The Awakening

by Ray Denman, 397-L

Ray Denman tells his story with the assistance of Jimmy Calvert, 925-B Progeny.

A Little Background

I had just turned 16 on December 4, 1941 and will always look back and remember how that Sunday morning—December 7—changed our lives. After church I had driven to the photo shop with my cousin, Harriette, to pick up some pictures she was sending her boyfriend who was in the Army and stationed in England with the Quartermasters Corps. As we pulled into the parking lot, news came blaring over the car radio telling Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I know we must have sat there a good ten minutes listing to the news.

Leaving there we rushed straight home. I remember how we sat there in the living room listening to non-stop news on the radio for the following four hours. Back then we only had three radio stations to listen to.

A lot of us at the time had never heard of Pearl Harbor or even had any idea as to where it was. That Monday evening my family gathered around the radio and listened to FDR's fireside speech. For the following weeks at school this attack was all we talked about as well as learning more about where Pearl Harbor was. It was so shocking to think that they could have done such a thing.

Within six months everywhere you looked throughout the neighborhoods you saw Blue Star service flags hanging in the front windows of houses with the occasional Gold Star, which meant they had lost a son.

It was also about this time my dad joined the Civil Defense and became what was called a block warden. I, too, joined and helped out by using my bike; I would deliver papers to all the block wardens. These papers came out of Washington, DC, and the state of New Jersey, some of which showed us how to identify enemy planes. My other duties were also to deliver the armbands, gloves, helmets, and jackets to people who needed them.

I would like to say also four years later while in combat I had received a letter from my mother telling me Harriette had met a sailor at a USO Show and they had gotten married on December 4. She also went on to say how Harriette had written her boyfriend in the Army a "Dear John" letter.

Our city had a number of German and Japanese families living there, some of whom were pro-Germany. My great-grandfather had come to the United States in the late 1800s from Germany and spoke German really well. I can remember asking him a number of times to teach me German, but each time he would say, "No! You learn our English." He had a large flag pole in his front yard and he made sure his American flag was put up each morning and taken down before dark.

Growing up I remember sitting around and listening to him tell us what it was like during World War I for his family and how at times they were looked down on for being German immigrants even though their son had joined the US Army and was a medic.

Within a month or so following the news of Pearl Harbor, the gas rationing had started along with other things in the stores. Everywhere you looked, stores and shops had War Bond posters up in their front windows.

My mother knew a couple of ladies in our neighborhood who had sons in the service and the three of them would get together for tea and to talk.

During the middle of my senior year all the boys in my class took the ASTP tests which I passed with good marks.

By June 1943 I had turned 18, graduated from high school and watched as a number of my friends left for the military. I, too, decided to join and talked to my parents who weren't for it but basically had said that I should do as I pleased.

I went down to the recruiter with all intentions of joining the Navy, but was turned down no less than five times because I wore glasses. Each time that I was told to go back home I did so—and drank a lot of carrot juice.

Having given up on getting into the Navy, I had taken a job working at a war plant in the tool room of the sheet metal shop. At the time I was working 48 hours a week, earning sixty cents an hour.

December 1943, I received a notice telling me I had been drafted and was to report to Fort Dix on January 19, 1944. Even with this news my family and I didn't allow it to put a damper our last Christmas together.

The day I left my mother decided to stay home while my dad took me to the bus station to see me off. As I recall his last words to me before I boarded the bus were, "God Bless you, Son. Good luck and take care of yourself."

After arriving at Fort Dix, we were all taken to a room where we were told to strip down. That day I was given my physical and what we called "Squeeze it, push it and the old bend over and smile." Then as we finished with that, we made our way to a room where we were issued our uniforms. As you stopped in front of each table, the guy behind it would look at your ticket, which told them what size you needed. For the most part they fit. I was a little bit taller.

The next thing on the list to do was to box my civilian clothes and send back them home. Part of one day was spent taking a number of tests. For the following week they kind of broke us in to military life the best they could before sending us on to our next stop. There was KP duty; learning what was meant by company and front; how to hold a rifle; and marching. Of course everyone we came across we said, "Yes, Sir." When I first entered the Army I was six feet tall and weighed 119 pounds, but by my third month in the service, I weighed 170 pounds.

Fort Benning, Georgia

By late January I found myself on a troop train heading south for Fort Benning, Georgia, where I was dropped off along with thirty other guys who I had been with at Fort Dix. The shake, rattle, and roll trip to Benning took three days to arrive with the troop train stopping a number of times along the way.

The barracks I was assigned to was a wooden two-story building and it was here I was introduced to military life. Most of the sergeants were older guys who had not only been in the Army for awhile, but also had already been overseas. The officers, on the other hand, from what I remember were no more than what we called "ninety-day wonders."

But How Am I Going to See Without Them?

About the third week, we were all called out to line up. There in front of us stood an officer with a helmet liner on the ground at his side. He told all of us who wore glasses to step forward and put our glasses in the liner. Wondering, "what's this all about?" and being slow to step forward, he shouted out, "THAT'S AN ORDER!" As we placed our glasses in the liner, he went on and gave us a long sermon on how it's all "mind or matter" and how we didn't need our glasses. Finishing what he had to say he picked up the helmet liner and walked off with our glasses.

For the following two or three days, as those of us who wore glasses wondered how were we going to see what we're doing, it came to mind being told that if we had a complaint we could see the chaplain. Some of us were afraid if we went to the chaplain over this, that this officer somehow would make it harder on us. Finally, though, someone got the nerve to do so and it wasn't long before we were once again called out front. There in front of us sitting on the ground was the liner with our glasses. This time instead of a sermon about it being mind over matter, we were told to fall out and get our glasses. Due to the way he treated us, we never could respect him.

Days were spent with physical training along with the other duties like KP and keeping watch over the fires.

We had been advised that we would receive eight weeks of basic training before heading on to ASTP at a university. During the last two weeks we heard through the grapevine, so to speak, that the ASTP

program was being dropped and as I heard the news, I thought to myself, “Oh boy, I’m not going to school.” We were then sent on down to Fort Bragg.

Fort Bragg—I’m in the Band

I arrived at Fort Bragg shortly after the 100th had returned from Tennessee Maneuvers. I was placed in the 3d Squad, 3d Platoon, Company L, 397th Regiment. I spent the first few days getting to know some of the guys in the barracks.

One of the three sergeants I got to know was a man by the name of Brower who was a tall, older man from Colorado. I always found Sergeant Brower to have been a fair man with whom I got along well. These older guys we referred to as Gramps.

One day they marched the Division to Pike Field where they held a ceremony and handed out the Combat Infantryman Badge to the top ten boys, one of whom was Walter Bull. Attending that day were a number of officials from Washington and officers, two of which were Simmons and McNair.

As time went on they decided to put together division dance bands. Having played a trombone in school I decided that I would apply. Surprisingly enough I was chosen. Not only did our band compete in contests but we also went to towns, some as far as eighty miles away, to play. In these towns we would play in their parks and ball fields, having picnics to raise money for War Bonds.

A lot of times after playing in these towns we wouldn’t return back to the base until eight at night and even as late as midnight. Getting back so late we would be allowed to sleep in a little later. This upset the company commander and in so doing, he started handing out extra duty to us.

The Trip Overseas

The trip overseas I was assigned to a sleeping area that was two or three levels below the main deck.

We all were given a meal ticket that you had to have with you when it came time to get in line for chow. Each time you showed up to eat, they would punch it and this was to make sure you didn’t try to go through the line twice. A lot of times due to the mess hall being over crowded I tried to take my food out on the main deck to eat. As I walked around the deck looking for a place to sit, the deck had a number of guys sitting on the deck hatches playing cards. Finding a place I took off my life jacket and sat on it.

One day while walking around I looked up and there was Robert Denman, a boy who I had gone to high school with and had joined the Merchant Marines. Seeing him I asked, “Bob, what are you doing here?”

I asked if he knew where we were headed, but he knew as much as we did, which was nothing. As we talked he asked if I was getting enough to eat and after saying I could stand a little more, he told me to meet him there at four o’clock. For the following two or three days I met Bob there and each time he showed up with a bag full of fruit, which I took back down and shared with the guys. On the third day as Bob handed me the bag he said, he couldn’t get away with it anymore. I guess he was being watched and was afraid of being caught.

So, This Is France

As I climbed down the rope ladder in Marseilles, I was loaded down with all my gear and rifle, making it tricky working my way down. After getting ashore and off the docks, we were lined up two abreast and no sooner had we disembarked that we heard “Follow me.”

That night we left the port area, the weather was rainy and foggy as we walked up the long road to the staging area. The field we used was no more than a muddy field where we pitched our pup tents in the dark. After pitching our tent, we dug a small ditch around it to keep as much of the water as we could out of the tent.

Early the following morning we were awakened and after being served some hot chow we were detailed back down to the docks where we spent ten-hour days unloading the ships. During the day—if we were really lucky—we were able to talk some of the crews on the ships into giving us a sandwich and a piece of fruit. We would start talking with some of the ship’s crew and as we talked, they would ask where we were heading, but of course we had no idea. Then as we talked more, we would worm in the

question, was there a chance we could get something to eat? If not, that evening we returned to the camp tired and hungry where we received our basic Army chow.

Within ten days we had unloaded the ammo, supplies, vehicles, and other things from the ships and made a 500-mile movement north.

First Weeks on the Front Line

For two days and nights during the first week of November we stayed in a crystal glass factory that was located in Baccarat. What I recall the most about the factory was how the floors were covered in glass with half of its roof gone. With all the rain and half of the roof gone it was hard to find a dry place to sleep.

Leaving from Baccarat we made our way through the woods, up and down the mountains and down roads that were no larger than wagon trails, heading for Raon l'Etape. The roads even gave the jeeps trouble getting up and down.

The Awakening

Late one rainy evening, just before dark, we made our way up the road headed towards Raon l'Etape and as I recall our squad was the third one in the column.

At the time our squad was made up with the following guys: Jack S. Walker, who was about five-foot-eight, a medium-built boy from Watertown, New York, and was always mild tempered; then there was James Morgan and I'm sorry to say all I can remember about him was that he was from North Carolina and that he reminded me of the Sad Sack in the cartoon; Jesse Daustia was a stocky boy with dark hair of Spanish background and a happy-go-lucky boy from California; Cecil Moss was a boy from Oklahoma and was a very quiet person who tried to fit in with everyone; Robert Knorrek carried a camera and liked to tell jokes; Earl Holly was smart as all get out; and William Duncan was a farm boy from Indiana who knew how to live off the land and was someone who came in handy when we found a chicken running around in the backyard of a house.

Whenever we heard that we would be staying put in a farming village, which most of the time the civilians had left, the first thing we would do was to look for fresh eggs and a chicken. If we were lucky enough to find some and the kitchen wasn't too far behind us, we would take the eggs back to them to fix for us. If not then we cooked them up ourselves the infantry way. There were occasions we would come across some potatoes and, providing it was safe, we would build a small fire and toss them in it. After cooking them for about two minutes or so, we would take them out, brush them off to eat.

All and all, everyone in the squad got along really well and depended on each other all the time. Now that isn't to say there wasn't a time or two we didn't cuss at each other and it would be over something that had happened. You know like, "Yeah, I screwed up and so have you, and I'll do better next time." Then after it was all said and done, it was over.

As I was saying, the route we had taken was no more than a muddy wagon trail that ran through the forest and mountains; we had about ten to twelve feet between each other.

All at once I noticed, about five or six feet off the side of the road, laid eight to twelve dead GIs under shelter halves and raincoats. Seeing them first, I said, "Hey, look at that." Even though all you could see were their boots and shoes sticking out, it was a real wake up for each of us. I realized at that point that I was staring death in the face and at any time this could be me.

By December 12 we had made our way through the mountainsides and forest to a location that overlooked the Raon l'Etape area and dug in.

The weather had worsened, turning cooler with rain, which in time turned to sleet and then to snow. We did our best to keep not only ourselves but our things as dry as possible. By now there wasn't time to put oil on our boots to waterproof them so our feet stayed wet; like all good GIs we bitched and grumbled our way along.

The mountainside was covered mostly with large pine trees with big roots, which made digging our holes hard. Most of the time, we tried our best to dig the hole at least three-and-half-feet to five-feet deep.

Now if the hole was just for the night, then I would only dig it deep enough to lay down in it and be just below ground level.

We covered the foxholes with as many pine branches as we could find to conceal them as much as possible, which also helped in keeping the rain out. It worked at times, but for the most part I remember being wet more times than dry.

As time passed, it got to the point that it seemed as if you weren't digging a hole, you were sitting in one. All of our food at that time had to be brought up by foot due to the trails being so small.

While here on the side of the hill we saw very little action but, we did get our fair share of shelling from artillery tree bursts and mortars rounds. Then there were days we would receive the occasional small arms and sniper fire.

Once in a while at night you would hear one of the other platoons on one side or the other whose nervous machine gunner opened up, causing you to think maybe the Germans were trying to slip in.

Word finally came to pick up and move out, so we slowly made our way down the mountainside to a road leading into the village. By the time we entered the village it was pretty well shot up with most of the houses' roofs blown away from artillery with the rubble from them covering the small streets.

As we made our way down the streets, you would notice a civilian here and there watching us through a window as we passed by.

We basically had hiked straight through the village, only stopping once just long enough to allow the rear of the column to catch up. It was during this wait we learned that the Germans had executed the Mayor.

As soon as the rear caught up, we continued on out of the village and down the road that lead through the hills. The countryside outside of the village was made up of large hills covered with thick woods.

I recall we had left the road and made our way over this large hill. Reaching the bottom on the other side, we came across some railroad tracks that went up this rise.

Following the tracks we came to a small bridge which we crossed and, pickup a small road that lead through the woods.

Unknown to us at the time, this two-day forced march was due to a French armor unit trying to take St. Blaise and we were on our way to back them up.

As I recall at the time the weather was rainy with a mix of snow as we hiked down the road, finally coming to a Catholic nunnery in which we took shelter. Getting inside we found a place to sit down to eat our rations and as I sat there, I watched as these nuns paced back and forth as if they didn't know what to do with us sitting in there.

Just as we got good and settled down, we heard the words, "Pull Up," which meant we were moving on out.

By now it was getting dark and as we stood there at the side of the road waiting for orders, a jeep with a covered top pulled up. In the jeep sat a general with his aide and I recall how our battalion commander stood there beside the jeep doing his best to get permission to allow us to stay there. Unable to do so, we once again found ourselves continuing on down the road.

The Slow Move North to Mouterhouse

During the first week of December we were making our way north through the hilly countryside toward Mouterhouse along a road that ran through thick woods.

If things weren't bad enough—having to put up with the rain, mud, and weather turning colder each day—we were shelled by their mortars a number of times as we made our way.

On these so-called roads the Germans had set up roadblocks wherever there was an intersection to slow down our movement north. As we came to each of these roadblocks it would take us from a half a day to a day to clear them.

Each of these roadblocks would be set in the center of the intersection so each time we had to work our way around it; to stop you from doing that they had laid mines all around them. There were five or six defenders at these roadblocks and has many as thirty or more soldiers armed with small arms to machineguns.

A number of times we tried calling for air support but because we were so close to the roadblocks, they wouldn't help us. Then we would have to call up for some tank support—if the trails were large enough and weren't too muddy they would come. If we couldn't get support from either of them, we had to just rely on our artillery boys—who were some of the best—for the support.

As soon as the German soldiers fell back, the engineers would be called to come up to clear the roadblock and mines. No sooner would they get started, though, than the German snipers would start up with mortar and tree bursts.

By December 7 we had finally made it outside of the Mouterhouse area and it was at this time we were pulled off the lines and sent back for showers, fresh uniforms, and shots.

Two days later we had returned to the lines and were on the move once again. This time we were assigned to take the hills outside of Mouterhouse that were being held by the Germans. These hills were covered with thick woods making it hard to see the Germans and we spent the better part of the two days pinned down by their mortars and machine-gun and small arms fire before taking it.

Hey, the Chaplain Is Here

Whenever things slowed down on the front lines, a chaplain would come up to hold services. He would setup about 600 to 800 feet behind us in the woods, out in a field or behind a barn, just so he was out of sight of the front lines.

Our sergeant would come around asking if anyone wanted to attend services and providing everyone didn't say yes, I was able to attend. These services would last from fifteen to twenty minutes at a time. The chaplain would set up the front of his jeep as his altar and his assistant would play the portable organ.

After the war I met Sam Tyler, who was the chaplain in the 398th. From what I had heard from some of the guys, Sam was loved by all the guys and was one of those chaplains if nothing was going on, he would go up on the lines and sit in the foxholes with the guys and play cards. He had also been known at times to have shared his whiskey rations with the guys.

Sam was best known, though, for being an angel of mercy. During the heat of things he would take his jeep to the front lines and, working alongside the medics, bring back the wounded.

December 24–26, 1944—Three Days of R and R

On December 24 I was sent to the rear for three days of R and R in the town of La Petite Pierre where I stayed in a house that had part of its roof blown away. I was assigned to sleep in a room on the third floor which had part of the roof gone. Due to the cold and no roof, those of us who slept on the third floor had to sleep bundled up with everything we could find to keep warm. The kitchen had been set up in a nearby house where they gave us our hot chow which we took back to our house and ate in a room on the first floor.

Christmas Day we were given a larger dinner with all the fixings and was great but we all ate too much which didn't help with my problems.

I remember having asked the medic a number of times for some medicine for my dysentery.

We had these two medics who were some of the best, one of which had been wounded pretty badly back in late November.

Back on the Line in Rimling

My three days of R and R was cut short, and by December 26 I found myself in the back of a truck heading back to Rimling where Company L was located.

As the truck came to a stop in Rimling, I jumped out and reported straight to the Company L CP which was located in a building in a courtyard. There, a platoon runner was assigned to take me to where my platoon was which was just outside of the village along the small road that ran north towards Erching. There I found my squad working hard on improving the five two-man foxholes in the frozen ground. I found, my buddy Holly, and we joined in what had to be done to the five foxholes. Earl Holly was a boy from Michigan who stood about five foot eight with dark hair and we had been together since Bragg. Each of the holes lay about 75 to 100 feet apart along the woods line of a ridge that overlooked a meadow

where a number of sheep were. From my hole I was able to look back into the village and see the church that was in the center of Rimling. The following day I received a package from home that contained some sugar cookies from my mother and some things from the bakery where my dad worked. The bakery was owned by an older German man who always told my dad to take some.

We, the guys in the squad, always shared with each other whatever we got from back home.

The weather was becoming colder with each passing day and by the end of the month snow had started falling again adding to the amount already on the ground.

During the days to come, I was assigned two or three times to go out and check on the two 57mm anti-tank gun crews. The closest gun crew to me was located in an old barn that had been hit a number of times and sat along the roadside that ran north toward Obergailbach and was within 100 yards or so from my hole. The barn roof had part of it blown away as well as the windows blown out. Each of the walls had a number of holes in them but as beat up as the barn was, it still kept the gun out of sight and provided a little shelter for the crew.

The other gun and its crew were just down the road that ran west out of the village and was set up in a small grove of trees, facing up the road that lead to Erching and Guiderkirch.

My foxhole was faced to the north towards the Erching and Guiderkirch area. To the back of us sat an old farmhouse some one hundred yards or so away that was being used as one of the CPs. I can remember as I sat in my foxhole watching the Colonel duck in and out of this farmhouse.

Most of the days were overcast and we couldn't see the sun, so it was hard to keep ourselves oriented as to which way was which.

During the last few days of December we had heard that something was going to happen but we did not know what it was or when it was coming. In no time we had everything zeroed in on our left flanks covered by our mortars as well as our artillery. With news like that running through the ranks, you were always on edge and watching for anything as we improved the lines by adding mines and barbed wire.

Using Sergeant Brower's field glasses I could just make out the Germans in the Guiderkirch area moving around trying to keep warm.

Days were spent watching for any troop movements or smoke coming out of the Guiderkirch area and, like the Germans, we too were doing our best to keep warm.

During the late afternoon of December 31 the Germans had started making a lot of noise and singing off in the distance, which I reported to the CP. Everything at this point had become a state of mass confusion—just sitting there, waiting, and not knowing was the worst. It got to the point where we just wished it would start.

With the weather as cold as it had gotten, I was now wearing a pair of long johns; wool OD pants and shirt, with heavy overalls over them; two pairs of socks; shoe packs; two sweaters; a jacket and heavy jacket; a scarf; a wool jeep cap; and two pair of gloves—and I was still cold. I was luckier than most of the other guys who only had one pair of gloves. The one thing we really needed the most was an ax to use to chop at the frozen ground as we dug the holes. It was one of the things we searched for in the bombed out barns and houses.

The I and R platoons were sent out on contact patrols day and night but due to the weather and snow those patrols were very limited.

A day or so before New Years, we watched as a number of German fighters passed over but due to an anti-aircraft battery behind us, they never got low enough to do anything.

2010, a Return Visit

In May 2010, while visiting France to honor all the fallen 100th Infantry Division heroes of WWII in Alsace Lorraine and Vosges areas of our campaigns our group was taken, in addition to two American cemeteries to a German cemetery (*Kriegsgraberstatte*) in the town of Niederbronn-les-Bains where our travel coordinator resides.

At the cemetery we were part of the internment ceremony of an unknown SS German soldier recently found in Rimling, France, and processed through the forensic system. With others in our group, I stepped forward and over the open grave gave my committal prayer.

His unit very well could have been the 17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division operating against my 397th during the unsung Operation Nordwind attacks of January 1 through 15, 1945.

[Ray Denman's story will continue with the action during and after Operation Nordwind in the next issue of the newsletter.]

Holiday 2011 Association Newsletter

The Awakening (continued)

by Ray Denman, 397-L

Ray Denman, tells his story with the assistance of Jimmy Calvert, 925-B Progeny. This continues from the Holiday 2011 issue, picking up with Nordwind on January 1, 1945.

And All Hell Broke Loose

At the time I had my BAR and a Garand M1 as a backup with me in my foxhole. The Garand M1 was lighter than the BAR and easier to carry while out of my hole and out checking on the anti-tank crews.

Just before the attack January 1, I heard the German's tank engines as they made their way down the Obergailbach road long before I ever saw them. It wasn't long before I could see the smoke from their engines.

As soon as they came into view, artillery was called in and we were able to stop the Germans from taking the town. We held our lines during the following ten days and nights against attacks from their tanks and infantry.

Just after midnight and minutes into the first of January found all of us hunkered down in our holes as the shells fell all around and rockets passed over. As soon as the barrage came to a stop, the silence was broken with the sound of their rifle fire; we watched as the company to our left fought off three waves of attacks, each one lasting three to four hours. It was dark and there was some distance between the two companies, so all I could see was the flashes from their rifles as they fired. For the following three days and nights it was touch and go with a lot of firefights as their tanks and infantry made their way into the edge of Rimling. Each time these attacks were fought off and they would have to fall back down the road.

Each morning before light or as time permitted, Sergeant Brower would make his way to each of our holes checking on us and giving out the daily password.

For the following ten days, the attacks came each day at a different time. Even through during all the confusion and noise of the shelling, I could still hear their tanks as they moved down the main street of the village. It was nerve racking to fight from our foxholes and hear their tanks moving about, but not being able to see them. My biggest fear was the thought of having one come up our street or come up behind us.

The mortar squads were set up behind a nearby house and each time they fired, I could hear the coughs from the mortars.

At night when things became quiet, I could hear the muffled voices of the Germans in the distance and sometimes from a nearby house. With them being so close now and some even in the village, we challenged everyone we saw at night or who came near our foxholes. Also at night, flares would be fired over the village and as it floated back down the light gave a very ghostly look through the area.

I can only recall our lines having to fight off attacks at night only twice or so, but I remember the hill where Companies E and F were catching it a lot of nights. What we got mostly at night was shelling.

We didn't have enough winter parkas to go around; at times if the guys who were going out on a patrol didn't have one, the sergeant would tell you to loan your parka to so-and-so for the patrol. You hoped when you got it back it didn't have any holes in it.

The other thing we had in short supply was blankets, and as I, recall I didn't have one.

By January 2 our biggest problem was keeping our communications going—repairing the wires that had been cut by shelling, and keeping good batteries for our radios. The medics were working around the clock on the wounded but found time here and there to check on us in holes. For those of us who were still having problems with dysentery, we would ask Sergeant Brower about getting us some medicine and if the medic had it, he would bring some back.

There were times things got so hectic that deliveries of our rations became few and far between. The road the kitchen had been using to bring things forward was now constantly under fire from the German artillery and infantry.

Days and nights were mostly spent fighting from our foxholes or watching as other companies fought off attacks. We would only leave the safety of our foxholes under the cover of darkness to slip back to get rations and as much ammo as you could carry. Once in a great while you would take a chance to dart back into the woods but as a rule you didn't do it due to becoming a target for some German sniper or give your position away.

The closest we allowed the Germans to get to our line was about two hundred yards because each time we saw them coming our way, we threw everything we had at them. For the most part it seemed like the lines to our left were always getting it the worst.

During those nine days and nights in between the attacks we received artillery and mortar shelling, some small arms fire, accompanied with some sniper fire. You never knew—artillery and mortar attacks could come at any of the day or night.

You were never told anything about lines being overrun but that's not to say I didn't hear bad news because at one point we had learned the news about the 117th Recon who was to our right and how they were overrun and how the Germans had broken through their line during the first day of fighting. This meant the Germans were now in control of the area to our right.

The other bad news that we received days later was about a group of fifty Germans just to our south who had been killed or captured, which put us all more on the edge.

We're Moving Out

Late in the afternoon of January 10, Sergeant Brower had come to each of our foxholes and advised us to get our things together because we were falling back as soon as it got dark. I for one was glad to hear that we were getting out of there. That night we climbed out of our holes as quietly as possible and headed out on foot down the Lenzberg road that ran west. I remember being crouched down low as I went past the snow-covered stone wall that ran around the cemetery. The biggest fear we had when we pulled back was being spotted as we moved across any open areas.

About a half mile out of Rimling we headed south down the Bettviller road. As we made our way down the road, the artillery started coming over, heading for Rimling. From where we were, I still could see the reflections from the explosions as the shells hit.

Under the cover of darkness, we made our way south on the Bettviller road which was covered in snow. As I recall we walked all that night. Throughout the march, we could hear a lot of noise coming from our left; and the further south we got we could hear someone catching it in the Réderching area.

It was late by the time we arrived in Bettviller, where we spent the remainder of the night before moving on south to Hoelling where we met up with some trucks that moved us over to Hottviller.

Hottviller and the Days That Followed

The following morning we loaded in the back of some trucks and after a long ride on those small winding roads, we arrived late that afternoon to an area just outside of Hottviller. As far as seeing Hottviller itself, I didn't see much of the village due to being in the back of a covered truck. For the following hour we rode around as they tried to locate the ridge we were assigned to dig in at. After jumping out and hiking north a short distance we came to a ridge that over looked a meadow. What remained of the first day there, Holly and I dug our foxhole which was just deep enough to cover us. Each day after that we dug our hole a little deeper, as time allowed. Just back over the ridge behind were some old farmhouses, one of which was used as our CP and the other one was where the chow line was set up. There was another house there but it had been used as a latrine by the guys who had been there before us. You just couldn't stand going in it.

There were a number of things our days were spent doing, most of which was watching and listening for Germans; and putting up barbed wire and mines out in front of us, when we felt it was safe to do so. For the most part, you just sat there and didn't move around during the days. Earl Holly and I would sit in our hole, looking around to see what may be lying around that we could use to improve our foxhole. Seeing something, we waited until it got dark, then sneaked out under the cover of the night to whatever we had seen and dragged it back to our hole. To pass time during the day, we would talk about home,

laugh at a joke someone would tell, and if someone had brought back a *Stars and Stripes*, we all took turns reading it.

The weather was bitter cold; new snow fell each day and what at first was eight to ten inches deep within a week became knee deep in places.

At dark the sergeant made his way to each foxhole, checking on us, making sure we were awake, and giving us the password for the night. Usually these passwords had something to do with baseball like teams or players.

Nights were long and cold as we sat there listening and watching for anything. Out in front of our lines we had set up a number of trip flares. As I recall there were only a couple of times they were set off. Sometimes at night we could see the flashes from artillery off in the distance lighting up the night sky along the horizon.

There were only two night patrols I went out on during this time, each patrol made up of four to six men. We worked our way across the meadow and then just inside the woods across from us. After getting into the woods we sat there listening for Germans talking or moving around.

By now the days had become fairly quiet with only the occasional shelling and small arms fire. As far as the sniper fire we got, it came from some old building that was off to our left. As far as the shelling went, they only lasted for five to ten minutes.

Rations

I was never one of those guys who was choosy about what I had to eat, but there were times I sat there trying to decide if I was going to eat the canned meat or the cheese, which was tastier than the meat. Of course having dysentery didn't help matters. I would save the packs of crackers to trade the guys for canned meats. Unlike some of the guys who you hear fussing about the rations I would just say, well it's the best for now.

I always kept three or four packs of sugar back to be used during a late night guard duty and when I found myself getting sleepy, I would pop a pack of sugar in my month.

One other thing I found myself doing was to keep back a can of meat or crackers as a holdover during the next twenty-four hours; this was in case you heard shells passing over and hitting in the rear.

Too many times this happened and when it did, you knew right then the supplies being sent up would be delayed. These delays happened more than once and sometimes we would do without rations for as long as two days. The order things were sent up went like this: First were the medical supplies, second was our ammo, and third was the food or rations.

If and when they brought up hot chow, it was always in this big pot and they would set up behind a building or a barn out of sight of the Germans. Then we would take turns running back to where they were. If you had four or five minutes you might have enough time to eat it there. If not, you just grabbed your chow and ran back to your hole and ate it there.

The Lord Is My Shepherd

As a youth, I grew up in church and had memorized the 23d Psalm, which was something I prayed a lot every time things started getting hot.

R and R

On March 12 I was given four days of R and R spent two days of it in Nice. The ride down took a day in the back of a duce and a half to get there.

Riding in the back of a duce and a half was always a bumpy one as the drivers made their way down those small rough, winding roads that ran through the mountains. Riding in the back of these trucks, you would place your small packs on the bench and sat on it to soften the ride.

Heading down we talked about where we were heading and how much we were looking forward to a shower, some hot chow and a bed to sleep in out of the weather. Mostly it was about a shower and at this point I didn't care of it was a cold one.

The truck came to a stop in front of this hotel where we jumped out and went inside where each of us was assigned to a room. No sooner had I gotten into my room; I made my way down to the shower. Finishing the shower, I was handed a clean uniform and for the first time in months I felt like a human again.

During the first day after eating a large meal, I made my way down to the waterfront where the Army had set up a boat cruise. The water was rough that day and the fact I had eaten a large meal didn't help because I was sick.

As the day came to an end the medics gave us a talk about the girls.

Each evening they handed out copies of the *Stars and Stripes.* I kept as many of as I could to hand out to the guys when I got back to the lines. I had also made sure to pick up some writing paper to hand out also.

The next day I when back down to the water front, where I stood watching the girls in their tight swimsuits play in the water.

Later that evening I attended a USO show, then went to the Red Cross where I had coffee and donuts, then wrote a letter home. They also had a radio and a small band to listen to.

The fourth day was a quiet ride back in the back of the truck as we made our way back to the front lines with none of us having much to say.

By the time I had returned to my platoon, the 100th had broken through the lines and moving north towards Germany. As always the guys were glad to see me back and I handed out all the *Stars and Stripes* I had been able to get my hands on.

Replacements

We had started receiving replacements in late November but it wasn't until the end of January that we received the majority of them. Most of them were from 30 to 40 years of age. Most of these replacements hadn't had much infantry training and what training they had received, it was in the way of truck driving, cooks, and clerks.

The replacement depot was always in a rush to get these guys up to the front lines and they would show up ill equipped and dressed with most of them lacking a lot. What I'm trying to say is that I felt so sorry for these kids because most were right out of boot camp without any infantry training whatsoever and some weeks earlier had been a clerk in some office, behind the wheel of a truck or serving chow out. These guys wouldn't have their winter coats, shoes instead of boots, and most had no gloves with them.

After dark the platoon sergeant would bring these guys up to the front lines and as he came to your hole in a low voice he would tell you he was putting this guy with you.

One of the first things these guys would ask was where they were. Not knowing myself I would do my best to tell them. Next they would ask how long had you been with the squad, followed by a number of other questions. By this point the advice we gave them was to keep their heads downs, keep their weapons clean, listen, do what you are told, and, most of all, to be as quiet as possible on the front lines.

It was tough on us, the guys who had been together for so long, but that's not to say we didn't do our part in watching after these kids. Also in the back of our minds we were wondering if they would be able to hold up their end when it came down to it. As far as getting to know them and as bad as it sounds, you didn't. I've seen times these guys would only be around a couple of days and there were some who lasted weeks.

During their first shelling you sat there doing your best to keep them as calm as possible by explaining how to tell the difference between the rounds and if the round was passing over or to hunker down in the hole.

Then there were the times you had to take them out on a patrol. You did your best to show them what to look for, like trip wires; to watch for movement up ahead, and most of all, to be as quiet as possible.

There were times when the chow line was set up just back behind the lines and we would take turns running back to eat. There standing in line you would hear these new guys asking older guys questions.

On the Fast Track to Germany

By the time I returned to my squad the convoy was on the fast track moving north. The convoy was made up with trucks, half tracks, tanks, and other vehicles carrying the men of the 100th.

By now the weather had gotten warmer, which made riding on the back of a tank a hot one, as you sat over the engine. The guys who sat on the side of the tank sometimes had to hold on for dear life as the tanks made their way down the roads. Not only was it hot sitting over the engine, but you also had to put up with the fumes coming off the engine.

As we moved north, our convoy came across a number of places along the road that were lined with German tanks, trucks, and other vehicles that had been caught by our Air Corps.

Late one evening we arrived in a small German village where we spent the night. My squad was assigned a house and as we entered it, we told the civilians they had to get out. It was great having a soft bed with clean sheets.

A lot of the small German villages we passed through would either have a white flag or white bed sheets hanging from their windows. This was different from France where the families who owned the houses where we used to sleep in were allowed to stay in the house with us; in Germany the families were made to leave their houses.

April 4–11, 1945—Heilbronn, Six Days of Hell

Before arriving in Neckargartach—a city near the Neckar River—we passed through many a number of villages and towns, sometimes running into the Germans, but the firefights didn't amount to much.

As I recall we moved into Neckargartach April 3 or 4. As we arrived, we could hear artillery coming in, passing over us and hitting somewhere behind.

Neckargartach was made up of a number of buildings and as we stood there at the side of the road waiting for orders, four Germans came walking around the corner of a building. Seeing them, the three of us rushed up and took them as prisoners without a fight; one was SS, from whom I took a pistol. We spent that night in one of the buildings that sat off from the main street; it was nice being able to sleep out of the weather.

Each time the engineers had set up a place to cross the river, the German artillery would start coming in and hitting that area. When it came time for me to cross the river, I went across in one of the small assault boats that held the eight of us, four on each side. After we got into the boat, the engineers pushed us off and we started paddling as hard and fast as we could. The currents were so strong and fast it kept pushing us down stream.

No sooner had we reached the banks on the other side and started to run towards the three-story power house than we came under fire from a hill. We learned later that the Germans also ambushed a company from the 398th from that same hill.

After working our way through the power house making sure it was clear of Germans, we set up our OP. For the following couple of days we took turns watching for German troop movement, along with any tanks moving through the street, which we could see off in the distance. Forward movement each day was in yards and from one building to the next, with casualties growing by the day.

Days later after making our way from building to building and clearing the factory area of the city, we made our way past the railroad yards and into an area that had a small crossroad. As the five of us sat there in a bomb hole waiting our turn to move forward, we watched as our first scout made his way across and was hit. Seeing it, the sergeant and I told the other three, one of whom had a BAR, to give us cover fire and to keep it going. As they opened fire, the sergeant and I ran out to him and dragged the scout back to the safety of the hole.

Medic! Medic! I Got It!

On April 13 we left Heilbronn, moving down what at first was a two-lane road with an island in the center with trees. We took turns riding on the back of the two tanks that accompanied us.

After crossing the first bridge the road then turned to a narrower secondary road, with rounded hills on both sides covered with thick woods. This secondary road also ran alongside some railroad tracks. At the

road's next bridge, the tracks ran under the road. Further on down the road we came across two roadblocks.

The first one we came to we had no trouble getting around. Approaching the second one, though, we came under heavy small arms, machine-gun, and mortar fire from the left and right hill. My squad was ordered to make our way up the hill to our left and for the following ten minutes under heavy fire, we worked our way up the hill in two- and three-man teams with the guys behind us providing cover fire.

It was during my second forward movement and just as I fell to the ground, I was hit in my right leg. As I scanned across the ground looking for better cover, I yelled out as loud as I could, "MEDIC! MEDIC! I GOT IT!"

With the medic unable to get to me I started a slow crawl back down the hillside until I was able to reach better cover. There unable to make it on my own, someone came up and helped me to the aid station.

From there I was carried back to the battalion aid station where I was patched up and placed in the back of an ambulance late that night and taken to a evacuation hospital. Arriving there I was put on a cot in this large tent. Somewhere around one or two in the morning I learned that I was being put on a C47 and flown out that night to Nancy. That was the first time I had ever flown on a plane.

It was while in the hospital I learned the war was over and hearing the news, I was one happy person knowing I wasn't going to be banged up anymore. Even with the good news, it wasn't long before my thoughts turned to those who didn't make it and wouldn't be returning home to their families. It wasn't until the middle of June that I returned to my company.

Occupation

After being released from the hospital, I caught up with the 100th in Stuttgart which was billeted in an old apartment building in the center of the city. The French were in Stuttgart along with the 100th; not only we, but also the civilians wanted them out. Let's just say these French soldiers weren't the most desirable bunch and didn't treat the civilians right. The young ladies stayed hidden during the time the French soldiers were there. Two weeks later, the French were ordered out. We watched as they took everything that wasn't nailed down, including food.

I remember how I would go to the chow hall and go through the lines twice, the second time taking my food outside and giving it to the old civilians. They would go through our trash cans looking for something to eat.

While here I stood duty down at the old Post Office, watching people coming and going. For the most part the civilians didn't give us any problems but a couple of times we had to call for MPs, who took them off our hands. As for German soldiers, there were very few who returned there because most of them were in POW camps.

The black market was something we had to keep an eye on.

Near the railroad station there was a large sports field where I saw a USO show that featured Jack Benny. It was packed with GIs.

From July to August we were moved out into the countryside in a farm village where we started training on maneuvers and getting back into shape to be sent over to Japan. Luckily the war ended before we had to ship out.

By November I was shipped out to Heidelberg where I was assigned to the engineer unit who were stationed there and lived outside of the city in an all-girl's school. It wasn't bad duty here and these engineers were a laid back bunch of guys.

During Thanksgiving, I loaded a truck up with our turkeys and took them to a bakery in Heidelberg who had a large oven.

On December 21 I was in Heidelberg when Patton was brought to the hospital and the MPs had their hands full keeping the news reporters out. As soon as the news of his car accident got out, rumors spread like wildfire as to what had happened.