Christmas Day 1944

Christmas Day came at last! What a way to spend Christmas—in a foxhole. I spent last Christmas 1943, in a foxhole also, but instead of live ammunition being fired at me it was blanks. I was in Tennessee on maneuvers. We really had a treat then: a turkey dinner with all the trimmings and a quiet and joyous day was had by all. Everyone who had been there agreed that it wasn't so bad after all compared to this year.

The day after Christmas I was ordered by the captain to set up an outpost of four men across the firebreak on the next hill to our front. This outpost would be about 200 yards to the front of my men. It would be a hardship on those who already had their holes prepared, so I let them draw straws. The four unlucky riflemen went with me to the hill where they dug in. The very thick woods here offered no visibility at all so trees and bushes had to be cut down in order to have fields of fire a visibility of a possible enemy attack. I arranged the outpost so that this duty could be alternated around in the platoon.

The following day I had a pleasant surprise. Into my dugout crawled a 2nd lieutenant to take over command of my platoon. The officer was my former first sergeant, Roy Simmons, who had just received a battlefield commission. He was fortunate to be able to come back to his old company, because it was usual to send newly-commissioned officers to other outfits.

I had been acting platoon leader for sometime then and I was happy to turn this responsibility over to someone that had a little rank. I was just a staff sergeant. One of the Company I dugouts was a large cave that had two cots in it. It was probably dug during World War I. I've got to hand

it to one of my men, regardless of how cold the weather was, or how short our water supply was, he shaved every day. He had been born and lived most of his life in Italy before coming to America. It seems that his wife returned for a short while to Italy just before the war began. She was not allowed to leave and her letters were very few and finally none at all.

Being too old to be sent overseas, this man volunteered for overseas duty and was assigned to my platoon soon after we arrived in Europe. He wanted to go through combat just to get a chance to go search for his wife after the war. One thing about him: regardless of his age, he was one of my best soldiers. Later, during the breakthrough, this fellow was wounded, but not too bad because he returned to duty with us later in the campaign.

Everyone had been issued a wool-lined reversible overcoat. The outside was gray and the inside was white. The white side was used while snow was on the ground as camouflage. Some of us had also received a quilt-lined sleeping bag. The disadvantage of a sleeping bag is that it was slow getting out of it during an emergency. Our assistant division commander was evacuated through medical channels a few days before and our regimental commander was promoted to that post. To take our colonel's post was the 1st Battalion commander, Elery Zehner. My company put my name in for the Bronze Star Medal, but higher headquarters turned it down because the write-up had the word "withdraw" mentioned in it. They didn't want army to know that a company had to withdraw at that date. Oh well, what's a Bronze Star Medal? The rear echelon seems to get them by the dozens.

A terrible shock was in the mail the next day. I received a letter from my girlfriend, who later became my wife, that my mother had passed away on 12 December. I had been receiving letters that they were expecting her to leave the

hospital most any time. This seemed like a terrible nightmare, but a family death is something that a person must face at one time or another in his life.

There was talk that the breakthrough in Belgium was the German's last little push; and when our army quickly pushed them back, the war would hastily come to an end. Everyone of us were content to remain here in this defensive position until Hitler would throw in the towel and surrender. We had spent a little time now just relaxing, and writing a few letters, but the weather was extremely cold for any comfort. A good deal of the day was spent just walking around our dugouts trying to keep warm. We were not allowed to have fires in this area. About 2 AM on 30 December I received strict orders to go to the company CP and pick up gas masks. This certainly did not sound good. Evidently the Germans had sprung a gas attack or G2 thought that they were going to use gas. Most everyone worried about this most of the night.

The situation on the front lines was quiet as a mouse, but back in the German rear echelon things were not so tranquil. About 10,000 crack Nazi SS troops and several hundred tanks were building up in Bitche. Their horse-drawn artillery was brought near Bitche while their fighter planes were flying in the Maginot area. Something big was about to explode and it did. Hitler must have been convinced that his boys were not really a super race, because he wanted to give his crack SS troops much more nerve and guts than they had demonstrated. To achieve this, he fed the Nazi legions chocolate bars containing dope.

It began snowing on the afternoon of 31 December, and snowed steadily all night. About midnight the quietness of the night became broken at our 1st Battalion outpost and the 117th Reconnaissance Squadron, who were holding a portion of the eastern front. Mobs of shadows made their way against the snow-white background and they were

whooping and hollering like Indians, to the outposts who quickly called for a tremendous artillery barrage, which built up from 60mm mortars to the giant 240mm self-propelled guns.

German artillery retaliated with a tremendous artillery fireworks celebrating the New Year. At that moment, the doped-up Krauts began rushing the outposts in waves. Three or four of their rushing waves were broken up, which killed hundreds of the crazed Krauts. Then great waves charged and overran the first outposts. Many GIs ran and escaped back to our lines, but some of them were captured.

The outpost in the only Schiesseck fort that we commanded at that time was surrounded and captured. A little later in that early morning, the 117th Recon was hit vigorously by the SS Storm Troopers. Realizing they could not hold against the tremendous odds, the lucky ones that had not been knocked out made their way back through the Bitche Woods. They withdrew several thousand yards, leaving our regiment's right flank with an open gap of about three miles.

Platoon after platoon of our 1st and 2nd Battalions were hit, but gallantly fought against 20-to-1 odds. A few were surrounded and some managed to withdraw successfully, leaving hundreds of German casualties. Our artillery batteries firing concentrations on every sector really played havoc with the incoming Nazis who captured a great deal of our equipment and our prized white parkas were quickly taken off the American prisoners and casualties and worn by the Jerries. It seemed as though the Germans had as many of our parkas as we did.

So far there had been no action at our positions. Snow fell continuously all day long and its depth at late evening was about eight or nine inches. Artillery had been swishing over our heads all day landing on the attacking Krauts some distance up ahead.

Chow was brought to us early in the afternoon and the jeep had already left the area when all of a sudden there were some bursts from a nearby BAR. The sound was from the direction of our outpost beyond the firebreak just in front of our position. Then several other bursts were fired and a few scattered shots were heard.

A call came over the telephone from the company CP asking us where the shots were coming from. I told them that I was on the way to investigate it. At that time, I saw my men from the outpost on the other side of the hill. They said that there were hundreds of Krauts coming over the hill and they wanted to withdraw to our lines. I relayed this message to Lieutenant Simmons, who immediately called the commander of Company I. The CO wanted the men to remain there until dark. This was quickly relayed to the outpost. Something had to be done soon since the Germans were coming from my position's left flank. I convinced the lieutenant that the boys had better get back, one at a time, as fast as they could across the open draw. It did not take them long to get back.

A while later as the day was fast drawing to a close, about 700 men, dressed in American parkas began to cross the firebreak. At first we thought they were our men withdrawing. The disguised Krauts began to shout, scream, and fire at us. Most of our foxholes were facing the wrong direction. Some of our men had to swing around and fire behind them.

My CP had to be quickly abandoned as it was right in the pathway of the enemy onslaught. I jerked the telephone wires loose, grabbed my equipment, and took off for our new, hastily-formed defensive position.

It was getting quite dark then as the Germans cut us off from the rest of Company I and moved into the rear of our position. They didn't seem to care about shooting at us, they were intent on encircling us. Our backs were now against the corner of the woods. On the other side of the

woods was an open field about 300 yards wide. The Lemberg-Bitche highway lay on the other side of that field. Past the highway was a hill with very thick woods above it that sloped down to the hill we were now on. I had an excellent pair of German binoculars that had been left behind by the fleeing Krauts at Lemberg. That night, after we had been encircled, I got to thinking about how the Nazis treated a prisoner found with German equipment. It was rumored that they were tortured to death. I took those high-powered field glasses and hid them in a clump of bushes.

Since the Germans were so close to us, we pulled all of our men together so they could not be taken one by one from their foxholes. We planned on fighting to the last man and to give them everything we could in an effort to beat our way out of the trap if and when the Germans attacked us during the night. The minutes ticked away. The hours went with not a word from the crazed SS troops. What were they up to? We couldn't understand why they hadn't attacked because we knew we were surrounded. One of my men reported to me that he saw soldiers moving in the woods on the other side of the highway just as it was getting dark.

Nothing happened and just before light was approaching, we gathered our equipment together. Lieutenant Simmons and I decided that the only possible chance we had of getting out of the trap was to get on the highway and march to the rear; back to where some other unit was. We had been completely cut off from our company. We didn't know whether they had withdrawn already or not. Some friendly troops had to be back there somewhere. If we escaped, we would have to make it before light because we would be cut to pieces trying to cross that open field and the Germans were on all sides of us. We picked up our equipment, bedrolls, and everything and marched across

the open field and finally onto the highway. Not a word was uttered as we marched up the highway for about 1,000 yards and then we came upon a soldier in a foxhole at a road intersection that led onto the highway.

Was he one of ours or was it a German and they had already taken over the hill? It was one of our battalion's BAR men. He directed us to where Company I had withdrawn. Everything was upset; no one seemed to know what to do. There were portions of platoons from different battalions back there. Our battalion S-4 (supply) had us place all the bedrolls in a pile so they could be picked up. I was then carrying a bed roll, regular-sized shovel, telephone, gas mask, ammo sack full of miscellaneous things, plus a carbine and a grease gun (submachine gun), not to mention all the heavy clothes I was wearing.

GIs were coming from every direction. Some were wounded who had hobbled back to our retreating forces. There were jeeps in this area carrying some men lying on litters in an effort to evacuate them before the Germans could overtake us. Everything was topsy-turvy. Just after we had cleared the Lemberg-Bitche highway, many German tanks were rolling on it. Apparently they did not see us on the side of the road to their right, or they purposely passed us in an attempt to get to Lemberg and cut us off again.

A semi-reorganization took place and we moved up the road on top of Spitzberg Hill. My platoon was in the rear of some green troops that had just been sent to the front lines. We moved up the road until we were overlooking a steep sloping draw on our right flank. I looked down the incline and saw a few Germans ascending the hill. Some of the green troops also spotted them, lost their heads, and began running in the opposite direction. One by one, the rest of them were beginning to follow suit. My platoon hit the ground and began firing at the enemy while Lieutenant

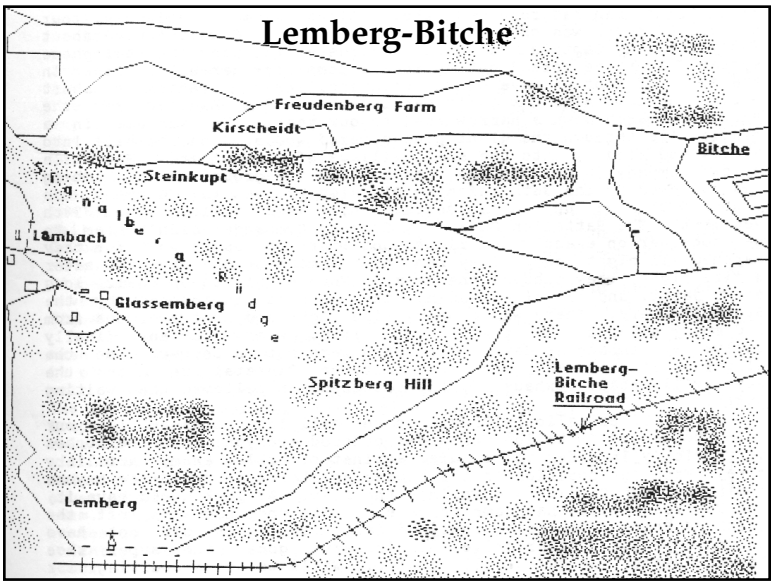
Simmons and I were trying to stop the fleeing men from causing a rout. We got them. Only a few Germans and there was nothing to be alarmed about. They finally stopped. Meanwhile, my men had repulsed the first wave. Our withdrawal route had been changed again as we returned down the road about 200 yards.

My captain was getting his orders via telephone. Everyone spread out to form a temporary defense line in the event that there would be another wave of oncoming enemy. After a short while, the companies got their men together and my platoon led the battalion march down a narrow road to our rear. We marched in single file through

Maginot bunker

the giant pine-covered woods, down the hill into a draw and finally into the small village of Glassemberg.

Meanwhile, my own company, L, had been holding the ground around Lemberg and they were relieved by the 36th Infantry Division. Love (L) Company was supposed to move up to a certain hill and relieve the 398th Regiment. The battalion CO and my company commander didn't seem to get together on exactly where the 398th was, for they marched all night long. They ran into the enemy on the way, and after a firefight, they subdued the Germans. They continued on their long snowy jaunt and all of a sudden, they were surrounded by Storm Troopers. There was a heavy firefight and most everyone from Company L escaped the trap. The tired, combat-weary company finally arrived at Lemberg at dawn. The 398th was not in Lemberg, so the disgusted infantrymen were sent back through Sierstal, up along the Reyersviller Road.



Exhausted, the battered men relieved the waiting troops of the 398th Regiment.

After our battalion withdrew into Glassemberg, our calm, collected battalion commander ordered everyone into the houses very quickly in order to be safe against probable enemy artillery fire. From our position in the houses and barns we could see anyone coming through the woods into the draw. As luck would have it, the enemy's New Year's Party had come to an end. The dope had worn off the famed SS Storm Troopers, and they did not have enough dope for another drive. With their nerve gone, the super race calmed down to the quiet dull normal Kraut soldier.

While we were waiting for the enemy, all of the company commanders were getting new poop from their battalion commanders. One thing was certain, we could not remain in this town as it was not good as a defensive position. When we had calmed down a little, the captain returned, assembled the company, and we moved down the hill to our front and into the woods. Companies K and I went through the snow-covered woods until we had gotten to the top of the next hill from Glassemberg. My company built a defensive position along the hilltop. My platoon's left boundary was a narrow trail with Company K on the other side.

Digging in was real drudgery. Trying to dig in a rocky area after breaking through the snow and ice was really tough. Portions of our units were still making their way out of the enemy encirclement and back to our lines as late as midnight of 2 January. A squad of men stumbled their way back to Company's K's line, relating what had occurred to them over the previous two days.

The next two or three days were spent in improving our position and our foxholes. This wasn't a very good position. We were now bedded down on a long, sloping hill

located in a dense, thick woods. Trees and shrubs had to be cut away in front of us to have a field of fire and to keep the enemy from crawling up on or near us. Our lines were dangerously thin due to the extreme scarcity of men. We did not have enough men for an outpost; we were the outpost. The trail on my left flank was a likely avenue of approach for enemy tanks. My bazooka had its sights aimed in that direction, protected by one of our BARs. A bazooka position has to be placed in a position with extreme caution. When this weapon is fired, a stream of fire blows back almost 50 feet. A person would be burned badly, if not to death, by the back blast.

The German foot soldiers had quieted down and rumors were floating around once again that they would surrender at any time. Those kinds of rumors are for the rear echelon to believe. I doubt that any of the front line troops fell for it, not from the manner in which the Germans had demonstrated their strength a few days ago. During the next few days, snow fell intermittently. The weather was so cold that only the hard sleepers could get any rest. The days were spent in walking around and exercising in an effort to keep warm. The nights were dark and long. We did get two hot meals a day, but mail was scarce, due to the large-scale breakthrough. My old company, L, which I hadn't been with for some time, was kept busy in an attempt to re-capture Steinkopf Hill. Enemy fire from atop Signalberg Ridge commanded their approach to Steinkopf and broke up several of Company L's attacks.

They finally figured out that Signalberg Ridge had to be taken before Steinkopf could be captured and held. Our battalion S-3 had received word that four enemy tanks were seen deployed about 500 yards to our front. They were in a position to play havoc with anyone attempting to attack Spitzberg Hill. A patrol must infiltrate through the woods to knock out the tanks. The battalion commander

sent the information to Companies K and I requesting some platoon leader or platoon sergeant to volunteer to lead the patrol. The S-3 wanted five men armed with bazookas to sneak through the dense snow-covered woods at night to knock out the tanks. We knew that tanks did not remain on the front lines unless they were guarded by infantrymen.

Our patrol would be heard crashing through the snow-covered bushes for quite a ways before getting close enough to the tanks. Their infantry would cut the patrol to pieces even though they had killed the tanks. One certain thing was, I was not going to volunteer for such a suicide mission. No man volunteered without his consent. The men very slowly walked through the woods for some distance. To their sighs of relief the tanks had evidently pulled back, because the fortresses on treads were nowhere to be found in that area.

I did manage to write a couple of letters on 7 January. The ground was still blanketed with snow and zero-degree weather still harassed the troops. That night, Sherman tanks crept up to our frontlines. This could only mean one thing. We were going after that high ground to our front—Signalberg Ridge and Spitzberg Hill. My CP received the order in late afternoon, "*We were going to visit Grandma tomorrow.*" Everyone dreaded that order, but you can't win a war staying in a defensive position.

All during that freezing night everyone wondered what the next day had in store for them. At dawn, we moved out with my platoon being to the rear of Company I. We hiked along the untracked road on our left for some distance until we reached another long, rising hill. The riflemen began to climb the hill when machine guns all over the hill to their front echoed burst after burst of fire, pinning them to the ground. One platoon went through Company K's area to our left flank to put flanking fire on the well-dug-in Krauts.

Then, those accurate 88s began screaming into our advancing company, finding the mark on a few men.

Our artillery was also whizzing overhead to help support us, but it was soon lifted so we could advance closer to the enemy. All of Company I was virtually pinned down. My platoon was sent forward to help assault the position.

The flanking platoon, meanwhile, had knocked out several machine guns with automatic fire and grenades. By this time the German artillery had zeroed in on us. We had to keep moving forward to get as close to the enemy as possible to get out of their barrage. I was leading my platoon on the left flank while Lieutenant Simmons had charge of the right end of our advancing line. We kept advancing, firing hastily from our hips. We finally overran their positions in dugouts.

Most of the Germans had figured they could hold these positions from anyone and they were dumbfounded and stunned at the way these crazy Americans were overtaking their positions. Most of them were scared to death and probably thought that we might pass on by and not find them because the majority of them remained in their large dugout. One or two came out of their spacious holes and surrendered with their hands over their heads. The German dugouts were tremendous holes under the ground. Most of them were real dark inside and peering down through the opening, one could see nothing.

The prisoners were quickly lined up while we began the tedious task of cleaning out the very large foxholes. I was armed with a submachine gun, which was excellent in cleaning out holes. We yelled at them to come out and surrender. When no one answered, a grenade was sent down the hole to get a reply. After the grenade went off, I stuck my grease gun into the hole and sprinkled the inside with automatic fire. With this, the remaining Germans flew out with hand above their heads screaming "*alles kaput*." We

moved from hole to hole and finally the Germans came pouring out. My platoon alone, numbering 10 men, captured 35 Germans.

The right platoon of our company, which was also down to ten men, beat back a German company's counterattack and drove them back across the Lemberg-Bitche highway. My platoon quickly reorganized and continued the attacks across the road to where some of our battalion lines had been before the counterattack.

We were fired on from our right flank, but our quick charges to their holes brought them out, surrendering. We continued the attack for about 400 yards and then began to descend a long, sloping hill. Our company was busy cleaning out the foxholes and they had told my platoon leader to continue on to clean out any enemy to our front. I looked around and we were the only ones spearheading this assault down the long hill. I sent word down the well-spread-out men to the lieutenant to hold up. I was right, we had no contact either to our right or left. Halfway down the hill, it leveled off for about 25 yards and then sloped off again. A pillbox covered with dirt and grass was situated on the level area.

In front of it was a Kraut kicking his feet together to keep them warm. He was looking right at us. I had always considered myself a rather accurate shot with a rifle, so I borrowed an M1 rifle from the man next to me. The Kraut was about 200 yards down the hill. I aimed and fired. I missed him but it was so close that he did not stand there any longer. The excited Kraut soldier turned and ran behind the pillbox, but I was suspicious of something. The situation smelled. Lieutenant Simmons and I talked the matter over and decided to wait a little time before investigating the pillbox. I suspected something.

We were now in a line about 100 yards down the long hill. There was total silence for about ten minutes then the

Kraut behind the pillbox came into view again. When he ran behind the pillbox he had apparently given some kind of signal, for as far left and right that we could see, there were Germans coming up the hill toward us whooping and hollering. We had been sucked into a trap. Apparently the Nazis thought that our battalion would press the attack down the hill and into Reyersviller.

They were waiting for us to get halfway down the forward slope and then pick us off like sitting ducks. Seeing that we could not possibly hold any ground for any time at all. The lieutenant and I got our men to throw everything we had against them and then withdraw on the run. I felt helpless with my grease gun, as they were well out of its range, so I tried hard to keep the men on a straight line while withdrawing to keep anyone from being in front of another member of the platoon. This is imperative in a hasty withdrawal because a man might be accidentally shot by one of his own troops from behind in the excitement.

We withdrew to the top of the hill. As we came over the crest, one of my trusty BAR men, Giacchero, saw a dugout. He began to go for it, figuring that if he made it he could hold them back. I hollered and yelled at him to come back, but he kept going. The Germans kept charging fiercely toward us and were only about 100 yards away. They kept coming despite our automatic fire. Out of the ten men, seven, including the lieutenant, had a BAR. At the same time that Giacchero reached the dugout (about 30 yards to our front) he was hit in the ear. He fell backward and began yelling "Tyson, Tyson, don't leave me." I had to because they would have either killed or captured all of us if we had taken time to drag him back with us.

This nearly killed me having to leave one of my best buddies behind, but we had to keep moving. After the war, Giacchero wrote me that he got into the hole despite being

shot in the ear. He kept firing and the Germans overran the hole and left him for dead. He then whirled and fired at them from the rear. This act of bravery by Giacchero saved all of us. We managed to get back about 400 yards while firing bursts of automatic fire. This was where the remainder of Company I was just pulling in.

They called for artillery support and since there was no time to bracket the target, they called for it to land very close to us, hoping to stop the onslaught of the German counterattack. The rounds of artillery were coming in too close, bursting on the ground and in the trees above us.

There were only two foxholes in the area and a half-filled German slit trench latrine. The foxholes were filled to overflowing with the Company I men. At that time I was knocked flat by the concussion of one of our own shells which burst very close by.

As I was getting up off the ground, I felt around and pinched myself in several places to see if I had been hit by a piece of shrapnel. One thing I did know and that was that I wanted to get somewhere to find some cover. Our artillery in the meantime was exploding all around us and had severed the telephone wires. We had no way to alert the artillery unit to move their barrage out away from us. I ran over to the German latrine and did not hesitate jumping into the half-filled trench. Lieutenant Simmons followed suit and then another man, Ulrich followed him.

We were all trying to bury ourselves in this waste when Ulrich jumped up and yelled "I'm hit, I'm hit——or am I?" In all this excitement, I yelled to him, "Well if you are, get the heck back to the rear and take some of the other wounded with you." We wanted more room in that filthy latrine. He was wounded in the arm, but not too badly.

The reason that he did not know whether he was hit or not was because when a piece of shrapnel first hits you, you are stunned but feel no pain. Our company really felt

the effects of this artillery falling short. Finally, some word or signal must have gotten through, because the rounds began to fall further to our front, stopping the Germans from overrunning our positions.

After a fierce firefight with the Storm Troopers, we repulsed their counterattack and they retreated back to the crest of the hill in front of us. They continued to harass us, though. Every time a man would straighten up a little to try to dig in, a sniper would fire at him.

It was nearly impossible to dig in this frozen snow and ice. We had to set up a defensive area very quickly now because it was almost dark. I crawled out and set the men really wide apart to keep from being encircled again. My platoon was on the right flank of the entire division. We had to extend our eight men to the highway. To do this we had to spread out to 15 yards between each man. This meant that there would be no sleep for anyone that night due to the distance between holes. The Germans might infiltrate through the spaces as it was. We all began digging into the ice while lying in the prone position. It was a very laborious task and by morning due to the hard ground and German interference none of the foxholes were much over a foot deep.

There was a large gap in our lines. The 36th Division was supposed to have their left boundary on the Lemberg-Bitche highway, but they were not there. Our battalion set up an antitank gun to fire down the road behind us if enemy tanks were to make an attempt to come up from behind. My original company, L, meanwhile, had begun the attack up to Signalberg on the left flank of Company K. The German 88s had zeroed in and with the aid of their machine guns drove Company L back into the woods. The executive officer was killed and the platoon leader took over and counterattacked. This time they succeeded in driving up Signalberg Ridge to Beacon Tower along with

Company K, which had previously overrun the German position in their sector. Medics were kept busy all day giving first aid to the wounded. Just before darkness came, we set up a Company I machine gun in a foxhole on our line, and for the other hole which was located about 10 yards behind the machine gun, two platoon CPs were set up. These were the only foxholes in our area. Everyone else was trying to dig in the icy ground.

Lieutenant Simmons and I were sharing this hole with a platoon sergeant from an adjoining platoon. I had crawled around to every hole to tell all to shoot anything that moved during the night, regardless of password, when word came through the telephone to warn everyone that a friendly patrol may pass through our lines during the night. Now I had to return to those holes after they had been told to shoot anything that moved. What a spot I had put myself in! Now it was so dark that one could not see their nose in front of them. After I got my bundle of nerves organized, I walked to the first hole hollering, "It's me Tyson, don't shoot, don't shoot." My very able platoon guide, Orland Gabriel, was located at the first hole and he wheeled around and nearly shot me, as I shouted. I very luckily made my rounds to each foxhole, warning them about the patrol and to be very careful. The Germans could have heard my name when I yelled and could have used it to try and pass their way through the line. We were afraid that the enemy might try to crawl through our lines and get to the rear area to play havoc with communications and supply units.

In all probability, the supposed crack SS Storm Troopers must have once again been doped up, for they whooped and hollered and howled like dogs all night. Not long after dark 88s began falling near our holes. This kept up for several minutes and the crazed troopers began howling and the sound got nearer and nearer. Our machine gun opened

up. One of my men had found some German flares left by the captured soldiers. To set them off, one just hit them against the ground. This tripped some little mechanism that set the flare off. It would only light up for a second or two but that seemed to be long enough for us. They were distributed around to various men and this probably saved our lives that night for we kept busy using them.

The machine gunner thought he heard noises right in front of him and he fired a burst. It seemed as though the Jerries were out to get that machine gun as they tried to sneak up to it. My platoon guide Orland Gabriel was also very busy. He was in a one-foot-deep hole next to the machine gunner. When the German yells got really close, a flare would be tripped, lighting the area long enough to get a bead on one of the doped up Krauts just a yard or two away. When one of the flares went off, a German was able to sight in on one of the machine gunners and wounded him. The assistant gunner quickly took over. We called back for mortar support asking for flares to keep the area lit up as much as possible. Those parachute flares were truly a big help, but soon the supply ran out. Our lines were spread so thin that Germans were able to sneak between our foxholes and were in back of us and walked up to us from the rear. They spoke perfect English and got close enough to use a knife and stabbed several of our boys in the back.

A machine gun section leader was wounded in such a fashion. Our company runner had slipped up and failed to give us the position of the company CP, or, the battalion aid station. When the machine gunner got hit, someone had to help carry him and another casualty back to be evacuated. Our medics and I helped the two casualties and began to carry them through the black night to where we thought the company CP was. We stumbled through the pitch-blackness to the road behind us and down the road for

quite a ways. About a hundred yards down the road, we bumped into several men who knew the password. I recognized one of these men as my platoon-to-CP runner.

We quickly turned the casualties over to them and luckily found the path back to our position. Time after time, the howling Germans tried in vain to infiltrate. Each time a flare would go off, the result was several more dead Krauts. The entire ghastly night was spent in this terrifying manner. This was the most uncertain night that I ever spent in my entire combat experience. One never knew from one minute to the next whether a crafty enemy soldier might tap him on the shoulder and stab him in the back.

After a very long night of intermittent artificial moonlight, daylight appeared over the horizon. Most of us had survived a terrible night and we all breathed a sigh of relief. During the early part of the night our communications sergeant was killed. He had kept every inter-company wire line working; splicing the wires time after time until the fatal shell burst nearby. At daybreak, the Germans pulled back to their line, which was only 200 yards away, and let us alone for awhile. Just a few feet in front of every foxhole lay 2 or 3 stiff Germans. In front of the machine gun lay many German bodies, victims of a stupid and futile attempt, by doped up renegades, to infiltrate our lines.

Everyone began digging their individual holes deeper, meanwhile. No one had dared sleep any that night and were really arm weary, but that did not stop them from digging. The other two Company I men in our foxhole with us wanted to get away from the two skunk-sprayed individuals living with them. My lieutenant and I, with our brown stained white parkas were really beginning to smell by the next day.

I went behind my foxhole and began to wallow in the snow in an attempt to wash away the foul odors obtained earlier while lying in the partly-filled latrine. Lieutenant

Simmons and I talked over our situation. Our men just could not go on without any sleep. Something had to happen. I called the captain and talked the situation over with him. He said that he had been given orders that it was imperative for us to hold this position until relief came. Our regiment was stuck out in front of the whole Army line and if we did not hold this ground, our entire division might be cut off. The captain said that division was going to send us some reinforcements. There was some talk of another company going through us to push the Germans back. We just couldn't keep going through nights like the last one. Contact was finally established with the 36th Division on our left flank. They moved up on line with us. Our regiment set up a squad as an outpost on our right flank and on our side of the Lemberg-Bitche Highway. They alternated this outpost with the 36th Texas Division. This helped out my platoon considerably and we set up a new defensive position with two-man foxholes so that one man could sleep a little while his hole buddy was on guard duty. The morale, which was at its lowest ebb of the entire war the night before, began to rise. No one could walk around our area without being in danger of enemy rifle fire. The foxholes had to be improved by staying very close to the ground. Chow was also a problem. We had to send a few men back to the company CP to pick up K-rations. They had to keep low while running until they reached the road, which was in defilade. When the rations were brought up behind my hole, I threw them one by one to the first hole who, in turn, would pass them down the line to the other holes. My CP was 10 yards to the rear of one of those holes. It wasn't too healthy at all to try and walk to them. They threw their canteens to me to be filled with water.

One of the boys got a little too brave and decided to walk from his hole back to our CP. A shot from an enemy sniper

hit him in the chest. The aid man did what he could for him and the litter bearers were called to evacuate him back from the front lines. Night came and my platoon had no more troubles to cope with. The Germans did send a patrol against one of our Company I platoons, but the patrol found the going too heavy and turned back. We had flares parachuting most of the night to keep the enemy frozen in their foxholes. Their dope had apparently worn off. Early the next morning we were greeted by a company of our men who were passing through our lines. They were well spread out and being led by their company commander. The Germans saw them coming even before they passed through us and they called for artillery, so 88s began falling all around us and followed the bewildered company all through their attack.

This infantry rifle company marched through the bursting 88 shells for about 100 yards until the captain was hit slightly with shrapnel and their executive officer was hit very critically by another shell. The company's leadership was gone and no one seemed to want to take over. The company was going to pieces and the men began to turn and run back to our lines. Their company commander and first sergeant ran to my foxhole.

Another platoon sergeant and I ordered the captain to stop the company's rout and to get them to build up a line to reinforce our firing positions. The captain was unable to do anything because of his wound, but his word did the trick. They must have thought that we were officers because they obeyed our commands. We made them realize that if they withdrew, the Germans might counterattack and penetrate through our very thin lines. The fault of the rout was not blamed on the ailing captain; he did not have any cooperation from the non-coms. With the aid of their captain and first sergeant, they spread out and built up a line along our position, thus strengthening our defensive

hold. The murderous artillery with its extreme accuracy had left its toll of casualties scattered all over our area for as far as 100 yards to our front. A few of the less-critically injured managed to crawl back to our lines.

Some of my men tried to crawl out to the wounded to help drag them back, but the Krauts were determined to get the would-be rescuers as well. After aid men helped the casualties they managed to return to safety on their own. Something had to be done about the men still out there in the front. According to the Geneva Convention, neither side during a war is to harm medical personnel, since they do not carry weapons and are noncombatants.

The Germans were already notorious for breaking the rules of warfare and our aid men knew it. Their sense of duty and bravery, however, overcame fear and they, with large red crosses on their helmets, in addition to Red Cross armbands, moved out on the double in an attempt to reach the wounded GIs. As soon as the corpsmen left the safety of their foxholes, they were fired on by the murderous gangsters. We began to fire a screen of bullets over the heads of the medics in an attempt to keep the Germans in their holes. This proved to be futile because the Nazis refused to permit the aid men to evacuate the wounded. We telephoned the situation to company headquarters. They decided later on that we would form a smoke screen using mortar smoke shells. We were unable to at that time due to a strong wind blowing toward us. Later in the afternoon the wind died down and every foxhole was alerted that the Germans might take advantage of the smoke screen and attempt a counterattack. They could be right on top of us before we would be able to detect their maneuver. The smoke screen was laid on and the medics bravely moved out to the front; they were accompanied by litter bearers who had come up from the aid station to help in the attempted evacuation. The medics worked for some time

under the smoke screen. Most of the injured were returned to our fortified lines of foxholes when a terrific volley of rifle fire whizzed past us. The medics managed to get back to safety as the firefight began. We called for mortar fire. Our mortar men already had this area zeroed in and their accurate barrage falling on top of the Germans accompanied by heavy rifle and machine-gun fire quickly repulsed their attack.

That night the Germans sneaked up and captured a few of the casualties that lay on the ground near them. The remainder of the night was relatively quiet. Our original company, L, meanwhile, being disorganized by the death of its executive officer and by the evacuation of their captain, were begging the battalion commander for the return of my platoon. Company L had suffered many casualties during the last few days in the attack on Signalberg Ridge. They had such a large area to defend that it was imperative that they have reinforcements. There had been repeated counterattacks by Germans charging up the hill behind the tower. Our battalion major was finally convinced that my platoon was needed more by Company L than by Company I to which we had been attached for some time. Company I now had plenty of strength after being reinforced by a company from the 398th Regiment.

The next morning, after eating a delicious K-ration breakfast, we got word that we were to return to Company L. I was very happy with this news, because I had rather fight with the boys that I knew. We gave the joyous news to our men and moved back to the company CP to get the position on the map as to where we would proceed. Through the woods of Spitzberg, down a draw, and finally through another woods that led nearly to Lambach, we marched wearily along. We were carrying our bedrolls, and were heavily weighed down with all of our equipment when we reached a road that ran from Lambach to the town on Signalberg Hill.

We proceeded up the steep grade until we ran into the company CP. My platoon spread out and rested along the road while Lieutenant Simmons was getting instructions from the CP.

Greeting us were several of our platoon who had been wounded and hospitalized and had returned to duty. We certainly needed reinforcements since there were only eight of us left when we returned to our home company. After receiving our orders the platoon moved slowly up the steep, bare hill to the spot we were to defend. There were no trees or bushes at all on this hill except for a line of seven trees that ran in a single file down the extreme right flank. On top of this hill was a panoramic view of the very thickly wooded area to our front where the enemy was dug in. Behind these woods there was one hill after another.

Our company CO had given orders to dig in on the forward slope of the hill, in plain view of the enemy. In this position we would be exposed to rifle or machine-gun fire at all times. The enemy would know every move we made. Under protest we began digging foxholes, expecting enemy machine guns to cut us down any minute. Digging was extremely difficult here because the soil was very rocky. Fortunately, nothing happened during that afternoon.

Dark clouds appeared overhead and drops of rain began to fall. This misty, rainy night must have discouraged any enemy patrols, because the only noise heard throughout the night was the pitter patter against our raincoats and the occasional expression "Why was I ever born a boy?"

About 0200 in the morning the rain stopped and snow flurries fell over the area. It snowed continuously the remainder of the dreary night. By morning there was a thick, white blanket of snow. What miserable weather these Europeans have to cope with. Since we could not dig in the ground very deeply, we built the sides up around our foxholes. Then we put our raincoats over the rest of the hole.

Maginot fortification

The day before our regiment had received a new commanding officer to replace the post vacated when our colonel went up to division to take over the executive officer's vacancy. Our battalion also got a new CO. He must have carefully studied our defensive positions because he ordered a shifting of boundaries between the various companies early the next morning. We moved back onto our side of the hill and down the road several hundred yards and then back near the top of Signalberg Ridge.

My platoon began digging through the snow and dirt along the military crest of that snow-white barren hill. Lieutenant Roy Simmons had remained at the company CP. The commander was the only other officer in the company and he needed my platoon leader to assist him. I again had the platoon.

I scouted a spot for my platoon CP on the side of a bank where once, long ago, there had been a narrow road going over the hillside. This road was not passable for the large holes in it where the soil had washed away. My platoon guide, Gabriel, dug into this bank, making a small cave-like foxhole. The hole was just large enough for two people to lie down. Late that afternoon I placed a two-man outpost

on the forward slope of the hill. The two men had to wait until dark before digging in because enemy snipers on nearby Steinkopf Hill would surely pick them off. We strung wire out to them and a sound-powered telephone connected to my hole.

Two other men were sent out there to stand guard while the outpost men were digging. Hot chow was brought up to the different platoons late in the afternoon and it tasted good even though I got a mouthful of snow every time I tried to take a bite of the chow. Sometime after eating, everyone settled down in their open foxholes to await the expected German patrols. They were notorious about greeting a new outfit on the first night they moved into a new defensive position. This night the weather again probably discouraged this activity.

The next morning, after a hot breakfast of powdered eggs, French toast, and coffee, our new CO, Lentz, came to my CP reconnoitering the defensive positions. He mentioned something about having engineers come up to lay barbed-wire entanglements in front of our main line of defense. That afternoon I received a dozen small pecan pies from my aunt. They were all broken in pieces, but Gabriel and I ate them all. Christmas presents were still being delivered to everyone. Early the next morning, 15 January 1945, the 1st Battalion relieved us. We had been given the happy news an hour before and everyone was ready.

A platoon was sent to my CP. I oriented the three relieving squad leaders, and also the platoon leader concerning the enemy, our boundaries, and other details concerning our defensive position.

We picked up our bedrolls and equipment and marched to the company CP. There were smiles on the faces of everyone as we actually moved down the long hill into Lambach. It was a tiresome hike, loaded down with our equipment, but no one seemed to complain about it. We

were going to stay in a house out of the snow and rain for at least two days. After that, no one knew what to expect.

Our very unusual winter line was now established, with the Germans holding half of the Maginot Line, and our regiment holding the other half. On the left boundary of our regimental winter line was Little Anzio, hidden in the edge of the woods overlooking a narrow road lying in a draw. This adjoined the Splinter Factory, a half-moon shaped line of foxholes that were dug in on slopes of the Kirscheidt Woods overlooking the small artillery-battered village of Reyersviller.

The Splinter Factory wound around, down into low ground, across the highway and up into the Steinkopf Woods. The winter line next extended across wide-open Signalberg Ridge, which had a beautiful panoramic view of the whole winter line. This mountain ran into Spitzberg Woods, our right boundary, connecting to the 26th Division lines. Our battalion moved along the narrow winding road into the mountain village of Lambach. My platoon was billeted in one of the better homes of this farm community. With only one bed in each house, almost everyone slept on the floor. The first item on a GI's itinerary (not the Army's) seemed to be the investigation of the contents of every home in an effort to find souvenirs and food, especially pistols. After a lot of plundering, spare time was spent lying on their bedrolls, either telling of amusing experiences or taking a nap. No one suffered from oversleep while on the front lines.

Lieutenant Simmons came into my house that afternoon to tell me that he had put my name in for promotion to tech sergeant. Well, the rank didn't mean much to me, but the extra pay did. He also told us that the men in our company were to get their New Year's turkey dinners the next day. The Nazi's futile breakthrough on New Year's Day had delayed all the holiday turkey dinners. That afternoon the

Germans served notice that they were fully aware that we were taking a rest in Lambach by sending two screaming artillery shells to greet us. Evidently their intelligence sections had it mixed up. They probably thought we were celebrating New Year's Day then, instead of the following day. There was no damage done, as the shells fell about 30 yards short of our house.

After dinner everyone began cleaning their Garand rifles (M1s) and their BARs (Browning Automatic Rifles), and as usual this was followed by a rifle inspection. Two hot meals were served and everyone slept most of the night. There still was, however, guard duty to be performed. Only one man from each platoon had to remain on guard at one time. The next day's schedule was crammed with many different events. Soon after breakfast, there was a shower detail. Regiment had installed temporary showers in one of the houses. We got a welcome change of clean clothes. None of us got a tailor-made fit from the pile of clothes, but that was the least of our worries.

Doughboys on the front lines don't have much pride in the art of neatness of dress. One of my riflemen was a barber and he worked all day, giving the men of our platoon and others, haircuts. After a joyous New Year's dinner of turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, peas, and salad followed by a piece of delicious apple pie, everyone of us that desired to go to a movie was allowed to do so. Naturally there was no transportation, so we had to walk a few kilometers to Siersthal. There was a theater set up in one of the large houses. Many of us had seen the movie "Bathing Beauty," but the sight of American civilization alone was worth making the hike to the theater. For about an hour our minds had escaped this troubled world and were concerned with only what we could now see of the good old U. S. A.; but soon the movie ended and we were once more in a formation, marching back to Lambach.

We reached the tiny cow village in time for roll call, but there was no mail. Mail had been very slow coming up to us since the breakthrough. The rear echelon must have been busy also, moving from time to time, to make certain that they would not be captured. Most everyone caught up with his correspondence the last two days. Writing in freezing weather is difficult to do. Your hands get so cold that it is very hard to make these muscles react as they should.

The former captain of Company I, Travis Hopkins, returned to our battalion after being wounded. He took over command of my Company L. This captain was a former boss of mine, having been my first platoon leader back in the latter part of 1942.

Lieutenant Simmons returned to take over command of our platoon. I received word from company headquarters that one man from my platoon would be allowed to go back to the rear echelon for a week's rest at a newly-formed division rest center. I sure wanted to go myself, but I let all those I thought deserving draw straws. The lucky squad leader left the next morning for a much-deserved rest at the center.

There was some talk about sending me back to division headquarters to receive a battlefield commission at this time, but I did not want to go until I was assured of returning to my old company. I had been with this same platoon since I was first stationed in the Army. Time sure flies when one does not want a good thing to end, because our two-day rest was at an end. At the break of dawn the next morning we laid our bed rolls in platoon piles, marched in column formation up the road through Siersthal, to a road junction. Our company then took a right turn, and marched down the Reyersviller highway for a good while until we came to a roadblock. We had gone way out of the way in going this far, but the Germans had minefields all over the countryside. We did not want to take any chances on

exploding those Schu mines. An anti-tank gun was set up a little way from this roadblock at a torn down overpass.

We pulled off the road to the left of the highway and moved in a single file up the snow-white plateau until we reached a wooded hill. The company wound around the hill and we passed some mortar men dug in at the foot of the mountain, then we moved up the road farther until we reached the top of Kirscheidt Hill. Our advance was held up temporarily while Captain Hopkins was getting the new poop from the CO of the 2nd Battalion company that we were relieving. As soon as we found out to what area our platoon was to go, we moved around the hill. In questioning some of the men in the foxholes, I found the platoon CP. Their platoon sergeant zeroed us in concerning this hot corner which had become so famous that they named it "Little Anzio." On our left boundary was a road that ran from behind us around the hill to our front. On the other side of the road was a little patch of woods followed by open country.

Down the hill to our front was narrow road. Beyond it was a wide draw and across that draw was the enemy. Not far to our left front was enemy-fortified Freudenberg Farms. My platoon CP was a very old French dugout built under ground for about 10 yards. It was a nice hole, but my lieutenant wanted a CP a little to the rear and center of the platoon. We remained in this hole overnight, though, for it was too late in the day to begin digging another hole. I was kept busy checking the platoon's defensive position. There must not be gaps between any of the holes near the platoon's left boundary where the enemy might sneak through our lines. There was a deep cut in the ridge that came between two of the foxholes, which ended abruptly at the mountainside.

Captain Hopkins instructed us as to where to find our platoon areas and we moved in an easterly direction until

we crossed a narrow mountain road. Just across this road we came to a very steep slope that overlooked the Reyersviller highway far down in the valley. The cliff at this point was so steep that we had to slide down the snow-covered bank. Halfway down was a line of well-spread-out dugouts. Our line ran down the hill and bent around to the left, forming a half-moon-shaped defensive line.

After sliding some 50 yards until we came upon the platoon CP. Lieutenant Simmons already had his three squad leaders with him to lead those acting sergeants down to their areas. We searched the area to the front and found several sets of footprints. Evidently a five-man patrol was sent over to welcome us. I learned from the platoon leader that this was the company that a home-town friend of mine was in. I called the tech sergeant, John Angier, on the platoon telephone just as he was pulling out of his area.

After a few minutes of orientation the 2nd Battalion lieutenant assembled his platoon and they climbed up the steep slippery hill to join the rest of his company. I made a hasty reconnaissance of the platoon area because it was beginning to get dark. This was a spooky-looking area. Previous doughboys in the area had named it "the splinter factory." There had been so many enemy 88s and mortar shells landing in the area that most of the treetops had been blown off by the tree bursts. Naturally there were no leaves because it was winter and they had fallen. Many of the trees were broken and splintered, thus gaining the name Splinter Factory. It was easy to find these various dugouts because there were dark, beaten paths in the snow leading from one to the other.

From right to left down the hill I journeyed until I reached the bottom of the hill. This was Hell's Corner for the enemy, buried in the hillside across Reyersviller highway, could see every move made on this corner. Just in front of us was an open draw with surrounding woods all

around our area. Just a few hundred yards from here was enemy-held Reyersviller. The town had been blasted for days by our artillery. I warned everyone not to remain out of their foxholes because enemy snipers could pick them off easily from Steinkopf Woods.

I made my way from Hell's Corner up the cliff to my left where there were three more foxholes making up this half-moon battle line. When I returned to the CP we received word from the company runner of the password for the night. My platoon guide, Gabriel, who was also the runner, did not know where our holes were, so I escorted him around the area to pass down the password and the countersign to the men. When we returned to the platoon CP, it was dark.

The platoon CP consisted of two foxholes; the lieutenant and I stayed in one with my assistant and the medic in the other. We all ate our supper K-rations and began the long night tours of guard duty. One medic, of whom all of us had become very fond, George Demopoulis, felt sorry for us and volunteered to help in pulling guard. He was not armed and according to international rules of warfare, was never to carry arms. While on guard though, he borrowed one of our rifles.

Old George, the medic, although very jittery, completed his guard duty along with the rest of us without a flaw. About midnight, and so dark that one could not see a thing, one of my riflemen thought he heard a noise just in front of him.

Being very alert and also trigger happy, he fired a shot directly in front of him. Nothing happened and he sat down once again on the edge of his dugout, trying to console himself that the noise might have been just his imagination. Everyone was on the alert for a while after hearing the shot and finally the tenseness eased a little and the rifleman finished out the night, two hours on and two hours

off. The next morning, the two men in the same hole that had fired that one single shot during the night moved outside the hole to stretch a little. To their amazement they found a dead German soldier lying at the foot of their foxhole. There was nothing left of his face because the one lone shot fired by a quick reflex had hit point blank in the German's face. The dead Kraut was in the act of throwing a grenade into the American's hole because he had his finger on the grenade pin, ready to release it to set it off and drop it in the hole. This would have killed both men occupying the hole.

It seemed like every time a new outfit moved into an area for the first time, the Germans would send a patrol to greet them. That night they tried to sneak a female spy through our lines. She came up out of the draw in front of the 1st Battalion. The Krauts were not smart enough, for the blond *frauline* was caught trying to sneak through. The next morning it was decided that something should be done to keep the German patrols from coming up to our holes without us detecting their presence. We put some pebbles inside some K-ration tins and tied them on a string stretched between two trees in front of each foxhole. Anyone climbing the hill in the dark would walk into the string booby trap thus rattling the cans and alerting us to their unexpected visit.

This bright idea didn't work too well that first night because the wind blew and we were on pins and needles trying to figure out whether it was the wind or the real McCoy.

In order to carry chow down the steep frozen cliff, we had to tie a rope from a tree by the road above us, down most of the way to my CP. One had to pull oneself up by the rope to keep from sliding back. We had to send several men up the hill to bring the different food containers down to the CP. My most able platoon guide, Gabriel, did all of the serving in the crude temporary cafeteria.

Late in the afternoon of the next day, we installed sound power telephones in four of the foxholes. Each flank had a phone and the other two were in the center of our line. Those holes could then report in during the night. Soon after dark that night, I tried to call our right flank hole, but there was no answer. We decided that some sneaky German must have found the wire and cut it. Gabriel and Lieutenant Simmons volunteered to check the wires from our CP to the right flank hole.

Our aid man, Demopoulis, was on guard with a BAR at this time just outside our foxhole. It was one of those dark French nights. The path led down to the hole and to the left for ten yards and then met a narrow trail leading left and right. The medic saw his buddy going behind his hole to the left and out of sight. Then, a little later, he saw shadows moving down to his right. Thinking this was some Germans that had infiltrated our line and was heading for our CP, he nervously pulled the trigger on the BAR and hollered to me that the gun had jammed.

I was in a predicament; my boots were off because I was in the process of changing my socks. I always kept a pair next to my skin to keep them dry and then would change them every so often. I quickly yelled to the medic to fire one of the M-1 rifles that were propped up at the entrance. He fired several rounds while I was hurriedly putting my boots on so I wouldn't have to walk in the snow barefoot. I flew out the door to determine which way they were coming from and the aid man showed me where they had hit the ground when he fired. I realized right quick that they were our men: Lieutenant Simmons and Gabriel who had gone to check the communications wires.

I yelled to the aid man to cease firing. I told him that he had been shooting at Gabe and Roy. Old George, the medic became hysterical, yelling "I've killed my best buddy! I've killed my best buddy!" I tried to calm him down a little while I kept watching the spot where the two men had hit

the ground. By this time, excitement came from elsewhere. Captain Hopkins called on the phone from the company CP asking what had happened and I explained the situation. He asked me to go and investigate to see if the men had been hit. I told him that I would and waited a few minutes for things to calm down. I was afraid that the other men in the foxholes might also think that Krauts had infiltrated our lines and shoot me while I was investigating. After about five minutes of anxious waiting, I moved down the winding path to our right flank.

I could not find any trace of them so I moved down to our last hole. I was happy to learn that the two men were there, unharmed. After hitting the ground, they lay quiet for a while and then crawled down to the hole following the wire to see if there was a break in the line. The break was right at the hole. Evidently one of the men had stepped on it, on a sharp rock, and had severed the wire. We all returned back to the our CP after Gabe had called by phone to let the medic know that he was not a killer. Old George swore he would never do guard duty again and he kept his word.

I called the company CP, relieving the captain's mind. The rest of the night was uninterrupted by the two-on-and-two-off of the infantrymen. One of our machine-gun dugouts on our left flank was raided by a very quiet Jerry patrol that stole the machine gun from the hole and then dropped a grenade in the hole. One of the men had fallen asleep and was awakened by a noise. He looked around for his machine gun and roused his sleeping buddy to tell him of the robbery. This scared the patrol away. The next morning a dud German grenade was found in the hole. A faulty mechanism in the grenade kept it from exploding, thus teaching one man to never fall asleep while on guard duty. His falling asleep could have cost both of those men their lives.

After chow the next morning the captain sent some trip wires and flares. We were to set them up at the foot of the hill at the edge of the woods. They would warn us if an enemy patrol were to trip on the wire, thus setting off a flare. The flares lit up an area and the men on guard could mow them down. The trip wires could not be placed during daylight hours. We waited until dark and about five of us went down the spooky hill to the edge of the woods. Across this field with a highway running through it was the enemy, dug in along a wooded hill. Two of the men kept watch while we set up the wire along the front of our defensive line. I was certainly glad when we finished that job and returned.

The next day a very queer, unfortunate event occurred. The company runner brought two new men to my CP. They had just come from a replacement depot. We were busy with some details right then so I sent them down to Hell's Corner. They were given instructions at my CP to stay down low and don't walk around outside their holes, because the enemy could see their every move. We had been having occasional sniper fire in the area ever since the captain had sent an experienced sniper, Horace West, to our area to snipe at the enemy across the hill to our front. I was on my way to their hole when I heard a shot echo from Steinkopf Hill and a loud thump nearby. At that time one of the men began yelling for help. I ran down there to find a GI lying on his stomach.

The victim was one of the two recruits that had just arrived. We dragged him to cover where we could administer first aid. I told the rest of the men to remain in their holes and not give the Kraut sniper anyone else to shoot at. We put pressure on the wound. It was a very bad chest wound and the recruit died soon after the aid man arrived on the scene. This young boy never knew what hit him. He had given the enemy sniper a target by untying his bedroll

outside his dugout. I asked the others at his hole what the dead boy's name was and even the recruit that had accompanied him from the repple depot did not know. He was not wearing his dog tags. We had not had time to write the man's name down at our CP. I called company headquarters to have litter bearers sent down for the body. No one at headquarters had written down the new man's name either. Regiment finally determined his name through a process of elimination.

Lieutenant Simmons and I began discussing the untimely presence of our company sniper. He being with us had caused us to also be sniped at for the last two days. Previous to this, there had been no sniping there by either us or the enemy. We became quite angry about all of this sniping and I called the captain and asked him to remove this sniper. The sniper, Horace West, was doing more harm than he was good. The captain agreed and we received less and less sniping. This event certainly made everyone move around "on the double" when they had to leave their dugouts.

Around dawn and dusk, the Germans liked to remind us that they were still thinking about us. We would receive at least a few rounds in our platoon area about once or twice day. The weather had been terrible lately. Snow was on the ground and had frozen as the temperature was at about zero degrees.

The Shoepacs that we wore made our feet sweat excessively. Many suffered from trenchfoot and frostbite. My big toes were numb with frostbite. I used to take my shoes off at various times of the day and rub my feet. Also, I would take the extra pair of socks that I kept next to my skin and change them. Many of the men did not do this, and consequently, their feet were in bad shape. One thing we were getting plenty of at this time was cigarettes. They were issued to us at various intervals. What hurt me so much

was the lack of sweets. We did not get much candy or cookies.

The mail finally caught up with us while we were in this area. I received 16 letters that day. Packages had been sent on up, but only a few letters. Around 3 PM the following day, we were nearly finished with chow when suddenly we heard some mortars being fired from Reyersviller. The men were well spread out, sitting on the ground eating from their mess kits. I was about five yards from my soggy dugout dishing out seconds to one of my men, when two mortar shells landed right in the middle of us. Everyone ran for his hole except my platoon guide and another man who quickly hit the ground. I made it to my foxhole just as another mortar shell, followed by several others that found their terrifying mark right at my CP.

My platoon guide, Orland Gabriel, who had been lying to the left rear of the hole stormed into my dugout yelling, "I'm hit." He quickly took off his battered steel helmet and blood flowed down his face. Our medic, who was already at my dugout, quickly put pressure on the superficial wound. That piece of shrapnel had penetrated his steel helmet, but the helmet had been a lifesaver, along with some toilet paper. These two items had slowed down the velocity of the fragment until it just lacerated the top of this "lucky" doughboy's head. (See Gabriel's input on page 42). Our barber-rifleman was also slightly hurt in the arm. I helped administer first aid to him, while some of the others collected all of their equipment. The mortar fire quickly lifted and we sent the two men up to the company with the chow containers, to be sent back to the aid station by the chow jeep. This was the second Purple Heart for Gabriel, and I sure did hate to see him evacuated for the second time.

Around midnight of this cold dreary night, a German patrol stumbled over the trip wire in front of our position.

As a result a flare was set off. They, of course, realized what had happened because they froze in their tracks. All along the line of our foxholes, everyone kept still but carefully reconnoitered the base of the hill in an effort to get a glimpse of a good target that had been exposed by the artificial daylight. The enemy patrol played it smart after the flares gray light burned out and returned to their hideout on Steinkopf Hill.

We waited nervously for their raid, but it never materialized. Snow flurries changed to freezing rain for the next few days, causing the leaky roofed dugouts to be filled with water. Most everyone was kept busy bailing out the flooding foxholes. Morale became very low. At least we were not on the attack. The account of the Russians pushing Hitler's Storm Troopers back became the talk of the foxholes. All of us were willing to let the Communists continue their fight on to Berlin while we remained here, but we knew that would never happen. What we looked forward to was the two- or three-day rest in either of the three quaint cow towns to our rear. They were: Siersthal, Lambach, and Glassemberg. They were barnyard homes with somewhat leaky roofs and they became the infantryman's idea of heaven after weeks of underground splashing around in water-filled foxholes.

Early in the afternoon of the last day of January 1945, our company was relieved and we left the spooky, never-to-be-forgotten, Splinter Factory. The long out-of-the-way march back to Lambach was made. A long and tiring march back to a town for a rest was one hike an infantryman never griped about. We wearily "dragged in" to Lambach after dark. I was notified immediately that I was to leave for a three-day leave to Paris the next morning. Three of us from the battalion jumped on a two-and-a-half-ton truck the next morning on our way to the overnight stop at the division rest center nestled on a steep hill of a small village far

away from the noise of warfare. We passed by many of these so-called cow towns before reaching our first stop en route to Paris. Our first instruction at this area was to walk down to the quartermaster building to get an issue of clean clothes.

I tried, in vain, to pull strings for a new field jacket. Some others had gotten them. Mine was filthy dirty with not only dirt, but blood and food stains. Next on the schedule was a hot shower, my third one since arriving in France about three months before. On the way down the hill I ran into two lieutenants who had just been sent back to receive battlefield commissions and were returning to the front lines. They were buddies of mine, one William Hackling, was a mortar forward observer and had been with my platoon on several occasions, observing and directing mortar fire. The other man was Al Coursey, a former platoon sergeant in my company. I was a little envious of them for I had temporarily turned down my commission before because they were too short of personnel to lose anymore at that time.

There was a really long chow line when we went to eat that afternoon. I thought we would never make it, but finally we received a very good feast. These rear echelon boys sure did eat well. That night we took in a movie and wrote letters in a nice service club that had been set up by the Red Cross in a large building in the town. The crowded village was jammed with rear echelon personnel in addition to some transients, like me, and there was a big mix up as to where some of us were to sleep. The next morning some two-and-a-half-ton Army trucks packed us in like sardines and moved out to Paris, one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The trucks moved slowly down the traffic-jammed highway until late in the afternoon when we pulled into crowded Paris. The captain in charge of our convoy had a little difficulty in locating Rainbow Corner, the Red Cross Center of Paris.

We were billeted at several hotels that the government had rented for such occasions. We each had private rooms, but there was no hot water and very little heat. There was a very serious coal shortage due to the coal-mining areas still being in the hands of the Germans.

Our meals were eaten at a swank French restaurant served American style by English-speaking French waiters and waitresses. This was certainly a treat, sitting down at a table to eat while a small French band played American music.

The Rainbow Corner was remodeled to resemble a luxurious service club with its own theater, canteen, writing rooms, spacious lobbies, and equipped with everything to make the GI tourists comfortable and content for brief visits. Information concerning plays, movies, variety shows, concerts, and many other entertaining events was posted or available at this resort. The canteen served such refreshments as coffee, doughnuts, and even Coca Colas. Many of us visited the large PX that had been set up in a department store. PX rations could be obtained, and one could buy a number of souvenirs, such as the very famous Parisian perfumes and various other reminders of this gay capital of France.

The purchase of souvenirs was certainly not confined to this one spot, but could be bought most anywhere. Sidewalks were lined with little shops and prices were quite high. Paris was a beautiful sight with its memorable buildings. Most everyone took advantage of the offered tours around the city, visiting such places as Notre Dame de Paris, Les Invilades where Napoleon is buried, Eglise de la Madeleine, Basilique du Sacré Coeur, l'Opera de Paris, and others. The most beautiful of all was Le Palais de Chaillot. The two landmarks that stood out in everyone's memory of Paris are the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe.

Hitler's troops did spare this beautiful city. The only war effects that I saw were the two buildings that had machine-gun bullet holes in them, but little damage was done. The Parisian women were pretty, but too artificial looking. I do not think they compare with the beauty of American women. Almost everyone in Paris travels within the city just as New Yorkers do, in subways. Here it is called the Metro. They are also crowded beyond capacity and as such resemble ours, but not as good.

My two-day-and-three-night visit to Paris had drawn to an end. On the morning of 5 February, we mounted into Army trucks and began the long ride back to the front lines. After a long tiresome trip we pulled into the village housing the division rest center where we changed trucks and were taken to the little village where our battalion kitchens were. The chow truck had already been to the front lines and back, so I had to remain at Company L's kitchen that night. What a racket those guys had. They lived in houses most of the time, way out of the danger of war. We sure did appreciate what they did for us, though.

Before dawn my mess sergeant woke me to get ready to move up to the company. We were in a defensive position in the chow jeep along the narrow highway for quite a few kilometers until we reached Lambach. Then we turned and went up a winding road to the company CP and then farther up on Signalberg Ridge to where my platoon had moved while I was in Paris.

This area had changed considerably since I had left. During the last week or so, two engineers had come forward and built solid concertina barbed-wire entanglements on the skyline across this wide open ridge and this was just 50 yards in front of our line of foxholes.

Defying all tactical training information from field manuals, my platoon, way under half-strength, had a front of approximately 300 yards to defend. There were only ten

foxholes so widely spread out that they were as much as 30 yards apart. The steep, sloped, barren hill had only two or three trees except on its right flank, where there was a single line of pines running down the hillside. There was a very narrow passageway through the wire entanglement for the men on the outpost to pass to and from the main line. We now had two outposts on the other side of the ridge with sound-powered telephones in them connected to the platoon CP. One of our foxholes was directly behind this gap in the wire in a position to see anyone that might pass through it.

Our battalion CP was at the very foot of the mountain. It had been an old large French dugout, built right into the side of the hill. It looked as if it might fall in at any minute. Heavy snows over a period of time had collapsed the farthest end of the dugout. This same dugout had been the company CP some days back. I was glad, in a way, to get back to my platoon, but I sure did enjoy staying inside a warm, dry building, especially at night. The long ride by truck during the cold weather made the trip very unenjoyable.

Barracks, 1944

The regimental history book, *399th in Action,* relates this incident:

399th Infantry Regiment insignia

"A cold driving rain swept the snow from the hills on 12 February. Love Joes (GIs from Company L) crept out to the fallen tower on Signalberg, planted hundreds of dynamite charges and moved back.

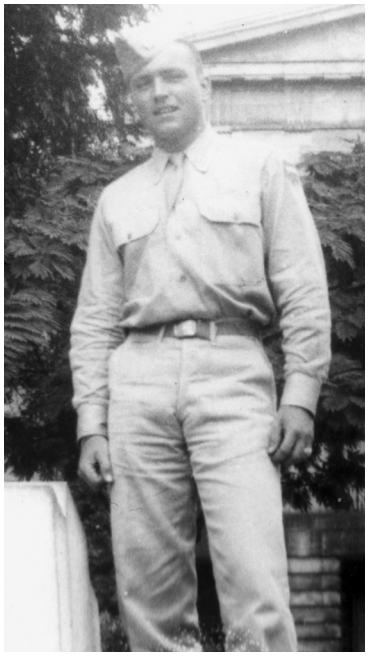
They then listened to a terrific explosion rock the night. Krauts in Reyersviller muttered *'verdammte Amerikaner!'* And dove for the cellars. The Panama Canal had been started. The long trench of World War I vintage was burrowed 75 yards from the nearest Germans."

(continued on page 113)

Harry St. A. O'Neill Added the Following Addendum

Previous to the above action, as squad leader, I took two new men with me each night to a foxhole on the far side of Signalberg Hill. This was one of several outposts situated right in front of our lines, looking for German patrols that might pass through. One such patrol had penetrated our lines a couple of weeks before and captured three of our soldiers from the outpost over 500 yards to my right. That same patrol returned a couple of nights later and came upon our outpost. We made contact with them and suddenly I heard what sounded like one of their grenades—

commonly known as a "potato masher"—in our hole. I told the other men to throw it out and it exploded fairly near us but without causing any injuries.


Harry O'Neill

Fearing that they knew our exact location, we shot up the patrol, taking prisoners. These were the first for our regiment in many days. Later I learned that one of my men had pulled the pin on one of our grenades and dropped it in the hole. It was this grenade that made the noise. Had it gone off then or even close to our foxhole, this story would have had a different ending. It was then decided that a trench would be dug from the near side of the hill over the top to the outpost. This way there could be continuous monitoring of the Germans with access to the outpost at any time. Prior to this, I was required to go to the outpost after dark and then leave before dawn. I had been doing this for a couple of weeks before the decision to dig the trench was made.

The night that the engineers placed the charges, I took a patrol out beyond the outpost for protection. When the engineers had completed their job and were ready to set off the charges, I was told to go to the

outpost and bring those men back. In making my way there I unknowingly walked into a German minefield planted to discourage night patrols from our side.

I was in the middle of the minefield when I stepped on one. It knocked me to the ground. When I came to my senses and analyzed the situation, I was able to determine the direction of our lines. I was in a no-man's land somewhere on top of Signalberg Hill, but I finally located the site of one of our outposts near a group of trees. In order to get there, I had to crawl out of the minefield. Fortunately, the mines had been buried in snow because the ground was frozen at that time. The rain had melted the snow and I was able to feel for and set aside several of the mines as I crawled to the outpost. Finally, I covered the distance and made contact with them. Notification was sent back that I was secure and the operation as cited above went forward. As for me, it was the beginning of a long trip to a hospital in Nancy, France, and then England and finally to the United States where after a year and nine operations, I was discharged.

(continued from page 111)

Our dugout began to leak so badly that we had to bail it out every few minutes. My hole had some "brass" in it at the time. My lieutenant was with another lieutenant who was the mortar forward observer. The medic also was in the hole. Lieutenant Simmons and I pulled all of the guard duty. We kept our phone by our ears while on guard. The men on the line and especially those at the outpost had to speak in low whispers. To make us hear them, they would blow into the mouthpiece. It is very dangerous making any noise on an outpost when so near the enemy. Their position might be given away and a German patrol slip up on their exact position.

The next day we got enough phones for one in almost every hole. This was because the holes were so far apart. If one of them detected someone sneaking through the lines, they could warn everyone of it and we could give them any information during the night without having to go to each hole.

During the breakthrough, someone had abandoned a jeep on the far side of the Airplane Beacon Tower on the far side of the ridge. Since that was a no-man's land, no one dared go and bring it back. That night, a man from our company decided he was going to retrieve it. He crawled over the ridge on the hard, icy ground near the tower pulling a long wire with him that was fastened to a cable on one of the truck winches. After reaching the jeep, he tied the cable hook to it and signaled for the winch to pull him back. He steered the jeep until it crossed safely behind our lines where he heaved a big sigh of relief.

The next day was the same as usual. Everybody tried to catch up on his sleep. I had to check on the holes constantly to make sure there were men awake to give the alarm and hold back an attack until the others woke up. That attack might come at any time, night or day. We strove for one man awake in every other hole. Everyone knew that this was for his own good.

We had two hot meals in this defensive position. Everybody looked forward to that time, for mail call, PX rations, and an occasional package. The chow jeep brought all of this up to the lines. At noon we had C-rations for a change. There was always a mad scramble to get the new C-rations. A few were getting through along with the old types. Evidently the boys in the rear echelons got the new ones and we got mostly the old.

We were not called on for many patrols during these times. Company I, a few days earlier, had made an unsuccessful attempt to take the Freudenberg Farms and the

pillboxes to its rear. It was too dark and the GIs had stumbled around making too much noise. They were forced to withdraw while Kraut flares burst overhead, lighting up the area. German machine guns then opened up on them, inflicting heavy casualties.

That night, one of our outposts reported by telephone that enemy activity could be heard some distance to his front. Lieutenant Simmons figured that the Germans might be sending a patrol up to try to capture our outposts. He called several of our men to go with him to our left flank outposts. He stumbled up the hill in the pitch-black night and located the others. They followed him through the gap in the barbed wire to the outposts. One of the men from there led them down the hill to where the source of the noise was.

They did not go far ahead of the holes and then opened fire where they thought the Kraut patrol was. This probably scared off an attempted attack because they did not fire but a few shots. Our patrol withdrew to our outpost, then down to our main line to get under cover in case the enemy dropped a few shells on them. They thought everyone made it back to their holes.

Just as my lieutenant was approaching our CP, I got a call over the telephone; it was one of the patrol members, Harry O'Neill. It seems that he got separated from the patrol, got turned around and accidentally walked back up the wrong hill toward Steinkopf instead of Signalberg Hill. Finally he realized his error and started back toward our lines. He had gone a short way when he stepped on a Schu mine setting it off. (See Harry's story on page 111.)

The exploding mine badly wounded one of his feet. The dazed squad leader, full of pain, began crawling back toward the outpost. After a bitter struggle, the brave infantryman crawled back to our left flank outpost. He then calmly called me on the sound-power telephone.

I asked him whether he could walk if we helped him. He said that half his foot had been blown off and we had better get litter bearers to bring him back. I called the company to get some litter bearers up to our CP. I thought they would never get to my dugout. After a short while they made it slowly up the road to my foxhole.

The night was very dark with not a star in the sky. I had to go with them through the wire entanglement, luckily making it to and through the gap. The wounded GI aided by his foxhole buddy had applied pressure to the wound and bandaged the foot with his first-aid bandage.

One of the medics took the bandage off and I looked at the wound. The whole instep had been blown off his foot, but he was very calm. An aid man gave him morphine and we placed him on the litter. Blindly we stumbled through the gap and down the hill.

At two points down the hill, one of the litter bearers fell into a shell hole, but we managed to keep Harry from falling off the stretcher. We finally reached my CP at the roadside where a battalion aid station jeep was waiting. We loaded the dazed but cheerful squad leader O'Neill onto the litter on the back part of the jeep. They took off down the hill through the black night. I told one of the men I had picked up at a foxhole on our line to go and join the other man at the outpost to replace Harry O'Neill. We warned the lonesome GI at the outpost that he was getting company for the night. All activity finally ceased and quiet set in for the remainder of the night.

Our division had now been on the front lines for 100 consecutive days, and to celebrate the occasion a Nazi patrol stormed up the giant draw on our right flank to greet us. Our alert combat infantrymen were ready and some fierce fighting took place for a few minutes.

Some accurate grenade throwing did the job and the bewildered Kraut patrol was pushed back into the draw.

This seemed to teach them a lesson. One of the wounded Krauts felt he had taken enough abuse so he hobbled up the hill to our lines with hands overhead. All he could utter in a low coarse voice was "*Alles kaput, alles kaput*." He was wounded in the hip and was escorted down the hill to my CP by one of my most able riflemen, who a little later marched the prisoner back to our company CP.

During the recent breakthrough the Germans had apparently captured some of our Thunderbolt fighter planes. This was a great asset to them, because they were spared by our anti-aircraft guns. They dive bombed and strafed the French garrison and Kirscheidt Hill. After this, every plane, friend or foe, was given a watchful eye by us infantrymen.

We were instructed not to fire on them for it might give our true position away to them. The moon finally came out on 10 February and it was just right for patrols. Everybody knew this, so jumped at the least noise. I was relieved by the forward observer lieutenant now staying at our CP when he received word from our right flank that a patrol had slipped past them and was heading down toward our CP and the town of Lambach. My lieutenant called the company CP and we alerted every hole. We told them to shoot anything that moved to their front or in an area to their immediate rear. The four of us in the CP dugout went out and took cover to be ready for the enemy patrol.

The men up on the line were still firing on the infiltrating patrol. Our men could not understand why the Nazis were not returning their fire. I stayed on the phone all of the time while standing on the steps that led down to our dugout. Battalion headquarters was repeatedly calling our company CP, who, in turn, kept calling us about whether we had yet spotted the enemy. No one had seen them except the extreme right flank holes. We kept waiting, but nothing happened. I, in turn, kept asking the excited men whether they were sure the patrol had gotten past them,

but each time they replied that they were positive. Nothing happened and we went back to our holes. Nobody slept much expecting something to happen any minute.

The next morning, I went up to our flank holes and investigated the approach route of the enemy patrol. We finally deduced that a line of trees running down the hillside was a mirage of the much-publicized patrol. The men had looked at the shadows so long that they appeared to move. They admitted that it must have been a mirage. The next day the Big Brass decided that something must be done to brighten the dark nights up a bit in an effort to keep enemy patrols from infiltrating our lines.

Flares that would parachute at various intervals would not be very effective and would be very costly. An idea that was put forward would burn powerful spotlights from back in the rear. The rays would reflect off the clouds, producing man-made moonshine up on the front lines. This proved to be very effective for it aided us in directing artillery bursts all night to keep the Germans from having a peaceful night's sleep. This also allowed us to conduct more and more night patrols by the light.

The Jerries did not go for this artificial moonshine at all, for the light got in their watchful eyes. The light helped one not be too jumpy while on guard duty. At least one could see anything that moved in the distance in front of them. The artificial moonlight seemed to make the foxholes seem closer together and lifted the morale of the men.

Shortly after midnight, a German 88 shell struck the battered tower on Signalberg Ridge and it collapsed. One of my outposts on our right flank was startled when the leaning tower fell right near their hole. They didn't know what happened for a few seconds. This ridge had been named for this Airplane Beacon Tower. A few minutes later, an icy rain began blowing our way just to add to the misery of the snow and freezing weather. The snow began to melt into slush and then mud.

Our intelligence section wanted some sort of observation post on the other side of the ridge to determine every move that the Germans made and also to be in a position to repulse any enemy patrol attack. To accomplish this, several dugouts would have to be dug, or a large trench. This would be rather treacherous since the men would be in plain view of the enemy. If this were done at night the enemy would surely hear them digging and strafe the area with machine-gun fire. It would be suicide to attempt it in daylight. This issue was pondered over for some time. It was decided that the move would have to be sudden and dynamite was one of the solutions. A large hole would be blasted with the dynamite and then some men would charge into it quickly before the enemy knew what was going on.

Dynamite was sent to us where the fuses and caps were assembled and everything was set for the dangerous maneuver. As soon as it got dark enough, our party assembled behind the ridge and Lieutenant Roy Simmons led them, loaded with the dynamite and fuses, across the knoll of the hill down to the fallen tower by our outpost. There the men worked, cautiously planting hundreds of charges. After they had been planted, the boys ran back across the hill behind cover and waited for the explosion. The terrific blast blew bits of dirt and rock all over the area. The Germans, bewildered by this earth shaking blast, dove for shelter.

Then our outpost men quickly moved out to the newly-created crater to spend the night and wait for the Germans to explore what had happened. What was known as the Panama Canal had been built just 75 yards from a Kraut outpost. All night long our Panama Canal men dug in, in order to make their trench larger and deeper. They were instructed to form a T-shaped trench, with the base of the T running perpendicular to our lines. We were afraid the Germans would catch our outpost off guard while they

were digging during the night, so we called for intermittent artillery all night long just to keep the Jerries back in their holes.

By morning the T-shaped Panama Canal was taking shape. One problem that confronted us was how to get chow and supplies up to them during the day. We decided that a trench should be dug from the outpost across the crest of the hill to our side of Signalberg. During the day, one man from each of our main line holes would work on the long trench. The ten men out in the Canal were alternated, since the position was a most dangerous one. We had to feed them K- and C-rations for 2 days; the food, water and supplies were carried out to them right after dark. Later we began to let half of them come back across the hilltop for their chow.

Lieutenant Simmons and I became so tired of bailing water from our broken down dugout that we decided that a new CP would have to be dug. The rain had melted most of the snow, and the water flowed down the mountainside directly into our hole forming a small lake, with four tired men trying to keep from drowning. A little dynamite was left over from the Panama expedition, so we decided to put the explosives to good use. About 75 yards from our present hole, we dug a few small holes, placed dynamite in them and set them off. This sure was a good way to start a large dugout. The explosion made a good-sized crater. All we had to do was shape the hole and dig it deeper. We spent the better part of two days in digging out and improving our new CP.

Our supply sergeant donated a large tarpaulin to the cause and we spread the canvas over a ceiling framework of several large logs found nearby. We shoveled dirt on top of the tarp to hold it down, and camouflaged it quite effectively from the air. For the doorway, we tacked up two blankets to form a storm door just behind us leading out of

the dugout. That afternoon the mess sergeant brought up a large bag of hay in his jeep trailer, which we put on the floor of our cozy winter home. The two blankets kept out some of the chilly winds and were a good blackout screen for our CP at night. Five of us in our new hay-lined foxhole tried to read and write letters aided by candles and a Coleman lantern that only worked on rare occasions. I wouldn't have minded spending the duration plus six months in this dugout.

That afternoon my telephone rang; it was the squad leader from the middle of no-man's land at our fortified Panama Canal. He told me that the Germans who were in front of them were having a little activity. The Krauts were moving around outside their holes. The squad leader thought that a little artillery would play havoc with them at that particular time. I called on another telephone system and asked for some artillery on that spot. It wasn't long before four or five rounds had whistled overhead. The Panama Squad called on the phone to cease fire. One of the shells had landed right on the canal tunnel and one of his men was badly hurt.

While the lieutenant was calling for litter bearers, I ran quickly up the hill and across the knoll to our fortress. When I arrived at the long trench, several of the men were attempting to take the wounded soldier's field jacket off. He was well aware of what was going on. I asked him where he was hit and he said it was in his side. One of his hands was blown to bits but wasn't bleeding. We bandaged up his hand and took off his field jacket just as he went into shock. About that time I noticed a torn place in his pants; he had been bleeding profusely from his thigh, but did not even know it. We applied a tourniquet around the upper portion of his thigh as the badly-wounded GI breathed his last breath. He bled to death while we were trying to bandage his hand and his side. I don't think he ever felt any

pain from his torn thigh. Perhaps if we had noticed it he might have been saved.

This unnerved several of the outpost men. The shell had burst about a yard from the squad leader and he didn't get a scratch. He had been knocked down by the terrific concussion of the explosion and was temporarily deafened by the loud noise. The dead GI had been much farther away than the squad leader.

Artillery shells are sometimes peculiar. A man 50 yards from impact might be killed or wounded, while someone just a few feet away does not get hurt. As soon as the litter bearers got to the scene they quickly took the body back across the hilltop and down to the foot of the hill, where a jeep was waiting to evacuate him. Lieutenant Simmons complained strongly about the artillery's serious mistake. We had given instructions to fire way ahead of the Panama Canal and then to bring the fire backward on top of the enemy.

That afternoon, Signal Corps photographers braved the front lines and came to our large winter home mansion. They wanted to take pictures and get a first-hand story from a tall lanky hero of the famous African Campaign, who had transferred to our company a few months back. I sent for the bragging old Oklahoman, Horace West. He was, at the moment, out at the Panama Canal sniping at the enemy. He proudly made the journey across the hilltop and down the hillside to my CP.

The photographers took over and had the heralded hero pose behind our recently-dug garbage pit mound of dirt. The rear-echelon boys assumed that the garbage pit was a foxhole up on the front lines. The trusty Oklahoman proudly held his sniper's rifle named "Mabel" while he related the legend of the 150 Germans slain by him. The Signal Corps boys were spellbound by the bragging hero. Lieutenant Simmons and I thought that we would have a

little fun. I ran out of the CP shouting to my platoon leader, telling him that some Germans were moving forward toward us in an attack. I told him that the outpost had just called the news in through the telephone.

Not one word was uttered by the photographers as they grabbed their equipment, threw it hastily into their jeep and spun the tires in a heroic escape to the rear echelon. What a story they had to tell their rear-echelon buddies.

Old Sol was shining so bright this afternoon that almost everyone stripped to the waist and took baths from the many nearby springs that ran down the hillside. One might have gotten the idea that this was Florida as they lay basking in the sunshine in the backyards of their winter homes. One of the men exclaimed, "This is the life; I wouldn't mind sweating out the duration plus six months right here in this spot." He wasn't joking either.

On the morning of 15 February 1945, I took a walk up to our right flank line to see how everyone was getting along. I visited several foxholes one by one, "shooting the bull" with them. While talking with two of them standing in their foxhole, I heard a strange whishing sound. I had never heard that peculiar sound before. It was getting nearer and nearer. When the sound seemed to be right at us, I, by chance, happened to crouch down. At that moment a terrific explosion took place about a yard from me. My brain reacted just in time; I noticed that it was a white phosphorus shell and its umbrella-type fragments were beginning to fan out and fall on us.

I ran to get out from under the smoking fragments. One of the white phosphorus fragments had already pierced my cheek and my mud-stained white parka coat was covered with smoking pieces of it. I quickly took off the coat to keep the other elements from burning through to my other clothes. The shell had landed just in front of the faces of the two men standing in the foxhole.

I had qualified as an instructor of first aid prior to shipping overseas and it then became handy. I knew that white phosphorus would keep on burning as long as it was exposed to the air. We quickly made some mud and applied it to the faces of the two screaming GIs. They had so many pieces imbedded in their faces that the mud steamed. I also placed a gob of mud on my cheek, and the wound did not bother me much.

The news was relayed to Lieutenant Simmons at the CP and he called for litter bearers to carry the men to the battalion aid station. One man's face was so swollen that his eyes could not be seen. Both of them were in terrible pain. We laid them down and kept pouring water on the mud to keep it moist. It kept steaming as the mud kept drying out. A medical corps jeep finally arrived and we helped them board the vehicle and I went with them on the lonely ride to where the battalion aid station was located. On the way, we had to continually pour water on everyone's faces, including mine to keep the mud moist. The medics attended to the badly wounded before working on my face. They cut a little incision, took the fragments out of my cheek and bandaged it. They wanted me to go to the hospital, saying I would probably end up in England. It was tempting, but I opted to return to my unit. I was afraid that if I left I would never get back to good old Company L.

The Maurice Lloyd Monument story

In 1996 Franklin L. Gurley, the 100th Division's historian, wrote a letter to me reflecting the true story of Mo Lloyd as it was reported by Jack Walsh in November 1995. What follows is a copy of the memo about the Lemberg Monument and the ceremony in May 1997.

Justin Gehl, the sculptor of the Monument often cut stone in the Lemberg Forest for house construction, and so on. Mr. Gehl, a religious man, often stopped on his stone-cutting rounds at the chapel in Mouterhouse, where he lit a candle to the Virgin. In 1976 when Lloyd's remains were found, Gehl was probably in his early twenties. For the next decade or two he mulled over the meaning of Lloyd's death. He said that what finally happened was totally beyond his control. The Virgin told him to build the monument to Lloyd, saying, "These are our children; they fought against the evil of their time." He said that this was repeated many times.

He acquired a chunk of granite weighing one ton. The City of Lemberg loaned him the use of a huge vehicle to move it to the site of Lloyd's last stand. He carved the monument and included a small statue of the Virgin. The town fathers said he would have to get rid of the statue, because Lloyd's religion was not known.

Gehl also carved Lloyd's name but put "William" rather than "Maurice" as the first name. So he was told to get rid of Lloyd's name. (Obviously the "William" error was not Gehl's but dated back to 1976 when the remains were found).

Noting Gehl's disappointment, the town fathers said, "Anyway, we don't find Lloyd's name in the 100th Division's account (of the last stand)." Ironically, the 399th

history *does* include Lloyd's name, but of course, the town fathers did not have that particular book.

As a result, the dedication of the monument appears on a plaque several feet away, and it is not to Lloyd, but to the soldiers of the 100th Division who liberated Lemberg.

While we were on Signalberg Ridge, It had rained quite a bit and all of our foxholes were full of water; we had to continually bail them out. Around 17 February 1945, our Company L was relieved from front line duty at Signalberg Hill and the "Panama Canal." We moved out to Sierstal, France, and were billeted in houses for a *big* change. It was

surely better to live in houses than those drab, dirty foxholes, even if there were not enough beds to go around.

On 18 February, I borrowed the chaplain's portable record player and some records and took them to my platoon's houses so that we could once again enjoy some good old American music. The records had a lot of scratches, but they still sounded good to us.

On 22 February I received the Oak Leaf Cluster and a copy of my orders for my second Purple Heart for the white phosphorus face injury I has sustained a while back. I also ran into Bill Skelton, a former Company L member. He was now with the division band. Bill and I had double dated Highsmith Hospital Nurses in Fayetteville, North Carolina. On 24 February we went to a movie. Afterward, I again borrowed the chaplain's record player and played some more records including the "National Barn Dance."

I was formally presented the Purple Heart with Cluster by my company commander. Each day we had to clean our weapons to be sure they would function when we needed them again.

We were going to see another movie but the projector would not operate. Instead, we listened to a few numbers by the division band. Two of the pieces they played were "How Blue the Night" and "I'll Be Seeing You." It sure did make us think of home and our girl friends back there.

During January and February there had been a lot of changes in officers. Our Captain Alphonso left and was replaced by Captain Hopkins who had returned from the hospital. When the division was activated at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, "Hoppy" had been my platoon leader in Company L. Then he was transferred to Company I where he was promoted to captain. He had been wounded in the Vosges Mountains when we first got into action.

Lieutenant Bennett Taylor of the 3rd Platoon had moved to Company M; Tech Sergeant Al Coursey had received a

battlefield commission and was now the platoon leader of the 3rd Platoon. Also, Tech Sergeant Bill Hackling had received a battlefield commission in Company K and was now our Weapons Platoon leader. Tech Sergeant Tom Ryder had been commissioned in Company I and was the platoon leader of the 2nd Platoon. Lieutenant Plante had been assigned to the 1st Battalion and Lieutenant Park Ashbrook had been killed.

For the latter part of February, the weather cleared up a bit and the moon shone at night, lighting up the foxholes and houses. This prevented the Krauts from sneaking up undetected. The moonlight also helped the person on guard duty to be a better sentry, but it had a tendency to make me nervous. The sun actually came out and we thought summer was arriving. A few took off their shirts and did a little sunbathing. Many of us thought of home and caught up on some letter writing. PX rations, including candy bars, were sent up to the front and were enjoyed very much.

Many of us were quite happy for the brief lull in the fighting and some thought they might just like to spend the rest of the war right there. After a two-week rest, on 3 March our company was back in the foxholes. Up to 5 March the weather had been pretty nice.

My girlfriend Jean (now my wife), wrote me nearly every day, which I really appreciated. She had sent me some pictures and I put them in my billfold. She also sent me some candles.

On 6 March I was told that I might be sent back to OCS (Officer's Candidate School), which would take me off the front line for three months. At that time I really didn't care to be an officer and also I would rather have a battlefield commission than have to go through OCS.

On 10 March we were placed in reserve and moved back into a house, which was nice, but the "grapevine" said that

we would probably move back into the woods in foxholes the next day. It was raining on the 14th and the houses were a lot dryer. On that day I got a break and was sent to the rest area in Nancy, France. This was good news as one sure needs a break from the terrible front-line infantry fighting. I decided to wait and write to Jean from the corps rest area.

One is never sure of going anywhere because plans change so quickly. Our platoon CP had been a good dugout; nearly like a small room underground. I received some salted peanuts in our PX rations and they were truly a delicacy as I hadn't had any peanuts in months.

Last night they had movies in the area and a lot of us took turns watching the movie, "Laura." I only got to see the last part of it but it sure did make us homesick. We went around to some of the houses in town and collected some eggs, which we thoroughly enjoyed.

On 15 March they sent a few of us to Nancy and the corps rest area. There they outfitted us from head to toe with new clothing that actually fit for a change, except for a field jacket. While there I took a tour of the city, caught up on letter writing to Jean, my father and grandparents. On my last night in "Paradise" I went to a movie called "Hollywood Canteen." It was great getting to see movies on a big screen again. This took my mind off the horrors of war and made me dream of being home in the good old USA.

We left the next day and headed back to the front, arriving on 21 March; I was going to be 23 years old in ten days. Lieutenant Roy Simmons was still my platoon leader and while I was gone to the rest area, the 399th had jumped off in an attack from the winter line we had been holding for nearly two and a half months.

Our 3rd Battalion, each company with attached tanks had crossed the Kirscheidt area and rapidly overran the Germans by our stubborn penetration. Company L had

pushed back into Shimberg on 15 March. On that same day, the 398th Infantry Regiment attacked and advanced over the Schiesseck Hill and down off the Hill at Shimberg and into the town of Bitche.

The city fell without a fight. The Germans were apparently employing delaying tactics. A fierce fight that had started over four months earlier now ended within a few minutes. The 1st Battalion, 399th Infantry Regiment actually took the town of Bitche. The civilians spoke English and welcomed the 100th Division soldiers. On 17 March, our 3rd Battalion remained at Schoenberg to protect the division's right flank. The 399th and other units of the 100th Division moved into assembly areas north of Bitche and remained there from 18 to 22 March.

During the siege of the Citadel of Bitche, Lieutenant Thomas E. Plante, formerly the Weapons Platoon Leader of Company L who was now with the 1st Battalion, was killed in a valiant effort to destroy a tank. He had disabled it, but the tank's machine gunner killed him as he was trying to throw a hand grenade into the turret. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

We were given a mission to move to the Rhine River on 22 March. As we were being loaded on trucks, I was introduced to my new platoon leader, 2nd Lieutenant Melville (Mac) MacDonald who had just returned from the rear area after receiving a battlefield commission. He had been with the Anti-Tank Company of the 399th Infantry. Lieutenant Roy Simmons was promoted to company executive officer. We loaded up for the two-day trip of 92 miles to Ludwigshaven on the Rhine River. The 100th Division made this long trip using only its own organic equipment plus some attached vehicles. We received no enemy resistance, but were delayed a little with an occasional blown-up bridge or roadblocks. Along the way we observed a lot of dead cattle and badly-damaged enemy equipment. Also,

our advance was slowed by the many displaced personnel (DP) who had been liberated and looked quite bewildered by their sudden freedom.

Company L arrived in the city of Neustadt at night. We moved into an apartment house and stayed put for two nights. During the days we cleaned rifles and equipment and policed the area. We were given information about our location and the 100th Division's movements since last October by Lieutenant MacDonald.

We received an attack order for the next morning and before dawn we moved out on foot. We marched east for several miles to a small town. Our platoon was battalion reserve at this time. Colonel Lentz called for Lieutenant MacDonald and told him to put the 1st Platoon on top of a newly-attached tank, get in front of the battalion and lead them to the town of Altrip. He said that if we met any resistance we were to start shooting and keep rolling until we got to the Rhine River. Lieutenant MacDonald told Sergeant Rodriguez to load his squad on the first tank, Staff Sergeant Frank Froio's squad would be on the second, Staff Sergeant Dick Saathoff squad would be on the third.

Our medic, George Demopoulis; the bazooka man, Bob Johnson; and I all loaded on the last tank. We passed through Company I, who were all on trucks. There was no resistance from the enemy. Only the demolished bridges, roadblocks and more DPs. We pulled into Altrip the morning of 24 March. We were the first elements of the 100th Division to reach the Rhine River.

When Captain Hopkins arrived, he told Lieutenant MacDonald to establish an outpost two miles down the river toward Ludwigshaven. He asked me to set up the outpost with a perimeter security. As soon as it was set up, the company commander called up to us to load up on trucks as soon as they arrived because our mission had changed again. We loaded up, rode to Ludwigshaven and

at dusk moved into houses along the Rhine River at the city park at a bend in the river. We had real running water, electricity, and all sorts of modern conveniences. We set up another outpost at the park overlooking the Rhine. There was a lot of looting, but when questioned, everyone swore they had bought and paid for the stuff.

Our men found several Lugers, P-38 Pistols, swords, and other souvenirs. Lieutenant MacDonald and I were always so busy scouting and setting up defensive positions that we weren't able to get any of the pistols.