mine; a big old Bouncing Betty, and the pin that triggered the damn thing was just half way through the hole."

"We realized that we came within 1/32nd of an inch of being killed. Did that bother us? No, it was exciting! We dug up the mine (for kicks!) like we needed a souvenir. That wasn't enough; we carried the damn thing out and were walking along the dirt road next to the fence, coming our way, was a group of guys led (I believe) by Major Pinaro. We stopped and so did they, for they saw what we had. So there we were, a standoff about 50 feet apart. The Major commanded: 'Put that thing down and report here at once!' I was carrying, and so gently put it in the middle of the road; and said to my buddy 'Let's get out of here!' And that is exactly what we did. We went into reverse and got the hell out of there. I don't remember running, but we must have. You can bet the Major was pissed. For many years I would recall that little incident, and for some strange reason it would just frighten me something terrible! That tiny fraction of an inch from unintended suicide haunted me like no other danger that I ever experienced."

"We've been packing for a move, it is an enormous nightmare ... no wonder I miss the smug self-sufficiency of going into combat with nothing more than I can carry. I miss the joy of being unencumbered, but worked so hard to collect all that stuff..."

Al Bowman, the "old" Panama Forces antiaircraft gunner, invites me to accompany him from our pillbox, on a tour of the nearby Maginot fort. (We leave

two men “on watch” by the gun.)

Near the fort, we find a GI helmet; "How good are these things?" A shot from my 45 caliber pistol at the top of the helmet (with just enough angle to avoid a returning ricochet) dents the helmet, but does not penetrate. A second shot penetrates the dent. The smaller diameter, higher powered 30 caliber rifle bullet with its higher muzzle velocity, can penetrate a helmet easily.

We enter the fort and examine a French 75 millimeter cannon mounted in the face. The ground in front of us is saturated with bomb craters. Al is impressed.

"Look at all this ammo, I can fire this thing! Go up in the tower and tell me where to fire."

I climb the steps and find an observation slit high in the wall of the fort. Our pill box, the Farm, the road to Bitche are a panorama from here. Al fires the cannon; the shell bursts in the field by the Farm. We correct the aim, and drop rounds on the farm house and other buildings, but there is no sign of life and no return fire.

Once again we return to Siersthal for a rest and showers.

52. THE THAW

The cycle continues; eight to twelve days on the front, then a few days rest. We save sugar from C - rations, and then, when we are back in town, we scrounge a little butter or shortening and a few apples, and Al Bowman bakes an apple pie; almost as good as Mom's!

The villagers offer a little hot boiled milk; we really miss fresh milk, but this is no substitute. YUK!

There is mail, and time to write letters, both in town and in the dugouts. A few candy bars and some tobacco products appear as "PX rations." They are not expensive, but several times when we are in the front lines, Lt. Witt buys PX rations for the entire platoon.

We are back on the same Spitzberg Ridge that we had recaptured early in

January. The Germans are still out there, waiting; occasionally firing a burp gun, a round from a sniper, or a mortar round. Their artillery seldom fires. The front is much quieter now.

We are barely settled into these dugouts again when cold rains sweep the hills and melt the snow. Each dugout become a muddy slippery mess. Melting snow reveals a three month accumulation of debris and feces. Our positions are plainly marked by the trash and threatened by lack of sanitation. We hasten to clean up the areas and restore a little natural camouflage.

On the night of February 12th, our rifle platoons stage two raids. We huddle behind our machine gun, waiting and watching for them; but they return by another route.

We are a little more careless about leaving the dugout. I am outside in broad daylight, when I hear the cough of a German mortar that has previously shelled our position; I dive into the dugout and bowl over a gunner sitting at the entry hole. The shell bursts in the tree overhead, and I apologize for knocking him over. He thanks me for bringing him in, for he had not heard the sound of the mortar.

We continue the almost-comfortable routine of one hour on watch and two off. We have time for rest, for letters and reading, and for thinking.

Keeping my glasses clean has not been the problem that I expected, so long ago at Ft. Meade. No matter how wet and dirty, there is always a dry clean part of my clothing for wiping the lenses. A little dirt on the lenses does not interfere with details seen at a distance as the helmet shields the lenses from sun and rain.

On watch, one scans the far tree lines for any sign of enemy activity. Standing watch on a mild afternoon, I see a field mouse picking his way through the twigs, maybe 10 yards in front of the machine gun. A shot from a carbine cuts the ground away from under him; he does a double roll and races away out of sight.

If the mouse is properly in the carbine sights; and if I fire accurately, will the round be more likely to go over or under the mouse? The sights are on top of the carbine; for the first few feet, the round will be lower than the line of sight to the target. I think about my old boast; "I can hit anything that I can see."

Every night a German plane drones through the sky overhead; "Bed Check

Charlie." Several times we hear a sporadic roar marked by flames in the sky; later we learn it was a V-2 rocket, on the way to our rear echelons. Hope it does not hit our mail, riding the supply lines all the way from some French seaport.

Following the rain, blue skies bring out our P-47's; they patrol our front and bomb targets in the Bitche area. The cycle continues: a few days in reserve, another apple pie whipped together by Al Bowman; another 10 days on the front.

Ralph Reeves writes:

"I was with Lt. Flaum when he opened a package and there is this little book, "You Can Never Go Home Again" by Thomas Wolfe. The Lieutenant is thrilled, and seemed to miss the macabre humor of it. I thought I might die laughing, but contained it until I got some distance from him."

We move about more freely; shell fire is rare and we see few Germans. We hold "The Winter Line" for 72 days. Unknown to us, the Germans launched "Operation Northwind" at our lines in late December and early January. It was a major effort to break out after the failure of the "Bulge" at Bastogne. Ski troops, crack SS mountain divisions, and Panzers (tanks) bent our defenses, but failed to break through. I saw their white clad attackers; and felt blessed that I had only heard their tanks a few times at night in the distance. Now the opposition is weaker.

On March 14 we are back in Siersthal. This night we sleep uneasily for tomorrow, on the Ides of March, we will attack the positions that had inflicted so many casualties in December and January. The enemy has had time to lay mines and fortify their defenses. A few troops with a little support from artillery and air can hold such positions against heavy odds. Beyond their Maginot forts lies the vaunted Siegfried Line; its seemingly impenetrable "dragon teeth" tank barriers are already visible from some of our observation posts.

Once again, long before dawn, we move out. The Germans are waiting, ready again to trade real estate for our lives.

53. SONS OF BITCHE

The first light of dawn filters through the trees, casts shadows in the fog, and reveals the Third Battalion, advancing through the woods far to the right of the Freudenberg Farms. I carry the tripod of a light machine gun and watch the riflemen ahead of us, as they carefully walk around little wooden boxes; "schuh-mines," no longer hidden by snow. We follow just as carefully. Explosions from mines, artillery fire, and small arms roar and rattle through the woods to our left. The First and Second Battalions attacked there, and ran into 4,000 mines and a strong infantry defense. Three of our tanks are knocked out in this fight.

Far to our left front we hear screeching rockets, the "Nebelwerfers." We call them "Screaming Meemies." From a hilltop I see, perhaps a mile away, a battery of these rockets being launched: exhausts flaming and billowing smoke, a sound like the iron wheels of a streetcar turning a curve, and then scattered explosions in our lines to our left. These rockets are not accurate, but they lay down an intense barrage with a nerve-racking sound. We are relieved to find none in our area.

Riflemen see distant troops to our left front, and call a brief alarm. Just as we are about to open fire, the strangers are identified as our own.

We stop, regroup, start and stop again, and continue through the woods most of the day. As dark approaches, we dig slit trenches to form a rude defensive line for the night. At dawn we are off again; a brief jeep ride, and then we carry our guns up into a new range of hills. Our "light" machine guns seem heavier than ever (and the mountains are actually steeper here) - after the months of relative inactivity in the defensive positions - and before that, in the hospital.

.

I have no hint of where we are, and expect to see the Citadel of Bitche any minute. But after all the talk of a town, I only see woods and hills.

From the edge of a woods we look down on the bare fields of a pleasant valley. Perhaps 200 yards away, three Germans in field gray uniforms are walking away from us. I hear a few rifle shots as I set up the light machine gun, take a

hasty look down the barrel, and fire a few rounds.

The Germans take off their tunics and wave a white undershirt; we cease firing and they come back up the hill to be escorted to our rear by a couple of happy riflemen. (They get to go back too!)

The Germans are laughing; they had been left behind to blow up a bridge, but our firing interrupted them. One of the Germans points at my gun, and a riflemen translates; "The Americans do not shoot very well!" Nearby riflemen seem happy with the results; "We should be so lucky!" I join in their laughter; no doubt they are happy to be alive after such a close call.

These three Germans really were lucky. If I had been firing a water cooled gun, the line of sight along the barrel would have been quite accurate; but the barrel of the air-cooled gun sits well below the receiver, and I had, fortunately, fired over their heads, with no tracers to show the error.

We dig in on a bare hill top, and learn that we are on the German border. On a distant hill we see the Dragon's Teeth of the Siegfried Line.

An 88 mm shell whistles over our heads in a flat trajectory and bursts well behind us. We see the smoke and flash of a second round which again seems to pass a few feet over our heads. The Germans are shooting at trucks bringing artillery from the woods behind us. With binoculars, I see the long barrel of an 88 mm gun, pointed directly at me. It is mounted on a 4 wheel trailer.

This is the famous all purpose German 88, the same type of gun that hit me with its shrapnel last November. The 88 is used, with different types of shells, against infantry, tanks, or aircraft. I do not think my machine gun will reach that far; and we do not care to attract their attention, so we stay low in the hole.

Horses are brought up behind the gun as the firing stops. The Germans hitch up the horses, load their rigs and tow the gun out of sight, all in just a few moments. Our artillery rounds seek their range, but fall well behind them.

We have penetrated the Maginot Line and left behind us a fortress that was built by Louis the Fourteenth in 1661 to guard this fertile valley. This fortress stopped the Prussians in 1870, the Kaiser's troops in 1914, the Wehrmacht in 1941, and the 100th Division in December of 1944. Now, in March of 1945, we have

captured this same fortress, the famous Citadel of Bitche.

And we earn a new nickname;

"The 100th Division Centurymen, Sons of Bitche."

54. DRIVE TO THE RHINE

Not far behind us there are flashes and thunders from batteries of the big 155 and 240 mm cannon; the "Long Toms." The noise is deafening and continuous; one shell after another, sometimes in volleys. Each blast is followed quickly by a whispering shell, slipping through the air over our heads, and then a distant explosion to our front. The Dragon's Teeth, tiny in the distance, are hidden by clouds of dust and smoke.

The shelling goes on - and on. It is uncomfortable for us; what can it be like for the Germans in those Siegfried forts? We dig and dig. Foxholes are enlarged into dugouts. We watch and listen for patrols and counterattacks. All night our rest is interrupted every few moments by explosions from big guns, shaking the ground and lighting the sky, not far behind us. Sometimes we hear shells whispering through the air overhead. A few moments later, the sky blazes over the Siegfried Line, miles to our front, followed by thundering roars, rolling back to us.

Shelling stops at midmorning, and a little airplane scouts the enemy positions. The olive drab single engine plane, about the size of a Piper Cub, is suddenly bracketed by shell bursts; flashes of fire and puffs of black smoke. The plane turns abruptly towards us, dives away from the enemy fire and zooms over our heads to safety behind our lines.

A few hours later the little plane returns to those same hostile positions. I wonder at the pilot's foolhardiness as he again dives away from antiaircraft shells and scampers back behind our lines at tree top level, rocking his wings at us.

Suddenly we hear the roar of fighter bombers and a P-47 dives out of the sun behind us and disappears behind the trees into the enemy positions; then pulls back up into sight, followed by a huge cloud of smoke and, seconds later, a distant blast. The leader is followed by another and another; each fighter bomber drops a bomb.

We stand by our holes and watch - and cheer. Thunder from the P-47 Thunderbolts.

We still expect the worst. We know that the Maginot Line survived fearsome bombardments and the Siegfried Line is better built. The Germans have learned from six years of combat experience. They poured in slave labor and resources from half a dozen countries. When the call to move out comes, we mount the jeeps and trucks reluctantly; we expect to dismount and attack those forts somewhere nearby.

The convoy rolls through the woods on a good paved road and suddenly breaks out onto a plain of rubble and dust. The fields are covered with giant pieces of concrete. A thick layer of dust blankets everything. We see only dust and debris for a hundred yards on each side of us.

Our vehicles tilt and dip through the shell and bomb holes as we look in awe at pieces of concrete as big as houses, torn up and thrown about. To the right and left we see the dreaded Dragon's Teeth parading, untouched, into the distance, but we drive through a gap marked by total desolation and inches deep in tan- gray dust. We smell the fumes from explosives; our faces are plastered with the acrid dust.

As quickly as we enter this incredible scene, we leave it, riding into another woods and on to a German village that appears to be deserted. Each house has a white flag of some sort; bed sheet, towel, or a scrap of cloth hanging from a second story window or from a pole or doorway. We are being watched from behind curtained windows.

Our faces are coated with gray dust except where goggles leave a hint of white skin. Weapons are everywhere; we are dirty from living in foxholes; we must look menacing to an unarmed civilian population.

Walking a little way from my jeep, I feel a chill. I am only slightly reassured by the weight of the loaded pistol pressing the holster against my leg.

55. WATCH ON THE RHINE

Our C-ration lunch is interrupted by an order: "MOVE OUT! - ON THE DOUBLE! - HURRY!" We scramble into the vehicles and the convoy races through German villages and woods, past well tended fields. We drop away from the Vosges Mountains into the fertile Rhine Valley; race at dangerous speeds into the City of Ludwigshafen and stop abruptly at the edge of the Rhine River. Our objective, a large ferry boat, sits at the dock with only the superstructure and smokestacks sticking out of the water.

We wander to the water's edge, sit on the docks and study the opposite shore through binoculars. A few shells are fired from the opposite bank and we retire out of sight of the river, into the city.

For several days we move from one town to another. We sleep one night in a German Army barracks; the bunks are rough board frames with straw filled ticking for mattresses. A big red cross is painted on the roof. There are hot showers and clean clothes, some of which fit. And DDT.

Easter Sunday: I sit on the spare tire behind our jeep; feet braced on the back seat, and my hands clutch the twin handles of a loaded 50 caliber machine gun. We look for an air attack, and if it comes, I think I will not be free to seek cover. Almost swashbuckling, we tool through picture postcard villages and fertile fields.

The convoy slows. Ahead, the endless line of vehicles vanishes into a giant cloud of smoke. Four wheels driving and sliding, our jeep mounts the steel ramp leading up to a floating bridge; - wooden planks on floating pontoons.

The bridge sways under the weight of the vehicles; the Rhine River reflects the gray of the smoke and the river’s current drags the pontoons from our right to left.

Disregarding the clawing stream and the flimsy bridge, we look for danger from an aircraft that we can hear, but not see above the smoke screen. A few tense minutes and then we roll down off the bridge ramp and climb up the East bank of the Rhine.

I whisper an Easter prayer of gratitude: "God help these poor people. And Thank You for protecting us on that flimsy bridge! - And would it be too much to ask for a little continued protection?"

For the moment, my prayer is answered; we spend a quiet day and a night guarding Corps Headquarters near Mannheim.

The quiet is uneasy; Hitler promises to fight to the last man.

56. SLAVES

Mannheim is the most damaged city that we have seen. Four and five stories above us, empty windows are backlit by the sky. A list of names guards each building front. The streets are empty except for piles of rubble and the smell of death. We leave Corps HQ reluctantly. Once more we are in pursuit of the German Army. Our convoy twists like a snake along the path, around the rubble and bomb craters.

Once again we dismount and search the woods, South, near the East shore of the Rhine. We stop when the Regiment links up with the French Army coming North from Strasbourg, and we spend a night in requisitioned farm houses.

A group of women visits our headquarters. Most of them are middle-aged, and they all wear "babushkas" (head scarves) and long dark skirts. Sgt. Roman of the mortar platoon translates: "They came to thank us for liberating them. These women were brought here from Romania to make uniforms for the Wehrmacht. They were prisoners in the factory and had enough food to keep them productive..." (unlike the starving concentration camp victims that we were soon to learn about).

The factory produced Wehrmacht uniforms during the war and was run by a German who maintained good productivity by making sure that his work force had enough to eat. They said they were not abused, just confined to the factory. Something like livestock, being cared for and fed by a smart farmer..

Sgt. Roman continues; "They are glad that we are Americans. They do NOT want to go home because the Russians will call them traitors and they will be killed." This seems strange, but appears plausible considering the horror stories that I heard from POW Haase, back in the hospital.

The mess sergeant gives them rations and they go back to their factory. Later in the evening, we hear the women singing melancholy Slavic melodies which bring to mind centuries of suffering by generations of serfs and slaves. I

think of songs like "The Volga Boat Men."

Rejoining the drive, we scout on foot through the quiet woods and villages south of Mannheim.

57. THE SEARCH

We search forests, houses, barns, everywhere, looking for German troops, weapons, or armed civilians that might have been bypassed in the rapid advance. Once in a while something useful turns up. One patrol captures a Wehrmacht truck loaded with fresh eggs. They are a real treat after six months of powdered eggs. For two days, we have all the fresh eggs we can eat, cooked anyway we wanted them.

Ralph Reeves continues on the subject of "Looking for Loot:"

"I suppose, given the opportunity, it was everyone's pastime, the thing to do. In one farm house I found something good to eat, some preserves or jellies. Just as I was saying 'Boy! This is great!' this German housewife begins to cry. Damn, I couldn't take her food, so that was the end of that foray. In a swank apartment in Kaiserlautern (?), I found a lovely expensive looking pocket watch (of course we are looking for weapons and flags and copies of Mein Kampf, none of which were found). I was about to pocket the watch when the civilian said: 'I am a priest, and the watch is a gift from a relative in the United States.' And he showed me the inscription on the inside of the back. Damn, so much for another foray."

"I was a lousy looter. I did liberate a 12 gauge Browning shotgun and carried it around for a couple of weeks. It was a great comfort on guard duty at night. Finally I gave it to the mess sergeant, or the mail clerk to send home for me. Surprise, it arrived home and I got many a rabbit for the pot after the war with that shotgun. It arrived home with a bent barrel, but I got that fixed and finally sold it for a tidy sum when I was broke during college."

"In a wealthy apartment in Mannheim I found a nice box (about cigar box

size) full of mint condition coins or medallions of some kind. Each was factory wrapped in tissue paper. I must have been the first to unwrap one. They were silver dollar size and gold in color, but I was too dumb to determine what they were and had them with me when I got wounded. No telling who got them or what they were."

"Somewhere in Germany my section was ensconced in a small village of farmers. We took over for several days and ran off the farmers. I don't know why we were there; there was no action of any kind, so I suppose we were to just hold the place. That was fine. I slept in a big bed. The cellar was full of hams, fresh eggs in water or some liquid, kraut, and a barrel of delicious hard cider. It was paradise."

"One day, liberated slave guys came and one of them told us about a cache of schnapps buried in a field nearby. He took several of us there; we dug and sure enough there were maybe five jugs, each about a gallon, all full of booze of some kind. It was lousy, green, ghastly tasting stuff, and we got drunk as skunks in minutes. We were sloppy, falling down, mush mouth near helpless drunk. As it turned out, this meadow of buried booze was also a landing strip for our little artillery spotter planes and one of them landed."

"The pilot, an officer, walked to my drunken group, and said; 'I am going to fly back to the last field where I can gas up, but that field is supposed to be abandoned of people and there is no telling what may be going on there. I want one of you guys to ride shotgun with me in case something goes wrong!' I said to myself, 'Oh shit!' as he looked at me and said 'You'll do!' I couldn't believe my ears. Several guys blind drunk, all trying to look sober, and now me trying the hardest. I figured, 'Boy, if I ever get court martialled, this will be the occasion.' Somehow I managed to fight my way into a seat in that little flivver, and collapse. Off we go, and now I am not only drunk, but expecting to get sick. We finally got to his old field and gassed up (no one else was in sight) and returned to the starting point for me. I was one relieved guy when this pilot went on his way and I went on to my hangover."

We ride across the Neckar River and follow the south shore to the East, deeper into Germany. We are almost the first American troops to enter Heidelberg where aluminum canteen cups make the champagne taste funny.

Picture postcard castles and the University of Heidelberg perch on the hills on the south side of the Neckar River. Spring is in the air; no one is shooting at us, and we hope for an end to this war. On the north side of the road, blown-out bridges across the Neckar remind us of the War.

Another stroke of luck! We guard an underground factory. My partner, a machinist, admires the rows of machine tools that line the miles of tunnels in the old salt mine. He puts aside a couple of precision micrometers. The railroad tracks appear to end at the edge of the hill, but they actually go deep into the mine. Four-star General Devers visits; we snap salutes and breathe easier when he and his entourage leave.

58. HEIDELBERG TO NANCY

The castles on the hills south of the Neckar River have survived for centuries. For them, this war is like a passing moment. I look up at these famous scenes; entranced with the peaceful, enduring beauty of these buildings. Behind me, at least one span of each bridge lies in the river.

Fortune smiles again; and I spend a night with Company M Headquarters. I greet my old tent mate Twomey, newly promoted from T-5 to sergeant.. Mess Sergeant Burns plays his guitar. Ashkin, Bowman, Engles and I join Burns in the garden behind the house. The air is mild with a promise of spring. A full moon illuminates our group. I admire these handsome fellows, so full of life and strength.

We sing of "Annie Laurie" and the "Rose of San Antone." - And we each think of a special girl, - thousands of miles away. Concrete telephone poles cast shadows in the moonlight and take me back to that last June night at home.

I draw a 3-day "R & R pass" to Nancy, France. About 2 a.m. the train to Nancy stops; we climb down and walk between rows of gallon cans filled with burning fuel; a scene from Dante's Inferno. I wonder if our control of the air is really good enough to guard this arrogant display of light. The fires light our way to a GI kitchen; powdered eggs and oatmeal; hot coffee and dry toast. Delicious!

Nancy is a welcome respite. No loaded weapon to carry; a shot of cognac with dinner served by waiters; white table cloths, real china plates and a formal silverware setting. My fork-spoon rides in my boot, unused for a few days.

We walk through the quiet streets, sample the beer and soups of the taverns. We read, and enjoy quiet moments reflecting on the joy of not being on the front. We sneer at the clean, pressed clothes of the rear echelon troops. They tell us that Patton makes his Third Army troops wear neckties on the front. He can not possibly get up to every foxhole to pursue such idiocy.

April 14: The French newspapers - and our own "Stars and Stripes" carry black bands and headline the death of President Roosevelt. Too soon, the R & R is over, and we take the train back to Germany. This time there is no stopping to eat.

The trip to Nancy gives me a new perspective on the massive operations which supply the Army. In the Italian mountains, pack mules help our Seventh Army, but jeeps are our pack mules, and "The Red Ball Express" brings supplies from the ports. The prime mover of "The Red Ball" is the 2-1/2 ton 10 wheel truck, known as the "deuce and a half." From space, they must look like a long line of ants stretching from Le Havre, Marseilles, Cherbourg and Antwerp to mobile supply depots that follow the armies.

59. BEILSTEIN HILL

Twas the 18th of April in '45,
Hardly a man is now alive...

(With apologies to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

Spring in Germany is a marvel of new life. By April 17, the grass is green; trees are leafed out and apple blossoms adorn the hillsides. Farmers are digging, plowing, planting and spreading fertilizer from the barns. There is no fuel for the few tractors, and the horses have gone to pull cannons and caissons in a shrinking circle defended by the dying Wehrmacht. While horses and men struggle and die, old people, children, and women use dairy cows to pull plows and fertilizer carts.

A weapons carrier carries me quickly from the train station to the Company M Headquarters; a row house "somewhere in Germany." The Mail Clerk hands me a pile of letters; several from my parents, and a rare one from my prom date, Pat Borden. "I'll use the table upstairs to write letters." First Sergeant responds: "We'll call you when the truck comes to take you to your platoon." I reply: "Thanks, just call up the stairs; I'll be there."

An hour later the rattle of mess kits calls me to the evening meal where I meet the Company Clerk; "When is the truck coming?" "My God, I forgot you were up there. No matter, a jeep is going up after dinner."

Sure enough, I join several men in the jeep. We leave town, heading East. An MP stops us at a check point on the hillside. "Back-up and turn around! This road is being shelled." We return to the HQ house where I sleep on the floor.

Ralph Reeves writes (about April 18th):

"We mortar guys are lazing in some woods and we hear a lot of mortar and artillery going on, when some dude dashed up saying 'Volunteers are needed to carry wounded.' Sgt. Winkles immediately shouted; 'Reeves!' it actually seemed funny at the time, just like the movies. I said 'Yes Sergeant?' just like I didn't know what was up. He said 'You are a volunteer.' I said 'Yes, Sergeant, of course! Just point me in the right direction. Farther along that hill top exhausted medics traded helmets with us, gave us red cross arm bands and took our weapons for we were to be clearly visible hiking way down to the bottom of this big hill after the wounded."

"It looked like a whole platoon had been shot up. (Actually it was most of a rifle company and two machine gun platoons.) With two bearers to a litter, I helped carry two guys up that hill. I don't know who I carried, but one guy had his right arm damn near severed from the arm pit. I could not imaging it being saved, but I hope it was."

"At the top I came across Captain Derryberry in a litter on the ground, and

propped on one elbow. He appeared to be in great pain, but was directing all kinds of activity around him. The captain told us to go find the radio man and pointed the direction. We found him with a bullet hole centered on his forehead which left his face all purple. We put him in a decent position and stuck his carbine in the ground with a helmet on it to mark his location."

Ralph Reeves

In the early morning I'm ready to go, but the mess jeep is full of cooks and the big insulated containers of food and coffee. No room for me. After breakfast I hitch a ride in another jeep carrying an officer and some ammo.

We drive quickly, nervously, past the abandoned check point and skirt the shell holes from last night's artillery barrage. We follow a wagon trail up into a wooded hill; the cool shade is welcome.

The trail ends in the middle of a big clearing occupied by another jeep and an ambulance. Ahead we hear familiar sounds; the low coughs of M-1 rifles and BARs, dueling with higher pitched roar of German "burp" guns and the "crack" of German rifles.

A mortar platoon lieutenant asks; "We need a little help, would you mind joining this litter team?" He takes my pistol and holster; and tells me to tie a handkerchief around my left arm. I wonder at being asked, rather than told to do something, and follow three other men as they dash from the woods down a bare cultivated hillside and over a series of little terraces.

Firing continues from the next hill, marked by little puffs of smoke, but I see no other signs of life. A bullet kicks the dirt near us and we scramble and skitter down the steep slope. Breathless, we land in the bottom of a cart path cut into the hillside by centuries of farm traffic. The draw is 6 to 10 feet deep; only 8 to 12 feet wide, and no more than 50 yards long. In this small area are several dozen men; perhaps half are lying, wounded, on the ground while medics and others are tending them. A litter team leaves, carrying a man up the hill. I see a piece of shrapnel embedded in Sgt. Hogan's upper lip. Sgt. Fitzgerald lies nearby.

A little bird sings in a tree overhead as a medic calls to us. The medics slide Danny Doyle onto our litter. The four of us lift his 170 pounds easily and we start briskly up the hill. A few yards from the draw we hear firing from the next hill; and again bullets plow into the ground on "our" hillside. We race for the top of the hill, trying to avoid hurting Danny. Suddenly he is a lot heavier.

A fresh litter team dashes out from the woods and takes Danny off towards the waiting medics and ambulance. We stagger into the woods just far enough to be out of sight, and collapse onto the ground, unable to move; exhausted and winded.

A few minutes later I rejoin the Mortar Platoon. Wounded men are waiting for another ambulance. PFC MacLeroy, Lt. Scott Witt and our Captain, now Major Derryberry, all have leg wounds. Derryberry wants to be evacuated at once.

Sgts. Fitzgerald and Waller are on litters; I cannot sort out all the casualties; and some are already evacuated.

The Mortar Platoon Lieutenant returns my pistol. He asks me to help retrieve weapons abandoned by our casualties. "Look for Twomey, along the edge of the woods up here; and check the others down in the draw. The Krauts are supposed to be cleared out, but keep your eyes open."

I follow the tree line along the hilltop to the South; our right. Within a hundred yards I find Cpl. Twomey sitting in the bushes; a bullet went through his head and through the radio, still strapped to his back. No need to recover this radio now. I pick up Twomey's carbine and pistol belt.

Down the hill and in the draw again, I find three dead friends; Ashkin, Ingle, and Bowman. One has a massive head wound, another is missing a foot. A couple of carbines and a pistol are added to my collection. As I climb back up the hill I recall the moonlit night only a week ago when we sang "Peg O' My Heart." As long as I live that song will summon a memory of these men - and this day.

Back at the hilltop, I load a 3rd platoon jeep with the weapons abandoned by the dead and wounded; rifles, carbines, pistols; belts, bayonets, trench knives; clips of ammo, grenades, canteens, and aid packets. "Wait here." the driver tells me, "A 2nd platoon jeep will pick you up." Sure enough, a few moments later Lt. Witt's jeep arrives, driven by PFC George Thomasson. Birds sing incongruously as the sun sets and we piece together the day's events.

The 1st and 2nd machine gun platoons had passed through this area, following rifle Company L. When most of these men were on the bare hillside, the Germans opened fire with rifles and machine guns. Our riflemen and some of our machine gunners had passed the draw, and they attacked the Germans on the next hill top. The rest took cover in the draw; only to be greeted with a barrage of shells from “Screaming meemies” (or Nebelwerfer rockets), - 88 mm cannon, and both 50 and 120 mm mortar shells; all "zeroed in."

The sheltering draw was a trap. Lindsey and Beckett were among the first to pass it; their hazardous position saved them as they were well past the draw when the barrage hit. Not knowing about them, Thomasson and I think we are the only survivors. We nibble at our "C rations" and bed down for the night by the trail. I weep silently, and then sleep, exhausted. (Due to lack of GI insurance, Bowman was offered a transfer that very morning. He said; "You'll be needing me." and stayed.)

PFC Leonard Dembeck writes:

"April 18, 1945 was a day which will live in our memories for the rest of our lives. I was a jeep driver, and early that morning was on the crest of the hill of death, Beilstein. Everything was quiet then as off to my left, stretcher bearers approached carrying a wounded soldier. I heard a call: "Hey, Len!" and went over to find that it was Lt. Scott Witt who had been wounded in the leg." (Witt had both knees broken, one kneecap lost, a broken wrist and shrapnel in his neck)

"We spoke for a minute and he was taken away. I moved forward in the direction of the attack and a few yards below the crest of the hill saw a radio antenna protruding from a clump of bushes. Inside the concealment was a GI, slumped forward in a sitting position, on his back was a 300 radio with a bullet hole in its center. As I moved around the front, I saw that it was our Sgt. Twomey. At the bottom of the hill, in a drainage ditch were bodies of some American soldiers. I picked my way down the steep hill to the first body which was lying on its back with an OD sweater over its face. The right foot was severed cleanly above the ankle and the leather cuff from the combat boot was still in place. I lowered the sweater and was shocked to see my good friend, Milton Ashkin. A feeling of overwhelming sadness passed over me as I knelt beside his body. God rest his soul."

"I was pleased to meet Scott Witt a few years later in Chicago. ... I would have been pleased to do him one last favor, but alas, I could not. As he was carried out at Beilstein, Scott asked me to keep his 45 pistol for him. I carried it at my side until transferred out of the 100th in October. Before I left I unknowingly turned it in to the supply sergeant in the hope that Scott would be able to retrieve it. Of course that was not possible, and I'm sure that we both are unhappy that it was not possible."

That same day, April the 18th, a few hours earlier, the infantry lost an old friend. War correspondent and author Ernie Pyle was killed by a Japanese sniper on the island of Ie Shima, not far from the coast of Japan.

60. ANOTHER AMBUSH

The rural villages are picturesque; stucco and half-timbered buildings, hundreds of years old and mostly undamaged by the war. Townspeople watch cautiously from a distance, as we regroup and move on.

Again, Ralph Reeves writes:

"I was wounded on April 20 in the middle of the road in a village called Backnang. Sounds like some place in the Orient. I was shot up pretty good and spent the next five months in hospitals. I had three holes in my chest, a shallow broad chunk of left calf missing which was later covered by skin graft, a chunk of shrapnel deep in my right thigh, - and the humdinger was shrapnel through the right calf that tore up muscle and scratched a nerve. My right foot has pained me ever since."

"In Backnang. we were in one of those fast moving armored columns that must have covered 20 or 30 miles already. It was the first decent weather in all of combat. We stopped at a roadblock and were instantly bombarded with both mortar and 75 mm cannon fire (according to Sgt. Winkles who wrote to me in the hospital). The shelling was right on target. I was standing on the trailer tongue behind our squad jeep when we stopped, and I was hit just as my feet hit the ground. I think five guys got hit. Lucky there were medics all over the place and care was instant. I grinned up at Sgt. Roman from my litter, and said 'So long Sergeant, I've got my million dollar wound!' Let's face it, after all that time in combat, we all live on borrowed time ever since; a wound seems like an improvement."

"On April 21 I woke up on a cot in a tent field hospital to discover Lt. Flaum was only a couple of cots away. He said he was not wounded, but had yellow

jaundice. That is the last I have heard of him."

(After the war, Ralph Reeves worked on a boat that did the first seismic surveys of the Gulf of Mexico oil fields. He worked as a construction contractor and operated a bar in Hawaii. We heard from Ralph Reeves in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, before he retired.. He wrote: "I would be happy to take a long dreamed hike from Mexico to Canada, the inland route, or maybe the Appalachian Trail, - or go see the wilderness in Baja." Now he dodges hurricanes on Longboat Key, FL)

61. THE LAST SHOT

Each of the 8 machine gun squads in Company M now has two guns; one light (air cooled) and one heavy (water cooled). But there are men enough for only a few shorthanded gun crews. Another gunner and I climb onto a tank with a light machine gun and ammo. Two riflemen join us on the crowded deck. The turret offers a little protection from small arms fire and it sure beats walking.

Our tank is third in a column that rumbles down a winding country road to the edge of Esslingin; a few miles north of Stuttgart. A canopy of trees embraces the road, and turns the evening dusk to dark. A brilliant flash bursts from a black hole under the trees, and a tremendous explosion lights up the lead tank.

Riflemen hide in the trees on each side of the road as we hug the tank turret and look in vain for our tormentor. Men are shouting, then all is quiet except for the sound of labored, gurgling breathing.

A rifleman returns to our tank; "What happened?" "A Panzerfaust hit one of our guys. His buddy slit the Kraut's throat."

The tank and infantry commanders confer in the road by "our" tank. "Get a patrol down there and clean out these traps!" "Hell, you guys are in the armor, just roll on through!"

Sure enough, the riflemen take the lead for a short distance. They find no more resistance; and climb back on the tanks. We roll through the dark town and bivouac nearby.

Next day, we continue, unopposed, into Stuttgart. We occupy several beautiful big hillside homes from where we can see much of the ruined city lying in a big bowl of a valley below us. Rows and rows of buildings with no roofs and gutted interiors. Most of the houses are - or were - 3 to 6 stories high. Row houses and apartments are now empty shells. Again, each house is marked by a list of names; and the smell of death lies heavy in the streets.

Our little area was prosperous, and remains almost undamaged. Houses are large, and some include apartments. Many of us even get to sleep in beds.

We do not even know that for us, the war has ended.

62. A JOURNEY DELAYED

French Moroccan troops arrive in Stuttgart, from the West by way of Strasbourg. I think of the price we paid for opening the road to Strasbourg, already 5 months ago at Raon L'Etape.

The Big Three Agreement is that we, and not the French are to occupy Stuttgart. But the Moroccans stay, and we see that they are looting and raping. Women sleep in the churches and we send armed patrols in jeeps to check each church and scare off the Moroccans.

As a new sergeant, I command a jeep patrol. We follow our mapped course and check a list of churches in the middle of the night. I ride behind a light machine gun mounted on the jeep, we look for an ambush, but the streets are quiet and dark, perhaps because of our patrols.

We move East and the Moroccans pull back to the West, leaving Stuttgart quietly occupied by a small number of Americans.

We search for by-passed German troops and find none. Advancing "as skirmishers" through the forest, I scare up a buck deer with a tremendous antler spread. His rack towers over me for a second, then he turns and trots off into the brush. He is far bigger than an American white tail deer. I resist the urge to shoot him. He will be a real prize for some hungry Germans.

We reorganize again. As squad leader, I help to train replacements in gun drills and machine gun maintenance.

Company M lives in a row of houses linked by speakers from a common radio in the Company HQ. Armed Forces Radio reports that Admiral Doenitz has surrendered. We take down the blackout curtains, turn on the house lights and admire the effect from the road. After six months of blackout, the lights mean peace.

The 100th Division occupies an area of about 2,400 square miles, following the Neckar River from Heilbronn to Ulm. In this 80 by 50 mile area, the companies are scattered throughout the towns and villages. We search the woods and provide guards for power plants, radio towers, dams, ammunition and supply dumps. In spite of the "fight to the death" propaganda of the Nazis, we find no resistance.

Reports of attacks on Americans are more in the order of random crimes of opportunity which occur anywhere an Army is stationed.

We round up "Displaced Persons," (DP's) and send them off to the new DP camps. They make it clear that they will not go back to Russian occupied territory.

At the end of May, men with 85 points or more are sent home. I have 65.

By early July the area has been purged of weapons and there remains no overt signs of resistance. Late in July, the Division moves back to the west and settles into a long term occupation of the area from Stuttgart to Ulm with Division HQ at Stuttgart.

Another search dragnet called "Operation Tallyho" is reported to find weapons, black market goods, and a few Germans who are wanted for war crimes, but I see none of these.

Near Stuttgart we find the smaller city of Pforzheim in ruins. Survivors tell of horror, when the city was hit one night by a massive fire bomb attack. The resulting fires gutted every building in this city of 100,000 people. Half the population died or disappeared that night. Some survived by submerging in the water of Neckar River but the smoke killed many, even in the river.

Training intensifies as we expect to be part of the invasion of Japan. The 100th Division is on alert for shipment back to Marseilles; and then back to "the States." Rumor has it that we will get a 30 day leave, and then new weapons before proceeding to invade Japan. We do not think beyond the promised 30 day

leave. Unknown to us, the commanders in Washington set a date for our invasion of Japan: November 1, 1945.

We relax while the radio plays an old hit tune: "Gonna make a Sentimental Journey." Then a new one: "Dream - when you're feeling blue - Dream, that's the thing to do. Just watch the smoke rings rise in the air, you'll find your share of memories there." I don't smoke - yet. But I watch smoke rings, and dream of home. We are scheduled to move out on 27 August and sail from Marseilles on 10 September.

Second week of August: The radio reports that Japan was hit by two "atomic bombs;" and later, Japan surrenders! Our alert is canceled and we settle down to occupation duty.

63. THE OCCUPATION

Traveling in Germany is no trouble for us. We ride the trains free. Every city has a US Army transient billet, or some kind of Army HQ; - maybe a Quartermaster Depot where a traveling soldier can draw rations and find a bed.
.

A 3-day pass to Paris falls my way; and I tour the Palace of Versailles, the Eiffel Tower, and the Folies Bergere. The Hall of Mirrors seems smaller than expected. But the Eiffel Tower is taller, and the girls are prettier. Oh those magnificent girls! Wow!

A train brings me back to Karlsruhe and a GI truck drops me at a transient billet next to a welcome GI kitchen.

After supper, I walk around the block and find a small portable merry-go-round, set up in a clearing surrounded by rubble from bombed out buildings. The wooden horses bob and circle, the organ plays a lilting Strauss Waltz, kids laugh, and mothers and grandmothers stand back and watch.

Across the street I see the sky through the empty windows of burned out apartments. The merry music and laughing children contrast starkly with the ruins of Karlsruhe, and the dazed, hungry expressions on the faces of the adults. I wonder "Where are these mothers and children living, in these ruins? What are they eating? Will their missing husbands, sons, and fathers ever get back from Russia?"

Most fortunate of the German soldiers, are the comparatively few that we captured. Even now they are being sorted out and sent back from POW camps in the States and in Europe. Watching this little scene is overwhelming. Tears fall, as I think about what has been done to these kids - and to their parents and grandparents. I love Strauss Waltzes, but every time I hear one, I picture wounded men in the Epinal hospital, and kids on a merry-go-round in the ruins of Karlsruhe.

(Forty years later I return to Germany; a new nation, our ally, a vigorous democracy, and a flourishing economy; all run by these now grown kids.)

"Bugler" is found in my file again, and I join the newly organized 399th Regiment's Drum and Bugle Corps. We have about 6 bugles, 4 snare drums, a bass drum and a drum major's baton. The drum major is a corporal, the rest of us are Pfc.'s, sergeants and corporals. We buglers are amused that this conglomeration is referred to as "The Drum Corps." (Of course, we are just one unit, but the word "corps" has no singular form, and what happened to mention of the bugles whose calls are the main purpose of the "Corps?")

64. DRUMS AND BUGLES

Our Drum Corps' workday starts after breakfast with a few hours of practice, followed by a break that lasts until noon. Most important are the bugle calls: "Retreat" - "To the Colors" and "Ruffles and Flourishes" - all accompanied by stirring drum rolls.

Then we perfect a series of bugle marches; "Sabers and Spurs," "The Thunderer," "We're in the Army Now," "Oahu," and even the Marines' "Semper Fidelis" which is a thundering good march. After lunch we are free until 4 PM when we are carried by truck to one of the battalions for "Retreat."

The ancient "Retreat" is a ceremonial lowering of the flag at the end of the day's work. The drum and bugle corps (or just a bugler) stands on one side while the local commander, senior non-comma and any visiting brass stand on the other side or in front of the flag. We might play a march as the troops move into place facing the flag. At the order: "FALL IN!" the troops snap to attention.

After the obligatory announcements (and sometimes awards) we play the

bugle call: "Retreat" - followed at once by the order: "PRESENT - ARMS!" and then the bugle call: "To the Colors" - during which the flag is slowly taken down and folded. We may play another march while we march off to our waiting truck.

Sometimes one or two buglers with, or without a drummer will do a retreat ceremony consisting of just the two calls, "Retreat" and "To the Colors." This allows simultaneous Retreats at several individual companies scattered over the Division's occupation zone.

When a General is present, he is honored with the bugle call: "Ruffles and Flourishes;" one "flourish" for each star on the General's shoulder. When a band plays a retreat (like the one I saw in Saarebourg) the flag is taken down during the playing of the National Anthem.

We eat with the Regimental HQ Company and our only duties consist of the morning practice and evening retreat ceremonies. We spend afternoons and evenings reading, writing letters and exploring the neighborhood.

The ban on speaking with Germans is lifted to the point where we negotiate laundry and house cleaning services. Our candy and cigarette rations are worth more than our money.

All through the war the tobacco companies have been very "cooperative" in providing their products at-cost, and often free to the armed services. Tobacco products are tax free as part of our "PX Rations." At breaks, in every training facility, and even now in the Drum Corps, the non-comma in charge might say:

"Take five! - Smoke if ya' got 'em!"

I think of my Grandfather's lifelong habit and the havoc it wreaked on his heart and lungs. Here were 16 million members of the armed forces being encouraged to be slaves for life.

Summer in Germany is so cool that we wear wool OD's rather than the summer-wear khaki uniforms.

One warm afternoon we find a small private swimming pool in a neighboring lawn. A resident in the house gives permission for us to loaf around the pool and to swim, although he seems to be amused at the idea. We strip to our shorts and jump in. Since my jump carries me half way across the pool, I probably break a short-dash-swim-record to the opposite side to climb out of the frigid

water.

At the end of the War, "Points" were awarded to select the first troops to go home. We get something like one point for each month in service, two for each month overseas, five for a Purple Heart or Bronze Star. Men with 85 points are sent home in May at the end of the war in Europe.

Finally, The 100th Division is alerted to go back to the States. Only men with 70 or more points are to go. I have only 65 points. Forty years later I receive the belated Bronze Star that would have sent me home with the Division. I am transferred to Military Government while the Division prepares to go home.

Reluctantly, I leave the Division on 20 October, 1945. Seven months in the Military Government turns out to be very educational. (At the same time, it takes nearly six months to get the Division home.)

65. MILITARY GOVERNMENT

Our Military Government Detachment is number H-72 of the "2nd MG Bn." where "MG" does not stand for "Machine Gun." We operate a depot of four warehouses, an office, and a motor pool. Each warehouse is served by a railroad siding. Our staff consists of a captain, a lieutenant, five enlisted men (including me), a Dutch civilian translator, a secretary and a work force of several hundred German civilians and Displaced Persons ("DP's) of various nationalities.

The warehouses are in the city of Kassel, and they receive, store and issue foodstuffs for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, known to us as "UNRRA."

German railroads deliver loaded freight cars to the warehouse docks. Our workers unload sacks of flour, oatmeal and sugar, crates of powdered eggs, crackers and canned goods are moved from the freight cars into the warehouses. Later the foodstuffs are portioned out to the UNRRA trucks and delivered to the DP camps in the area. There is no refrigeration so there is no fresh food.

The UNRRA food is not as good as the Army's "B ration" which we

received on the front and in the hospital, but it feeds the DP's who had been systematically starved in the German labor and concentration camps.

Barely 20 years old, I supervise one of the four warehouses and a staff of about 100 Germans. Fritz, the foreman, quickly earns my respect. He is some 10 years my senior, a lean, twice-wounded veteran of Rommel's Africa Korps, and an accomplished violinist. My German is only a little better than his English, but we exchange information freely.

We live in houses a few blocks from the depot. The officers have their own house. The secretary, a pretty dark haired fraulein, lives with the lieutenant. We enlisted men share a house where each man has his own room.

We eat in a warehouse dining room with space for three times our number. The food is prepared by a DP cook and served by a pretty young lady DP from Latvia. The officers get the same food and service in their own dining room.

A separate kitchen prepares food for the warehouse workers. Their noon meal usually consists of a small pail full of soup and a chunk of fresh bread. The soup usually contains some kind of meat (maybe Spam or sausage), vegetables, potatoes, barley, or pasta. It is unappetizing compared to our meals, but this lunch is a big attraction to the local workers. Food is scarce in the demolished city.

Our motor pool has three Jeeps, a 3/4 ton Dodge weapons carrier, a flatbed German truck, and three military motor cycles; two are big “Harley Hogs;” and the 3rd is a smaller Indian Motorcycle..

The two officers share one jeep. A second jeep is assigned to the Staff Sergeant who is the detachment's noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC). Staff sergeant Lancaster is proud of "his" jeep. He has coaxed the motor pool mechanics into adding a cab, heater, radio, and electric windshield wipers.

The Corporal Friday drives the third jeep when transporting us to and from the house and depot. The rest of us share access to this jeep.

My driving experience is limited to one circuit around a pasture in a new 1939 Plymouth - six years earlier, when I was only fourteen. One night, when no one is watching, I experiment with our jeep. In the dark, I back into the narrow edge of a rail-end bumper and put a big dent in the back of the jeep next to the fuel can. (My luck holds again - missed the gas can!)

One morning the Staff Sergeant does not show up for work. Corporal and I find him in the U.S. Army hospital in Kassel. Staff is apologetic; he has smashed "his" jeep and broken his leg. The Medics say that the injury is too severe for rehabilitation in Europe, and he has already been scheduled to go home.

He begins to tell me all the things that need to be done to continue his functions, but then interrupts himself: "Go get the jeep! Hurry, before something happens to it!"

What is left of the jeep is exactly where Staff said it would be. The cab, radio, heater, wheels, gas can, tool kit, drive train and engine are all missing. We send the motor pool mechanics and a few warehouse men to lift the useless chassis onto the flatbed truck and bring it back to the depot.

Captain appoints me NCOIC with duties of the first, mess, supply, and motor pool sergeants; plus mail clerk and warehouse supervisor. Fritz has earned our trust and takes over most of my warehouse duties. Corporal takes me on a trot line of errands to the post office, the Air Force rations depot, and to the Quartermaster Fuel Depot.

A predecessor wisely chose Air Force rations which are reported to be superior to those available from a nearby infantry division or Quartermaster Depot. We justify rations for a hundred men because, officially, truck drivers and visitors often eat with us. Unofficially, our little kitchen feeds the cooks, the waitress, translators, and the secretary.

Gasoline for our vehicles comes from a Quartermaster Depot about sixty miles or a hundred kilometers from Kassel. The mechanics hook a big trailer onto our weapons carrier and load empty 5-gallon Jerry cans into both the weapons carrier and the trailer. The trailer was designed to be pulled by a 2-1/2 ton truck, so when it is hitched to the lower weapons carrier it tilts forward like a great ugly duckling. At the Quartermaster depot, Corporal and I fill the carrier's gas tank and exchange empty cans for full ones. We drive back to the depot with 800 gallons of gasoline literally breathing down our necks. This is a nonsmoking run! At the depot, the mechanics unload and store the full cans of gasoline.

After an afternoon rain shower, three enlisted men take the three motorcycles out onto the meadow where they ride on the slippery grass. They take great delight in sliding and slipping around the field until one of them winds up sitting on the hot muffler after a spectacular slide and fall. I try one out; it is a lot

more fun than riding a bicycle. So much so that I ride on out of Kassel up into the hills as dusk fades into dark.

I turn on the lights and find the cycle is equipped with three big headlights. When the cycle slows to turn back to the depot, the engine dies. The engine will not kick-start until after I turn the lights off. The cycle has more lights than the generator will carry, and I cannot see where they are connected. The trip back down the mountain is a nightmare of little patches of road glimpsed as the headlights are flicked quickly on and off. Fortunately, there is no other traffic.

Corporal does not come back to the house one night. In the morning, we ride from our house to the depot with the officers. We find Corporal in the Army Hospital where he tells us: "I dodged a bomb crater and hit a patch of black ice. That's all I remember." At the accident scene, once more we find a jeep stripped to the bare chassis. The jeep had skidded from the ice into a stack of crated aircraft engines. The impact on the bottom crate knocked the top crate off the pile and onto the hood of the jeep. A few inches back and Corporal would have been crushed by the engine, but his only injury is where the windshield frame opened a cut across his forehead. He rejoins us a few weeks later.

66. DOUBLE CLUTCH

Back at the depot, the Captain wants to see me. "Sergeant, take this package to the post office." "Yes sir! Which vehicle shall I use?" (Perhaps the officer's jeep?) "Take the weapons carrier." "Yes sir!"

I climb into the driver's seat of the 3/4 ton 4x4 Dodge weapons carrier, drop the package on the seat beside me, and examine the gear locations marked on the dash. "Hmm - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - and R. Should be a snap." I turn on the ignition switch (no key), ease the clutch pedal down, start the engine, slip the gear into "1" and allow the clutch pedal to come back up. No problem, the truck slowly and smoothly moves forward. But now the engine revs up, almost screaming, while the truck barely moves, and regardless of what I do to the clutch, the gearshift will not come out of "first."

I want to experiment alone, out of sight. The Polish guard stares in amazement as the truck screams slowly through the gate and down the road.

"First" is obviously a mud gear and it must really be low when the transfer case is shifted to low! Once stopped, the transmission releases the mud gear. I shift to second and pull away. Each time I shift from second to third and on to fourth, the transmission complains with a heart wrenching growl.

I pick up a hitchhiking soldier who observes my problem and explains the mysteries of "double clutching." After a few tries I can match the engine speed to the vehicle speed at every shift up and down through the three working gears. This weapons carrier has such a tight transmission that shifting up through the gears is much smoother with the double clutch action.

(To "double clutch - shift," one must depress the clutch, shift to neutral, let up on the clutch, race the engine by giving it a little gas, then quickly depress the clutch again, move the gear shift lever to the next gear, and then release the clutch and go again. This trick is especially useful when using the engine to slow a heavy load on a long hill where brakes can overheat and fade.)

It is a great time and place to learn to drive. There is very little traffic. I explore parts of that engineering marvel, the autobahn, which links all the major cities but goes through none. The roads are almost empty. German civilian traffic stays well clear of our Army vehicles. Roads are not all good; one must avoid bomb craters and missing bridges.

Our Army and the German civilians are busy fixing the roads. The four lane autobahn frequently narrows to one or two lanes and crosses a Bailey Bridge erected - or furnished by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The "Stars and Stripes" (our newspaper) reports that a number of soldiers have been killed when their trucks ran off of empty bridge spans.

67. WAR AND PEACE

A 10-day leave to Switzerland starts in the first week of December. We change trains in Mulhouse, France, and walk through the smoke blackened, dusty, bombed out train terminal; - no roof or windows. Moroccan Troops hold up fistfuls of "occupation" Francs and Marks. They want to buy our cigarettes or candy with money that has no value, printed by the French with plates provided by the United States.

A few minutes later I leave the dirty beat up French railroad car and pass through the Swiss customs at Basel. Now in a neat, prosperous railroad station, I am astonished to find a candy machine with no ration requirement! Swiss trains leave exactly on time; the cars are well maintained, clean, neat and comfortable. Roads have no bomb craters and buildings stand undamaged as some of them have for centuries.

What a contrast! War and peace, Mulhouse and Basel!

Sgt. Elliot from Co. M shares a few meals and some explorations as the tour takes us by train through a long tunnel. We leave a blinding snow storm and come out in green pastures. We spend a few luxurious days in Lugano, where the weather is warm, even in December. Our hosts are friendly, but the people seem to stay clear of us. A cable car takes us to the top of nearby Monte Bre, and we admire the beauty of Lake Lugano.

In the hotel lobby, I join a group of people from all over, including several other GIs; and refugees from Germany and Eastern Europe. We meet a lady who claims to be a Countess from Italy. She seems to be "holding court," dropping names and trying to impress everyone. We are not impressed.

We stop overnight in Lucerne on the way back to Germany. I find a watchmaker in a jewelry store and say: "Ich mochte ein starker uhr." I hope that means "I want a really strong watch that won't break easily." I try to make the point that I do not want a self-winding watch because they break too easily.

The clerk is all charm, and sells me a nice looking, water resistant watch. It keeps good time, and I wind it faithfully, every night for three years, when it stops.

My Chemistry Professor, a Jesuit Priest, offers to look at it. He takes the back off, cleans it, and it works! He shows me the works, and I ask "What is that little moving part?" He says "That is the pendulum that winds the watch." The watch runs, without being wound, for another ten years. I have never wound a watch since that day.

68. TEMPTATIONS

An interpreter from another unit bums a ride in my truck and I tell him what happened to our two Jeeps. His English, no doubt corrupted by the GIs, sounds like this: "Ya need a fawking jeep? Gawdam! I'll git yew a fawking jeep."

Next day he wheels a jeep up to our gate; "Here's ya fawking jeep. No PROBLEM!" Captain says "We can't afford to be caught with a hot jeep!" So we send the guy away - with "his" jeep. No need to call the MPs, he is long gone.

A load of cooking stoves needs to be picked up at a supply depot. Captain borrows a 2-1/2 ton truck and sends me off in it to get the stoves. I never drove one of these trucks before. Riding empty, the truck bounces as if it has no springs. After we load 7 tons of cast iron stoves, the truck settles down and rides like a limousine.

(Truck driving experience comes in handy 17 years later when I use it to wangle a job performing the engineering tests on the XM-561, the Army's prototype amphibious 1-3/4 truck known as the "Gamma Goat.")

One of the Pfc.'s takes me on a double date in the nearby town of Melsingen. His date, Hilda, is a sophisticated Lithuanian girl who is staying with a German family. He says he needs someone to keep Hilda's roommate out of the way.

My date's name is Jutte, pronounced, she tells me, as "You-tah." She is a little beauty with blue eyes, red hair, and a naturally ruddy complexion. I learn that she is just my age, and already has a degree in chemistry. I tell her, as well as I can, of my own interest in chemistry, and about the paint lab in Baltimore. We set about improving my German and her English.

While the PFC and the DP vanish into a bedroom, Jutte reads aloud; children's stories and poems in German. I never thought this harsh language could sound so lovely. PFC and I return several times to visit the girls. While he is making love, I wonder if I am falling in love.

In February, 1946 the Captain tells me that I will soon be due to go back to the States for my discharge. He says: "If you will sign up for six more months here, we will see that you get a rocker to go with those three stripes." I am already saving my entire $105 per month salary; a raise to staff sergeant and six

more months of savings sounds very tempting. And what will happen if I keep going back to see Jutte? I write home about the offer, but not about Jutte.

69. HOMECOMING

Dad replies to my letter: "This GI Bill is really great. Just what you need. But if you wait six more months, Congress may find how expensive it is going to be, and cancel it. You better get it while you can."

I show Dad's message to the Captain. It makes sense to both of us. By the first week of March, I am at "Camp Top Hat" near Brussels, Belgium.

Camp Top Hat is a grid of faded OD tents sticking out of snow covered fields. The tents are heated by little coal stoves and there are cots in each tent for about ten men. Our tent is blessed by Cpl. Fitzgerald, an ex-coal miner who loves to get the fire going - well before we have to get up.

We go through the usual processing and board a ship bound for New York. The Vasser Victory ship is smaller than the George Washington (our troopship to Marseilles) but the weather is better, the trip is faster; the distance is less and there is no slow convoy.

For more than a year I enjoyed escape from KP. Now this ship is full of sergeants and most of us pull one day of KP. My luck holds to the end, I get to sweep out parts of the ship after all the other troops are ashore in New York. No matter, we all wind up at the same time, at Camp Kilmer with no passes or leave.

A few days later I am discharged at Ft. Meade. During the final processing we are offered an opportunity to stay in the "reserves." It sounds pretty good to me, until a man next to me says; "I saw the last lot that signed up. They were standing there with their right hands up just like we did when we first got into this mess." I do not sign up.

We are handed our discharges in a simple ceremony. A captain scans my discharge, shakes my hand and says; "Your country is proud of you, Sergeant Hancock!" To this day, I remain proud that I could do it.

I take a bus from Ft. Meade to Baltimore and a taxi home. Dad runs down the porch steps to greet me and Mom waits for a hug on the porch. She checks behind my ears and says "I see you have been washing properly." A week later she bakes a cake for my twenty-first birthday.

70. RECUPERATION

The sacrifices of those who died in the Armed Forces are well documented, and periodically recognized in the Veteran's and Memorial Day Ceremonies. Most of us find daily events that trigger memories of fallen comrades. For me, there is apple pie and Al Bowman; - any mention of Missouri and Bob Howell; - "Annie Laurie" or “My Gal Sal” evoke a moolit night with Ashkin, Engles, and Sgt. Burns with his guitar; - among others. We each carry a little secret list.

Less often recognized is the tremendous suffering endured by each wounded soldier. (Some of us were lucky. While healing, my two wounds and skin graft donor sites produced less pain than a bad toothache and, for the rest of my life, only an occasional ache and varicose vein near the scars.)

Each individual fought his own way to recovery. PFC Brunson MacLeroy elected to have his damaged knee locked into a rigid straight position; he preferred to stand and walk rather than sit for the rest of his life. When last heard from, he was a lawyer, retired from Convair, in Ft. Worth. First Lt. Scott Witt left his crutches by the college gym door while he hopped and staggered around playing basketball. He became an executive in the timber industry. These men learned to walk again - the hard way.

Again, Ralph Reeves writes:

"I was taken to a big multi-building hospital outside of Rheims where I was put in a ward for major skin grafts. I recall a Russian pilot in the next room (private rooms yet) who had his whole face burned off. He was a mess. My big flesh wound didn't bother me and I never once felt pain from the three holes in my chest. One gaped open and another had meat hanging out and took a long, long

time to heal. The big deal was my right leg and foot. The foot pain was excruciating and was just that, 100% of the time for many weeks, and gradually diminished to where I could even tolerate the weight of a bed sheet on it."

"For years it felt like some big dude was sitting on that foot, and I wear oversize shoes. Part of the foot is super sensitive and always there is an electrical tingling there. I limp a lot, especially when tired or when the leg gets weak without special practice exercise. I drew a 100% disability for several years before it was reduced to 30% and then raised to 40% where it is now."

"It was a month before I could crawl out of bed. When you swing your feet on the floor after all that time in bed, the blood gushing down to the toes is an enormous pain in itself. Anyway, what took my mind off of me was the nurses. There were plenty around. Never in my life before or since have I seen anyone work so long and so hard so many hours of the day and seven days a week. And they remained cheerful and solicitous at all times. I was aware of this every day. They were superb, such that my admiration and respect for these Army Nurses was and is enormous. Wish I could have known mine personally."

"I became pretty swift on crutches and got transferred to Cherbourg where we were all carried onto the ship, the George Washington, the same ship we went overseas on, but now converted to a hospital ship. It was sheer luxury by comparison. The berths or bunks were only one high instead of four (or five) and there was lots of deck space and no storms that trip. I walked around most of the trip without crutches. A heavy limp and much pain, as always for several years, but on my own."

"When we arrived at some dock there was a big crowd of civilians, music, etc.; a big welcome event that was nice. Then some dude said: 'You've got to be carried off.' I figured, 'Boy this is some strange routine!' So I walk back to my sack and flop, not there, but on a litter and some guys carry me off the ship and to an ambulance, all the while surrounded by nice ladies. I wanted to get up and maybe kiss a couple but didn't. They drove us to Halloran General Hospital and here POWs carried us up two or three flights of stairs to our ward and beds. Then I got up; it was good to be walking around again, but all that litter stuff seemed strange."

"From there it was transfer to Nichols General Hospital in Louisville where I remained a few months before my Army discharge. That place was very nice. For one thing, each ward had a private kitchen where you could go fix anything between meals or all night."

"I started learning to type in an Occupational Therapy room where I had my own private tutor. For leg work I shot baskets on the basketball court. I really became expert at baskets, but not typing."

"We had a great weekend thing going that became a cause of embarrassment on the day I was discharged. There were free two-day bus excursions to Lexington about one hour away, that were arranged by some organization like the USO, but better. We arrive at some lobby like place full of women. Each guy paired off with his choice and had a date for the whole two days (if they got along). I got along fine with mine; we dated three or four weekends in a row. You could go dining, night clubbing, see the sights; and every damn thing was FREE! Even the country clubs! We hospital cases could not spend a dime, and the women had the cars. A very good deal."

"Then one day I was mustered out. I was walking down the corridor headed for a bus ride home, with all my possessions under my arm, when who should I spy walking towards me but my girl friend with her parents in tow to meet me. I wanted to hide, crawl in a crack in the floor, disappear, anything but be caught leaving without so much as a fare thee well. We chatted and finally I had to say it -- 'Sorry folks, I - uhhh, - hmmm, - have a bus to catch.' All of us were mortified and I couldn't leave fast enough to suit me."

"On the same day that I was discharged from the Army, a clerk said 'Sign here.' and it was a power of attorney for the VFW to get me some compensation. Limping and hurting was one thing, but the records must have made me out to be a basket case for I soon got a 100% disability. That lasted a couple of years while I went to Washington State University in St. Louis. It was reduced to 30% and the VFW went to work again (unsolicited) and got it back to 40% where it is now."

John Aughey writes:

"I was not wounded, but spent about a week in a field hospital with "service conjunctivitis." I was blind, and had to be lead around until recovery. I think it was caused by dirt falling from foxhole roofs, and running into branches of trees in the pitch black nights of the forest.

(Sgt. Aughey kept a picture of 34 men of the first platoon taken in

Fayetteville NC before going over seas. He listed their names along with another 28 who passed through the platoon as replacements. Of these 62 men, 37 were wounded, 4 were killed, and 2 were captured by the Germans. Others left due to various illnesses. Aughey was one of four who were commissioned as second lieutenants.)

Yellow jaundice and trench foot took several men out of action. However, almost every machine gunner and many of the mortar men were wounded. For each man killed in action, about 8 or 10 men were wounded.

71. POST WAR CAREERS

Also unrecognized are the continued contributions of the veterans as the nation developed a flourishing peacetime economy, transformed vanquished nations into economic powerhouses, and held the threat of Communism in check until its major protagonist collapsed.

Sgt. Roland Tuttle (wounded at Lemberg) was working as a technician in a defense plant in 1953 when a 40 mm antiaircraft projectile exploded, tearing up his left thigh and causing multiple other injuries. Treatment required 5 pints of blood and several operations. He writes:

"While under anesthetic that night, I witnessed the appearance of that man called Jesus. He came to me from a background of phosphorescent white, strolling up over a grassy green knoll which descended downward in my direction, then stopping a short distance away, - raising his arms upwards from his waist, left me His Message without a word spoken. I heard clearly that 'All is Well!' As long as I live that experience will be etched in my mind. I cannot explain the significance of that drama, but I honestly feel the hands of those doctors and nurses had divine guidance." (Later Roland is shot in the face by a hunter, and recovered from that too!)

Roland Tuttle wishes to add this quote: "Remember this passage, which I am committed to, in silence, whenever I watch 'Old Glory' wave: 'Let our

comrades who failed to return rest in lasting peace. Those of us more fortunate owe them our eternal gratitude for their dedication to the causes we all served.'"

Most of the men of Company M of the 399th went on to successful careers. Many continued their education, in some cases, encouraged by the ASTP program. To cite only a few examples, the roster includes accountants, chemists, contractors, doctors, dentists, engineers, executives, lawyers, optometrists, veterinarians and teachers.

Some stayed in the Army to fill ranks which include a few generals, a cluster of colonels, several command master sergeants, and many other career officers and noncoms.

Again, Ralph Reeves reports:

"With VA advice, I studied accounting and business administration at college, and hated it. I hungered for action. I went to LA, was a weight lifter, sailed up and down the Baja California and to Acapulco, and drifted to Galveston, Texas, where I became part of an ocean going doodlebug for a couple of years... Which is to say I was a computer operator, observer, and bosun for handling buoys in a seismographic crew that, with prototype revolutionary gear, found much of the oil that has been pumped from the Gulf of Mexico since."

"I quit to go after a major in Geophysical Engineering for it was a fun job, but went broke before I could get in any such college program."

"Instead I went to work as a field accountant and later project engineer for Del E. Webb Construction in Phoenix and bounced around a bunch of states on large projects and finally opted in 1960 to become building construction manager for Kaiser Hawaii Kai, a 6,000 acre new town near Honolulu."

"It was a helluva great executive assignment; I suffered burnout and moved to Lahaina, Maui where there were no tourists, no jobs, nothing but nice people and this new haole beachcomber. I opened a bar/night club for locals (really for my own entertainment) and had a ball. I was there 14 years."

"I did go back to construction as a laborer on a concrete crew among local guys who spoke only pidgin, and I loved it; became a carpenter, superintendent, and project manager for condos as tourism grew, which invasion was even worse

than the hippie invasion of the sixties. I figured the party, fun and games had to end or I was going to die much too young, or become a basket case, so my new bride and I moved to Florida where I got my Contractor's License about the time the first big recession struck in 75 or 76. And so I have been an estimator ever since."

"You mentioned 'catching the feel ... of the arrogant swagger of our youth.' You have elegantly phrased what has bothered me for many months. I have felt trapped by life, and totally bored. It is not the good old days that I relish. It is the feeling you mention that I miss - the arrogant swagger of youth. I recall my mindset of many years; me against the world and relishing the challenge. It was a great feeling. I recall April 20 when I was wounded. Earlier that day I took special note of my possessions; all fighting gear, a canteen, knife, pistol, couple grenades, first haircut in six months courtesy of Sgt. Winkles; a sleeping bag somewhere."

"I felt good, unencumbered with any trivia but a toothbrush and I felt - 'Who needs anything more?' Let's get it on - like the (399th) motto 'I am ready.' There was a similar arrogance back in training days. I had a furlough and returned to St. Louis. There I was, a teenage PFC with a Ranger emblem on my shoulder, feeling proud and tough. For two nights I wandered from bar to bar in the toughest districts or places I could find, spoiling for a fight. They were the kinds of places that I would have feared to enter a year before. I wouldn't pick a fight, and to my chagrin, and probably good luck, I was totally ignored. I was shocked that only a bartender noticed and he never came near until after a yawn."

"I had that same smug self sufficiency in Germany when there was an opportunity for looting. I never really looted anything except that shotgun which was fair game, but it was fun going through houses and apartments and looking around. The best part was being armed with my 45 pistol at my side. I never knew who or what was on the other side of a door, and in fact, surprised people several times, even walking in on a couple in bed. I didn't care who was on the other side. If he had a gun aimed at the door, then I was a goner and I lose the game. If he just had a gun, then I won because I was firmly convinced I could quick draw and shoot more quickly than any enemy could react to me. It's silly but I behaved just like you might see some dude in a Western cowboy movie."

Sgt. John Aughey writes:

"I was born in 1911..." (Aughey was a sergeant in the 100th Division Cadre at Ft. Bragg.) "I received a direct commission on May 11, 1945 and was one of the very few machine gun platoon members to escape enemy fire. In September, 1945, many officers of the 100th were assigned to Quartermaster Units in Rheims. My unit, manned by POWs, baked bread and roasted coffee. After a short time I was hospitalized with an appendectomy, then reassigned to Stockade 28 which took in 2,000 POWs. We infantry officers resented the QM boys."

"I was an Internal Revenue Agent, retiring in 1972; obtained a license as public accountant and card to practice before the IRS and spent seven years (part time) settling the affairs of the mortgage servicing company that I had worked for previously."

Following are additional summaries of a few careers pursued by Company M members:

Machine gunner Andy Aisenbrey earned a degree in Civil Engineering and served 31 years with the Bureau of Reclamation in Denver, Colorado.

Mortar gunner Don Brown taught school, served as school administrator, and rose through the Army Reserves to rank of Major General.

Machine gunner Jim Curley graduated from Bentley College (Boston) and worked for 36 years for General Electric.

The company commander, Major Quentin Derryberry became a lawyer in Wapakonenta Ohio, and died in 1992, leaving a lawyer son and grand children...

Jeep driver Len Dembeck became an Optometrist in Chicago.

Messenger Don Galles went to work for the Hawks Oil Company in Casper, Wyoming. He later became a partner and then bought the company.

Squad Leader Roy Kaminski stayed in the Army, graduated from University of Maryland in Germany, and retired as a Major.

Machine gunner, squad leader, and platoon leader, Lieutenant John Langley served as a lawyer for Ralston Purina in Mexico City, Mexico, where he died, June 5th, 1995.

Platoon Leader Lt. Peeples stayed in the Army and retired as an Infantry Colonel, in Yalaha, Florida.

Jeep driver George Thomasson became a lawyer in Kings Mountain, NC.

Platoon Leader Lt. Scott Witt retired after serving 31 years as an executive

of the Weyerhouser Corporation in Tacoma. WA.

72. EPILOGUE

We might have saved American lives and resources if we had left the Germans and the Russians to annihilate each other. God knows the toll was bad enough for us as it was.

Our absence would have been tragic for Europe. Without strong American opposition, the Russians were ready to invade and pillage all of Europe; as they actually did in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, East Germany, and the Baltic states.

The Western allies would have collapsed; economic recovery by the war torn nations would have been slow or impossible; and there would be no United Nations, no Marshall Plan, - and no NATO to provide a worldwide public forum and to stop the tyranny of Communism from engulfing the entire world.

In spite of our best efforts, the false premises of Communism caused immeasurable suffering to the large populations of Eastern Europe and Asia, and to many small countries such as Cuba, Cambodia, Burma and Viet Nam. If we had not been in Europe, how much worse would it have been?

World War II affected more people than any other conflict in history. It unexpectedly precipitated Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman into roles of world leadership which were unimaginable a few years earlier. Thanks to the efforts of these men and the reluctant cooperation of the allies, a shaky peace has endured in Europe, perhaps for the first time for more than half of a century.

The American presence in the European conflict protected much of the remaining population of the world from Communism. It made possible the establishment of successful democratic economies whose examples are even now hastening the abandonment of Communism.

Our 100th Division made significant contributions to the winning of the war,

to the pacification of postwar Germany, and to the establishment of the Military Government; all of which were critical to the building and maintaining of this (so far) enduring peace. We fought and beat a really great army, one that was perhaps equal to or second only to our own.

My Army tour was just a little more than 33 months, but the effects that follow me yet are wildly disproportionate to that short amount of time. I am grateful to be alive, and I think that I am not afraid to die.

The memory of that first shower in the hospital comes to mind every day. My shirts, jackets and coats hang with the "left sleeve showing" for no reason other than they look better that way to me - and the old "Ike Jacket" still hangs in my closet, with the division patch showing and the new Bronze star above the old "salad dressing."

The GI Bill put me through college thus enabling me to achieve a successful career in science and engineering. And perhaps helped me find the skill to write this. Thanks for reading it.

One last quote from Ralph Reeves:

"They were all great guys in our outfit. I hate to think it, but maybe there will always be wars because they are so damn exciting. Let's face it, we had one helluvan adventure. Often I miss it. In retrospect, getting shot at wasn't so bad as long as you didn't get hit real bad. The living conditions were worse, being so damned cold all the time. Surely there is no sport more exciting than being on the front line in combat, and I become chagrined thinking my big excitement is maybe playing a winning slam hand at bridge say once every six weeks. In retirement, I would be happy to take a long dreamed-of hike from Mexico to Canada on the inland route; or the Appalachian trail; or see the wilderness of the Baja, all those big bays and natural harbors."

Ralph Reeves lives on, so far, with his wife Gina, on Longboat Key, Florida.

73. CONCLUSIONS

We may draw several conclusions, some of which must be learned again and again...

Tyranny will flourish when a few good men do nothing.

Education is the beginning of greatness. The GI Bill paid for the training of millions of veterans; not just in colleges and universities, but also in technical, vocational and on the job training.

These trained men and women provided the skills needed to develop our economy through years of unparalleled growth. Similar benefits continue to be earned by our Armed Forces personnel.

The GI Bill arguably provides a precedence, and financial justification for the Government to subsidize education; a necessary part of any solution to our worsening economic inequities.

The military provided me with excellent medical service, mending me after an automobile accident, an appendectomy, and the shrapnel wounds. I wish all of our children and grand children had access to such good care.

Now we watch in dismay as nearly half of our children and grandchildren brave the world with no health insurance. If the military and VA can provide cost effective health care, readily accessible to their clients, can the Government, in good conscience, do less for our children?

Finally, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Sometimes this requires the courage to act quickly. A strong early opposition to Hitler might have prevented - or minimized - the effects of World War II.

The stakes have increased to the point where a major war is not a realistic endeavor. Where both sides are armed with nuclear weapons, neither side can "win" in a survivable mode. We who served in WW II - from every involved country - will
continue to pray that such a calamity can be avoided.

THE END