

## Crossing into Germany

We spent from 24 to 26 March at this location, cleaning equipment and talking about river-crossing techniques. Our company was, at first, to seize all available river-crossing gear to be able to make a crossing soon. Again the mission was changed. We had received occasional sniper and "88" fire from across the Rhine River day and night. On 25 March I sent my girl a Nazi arm band and officer's collar insignia as souvenirs.

Lieutenant Coursey was evacuated while we were in Ludwigshaven and Tech Sergeant Liberato DiBatista was made platoon leader of the 3rd Platoon. On 27 March we marched west to the little town of Mosbach, away from the Rhine River and were put into reserve. Here we had weapons demonstrations by Lieutenant Hackling's Weapons Platoon and also performed squad tactics drill.

The division band was in the area on 28 March, but I did not see my old friend Skelton at this time. We remained in this town until 30 March. While there we saw a movie called "Strike Up the Band."

Bobby Breen, a child singer of a few years ago was here singing in our backyard. He was a PFC and I missed him and went to the movie instead. Marlene Dietrich and her show were also in town. It sure was nice living in those houses instead of in foxholes.

On 31 March, my 23rd birthday, smoke generators and smoke pots were used as we crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge. It was a cloudy day that helped screen our crossing. We moved slowly in a column of vehicles into Mannheim, Germany. The floating pontoons that made up the bridge bobbed up and down as each truck passed over.

There was no enemy resistance and we moved into houses in Mannheim. Later that night we moved again to Schwetzingen and occupied the Palace Garden. Around dawn, one of the men shot a deer and carried it back on his shoulder. I think it was Dick Saathoff.

After breakfast, there was a non-denominational church service held in the field and a lot of the men attended since it was Easter Sunday.

On 1 April, we moved back to Mannheim to be the special VI Corps Reserve. The next day we moved again, going up the Neckar River Valley, past Heidelberg to Mosbach. During the next two weeks we took a lot of snapshots of the 1st Platoon as we provided security for HQ 35th AAA Brigade. In 1988, 43 years later, the 35th was still in Germany providing air defense for the Saar Valley.

On 6 April Lieutenant MacDonald got permission to take all BAR men and deploy them in the valley to shoot down a German jet fighter that had harassed us for two evenings in a row. We set up and waited until dark, but the jet never showed up again. His home base must have been destroyed.

Captain Hopkins was unhappy with the organization of Company L. In order to balance it out, he took Staff Sergeant Herman Sodie's squad from the 3rd Platoon and swapped it with Rodriguez's squad in the 1st Platoon. He took another squad from the 3rd Platoon and switched it with one from the 2nd Platoon.

We remained in Mosbach until the afternoon of 16 April. On the night before, Captain Travis Hopkins, while cleaning his pistol, accidentally shot himself in the left thigh and also hit Bill Alexander in the toe. "Hoppy" was evacuated and Lieutenant Roy Simmons became the company's new commander. On the 16th, Sergeant Froio's BAR man went "over the hill" (AWOL) and could not be found. I searched the entire area for him. "Pat" Labriola took his place.

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We moved out late in the afternoon of 16 March toward Heilbronn by truck. We bivouacked the night of 17 March southwest of Heilbronn in preparation for an attack the next day on Beilstein (pronounced "bile-styne"). We got the attack order early on 18 April.

At this time, Lieutenant Roy Simmons moved Lieutenant Tom Ryder from the 2nd Platoon to be company executive officer and appointed me as platoon leader of the 2nd Platoon. Lieutenant MacDonald then appointed Staff Sergeant Gabriel to replace me as acting platoon sergeant. The 2nd Platoon was to lead across the line of departure at the top of Steinberg Ridge, followed by the 3rd and 4th Platoons.

The objective of the battalion was to capture Fohlenberg Hill that overlooked Beilstein. The enemy had a clear picture of our battle area and could easily throw all the artillery and mortar fire they wanted at us. I gave orders to the squad leaders to move as swiftly as possible down the slope of Steinberg Ridge to the wooded area below; otherwise we would be cut to pieces. I didn't have a chance to get to know the qualifications or experience of my squad leaders or even the platoon itself because I had just been transferred there. I told them I would lead the attack down the hill.

I picked the platoon guide, George Havens, to be acting platoon sergeant. He was to be last and was to keep the men moving fast. We were going to reorganize at the base of the hill in the wooded area. DiBatista had been platoon sergeant of the 2nd Platoon when he was moved to take over the 3rd Platoon. That is what caused the vacancy.

At the time of the attack we were at the line of departure. I gave the signal and yelled "let's go" and I started running a zig-zag course down the Steinberg vineyard slope. It had thick patchworks of vine poles. I tripped over the vines twice as I was breaking the world's record for the downhill

run, but I didn't miss a stride. I finally reached the edge of the wooded area and looked back.

My platoon was way back up the hill, but they were coming on forward. When they reached the wooded area, we quickly reorganized into an assault position. I don't believe we had any casualties at this point, but a few seconds later the krauts began an artillery attack on us. It was very intense. One of my men was decapitated as he got up to run. What a hell of a way to die. We all thought the war was about over and we were in the worst battle of our lives.

Mortars, 88s, and self-propelled guns blasted the area and inflicted many casualties. I believe that Love Company had sustained 40 casualties, including the wounding of Lieutenant Hackling of the Weapons Platoon. This was one of the few times that I was thrown to the ground by the concussion of an artillery blast. While lying on the ground from the blast, you begin to wonder "how bad am I hurt?" When you do get hit by shrapnel you don't feel the pain at first, only the impact. Again I was lucky; no injury to myself. There was a lot of confusion at this time.

George Demopoulos and the other medics were busy patching up the casualties. Something had to be done, and fast. We moved across a deep ditch a little to the right toward the objective. We had to get out of the "zeroed in" wooded area so we moved on to Kubelsteige.

Companies K and I preceded us up Fohlenberg Mountain summit while Company L headed toward the objective on the left flank. The battalion objective was then taken. The Germans counterattacked from Beilstein Castle, but was finally repulsed. The 3rd Battalion of the 399th Infantry had smashed the German defenses east of the Neckar, opening the way to Stuttgart, Munich, and the Brenner Pass.

The battalion was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for this action. This had taken place from about

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noon to 2300 hours on 18 April 1945. That night, our company put out a listening post on our flank that consisted of Herman Sodie and two riflemen. During the night they thought they heard enemy activity, but nothing ever came of it.

On 19 April, the 1st Platoon of Company L again mounted on the backs of tanks and made a recon patrol south of Grossbottwar. They made no contact with the enemy and returned. One tank had bogged down in the low ground and could not be pulled out. When the platoon returned to the battalion area, there was no one there since while the patrol was going, the rest of the troops had moved out. The patrol had to go back to the tank company headquarters. Lieutenant MacDonald had a hard time finding Company L, but finally rejoined them late on the afternoon of 19 April. We moved into Backnang late that day or early on the next day.

The battalion then moved into Winnenden at 0300 hours on 21 April. At 0900 the battalion took the town of Korb, outside Waiblingen, with Company L acting as a recon patrol again mounted on tanks and tank destroyers. Lieutenant MacDonald's platoon was on tanks and mine was on the destroyers.

Around noon on 21 April, the 1st Platoon, riding on tanks, led the battalion and moved into Rommelshausen. There was no resistance. That same night, the battalion in a line of Companies K, L, and I, attacked south to capture Waldenbronn, a suburb of Esslingen. Artificial moonlight was provided over the enemy area by searchlights. It was cloudy with scattered showers and some drizzle.

German soldiers, retreating from Stuttgart, were trying to infiltrate our column. Many just walked up and surrendered. At least one soldier was killed and several were captured. Lieutenant MacDonald captured a German officer. The 2nd Platoon was leading the Company L column along

the curving, crooked road. At one point the road had tall banks on each side and our flank security notified us that we had prisoners coming toward us. The 1st Platoon was behind us and around the curve. They saw Germans and thought they were trying to ambush the 1st Platoon. They opened fire. The column was halted until we could get word out to stop firing at them. The march was then continued without further problems.

As Company K emerged from the woods at Waldenbronn, a Kraut antitank gun opened fire and Captain Batrus, the CO, was wounded. We moved into Waldenbronn and into houses and set up a perimeter defense with guards on duty throughout the night. Several days were spent cleaning out the woods with "mop-up" details.

*End Part I*

## Part II

About 25 April, after 175 consecutive days on the line, we moved into Stuttgart in trucks for reserve duty for the Seventh Army. We spent several days before we moved to Kirchheim where we remained for two weeks in houses.

A lot of things happened while we were in Kirchheim. Tech Sergeant DiBatista was sent to division HQ to receive his battlefield commission and I was sent the day after that. I was there when VE day was announced on the radio. The soldiers in the rear echelons fired their weapons in celebration. I stayed there for five days while the clerks did the paperwork to discharge me as an enlisted man and drew my final enlisted pay. I took the physical examination and made out my officer's initial records. I then had to ride 50 miles to let a general pin on my new second lieutenant bars. I didn't feel any different, but I was proud to have received a battlefield commission.

Meanwhile, back at the company, the platoons had started training doing close-order drill and physical training (PT). In the 1st Platoon, Lieutenant MacDonald had all of his NCOs drill the platoon. Most had gone overseas as



Receiving battlefield commission, 1945.

privates or PFCs and were not versed on giving commands. Lieutenant MacDonald was looking for a good drill sergeant. Orland Gabriel said he would be happy to be the platoon sergeant if the war was still going on, but didn't want the job in a training situation. He suggested that Lieutenant MacDonald have PFC John Bradley drill the platoon. Bradley got the job. Lieutenant MacDonald asked Lieutenant Simmons about it and Simmons said, "So, you found him?" Bradley had been a member of the fancy drill team in the old Army War Show company that had toured the country back in 1942. He had been a platoon sergeant in Company I and had been busted for some reason or other by Captain Hopkins and was transferred to Company L.

We could only promote him one rank per month now that the war was over, so it took until October before he got back to Tech Sergeant. That same week, Captain Hopkins returned from the hospital.

The first thing he did was send Lieutenant Roy Simmons on pass to the Riviera so that the company would be firmly in his grasp when Simmons returned. Next, he made Lieutenant Ryder the platoon leader of the 4th Platoon to replace Lieutenant Hackling. Lieutenant DiBatista got back to Company L on 11 May and I returned as Lieutenant Tyson on 12 May.

When I returned from Kircheim after receiving my battlefield commission, the guard at the door saluted me, and I smiled, waved my hand, and said, "carry on." Captain Hopkins saw this through the window and I got my first chewing out as an officer. He told me that Lieutenant DiBatista had done the same thing the day before. He reminded us that we needed to be really strict with the men and demand strict military courtesy or they would not respect us or follow our orders. I told Captain Hopkins that I did not need to yell at anyone. I could ask in a soft voice and the men would do my bidding. He was a very boister-



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ous type of an officer when he wanted something done. I was always different from that. We moved to Neuffen about the beginning of the third week in May.

All of the officers ate together at the Company CP for the first time. Captain "Hoppy" was a strict disciplinarian. He believed that soldiers should be very neat and dress correctly even when they were off duty like at chow or in the evenings. He would "chew out" any officer at the dinner table if his shoestrings were not tied and tucked down into his boots. He believed that everything should be perfect all the time, and that we were to set an example to the German people while we were there. These sessions got rather tiresome when we were, so called, "off duty." However, during wartime U.S. Army personnel were "on duty" for 24 hours a day.

Even so, we all liked the captain and called him "Hoppy." You could not help but have a lot of respect for him because he was a good combat officer. At that time, he made Lieutenant Ryder the platoon leader replacing Lieutenant Hackling in the 4th Platoon.

Regular training schedules were set up. One day, Captain Hopkins was conducting a class in tactical training. He wanted a demonstration on how an infantry soldier in combat charges forward with a rifle and then hit the ground and crawled with the rifle cradled for short distances; then get up, run, hit the ground and crawl again. He picked me and DiBatista. Where we were to perform were lots of stones and gravel. We demonstrated ruggedly and precisely, but did not let on that our elbows were all bloody. When we finished I "sirred" him and told him I was glad to demonstrate for him, but, please, the next time, would he pick a better place that was not a gravel patch, and then "sirred" him again. He just smiled.

While we were in Neuffen, one of the men, contrary to regulations, went into a German house to talk with the people. When he got up to leave, his carbine was accidentally

discharged. The bullet hit him in the chin, passed through his head, killing him.

After Neuffen we went to Altes Lager, which, when translated, means "Old Camp," near Munsingen. We stayed there for about a week. During the period of the "Army of Occupation" of Germany, we set up motorized patrols of the regimental area. They consisted of one officer, two jeep drivers with jeeps, plus five other men. We patrolled up to about midnight. Lieutenant DiBatista and I, being the junior officers, were called upon to head up these patrols more often than the other officers. "Hoppy" used to always remind us that, "I better not catch you two fraternizing with any of these young German women or I'll be sure to get you transferred to the South Pacific where the war with the Japanese is still going on.

Around 16 June 1945, the company moved to Hulben where we lived in an old German orphanage on a high plateau between Munsingen, Neuffen, and Kircheim. There was an ancient Celtic wall across the plateau. While there, a man who had gone AWOL did it again. He had been gone for about six weeks the first time and this time was gone for another month. He received a general courts martial for desertion in the face of the enemy, but was found guilty only of AWOL. I believe that he was sentenced to ten years and a dishonorable discharge. I don't know why he did it, he had been a good BAR man.

On or about 8 July we moved to Muhlacker. Pforzheim was the closest major city—or what was left of it. It was about this time that we practiced for a division review. It was quite difficult due to the new officers' inexperience in formal military ceremonies. It was real hot and we had some heat casualties.

I will never forget that when the National Anthem was played I had chill bumps all over me. Everyone felt proud.

Also, while we were in Muhlacker, Company L had a softball and a baseball team that played the other compa-

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nies in the battalion. Dan Downey was our baseball pitcher. Each team had their "bookies" and the men would place bets on their team. Milton Greene was our company bookie. He collected all the money and paid off the winners. This made the games a lot more interesting for everyone.

We began to have a lot of close-order drill, and the company wanted to get some *esprit de corps* built up within the different platoons so each would want to outdo the other. After a lot of practice a prize was offered to the best platoon. They would get cherry pies. I was experienced drilling since I had been a platoon guide and then the platoon sergeant and had drilled the platoon quite a bit before we set out for Europe. I drilled my 2nd Platoon and had a few people with two left feet who could not keep in step. I worked a little harder with them. The 1st Platoon, under Bradley, was a little smarter than I was on some of the contests as they would relieve some of their men that were no good at close order drill and put them on special details. Old Brad knew a lot of fancy drills also, such as, "To the Winds, march," whereby the platoon was spread out all over the field and then he could bring them back together. That was very impressive.

I started my platoon on coming down to "order arms" while marching, and each man would set his rifle on the ground with the man behind him picking it up on stride and come back to "right shoulder arms." This was very impressive if you managed to keep the rifles from falling. Another favorite was to come to "port arms" while marching, put your finger in the trigger guard, spinning the rifle. This worked great as long as everyone was dressed down properly. If not, the rifles had a tendency to hit the man beside you on the shoulder, then fall to the ground.

Sergeant Bradley's platoon won quite a few contests, but mine won a few times, too. This activity built the *esprit de corps* we were looking for and each platoon wore more pride than they had before.

Captain Hopkins really liked to run. He didn't jog, he ran. He ran the company in the physical training periods. Back in the States when he was our platoon leader, he used to run us before we went on the Tennessee Maneuvers. During these runs the platoon would be spread out and scattered. Several times there would be only two or three remaining together. At one time Lieutenant Hopkins said to me, "Tyson, you must like the Army a lot. You also like to run." I just told him, "No, I really don't like either one all that much, but I'm not going to let you outrun me." Of course, I was laughing as I said it.

He seemed to take to me a little more because of the running. He was a former high school football coach. He insisted on Company L being in good shape because he believed that we were going to have to go to the South Pacific and help finish up the Japanese.

The battalion training schedule had one hour each morning set aside for close-order drill and physical training, 45 minutes was supposed to be for drill and 15 minutes for physical training, but he chose to do it just the opposite followed by an inspection in ranks. If anyone in the Platoon got a "gig" the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, squad leader, and the man who got the "gig" all had to do pushups. This made the men shape up faster, but it was hell on the men's leaders.

About this time each regiment started organizing a football team. One day while we were scrimmaging, I blocked a punt. I had both arms crossed in front of my face and the ball went through my arms and took care of my nose. I was dazed, but they said I fell on the blocked punt. The broken nose ended my football career.

Captain Hopkins was also forming track teams and he made me one of the coaches. I had to set up the two-mile run. I had never run a two-mile race in my life. I ran with them and sort of paced the run. I don't remember of us ever having a track meet.

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Regular schools were set up also during this time: journalism, history and other subjects were taught. Lieutenant MacDonald taught blue print reading and John McNeil taught journalism.

One day Lieutenant DiBattista and I were officers assigned to take the men swimming at a pool in another town. He and I had talked about leaving the men at the pool and going nearby for some ice cream. Well, "Libby" double-crossed me and secretly told the men about this and gave them a direct order to throw me into the pool.

I heard about it and challenged them with the thought that they couldn't do it. We did a little friendly scuffling, but with a man on each leg and one on each arm, there's not much a person can do. When I came out, I had a hard time finding my clothes. They were scattered all over. DiBattista outranked me by one day, so they had to do as he said, not me. We all joined in and got some of that good German ice cream. We hadn't had any since we left home and it sure was good.

There had been rumors all summer about when the 100th Division was going home. Until V-J Day, we had been expecting to just pass through the States on our way to the south Pacific to fight Japan. Then the point system was announced. Those with the most points would get to leave first. A point for every month in the army plus a point for every month overseas. There were five points for every campaign star, medal or oak leaf cluster equal to or higher than a Purple Heart. Finally, fathers had twelve points for each legitimate child. This was when the phrase was coined, "you cute little twelve-point rascal." Lieutenant Roy Simmons had more points than any of the officers, so about the last of June or the first part of July he was sent home. Roy stayed in the Army Reserve and retired as a lieutenant colonel.

Ryder, MacDonald, Libby, and I all had enough points as enlisted men but not enough as officers to leave with the

division. Staff Sergeant Mike Rodriguez was one of the first enlisted men to leave on points.

Captain Travis Hopkins was transferred to battalion headquarters as executive officer in August and was promoted to major on 22 October 1945. Ryder and MacDonald were promoted to first lieutenant on 1 September. The first week in October, my platoon sergeant, Tech Sergeant Harry Brenton and I got a furlough to go to London and Glasgow, Scotland. We first went to Paris where we spent the night.

All of the men on this trip were given orders to be back in Paris on a certain date and time because we all would be returning to the 100th Division together. We all then went our separate ways on our different trips.

Before we boarded a British ship to cross the English Channel, Red Cross girls served us doughnuts and coffee. We ate the greasy doughnuts and boarded the ship. They had us all go down to the lower decks. The officers had bunks to lie on but the enlisted men had to sit on the deck.

The ship seemed to rock and roll quite a bit. Most of the men got seasick. I felt sick and lay down on my bunk. Someone told us that if you lie down and draw your legs up that you wouldn't get sick. They were wrong. I felt it coming on and tried to step over the men lying there but didn't make it. I got it all over one of them and apologized profusely. He said; "I don't care, I'm about to die myself". He was lying in his own mess. We finally arrived in England and debarked. Everyone seemed to get well quickly.

When we got to London, Harry Brenton, who used to spend some time there had an aunt who lived there. Harry and his aunt insisted that I stay with them and I never left London to go to Scotland. I attended two London stage theaters and toured the London area. I drove one of those British cars on the left side of the street with the steering wheel on the right side of the car. It was a different experience.

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This was a well-to-do family, but they had food rationing and money didn't help much. I hated to take much on my plate because every bowl was a little skimpy. I think I lost a little weight there.

We went to a nightclub one night and danced to British and American music. It made me a little homesick for my girlfriend. After several days Sergeant Brenton and I left London, crossed the English Channel again and took the train to Paris.

The next morning all the men were to meet for the return trip to the 100th Division. We waited as long as we could but had to leave without two men. I had to report them AWOL when we got to division headquarters. We were both glad to get back to Company L because we thought that the division would be leaving for the States just anytime.

I had orders waiting for me transferring me to Berlin. I hated to leave the division because I had spent my entire military career with it. I packed my belongings on 14 October 1945 and left early the next morning. I hated to leave all my old "foxhole buddies," but as they say, "*C'est la guerre*" (This is war). Lieutenant Libby DiBatista left the same day.

By 22 October, Company L had only 35 enlisted men left but by 6 November, they started getting replacements for their return trip to the United States. Lieutenant Ryder and MacDonald were transferred from Company L on 20 November to the 3rd Infantry Division.

While I was on my tour of duty in Berlin, Company L remained with the mission of German occupation duty. The 100th Division moved by rail and truck on 9 December 1945 to Marseilles, France, arriving there on the 10th. The rest of the Division followed about 18 December. Some units sailed on 31 December, but most of them left in February 1946. The 100th Division was formally deactivated on 26 January 1946.

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HEADQUARTERS 100TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
Office of the Commanding General  
APO 447, U.S. Army  
14 September 1948

GENERAL ORDERS )  
:  
NUMBER 249 )

BATTLE HONORS—CITATION OF UNIT

By the direction of the President, under the provisions of Section IV, Circular Number 333, War Department, 1943, and with the approval of the Army Commander, the following named organization is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action:

THE THIRD BATTALION, 399TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, is cited for outstanding accomplishment in action on 18 April 1945, in the vicinity of Beilstein, Germany. Assigned the mission of capturing the isolated, practically inaccessible hill mass of Fohlenberg, which dominated the entire 16,000-yard front of its regiment, the Third Battalion moved out from an assembly area 5,000 yards from the objective, and advancing cross-country over heavily wooded, semi-mountainous terrain, penetrated the line of enemy outposts to reach the high ground of Steinberg. After charging down the open precipitous southern slopes of Steinberg under a relentless hail of accurate enemy fire, the battalion climbed to assault and capture an intermediate objective, the thickly-wooded hill of Kubelsteige. The battalion, determined to accomplish its mission despite numerous casualties and the uninterrupted severity of enemy fire, maintained the momentum of its attack and continued across the



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open terrain between Kubelsteige and Fohlenberg; then fought its way up the steep slopes to the summit.

A steady downpour of enemy artillery and heavy mortar shells failed to daunt the drive of the battalion and, although taxed beyond the normal limit of endurance, it met and determinedly repelled a vicious hostile counterattack and proceeded to secure the entire summit of Fohlenberg. The brilliant coordination and teamwork of all elements which characterized the drive of the Third Battalion resulted in the capture of this important objective, and played a major role, too, in converting the difficult attack of the regiment against a continuous line into a lightning pursuit which completely routed the disorganized enemy, and carried the division into the outskirts of the city of Stuttgart. The gallantry, *esprit de corps*, and unremitting determination of the members of the Third Battalion are in keeping with the finest traditions of the United States Army.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL BURRESS:

J. O. Kilgore Colonel GSC  
OFFICIAL  
Chief of Staff  
Leonard F. Oliver  
Major AGD  
Adjutant General