

I was curious about and interested in this new environment, but we weren't there as sightseers. That was brought home to us with a jolt one day when we were issued live ammunition and hand grenades, the first we'd seen away from the firing range in training camp. No, we weren't tourists, we were infantry, and for my part, I was suddenly afraid. Fear is the one emotion that I lived with continually from then on whenever I was in combat or it seemed imminent.

Back to Bud:

"The 399th Infantry Combat Team left on 2 1/2 ton trucks for the 7th Army front on the morning of Oct. 29, 1944."

X. COMBAT – FIRST BLOOD

I remember almost always being afraid, but for some reason, though I was never even remotely heroic, I always stayed where I was supposed to be and went where I was told. Why, in the face of such raw fear? The overwhelming majority of the others did as I did, though I've no idea whether they were as scared as I was most of the time. Yet there were some that couldn't face it when the time came. A few broke down completely and were sent away, a few others were adamant in their refusal to face the danger and were given rear echelon assignments guarding baggage, or whatever else they did. Most of us, however, just faced what we had to face, and I doubt that many of us could have said why. In retrospect, there seems to me considerable likelihood that our long months of training—together, as teams—had more than a little to do with it, at least at the start.

Our attitude toward those who fell out this way was revealing. There was no disbelief in the sincerity of the dropouts, no scorn, no bitterness that I can recall. There was rather feeling sorry for them and maybe some fleeting envy. This was an advance taste of the enormous tolerance of the combat man for the non-combatant. Life is too fragile, too temporary, to waste any of it on anger or recrimination, and the combat life is too awful to wish it upon anyone who doesn't have to be there, for whatever reason. As I reflect on it I can't recall any feelings manifested of elitism or martyrdom, either one of which would have seemed well justified, given the conditions we endured during the next five or six months.

Flashes of clear memory alternate with long obscure periods from this vantagepoint in time, but I do remember a long "six-by-six" truck convoy ride up the Rhone River valley in the autumn air. Blasted military vehicles, mostly German, appeared by the roadside, attesting to the running battles and air attacks in this area during the weeks just passed and adding to our feelings of apprehension. One night we camped near a vineyard where a farmer was willing to sell us wine for 10 francs a canteen cupful, although he couldn't understand why we wanted new wine barreled only days before. Several large casks were emptied, and many of us were ill later, to put the kindest light on it. We went through Dijon, I recall, and perhaps three days after we started—military truck convoys don't move very fast—we arrived somewhere in the vicinity of Épinal and St. Dié, in Alsace. Between us and the Rhine lay the Vosges Mountains—old, moderate elevations more like our Catskills than the nearby Alps—which were to be our home, to use that word very loosely, for the next four months.

Briefly, although we knew nothing of this at the start, of course (and, indeed, we never had more than the vaguest idea of exactly where we were), the 100th Division was to participate in a slow push through these mountains until after Christmas. Then, on the eastern side, we were to occupy static positions in or near the old Maginot Line until the middle of March. Finally, we would participate in the final big push that ended, for most of us, two months later, near Stuttgart, Germany, where the Division was when the Germans finally capitulated.

Here is how Bud Stimes described the first days of combat for the *Newsletter*:

LETTERS SENT HOME FROM FRANCE MARSEILLES TO THE VOSGES

Nov. 3, 1944, from Somewhere in France. "... Things have happened fast and furious and I have no idea when this will be mailed or by whom. I have seen more of France than any of the boys did in the last war. There are fields full of dead cattle and one place with 4 unburied German soldiers. I have no conception of the war because I haven't had a paper since I left the states. I know that I've been thru a little tough going, but only God knows what is ahead. I've spent a few happy hours here and did see a little of the countryside. The future looks dark, but with God's help I hope to pull through. I have so many buddies and I'd sure hate to see them fall. The infantry really takes a beating here... Since leaving the states I haven't received a Courier (hometown newspaper) or even a haircut. I hope to enjoy those packages because my birthday (19th) is just a few days off. There are so many young boys and married men it doesn't seem fair. Whenever you send anything remember I have to carry it around. Send me expendable supplies like candy, airmail stamps, *[It is incredible to me at this late date that we had to actually buy stamps to get our mail out—and 6¢ airmail stamps if we expected the recipients to see it before the war was over. I believe V-Mail went by air at the surface rate, 3¢, but you could only write on one side of a very small sheet.]* cookies, jam, soap, and gum. But better yet keep writing letters, because we will enjoy them as soon as our mail reaches us. All this rain and mud has soured me on France forever. There is no future to this down life. I hope everything goes well back home now and forever. I am glad to be able to look back at a pleasant home and school life. Give my love and regards to all my old friends. There is nothing back home to compare to all this miserable life we lead. A bright spot is when we get hot chow and rest assured that none is wasted. I am O.K. now and please don't worry. Time is short so I had better close now. Goodbye and God bless and keep you."

"June 16, 1994 Recollections. My high school graduation Parker fountain pen was lost in the Marseilles mud hole. This letter was written with a very dull pencil. I had trouble reading this 50 year old letter. This letter is very pessimistic and not in my usual upbeat style. Now I realize this was our fifth day in the combat zone. I remember my chapped lips received in riding atop an Army truck as air attack guard in our three days ride from Marseilles to the eastern France front. I remember our bivouac next to the fox cage in the Dijon zoo. I remember walking with other 2nd platoon men in blacked out Dijon to find a French bistro that admitted us. I remember that I had little money and that Quartermaster soldiers treated us to several bottles of the finest French champagne that made me light-headed. I remember returning to the zoo as our cooks were preparing pancakes and as I jumped into the pup tent I knocked down the tent pole with my head and upset our little shelter. Richard La Fleur was very patient that early morning. I remember how much equipment I carried in eastern France. In addition to the Browning automatic rifle I remember taking turns carrying the air marking panels bag, the bazooka, and bazooka rounds. For a few days I remember carrying a full size spade Fred Drew obtained from the Engineers. Others carried the full size axe. Our gas masks and overcoats had been discarded along a mountain road. I remember our first squad bedroll that was too

huge to handle. Very quickly we learned to make two men bedrolls with distinctive knots we could feel in the dark when delivered to our new, forward position. I remember how the November nights were long, cold, and wet. I remember the day we were in reserve and toiled many hours to get a fire going for a pile of sawn boards on a hillside. Fred Drew and others used our full size axe to cut to the interior of a stump to get to some dry kindling wood. The fire was smoky, but comforting. I don't remember that our wet clothing and equipment got dried. In those Vosges Mountains I still remember one of the most comfortable night's sleep in my life. Our mattress was fir branches, a shelter half, and a blanket. The blankets on us had a shelter half for a bedspread. As usual Clarence Manganaro slept in the middle between Dick La Fleur and me. We awoke with three or four inches of snow serving as an extra blanket. I remember wearing the same underwear for weeks underneath our O.D.'s, fatigues, sweaters, field jackets, and raincoats. I remember how difficult it was to open and close buttons and buckles with cold fingers in wet gloves. I remember how uncomfortable our shoepacs were. I was always looking for regular GI shoes and rubber overshoes. I remember it took about two hours to eat a K-ration hard chocolate bar and then time to awaken your guard relief. I remember reading the Lightning News and other propaganda leaflets dropped on and fired at us by the Germans, every word on ration and ammunition boxes, and a few wet copies of Yank magazine and the Stars and Stripes newspaper. I remember the early November day when our full strength 40 men 2nd platoon replaced a platoon of the 157th Inf. Regt. of the 45th Division with about 13 soldiers walking off the hill. Our Sergeant Whitehead visited with their platoon sergeant and talked about their pre-war old army service together. The war stopped briefly and there wasn't enough foxholes for all of us. The mathematics of casualty rates entered my consciousness that day. I still remember our occupation of a barn in Neufmaisons in the early dark of night and the promise of a dry bed on hay and straw. Dawn's early light showed that the roof tiles were blown off in an earlier bombardment and we awoke wet and cold as usual. I never liked our K-ration menu as some did. I remember one tasty homemade meal when we gathered walnut sized potatoes in a muddy field and flavored them with envelopes of K-ration bouillon powder on Sergeant Doherty's little stove burner. I remember three brown squares of toilet paper included in the K-ration boxes and how it was carefully kept inside our helmet liners until time for its use. Sometimes French paper money was used for this purpose. We learned to dry our wet socks under our waists with body heat and to change socks daily. Trench foot and yellow jaundice probably accounted for as many casualties as the Wehrmacht. *[For more on this subject, see page 165.]* Some mail and packages reached us in those early November days. I vividly remember Pvt. Robert Geiger opening a package from home and expecting food treats and dropping a pair of bedroom slippers in the mud of eastern France. It was a time of endurance and perseverance in the cold and wet and our assignment was moving in the dark nights and wet days toward Germany with lots of equipment, weapons, and extra ammunition." *[Bud got this exactly right, but, as we shall see shortly, he had only about 15 days of this. He was wounded on November 13 and spent the next 4*

months away from his unit, recovering in hospitals and convalescent treatment centers.]

Jack Pointer also continued his account of this time:

“One Sunday morning 29 October 44 we had our duffel bags packed and our full field packs on and at 0800 the 399th Inf. was on its way to the front lines some 400 miles away. We took the Rhone River Valley up and enjoyed the scenery and the weather wasn’t too bad for riding in an open 2–1/2 ton truck. The first nite we stopped at Valence outside of town in a big field and had fires and everything as if we were back in the States. The next day we passed by nothing but the remains of the armed forces of Mr. Hitler’s that tried to escape the trap from the invasion of southern France but the US air corps shot them up and they were bumper to bumper with everything from tanks to bicycles all burned and knocked out. Foxholes along the road were numerous and many other signs that war had been in this area not too long before we arrived.

“That night we stopped in Dijon and slept in the park, I think I could go right to the tree under which Howard and I pitched our little tent. It was right next to Reynard or the fox’s cage. The Lt. and several of the other boys slept in the truck that nite so they wouldn’t have to pitch a tent. The next day we moved on for the last lap of our journey. Toward late afternoon we could hear the big guns and then we knew we were getting close. We drove on the small roads to the back woods where we would bivouac and noticed how the branches had been shot off the trees from the artillery tree bursts. We pitched tents and were told to dig a fox hole. Very few did dig a fox hole because they thought they were too far from the front. We were actually on a line with the 240s about 7 miles behind the front lines. Shortly after the big guns cut loose—everyone thought it was shells coming in and took off for the nearest ditch or some kind of cover. We didn’t know the difference between in coming and out going stuff at that time—we were just as green as we could be. Right after that you could hear the shovels just a throwing the dirt out of the ground and most everyone had a nice fox hole. That was 31 October 44 and what a Halloween nite with scares for us new boys, fresh from the States. The next nite the 1st and 3rd battalions of the 399th went in and relieved two battalions of the 45th Div. We heard the unbelievable story of how the trucks brought the boys up to the front parked bumper to bumper with no dispersion as we had been taught in the States. The 45th told them the enemy is that way, there is the hill you are supposed to capture, go get it, good—by. The second battalion was in reserve at that time and so we had to move closer to the front lines. We turned in our duffel bags and they told us we would get them later, we did get them later—after the war was over. All GI equipment was taken out of them and used to issue to the troops as we need them. Some personal property was unlawfully taken too but nothing could be done about it. Some of the fellows with false teeth left them in their bags thinking they would be able to get them in a few days—how they were fooled. We still spent the nite in the same place for the nite of 1 November 44, the day the 399th was committed to action against the Germans in World War II.

"2 November 44. On this day we were alerted to go up a little closer and take over reserve positions and sort of get used to being a little closer to the front. They called for one man from our platoon to go to battalion for a detail. We thought it would be just for a day or two and Smoky told me to get Cpl. Thayer for the job. It turned out that his job was going to be pretty permanent because he was assigned to Bn. GRO. It was a bad deal for him in a way but he got out of a lot of suffering that some of the front line boys had to go thru. (He joined us again in January when we were at Glasenberg in a house.) We were supposed to move out on trucks that afternoon, but they didn't come and we waited some more. It was raining and we had no tents or anything so we curled up on the ground in groups of five or six men and tried to keep warm under our rain coats. I believe I was more afraid that nite than at any other time (even more than on Nov. 13). The waiting made me so nervous that I was shaking all over. I tried to hide it but most all the other fellows were doing the same thing.

"3 November 44. After a miserable nite the trucks finally came and we left about 0900 in the morning to move 6 miles forward and just in front of the 105s. We stayed on the reverse slope of a hill with the company on two sides of a muddy road that the chow jeep couldn't get up under its own power. There we turned in those gas masks that we had been lugging. Apparently there was very little danger of a gas attack. We were to get them back when the word 'Cherrigas' came down from Army. It was one of those dark sections there at nite and I fell in the mud many a time when I was running a message for Lt. Calder. Nash was sent to be a regimental MP from that place too. Rained all the time and I was plenty wet. We got warm chow once a day and we also turned in our mess kits and let the kitchen wash them and bring them up when they fed us. Jack Porter was Capt. Clark's body guard and they had as good a hole to live in as anyone dug.

"4 November 44. Same as 3 Nov.

"5 November 44. We moved to another place just a mile or so away. There was a lumber factory near by where we stole all their lumber to make fires and keep dry but we were still wet.

"6 November 44. Moved up to the front lines. We saw men from the 45th Div. Coming back and they gave us little remarks to encourage us but they were black as they could be, tired with big beards and all their clothing wet. I wondered how long before we would look the same. The company was about 500 yards behind the front and the 2nd platoon went up on line with Easy company. Our platoon had to go out and get ammunition for them and bring up chow. Our bed rolls didn't get to us that nite, but Fritz and Smoky found a shelter half tent and two blankets. It rained like the dickens and so Lt. Calder, Fritz, Smoky, Molise and me slept in the tent of course my feet didn't fit in it. Actually we didn't sleep at all that nite. One or two men were killed from E Co., and that is where Lt. Jabo of E Co. got hit and he died in England 3 or 4 months later. That nite we prepared to pull out of that position and way after dark the 2nd Plt. came off the line and we went back to our position of 5 Nov. We had to hang luminous dial watches or wrist compasses on the man in front of us so we could follow. The mud was up to

our knees and plenty of the guys fell down when we crossed an overflowed creek and were completely soaked.

“Part of the above for 7 Nov. 1944. Molise fell on his face in the mud in the old position again. Election day and we didn’t know outcome for a mo.

“8 November 44. We had church out in the field with Chap. Fraser, and Communion. That is where I got the bible I still have with me, because I left my other one in my duffel bag.

“9 and 10 November were spent moving around in that same area.”

It was just beginning for us, a way of life completely different from anything any of us had ever experienced before. This was to go on, with infrequent and brief let-ups, for the better part of the next six and a half months—until the war in Europe was over. What was it like? Fear, dread, terrible reluctance to move when our prospect was “moving up” (to the front, to attack, or whatever, as differentiated from “moving back”—most welcome phrase) are the vivid emotions that stay in my memory. I’ve read considerably since then about troops in war who were anxious to fight, looking for the relief from boredom or tension that action provides, and other similar attitudes, but I can truthfully say that I never felt that way. Perhaps those feelings are for high ranking officers and military historians who write books; perhaps sometimes they’re pure bravado; perhaps other troops are trained and motivated differently than I was. Maybe some accounts are down—right lies. Whatever the reason, any such feelings were totally overshadowed, for me, with fear. And yet we—most of us—always went. I always come back to that, with a little awe from where I sit now, so many years later.

What else was there besides fear? Well, there was constant, grinding fatigue, there was hunger a lot of the time, there was everlasting wet, there was dirt, there was illness (almost everyone had perpetual diarrhea, or dysentery, and the incidence of infectious hepatitis became a military secret for a while, so widespread did it become), there was almost constant, unrelenting noise, there was blood and pain, and death—death for strong and healthy young men in their late teens and early 20s. Everyone knows what an awful shock the sudden death of a child of high school or college age is. We almost got used to it, God help us.

Bud wrote home:

Nov. 11, 1944 V-Mail. “... Today is Armistice Day, but it isn’t much of an event for some poor soldiers. This A.M. we passed thru a war devastated French town (Baccarat) and they were celebrating with a lot of color and excitement... Everyone who writes this outfit has the idea that we landed safely in England with the largest convoy ever. On my 19th birthday (Nov. 8) things happened that I can always remember. We sure have moved around this cold, rainy hole of a country. None of us have been hurt as yet, but I have seen the results on both our men and theirs. We have all attended church services whenever possible and I for one have benefited immensely. I wish this thing a speedy conclusion. We are a little out of touch with the world, but I guess F.D.R. is still the C. in C. I am safe so far, but we sure spend some uncomfortable hours... We hardly ever get settled in a spot before we are off on another direction. Somehow we keep each other going and we finally make it. I would write this airmail as I have stamps

now, but no paper. Living conditions are primitive and we think we are fortunate if we can keep dry. There is more rain here than California..."

First battle action, can anyone who's experienced it ever forget it? We had moved through forests and isolated farmlands to the "front." On the way we'd passed Jeeps loaded with large objects encased in mattress covers going the other way. Graves registration people at work—the large objects were dead bodies. Most of them had probably been just like us a few hours before. We passed a file of men, a few dozen at most, being led by a lieutenant and a couple of sergeants. They had a hollow-eyed, half-dead look we'd never seen before, but were soon to know well. They were part of the 45th Division, and we were relieving them from 30 straight days on the line. The few dozen men were not the remains of a company but of a whole battalion. Having fought for many months up the spine of Italy and then from the south of France, the battalion had probably been nowhere near full strength for a long time, but full strength was 1,100 or 1,200 people, and now there were, apparently, only 50 or 60. We suddenly saw very graphically where we were. Second Battalion was in reserve. Suddenly we heard the crash of nearby artillery shelling. First and Third Battalions were under fire, we were told. Casualties were heavy. Next we heard that it was our own artillery fire, misdirected. Was this the way it was going to be? Sometimes, yes, we learned as we progressed through that dismal winter, even if not really often.

Our turn came next. Early the next day we found ourselves—"G" Company—advancing along a cleared area paralleling a road in the thick woods. The enemy was out there we'd been told, but we advanced several hundred yards in eerie silence; we saw people running from a house at a crossroads up ahead, Oh God, maybe they've pulled out; we've scared them off. There was nothing—and then suddenly there was everything: rifle and machine gun fire, mortars, artillery, everything. We had walked into a rather obvious trap. Our scouts disappeared entirely; some of them we never saw again. A couple were killed outright, and the others ended up in a P.O.W. camp in Strasbourg. (As we shall see, they were released a few weeks later when our troops overran Strasbourg, and returned to us.)

I was near the road, with my B.A.R., when the firing started, about halfway between Company headquarters in the woods behind and the house at the crossroads. I dove for a shallow ditch on the far side of the road. Here I was very visible and completely pinned down by rifle and machine gun fire, and seriously concerned about mortar shells, which didn't seem to be being wasted on me, at least for the moment. Here, as I lay wondering how I was ever to get out of this alive, It suddenly, incongruously (and erroneously I have learned, I was a couple of days off) occurred to me that it was Armistice Day, November 11, which seemed ironic.

Presently, from the edge of the woods across the road, a man who had been close companion during training days, and who I shall always remember with profound gratitude, called to me. He would cover me with his B.A.R. fire, he said, from his somewhat less exposed position, and when the Germans stopped firing I was to get up and run across the open road to the relative safety of the woods. It worked, and that's one reason I'm here today. But somewhere in the course of all that I left my own B.A.R. behind.

The awful day finally ended and the early nightfall brought apprehension and confusion, along with pitch-blackness. Our Company commander had been badly wounded, and the executive officer, second in command, had sustained a superficial wound, and had become convinced that the front line was no place for him. The C.O. was invalided home and the Exec. Spent the rest of his time with us back at Battalion headquarters with the cooks and company clerks, frightening replacements with horror stories about life at the front.

We got our first chance to dig real foxholes that night, and didn't do well at it. An occasional mortar round or artillery shell and some harassing sniper fire kept our nerves on edge, as did the crying of the "wounded" from the area between us and the enemy (pretty surely recordings through German loudspeakers, we decided, although I have recently talked to people who were there also and who have assured me that one of our own men was indeed lying out there, and that he was later found dead). I felt naked without my B.A.R., and very vulnerable in this uncertain place. By the next day someone gave me a sub-machine gun (a notably ineffective infantry weapon) dredged up from somewhere, which I carried for a day or so until another B.A.R. was found for me.

One episode from that eerie and frightening night still stands out sharply in my memory. Exhaustion was just beginning to overcome fear when, with no warning, a bloodcurdling, sub-human scream came from very close by. I had instant visions of a commando attack or something worse. What had really happened was that a very tall, always uninhibited, comrade-in-arms had not made his foxhole long enough, was having very painful leg cramps, and was expressing his displeasure about the condition. Against, I thought, all principles of common sense, he decided to spend the rest of the night on the ground beside his hole. Dawn revealed him in one piece, unharmed by stray shrapnel fragments or bullets.

Well, we'd had our baptism of fire, near a place called Neufmaisons, at "Purple Heart Lane," as we began to call it. We'd been blooded and I don't suppose any of us was quite the same person as before ever again. We all felt, I think for one thing, quite a bit older than we'd been a few short hours ago. "G" Company lost 56 of its members that day, which is about a 25% casualty rate. The casualties included five out of six of our officers. Six of the 56 were killed, the rest wounded or taken prisoner. Some of the wounded—and the prisoners—came back to us later, many did not. We never had such an awful day again; the first was our worst. And yet, most of us were still around, and we were all quite suddenly a lot smarter. We got a new Company commander too, who turned out to be a superior leader in every way, and who rapidly gained from all of us the respect and loyalty his predecessor could never have known anything about.

And now back to Bud.

"June 16, 1994 Recollections. On September 22-27, 1978 my wife, Melpomene, and I were in France with a tour group that included 25 100th Division men. The sun shone, the countryside was peaceful and beautiful, the food and wine were delicious, the hotels were very comfortable, the people friendly, and our feet were dry and porters carried our luggage."

PURPLE HEART LANE DAY – NOVEMBER 13, 1944

"The 50th anniversary of the 1944 landings and campaigns of the U.S. Army in France created widespread interest in the United States and other parts of the world. I just finished reading Stephen E. Ambrose's *D-Day June 6, 1944 – The Climactic Battle of World War II*. The author uses interviews with over a thousand survivors in writing a very interesting and detailed history. I could identify with many of the participants who experienced and remembered this major campaign from a soldier's perspective. Many remembered events a few yards to their right and left and a rifle shot ahead. The recent media coverage stimulated other veterans to search their memories of distant World War II events and place their experiences into the historical record. My letter writing gap extends from the November 11 V-Mail letter written on our bivouac hill outside of Baccarat on the Meurth River to my November 22 letter written from the 23rd U.S. Army General Hospital at Vittel, France near the headquarters of the 6th U.S. Army Group.

"These are my memories of those November 12 and 13, 1944 days when our Company G, 399th Infantry Regiment was one of the assault companies leading the 7th U.S. Army attack on the strong German defenses blocking the Neufmaisons–Raon L'Etape road and a gateway through the High Vosges. Hundreds of tall, straight pine trees were felled across the narrow highway by German demolition squads with many land mines planted. We advanced through pine forests and mostly uphill. On November 12th we dug foxholes in the forest and were within German artillery range. Since then I learned it was called Forêt de Petit Reclos. I remember one concern with artillery shells on our positions, but I remember more strongly that not many of us had much sleep in the snow covered, wet ground. We knew we were close to the German lines on a very dark night. I don't remember eating much breakfast on early Monday, November 13. I had lost most of my appetite for cold K-rations, but I probably ate something.

"With day's meager light we advanced through the forest with wet clothing and equipment. I remember the news that Sergeant Joseph Will of our 1st platoon was evacuated with a shrapnel wound in his lower leg. He was one of our well-liked training sergeants in the A.S.T.P. training platoon. I had been issued his M-1 rifle #1037911. We both agreed it was zeroed in one up and two clicks to the right. Our second platoon was the support platoon in the November 13 advance. Much later I learned that the name of the strong German resistance center and our objective was Le Rouge Vétu. The day was overcast and the ground was wet. I had little sense of direction with no sun to orient me, but I knew that the German army, the Rhine River, and Germany were eastward and that our sister regiment, the 397th, was advancing on our right. I also knew that we were part of a major offensive by the U.S. 7th Army. [*I wonder at this memory. I can specifically remember none of that, though I'm sure it is all true.*]

"We stopped in the forest with our 1st and 3rd platoons ahead of us. The first squad of the 2nd platoon was sent as a contact patrol to the 1st platoon of the 397th on our right. Sergeant Carl Whitehead took us rightward (to the south) on a route well above a forest trail. The walking was difficult on the slippery slope with our full combat equipment. We reached the 1st battalion after they had taken hill 409. I remember how exhausted they looked. We were unwashed, unshaven,

and mud-covered and probably looked the same to them. We returned without incident to our original forest edge position.

"My next memory is our lying down behind trees next to a cleared field before the fortified farm house and awaiting orders. There was heavy machine gun and mortar fire falling on our leading 1st and 3rd platoons. Dick La Fleur, Clarence Manganaro, and I were lying prone behind a very large tree and trying to finish our breakfast or beginning our lunch. Our fingers were numb and our gloves were wet. Our B.A.R. team faced the enemy from our tree line. We knew we were in a serious situation. It was about 11 A.M. Sergeant Michael Doherty was a few yards to our right and had one of the fastest dug foxholes in the world. We noticed the bullet hole through his field jacket left sleeve where his stripes had been. Did he say something about the luck of the Irish?

"About fifteen yards to our left Captain Clark and our platoon lieutenants were standing together and examining a map and looking at the cleared field and the fortified farm house. To our rear the heavy machine gunners from H company were coming forward in short and noisy rushes when their equipment hit the ground. Then the mortar shells began exploding in the trees above us. From the corner of my left eye I saw the tree burst that exploded above our standing officers and knocked them to the ground. The second or third tree burst shell exploded above our B.A.R. position. A tree branch the size of a baseball bat hit me on my left leg. I felt like I had been hit by a swinging baseball bat and couldn't understand how a fallen stick had that much force. The snow covered ground was covered with tree parts and was blackened. A few yards to our right Delos Lowell was disabled permanently by this mortar barrage. I wasn't aware of anyone fleeing rearward from our zeroed in position. The 3rd and 1st platoons came back into the 2nd platoon position. Dick La Fleur noticed a few drops of blood and a hole about the size of a cigarette burn on the back of my left thigh. Then I examined my trousers and determined that I had a shrapnel wound and not a tree bruise. Later at the battalion aid station I saw the gash in my left foot. I knew I was wounded in action and needed help.

"The barrage lifted and I sought a medical corpsman. They were busy attending the cluster of our fallen officers. I was able to walk on my left leg and felt the usual coldness, wetness, and numbness we all had endured. I remember that Captain Melvin D. Clark was in shock and many others needed medical attention. I offered to help carry his litter back to the battalion aid station, but the corpsman said I should evacuate myself if I could. There would be a long wait for litter bearers so I moved rearward by following the telephone wire to battalion headquarters and the aid station.

"I was one of the first to reach the battalion aid station. Part of my clothing was cut away, my wound was dressed, I was placed on a litter, given a morphine shot, and drank my first shot of whiskey. The medics were careful to unlace my slightly damaged shoe-pac boots and save them for the next soldier. The whiskey warmed me and I was semiconscious from the morphine shot on my litter. Dry blankets kept me warm. I don't remember being loaded on an ambulance. I do remember that I was carried on the top tier on the left side and

that there were four litter cases and a wounded soldier sitting by the driver. All seemed to be Company G soldiers and two were from our weapons platoon.”

When he read this in our *Newsletter*, Daniel Capozzi wrote to us:

“When he [Stimes] wrote ... about ... Purple Heart Lane, he described the action as it was, I remembered the details, I was there! He wrote about November 13, 1944, his being wounded and leaving the battle area in an ambulance with other litter cases and the 4th Platoon Sgt. Sitting in the front seat. That was me! Sgt. Daniel L. Capozzi. He told the story with his usual exact facts.”

Bud went on:

“On the ambulance trip to the 27th Evacuation Hospital we stopped on a road and the back doors were opened. I could read the ten stars and I saw and recognized Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, 6th Army Group commander; Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch, 7th Army commander; Maj. Gen. Edward H. Brooks, 6th Corps commander; and Maj. Gen. Withers A. Burrell, 100th Division commander. One of them said, “Well done, men, you did a great job today.” A few weeks later General Devers visited our hospital room on the top floor of the Grand Hotel (23rd General Hospital), Vittel, France and presented Purple Heart medals to some of the other seven soldiers in our room.

“Some hours passed before I was examined by a surgeon about 10 P.M. at the 27th Evacuation Hospital. The more seriously wounded preceded me into the surgical tent. My two deep incisions on my left thigh were done about 1:00 P.M. I remember the blood covered sheets on the tables and floors in the surgical tent and the many operating tables at the end of a very busy day. I remember that Sergeant Carmelo Paratore was on the next table. Before I was anesthetized I thought that the surgeon only had to make one little snip to remove his shattered arm. Carmelo was my guitar playing assistant squad leader in my third platoon days. Weeks later I met him briefly in the 23rd General Hospital at Vittel and he had his shattered arm attached to lots of wires and splints and he was ready for an evacuation to England for restorative surgery. My recovery from surgery was rapid and I was placed in a ward tent. The ward nurse said I could have some solid food. The mess hall was long closed and the only food available was boiled cabbage. I ate three platefuls. When I woke up the next morning a Purple Heart medal was on my pillow, but I cannot remember the breakfast meal. The ward tent was filled to capacity. A forward artillery observer officer was on the cot to my right with many powder burns and slight shrapnel wounds from a short round.

“I was part of the U.S. Army medical evacuation system for four months. My stitches were removed on December 6 and I began walking again. I never did find any size 11 1/2 AAA shoes and I slopped around in size 12 D combat boots. Pajamas were replaced by O.D. clothing after Christmas, I returned to full duty in G Company on March 16, 1945 in time for the entry into Bitche on the Maginot Line. It was then I learned more details on our Purple Heart Lane day and that G Company held its position with a heavy loss of men and all but one officer and had named the place Purple Heart Lane.

"In my first letter after our November 13 battle I wrote, ' I was carrying the B.A.R. We got into an awful mess and it sure was a dark day I'll always remember. It made me mad as hell and I wasn't scared a minute although I sure was praying hard. It happened fast and I didn't have time to be scared. The walk to the aid station was long and hard, but what bothered me the most was all these (penicillin) shots... Right now I sure could use a haircut, but I am finally cleaned up since getting into this hospital...' This was written November 22 on a V-Mail letter to my sister. I was in the first week of my nineteenth year.

"I have strong memories of those November 1944 days 50 years ago in Eastern France. I still have to look up my Social Security number every time I use it."

William Matthews of the weapons platoon also offered a vignette of this time:

"I remember, for what reasons who knows now, that we ammo bearers had taken the machine gun belts out of their boxes and were carrying them draped around our necks, Air Corps fashion. Fortunately, we lived to correct this mistake! Later that evening, I remember after we had fallen back a little a single bullet passing through the trees. A few minutes later someone came and got me. My buddy, Bill Hollingsworth, had gotten that bullet in the thigh. After the war we attended each other's weddings, but over the years we have lost track of each other."

Jack Pointer's reminiscence continued:

"11 Nov. 44. That day we changed sectors. We went about 30 miles to the north and crossed the Meurth River I believe at Baccarat where they were having a big Armistice Day celebration. The convoy got mixed up there and we had to wait on the trucks for a half hour. We got off the trucks and walked to an area outside the town and stayed there. Nice spring water there and we saw a couple of Jerry planes getting chased home. Rain there as usual and a little snow in the morning. We turned in blankets for sleeping bags there but we didn't get either for a few days. E Company was on outpost about a half mile ahead of us that nite. Me and Molise did quite a bit of digging that nite but slept good.

"12 Nov. 44. That morning we got up in the dark and rolled up and turned in our rolls and got hand grenades and all the stuff for an attack. We caught up with E Company where they had a couple of Kraut prisoners. Then we moved off in a single file, Bn column. Gero the 300 radio operator got the stock shot off his carbine, F company was at the head getting quite a bit of fire from Jerry but mostly all small arms. Then in the afternoon the artillery came from Jerry and our stuff started to come in too but it landed on our own men and killed the artillery officer so he couldn't direct fire away from us. The first man in our company to get hit was the first man of the first squad of the first platoon S/Sgt. Will. After waiting in the rain about late afternoon we pushed off again and didn't run into Jerry that nite. We stayed in the middle of the road and dug in but I just curled up under a tree in my raincoat and tried to sleep. It snowed and every one was weak from exposure the next morning when I went around to wake the boys. Fritz and Smoky and Buddy [Lt. Calder] were feeling pretty bad too after digging most of

the nite and listening to a fierce artillery duel where the US won by destroying a bunch of Jerry artillery.

"13 Nov. 44. The day of the Baptism of Fire for me and the whole company, altho we had been under small arms fire prior to this day. It snowed the nite before and most of the men were sick from exposure when I went around to wake them that morning. The only thing we had to eat was the K rations that we got the day before. We got the company together anyway and moved off with scouts out and 1st and 3rd platoons leading the 2nd and weapons in support. Up and down those hills between Baccarat and Neufmaisons. They sure were hard with the snow on them to make me slip and then the woods was so thick in places that I had to run back and forth all the time to keep the squads going in the same direction. The first platoon captured a couple of Krauts who came in and gave up and the Bn. Cmdr., Lt. Col. Spiegle was there to tell them to go on back to Bn. with them. Jack Porter found one of the weapons of these Krauts, it was a burp gun. We had to move on tho and we only went a couple hundred yards and we came to the edge of a clearing where the trees had been cut down and the brush was still lying on the ground. It was open from all sides and could have grazing fire from 700 yards distance. The company was halted and scouts were sent forward to investigate a house at the crossroads of the Baccarat-Neufmaisons road which 3 Krauts had been seen leaving for the woods back of it. The house was declared cleared by the scouts and I had been sort of inquisitive and went up there right behind the scouts leaving the company and platoon behind. Kasney heard some noise in the woods to the left flank so he stood up with his BAR ready. The 3rd platoon went around to the right and saw five Krauts carrying something which later turned out to be the mortar crew that accounted for so many of our boys. I went back to Calder and Capt. Clark called for all his platoon leaders and they figured out the 'School Solution' which wasn't the right one for this particular place. Then it came, an explosion by the house. Everyone thought it was a mine that one of the boys had stepped on. Then all hell broke loose and were right in the midst of a trap which gave out with mortars, 88s, and all types of small arms, mostly automatic. Capt. Clark was hit, so was White. Kerr was behind a tree and me and Buddy heard another shell coming. I jumped along side of Kerr and Buddy went 10 yards further to the next tree. He got hit and called for me. I crawled up to him and tried to open my first aid pouch when another shell came in and Kerr picked up a little bit but not enough to stop him from staying on. Calder was gone. I guess he got up and ran. All I could hear was men calling for MEDIC. I saw Fritz and Smoky coming back on the right when a shell landed right next to them and blew them away but they didn't get hit. I was in a ditch on one side of the road and a Kraut was on the other side in the ditch. Every time I showed any sign of life somebody would open up with a burp gun on me and chew up the trunk of the tree I was behind. The only thing I could do was play possum."

When this appeared in the *News/letter*, we appended the following note:

Regretfully, the manuscript stops here. We don't know why, though it certainly seems possible that, so soon after it all happened, it was just too much

for Jack to go on with. He recalls that he just got busy with other things and didn't have time to continue his writing. We're fortunate to have what he did complete.

Then—Sgt. William S. Joyner, who we shall meet again in his role as Assistant Editor and memorialist of *Combat Company*, sent the *Newsletter* a reminiscence of this time that is quite different from anything else we have, and, I think, very expressive and moving. He called it:

A SNOWY BAPTISM

"End of the line, you guys. All out." The sergeant's Brooklynese call reverberated down the line of olive-drab, two-and-a-half ton trucks that had slid to a stop in the messy roadside slush.

"It had begun to snow earlier in the afternoon, a mid-November snow, the first of the Fall, while our convoy made its way up the winding road in the Vosges foothills. The roadside firs were already white, contrasting sharply with the muddy ground of the roadbed churned by the tires of the transports.

"I jumped out of the truck clumsily, weighed down by the walkie-talkie radio strapped on my back in addition to my M-1 rifle and other gear. No longer protected from the wind by the truck tarp, I was glad I hadn't thrown away my overcoat earlier when it had seemed that Indian Summer would last forever.

"The roadside sign read, 'Baccarat – 2 kms.' That seemed to ring a bell. Of course, the delicate French crystal I had only seen in the window display of the poshest shop back home in the States. This had to be where that stuff had been made. Damned incongruous—the reality of war had caught up with the crystal fairyland. A few rounds of the artillery shells I could hear thudding in the distance could shatter every goblet left in the warehouse, if in fact there were still any in town.

"This vision of elegance evaporated as we formed up our platoon and headed into the woods along the ridge line outside of Baccarat. When I had an opportunity, I pulled out the celluloid overlay for our company, which, when superimposed on the area operations map I kept in my musette bag, outlined our area of responsibility in the attack scheduled for the next morning. Our objective was the crossroads hamlet of Neufmaisons. Nine houses? Was that goal worth dying for?

"It got colder when we stopped near the top of the ridgeline in the starless dark accentuated by the evergreen cover for the night. I slept fitfully. My thoughts kept going back to that breathlessly hot day at Fort Bragg the previous June when I had been called to the Base Chaplain's office to be given the news that my older brother, a captain in one of the Utah Beachhead divisions had been killed, machine-gunned at a crossroads on the road to Cherbourg.

"My saddened but proud reaction to the news had welled within me in the form of a poem that had already been present in the my subconscious simply waiting for the occasion:

The Norman waves roll in tonight
And ebbing leave their flotsam beached
The bodies there now waterlogged,
Which yesterday were quick with life,
Were sacrificed unselfishly
For Freedom's sake.

They walked the path where courage led
They knew that path would end in death
Or victory, most nobly won,
And so without a backward glance,
They plunged ashore to wage their war
For Freedom's sake.

Can we who live love freedom less
Than they who died without a word,
Or hesitate to count the cost
When asked by them to do their best?
No, we must give, if needs, our all
For Freedom's sake.

"What would the crossroads at Neufmaisons look like in the newly-fallen snow come dawn? It was snowing even harder when my radio crackled with a message from Battalion. 'O.K., Company G, move 'em out.' The ice-covered firs in the early morning light appeared crystalline."

It seems a little strange to me that no one else mentions a memory that I have of, some of us at least, stopping for time in a huge, empty warehouse in Baccarat, out of the wet. Though I don't think we actually spent a night there, we were sheltered long enough to start small fires to warm and dry us a bit and heat the powdered coffee in our K Rations. I too thought of crystal while we were there, but saw none.

One more anecdote from that time came to the *News/letter*, from Bernie Jerding:

"When we got hit on 11/13/44 I took one of the company back to battalion aid. Tried to return to the company with a couple of aid men, but we got caught by dark on the way back. We didn't feel like trying to approach the company in the dark after what happened so we slept across their stretchers, planning to get back the next AM. In the morning the aid men decided to return to battalion. I started back to join the company. When I arrived at where I had left the outfit no one was there! There was lots of evidence of our being there—ammo, K-rations, etc., but no people. I was scared! Thought the whole outfit might have been captured! Just then I heard something or someone approaching. I hid and waited. It was Ron Fett. He had been sent back to the line to recover something left behind. When I called out to him I think I scared him too. He explained that in the