

Lieutenant Martin Hale

925-C Artillery Forward Observer

by F. E. Batrus, Company Commander, 399-K

We were fortunate in Company K, 399th Infantry Regiment, to have Martin Hale as an Artillery Forward Observer. I am sure this was true for all the rest of the companies in our battalion. This wasn't just because Marty did his job well, but because he had an unique quality about him that always seemed to lift the morale of our people. He was a friendly fellow whose optimism towards accomplishing our mission, whatever it was, was quite contagious. This was quite comforting to us who had to get the job done with him. His manner, his knowledge of artillery, his interest and concern for those he was supporting always left the feeling among all of his comrades of confidence and respect for Marty's high degree of technical competence in his work.

There were many instances in which he was a life saver. Very early in our combat experience his presence became quite evident to all of us. This was just a few short days after we were placed in the front line in the Vosges Mountain village of Etival in Eastern France. The village was made up principally of two streets forming somewhat of a cross. We had pushed into the village shortly after dark and occupied some of the houses on both sides of the street, not knowing where the enemy forces were. It turned out that at the intersection of the only two streets in the village were German positions. It was Martin Hale who discovered them first and who before dawn had prepared for artillery support if needed, either in our attack or defense.

Marty remained with us throughout the entire next day, not only as forward artillery observer, but in many ways like a regular platoon sergeant. It was at this time that he made his mark with Company K and really became in the eyes of all the men a part of our outfit more than a part of the artillery.

During the daylight hours, before we withdrew that night to reform with the rest of the battalion, it was Marty who discovered for us that the mortar fire falling almost on our position was really protective fire of our own rather than the enemy. This protective fire was being delivered because of what turned out to be a very open, unprotected position of the company.

There were many occasions on which our men had reason to be thankful for his presence, but there is one that stands out very clearly. In our assault at Beilstein, Germany, in April 1945, Marty's direction of the artillery fire was superb. Barney Lentz, our battalion commander, will recall the failure of the regular forward observer and the way Marty Hale went in to do his job.

At Beilstein we faced an enemy solidly entrenched on a mountainside that controlled the entire area. To reach this in our attack we had to cross a narrow saddle, which was in fact a small roadway. Both sides of this ground dropped sharply, and crossing it without the right cover could have been disastrous. We had already suffered great losses to other companies in the battalion by way of enemy artillery.

Marty Hale, working his radio in the midst of the foremost elements in our attack and with enemy bullets and shells flying all around him, on his first try laid down a rolling barrage of high explosives mixed with smoke that first hit its mark not more than 100 to 150 yards ahead of our position. It was only because of this that we were successful in accomplishing our mission.

One thing stands out clearly and that was Marty's friendly, smiling, always courageous efforts in helping us win our battles.