

## I. BACKGROUND

In the fall of 1987, just after I retired from my job as an architectural specifications writer, I wrote a memoir of my life during the years of World War II. I called it *My Good War*, with apologies to Studs Terkel, who had recently published his book of interviews with people who had lived through and participated in what he called “The Good War.” The rationale was that the experiences of unremarkable people, in which group I certainly belong, could be worthy of notice if they happen in remarkable times.

I covered my life during the time from the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 to my discharge from the Army in April of 1946. The core of this was an accounting of my year and a half as an infantryman in Company “G”, 399<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. This time lasted from March 26, 1944 through October 12, 1945 (with a two-month break while I was hospitalized), and was roughly divided into three six-month periods. The first of these involved training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the second, combat actions against the Germans in the Vosges Mountains of France and into southwestern Germany, and the third, as part of the army of occupation, most of that time at Pforzheim, Germany.

Since writing my memoir I have had a rather vaguely defined ambition to write and edit a history of Company “G” during those 18 months, with the thought that the story would come from those who experienced it—to the extent that I could locate them and persuade them to participate. There is a little paperback book, *Combat Company*, which is a history of “G” Company from the time we boarded the troop ship in New York through V-E Day, written by members of the Company who had experienced it all, and published in Germany in the Summer of 1945. My book I envisaged as being different from—but supplementary to—*Combat Company* in that the stories and other contributions would be personal rather than an overview of the complete story. We have all the facts; this would be illustrative of many of them. From the beginning it seemed that it could be a cumbersome, time-consuming, and probably expensive process. I thought about it from time to time in the following years, but never did much about it—or so I believed.

It was at about this time, at the second 100<sup>th</sup> Division reunion I attended, that I met Richard Welke. He had been in “G” Company, though we had known each other only casually, if at all. Neither of us could be sure. Nevertheless, we struck up a warm friendship, and commenced a regular and frequent postal correspondence that still continues, although now it’s primarily e-mail. Over the course of many months, our correspondence led us into a search for other members of the original Company. We had each met a few of our fellow veterans, and, through them, at subsequent reunions, the Division records we were able to access, the Veterans Administration, searching out-of-town telephone books, lately the Internet, and other means, we have so far managed to find, or find out about, 116 men who had at one time or another been assigned to Company “G”. Of these, 45 were either deceased when we learned about them or have passed away since we found their whereabouts. This amounts to almost 40% of the 300-odd men who we estimate may have passed through the Company ranks from the time just before we were shipped overseas in October 1944 until almost exactly a year later in October 1945 when the Division started making preparations to go home. By then a great many of us had been transferred to other units slated to stay

in Germany for a while longer, because we didn't have enough discharge points to go home with the 100<sup>th</sup> Division.

Once we had gathered all those names, we decided we should do something with them. The result was the establishment of the "*G*" *Company Newsletter*. We started it in late 1989, and to date have managed to put out over 35 issues, at the rate of approximately one every four months. We have basically informed our readers that their old buddies still exist and where they are, provided news of each others' current activities, reported on official and informal reunions when we get to see one another, and—the point of all this—urged them to share with us memories of Company "G" in the war, and their lives since that time.

In this endeavor we have had some success. Many of our readers have responded, some with only a sentence or two, others with quite detailed accounts, or extended quotations from wartime letters. The memories have ranged from almost contemporaneous accounts written down long ago to memories recently dredged up from the mists of time. In every case, they are at least interesting, and some, I feel, are valuable historical documents. We have found old unit newspapers and other wartime documents to publish excerpts from as well, and we have reprinted all of the original *Combat Company*.

So, now I have my memoir, plus all this additional material, and it seems to me that I shall not be able to get much more information for my history, and that this, therefore, is the time to put it all together. I have taken my original memoir and incorporated in it, at the appropriate places, material originally published in the *Newsletter* as contributions from our readers, including some items of my own that didn't get into the original memoir.

A note about sources. Fortunately, I did not have to rely solely on my memory in writing the memoir; memory plays strange tricks over the course of 40 or more years. *Combat Company* has of course been invaluable. The official 100th Division history *The Story of the Century* has also been useful, as has the 399th Regiment history *399th In Action*. I was also able to confirm some dates and places in *V-Mail, Letters of a World War II Combat Medic*, by PFC Keith Winston, a very moving book edited and published by Sarah Winston. Winston was in the 398th Regiment, I in the 399th, but both were parts of the 100th Division. Finally, after I had written the first draft of the original memoir, I discovered that my father had saved almost all of the letters I wrote him during my time in the Army. There are only two from basic training days, but, with only a couple of apparent gaps, the rest of the time is covered. There are 76 letters altogether, all completely legible and clearly dated. Thus it is possible to pinpoint in many cases exactly when and where many things happened without relying on fallible memory. Much of the letters' content has little relevancy to what I have tried to write here, but there is some useful information. I have included passages from the letters where appropriate. There is also a small portfolio of sketches, some of them incomplete, that I wrote in the early 1950s, which recall a few episodes much more accurately than I can from this vantagepoint in time.