The War Years—1944 to 1946

by Dick Drury, 397-E

A bus took us from Worcester to Fort Devens where we stayed several days in permanent brick barracks. We were issued uniforms and took numerous batteries of tests. One was the AGCT (Army General Classification Test). I scored in the high 130's which supports the accuracy of the Stanford-Binet test I had to take in high school. We got physicals and inoculations. My aunt Pauline (Spinney) Parker, by marriage to my uncle Chet, was working at Fort Devens and paid me a visit. It was a big deal because she arrived in one of those big old Army field staff cars. These vehicles were so big and obvious that they were soon canceled from the inventory. Uncle Chet was back in the Navy. He was assigned to converting the radio and other electronics (sonar) on two Italian liners that were captured in the Panama Canal when Hitler and Mussolini decided to declare war on the United States.

Since Fort Devens was the major Induction Center for Army recruits from the New England area, it was no surprise when we boarded a very long troop train and headed west. The train went through the Hoosick (?) Tunnel in the Berkshires. I was leaving Massachusetts for the first time as we slowly crossed the State of New York. The train was crowded with us kids and our barracks bags filled with newly acquired uniforms. We were shunted onto sidings to keep the main lines open for regularly scheduled trains and used, it seemed, back woods routes. We did not see any recognizable landmarks until we crossed the Ohio River into Kentucky. This gave us plenty of time to socialize with people in the adjoining cars. I met many acquaintances from Grafton Street Junior High School and North High School. One stood out in particular. He was Mateo (Matt or Butch) Mancini. He was someone I only knew about through the newspapers. He was a sports star, especially football, playing for Worcester Boys Trade School. Having never met him before this, I was surprised that he was not a giant. He lived off Shrewsbury Street across the railroad tracks from my neighborhood. We would meet again later in France as both of us were assigned to the same unit, the 397th Infantry Regiment of the 100th Infantry Division. Our train, after a four day trip, arrived at Fort McClellan, Alabama, a major IRTC (Infantry Replacement Training Center).

Fort McClellan is located near Anniston, Alabama in the Talladega National Forest. This is the southern end of the Appalachian Mountain range. March and April were bitterly cold. That talk about the sunny South is propaganda. It took a few weeks to gather all the troops needed to begin a new training cycle. They used us as labor parties to cut down trees and clear forested areas for use as firing ranges. That was almost as dangerous as combat for us city kids. This forest was nearly impossible to walk through. I had never seen anything like it in the Northeast. To save time we would walk in the stream beds until the day we sat by a larger stream to eat our lunch and started counting all the snakes swimming by. On another occasion, we found a clearing that would save us from fighting the brush for a while. Only a few steps into it and we stopped in horror. Taking advantage of this acre of sunshine were hundreds of snakes, on the ground and on the stump tops.

Our barracks were more like chicken coops. The outside was covered with rolled asphalt roofing over the 2 x 4 and board structures. There was no insulation nor any interior sheeting. The heating was by a pair of pot bellied stoves located at each end of the hut. Since I was relatively near the stove at my end, it was a big improvement over home in one way. These huts were set up in rows to form a company street. At the end of each street was a latrine. These had gang showers, but I was already used to those. The Army puts signs on almost everything, as if we didn't know anything. Down the right hand wall, over the plumbing fixtures was a sign that read, URINALS. Over here to the left was a row of toilets. On the wall next to the last toilet was a sign that read, VENEREAL. I used it and later found out its meaning. I wondered why I was getting those funny looks. But I rationalized it easily, by thinking it was probably the safest john in the row. Maybe, I was more of a virgin than I realized.

Soon we began our thirteen weeks of infantry basic training. One of the kids in our hut was a graduate of The Boston Latin School, a very prestigious high school. McNulty was in the Junior ROTC program there, so he was well advanced in many of these basic skills. He was made the company guidon (flag) bearer. Somehow they found out that he was asthmatic and they discharged him. He was heartbroken. His place was filled by someone who was hospitalized in the previous cycle and had to start out all over again. It wasn't all marching and drilling, that was the easiest part. Probably the hardest parts were the physical challenges of 20 mile hikes with full field packs and the various obstacle courses. We all had to qualify with M-1 (Garand) rifles, but we also got exposed to

and fired the .45-caliber pistol, the M-1 carbine, rifle grenades and Bazookas (an anti-tank weapon), the .30 and .50-caliber machine-guns and the hand grenade. The latter was exciting because of the danger and the explosive power of this weapon was awesome. After instructions on the grenade, you watch from a safe distance, then move up to a trench closer to the throwing pit. Those things are heavy and you cannot throw them very far despite what you see in the movies. Suddenly it is your turn to crawl up to the pit where an instructor tosses one to you. Our instructor was an oriental with a surly look. You have to catch it, pull the pin and throw it at another pit to reduce possible collateral damage. Any signs of fear or panic at this drill wins you a visit to the psychologist. On a weekly basis, we went to see a training film. Most were from the "Why We Fight" series and you would leave the theatre ready to kill. However, there was one on health which was really scary and frequently caused nausea. It was about venereal diseases.

At the end of this course you had earned an MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) number. I think it was 705 for a rifleman. Then our basic training groups were broken up and reformed for six more weeks of training in a secondary MOS category. Some men were further trained to be machine-gunners, others became mortar men, medics and so on. I was sent to the I&R (Intelligence and Reconnaissance) School. We specialized in map reading, use of the compass, patrolling, maintaining journals and situation maps. In addition, we were taught how to drive jeeps and light trucks. Near the end of this time, D-Day occurred and not long afterwards we began to see more and more of our instructors (called Cadre) were men who had been wounded in the European or Mediterranean Theaters of Operations. We also got training in the use of radios and wired telephone equipment. At the end of our training, we all got a ten day delay en-route, a vacation, before reporting to our new duty stations.

Here are some random thoughts about my life as a trainee. While we were out learning to be soldiers, our NCO's were inspecting our bunks and surrounding areas. Those bunks that were not tight nor smooth enough earned "gigs". Gigs put you on a detail list. This means that you will be assigned extra duties on what would usually be called free time. This could be guard duty, KP (kitchen police), policing up the area, latrine orderly or the garbage truck detail. Another way to get trapped into these nasty assignments, we quickly learned, was to lay on your bunk during your free time to read (like on Sunday afternoon). The NCO's would sweep through the barracks looking for "volunteers" for some dirty detail. My stratagems for detail avoidance were to arrange to lay and read on the bunk of some guy in an adjoining company. The NCO's could only task men from their own company. My solution to the neat and tight bunk problem was even easier. Due to the cold nights and the irregular heat from the pot belly stoves, we were issued comforters which had to be rolled up in the prescribed manner and displayed at the end of the bunk like a king sized egg roll. Each night I slept on top of my made up bunk and under the comforter. In the morning, all I had to do was tighten up my bed and roll up my comforter. I was surprised how many men chose to remake their entire bed each morning. Another one of my lifestyle anomalies was to go to breakfast every Sunday while most of my barracks mates chose to sleep. This way I had plenty of time to eat as much as I wanted. To this day I have fond memories of mess hall pancakes. They were thin and chewy like tire patches. Modem pancakes are thick and fluffy, dissolving in the syrup. Some of my other blessings were that I only had to shave about two times a week, did not care for smoking except when I wanted to appear older on occasions, and did not enjoy drinking the 3.2 beer (low alcohol) that was served at the PX (Post Exchange) beer Garden.

My ten day leave at home in Worcester came in mid-July. I spent most of my time at home and at Lake Park on Lake Quinsigamond. It went by in a quick blur. My mother told me about the visit of Doris Sistrand and Dolores Stalulonis to get a picture of me to use in the l944 NHS Yearbook. And it has only now occurred to me that they must have returned later to leave me a copy after I had returned to duty. The only picture mother had was one with an open neck sports shirt against a backdrop of flowered wallpaper. Doris and Dolores were classmates of mine in the GSJHS Preparatory class and understood my circumstances. Like all good things it was over too soon and I was catching a train to Texas. This was not a troop train where there was a seat for everyone. The trains were crowded beyond belief. My first change and layover was in Washington DC. I had a couple of hours to wait for my next connection to Atlanta. As I walked out of Union Station, I was stunned at the hundreds of people sleeping on the lawns there. It quickly made sense to me and I joined them. At least out there was an occasional breeze to relieve the night's high heat and humidity. By the time I got to Atlanta I was pretty grimy. An officer and an MP told me to clean up. With still a long journey ahead of me across the Deep South to Texas, I wanted to

save my clean uniform for when I got a lot closer. I wish I could remember the name of the camp I was assigned to. It was in the Red River Valley, north of Dallas/Fort Worth, near Denton, the home of Texas College for Women (now North Texas University). My memory finally kicked in. It was Camp Howze.

This was strange. I was not assigned to an active unit, but another training unit. The 103'd Infantry Division was organized and trained there, but we did not come in contact with it. Later, it was in the same convoy with us going overseas. This seemed like a big day care center because all of us were 18 years old. The story I heard was that President Roosevelt did not want anymore 18 year olds overseas. This policy was an outgrowth of the case where five brothers in the Navy died when their ship was sunk. I believe their name was the Sullivan brothers. I had never heard of the "Saving Private Ryan" case until I saw the movie. These policies were implemented to reduce the impact of rising casualties on mothers and families.

Many of these WWII camps no longer exist, like Camp Howze. We were given training, but it was a repeat of many of the things we already did at Fort McClellan. A good example was when we had to do the obstacle course again. While doing our daylight version, I noted the placement of the machine guns that fired over our heads. The traverse and elevation of these guns were confined inside a metal frame like a letter H. This kept the guns, which jump around, from depressing and hitting the soldiers crawling and from swinging too far to right or left and hitting cadre and observers. With this knowledge I knew how to position myself so that I could stand erect with little chance of being cut in half by either one of the two machine guns in use. This knowledge came in handy when we came back to do the night time version. The objective of this exercise was to capture or destroy the two machine gun nests. And, in the process, you learned how to crawl down the length of the range under the noise and threat of the machine gun fire. Additionally, there were pits where explosive charges were set off to simulate mortar or artillery explosions. These were surrounded with barbed wire to keep you away from them. The real nuisance was the two barbed wire fences across the entire range. It was tricky to crawl under these fences without getting your clothing or equipment caught in the barbs. In the night time exercise, I was able to pick a lane that was safe from the machine guns and in a low crawl/run move up to the barbed wire fence. Instead of crawling, I waited until a flair died out, then ran and jumped the fence. This was detected by observers with shouts of caution and concern from the dark sidelines. I repeated the scenario for fence number two with the same effect on the cadre, but I wasn't caught. It sure was a lot easier not getting caught up in the wire as you tried to crawl under it.

Another ruse we practiced frequently in order to extend our rest breaks was to ask Corporal Housty to demonstrate the techniques for disarming a man attacking you with a knife or bare bayonet on a rifle. CPL Housty was a fine man and soldier, but never saw through our ruses. Each time one of us had to sacrifice our body for him to demonstrate on while the rest of us watched and rested. It was his specialty and he was great at it. Another example of his courage took place on a road march. We were all resting by the sides of the road when someone screamed. He had discovered a snake near him. CPL Housty walked over and grabbed the snake by the tail and snapped like a wet towel, breaking its neck. Soldiering at Camp Howze was boring. They were always looking for volunteers to become paratroopers. I knew my chances were zilch due to my lousy vision, but I gave it a shot. I mastered the eye test that used a capital E in various positions. It took a couple of weeks until I got caught by a Doc who used a slide projector.

In late August something happened to change my mind. We were given a Sunday outing to a swimming pool at the Texas College for Women in Denton. I got lucky and the pretty lifeguard agreed to meet me when she got off duty in mid-afternoon. She was an Art Major and was willing to show me their galleries at the college. I forgot her first name, her last name was Hammond. Later, when I was working for the Chief of the US Army's Arts and Crafts Program, Mrs. Eugenia Nowlin, she remembered Miss Hammond as one of her students when she taught at Texas College for Women. I was looking forward to meeting her again on my next free weekend, when I was frozen (put on alert for transfer to a new duty station). I was being sent to the 100th Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, NC. I was on another troop train leaving Camp Howze. This time our route crossed the Mississippi River and along the shore of the Gulf of Mexico. It was 3 September 1944, my 19th birthday, and on my way to a division that was going overseas soon. I looked out the train's window towards the Gulf across great stretches of marsh grass and was surprised to see a large steam boat in the midst of the sea of grass. I later learned that the railroad tracks and the Inter Coastal Waterway run fairly parallel there near Biloxi, Mississippi.

Fort Bragg is located next to Fayetteville, NC. I visited the town only once. The most prominent sight to see was the old slave market. I was depressed at the treatment of blacks throughout the South and the segregation in

the use of public facilities and services I had seen. On post, the 100th Division was located in the building and area vacated by the 82nd Airborne Division when it went overseas to England to prepare for D Day. I went back to Fort Bragg for a visit when my son, Stuart, was stationed there. I was shocked to see all the new buildings and construction and right nearby was an area of old WWII Barracks. On close examination, through the fences with razor wire topping, I recognized that it was my old battalion area, including our old chapel. It was set aside for the exclusive use of the Delta Force units. It borders on the fence to Pope Air Force Base. In the old days it was the Pope Army Airfield. We used to watch as low flying aircraft tried to pick up with a hook two gliders loaded with troops. When these C-47 transports could not gain enough speed or altitude, they would cut the gliders loose to crash into our barracks area. The only other activity of any size going on at Fort Bragg was the training of field artillery. We saw a lot of huge vehicles called prime movers which towed large scale artillery pieces around the post.

I was assigned to the 397th Infantry Regiment. The heart of a WWII Infantry Division is its three infantry regiments. Ours were the 397th, 398th and 399th Infantry Regiments. All other units of the division are designed to support the regiments. The other units, from the largest to the smallest, include battalions of field artillery, companies of engineers and medical personnel, plus smaller units of military police, signal, supply, transportation and all of this totals about 15 to 16,000 men. Depending on mission and terrain other non-division units are assigned as needed. Independent Tank and anti-tank, Corps level heavy artillery, and special units were assigned. Despite all that man power, most of all the casualties (KIA, killed; WIA, wounded; MIA, missing in action) takes place on the front line with infantry companies. On offense or defense, there are usually two regiments up front and one in reserve for unexpected contingencies. The regiments have three battalions each. Each battalion has three rifle companies and one heavy weapons company. Similar to the pattern of the regiments there would be two battalions forward and one in reserve. The same applies to the companies and the platoons within a company and squads within a platoon. The point of all of this is to show that although there are more than 16,000 men, when attacking the concealed and waiting enemy, there very few men leading the attack. They are usually the first scouts. There would be four for a company of over 200 men, eight for a battalion, sixteen for a regiment and thirty two for a division of thousands. Any one behind the battalion feels relatively safe.

The 100th Infantry Division was activated at Fort Jackson, SC on 15 November 1942. Its newly designated Commander was Major General Withers A. Burress. He became a beloved father figure to all in the course of time. By November of 1943, the division was trained and ready to participate in the Tennessee Maneuvers. In the cold, wet, snowy mountainous area, the troops got a preview of their future battle conditions for the Vosges Mountain campaigns in France in November of 1944. About a third of the men who went overseas with the 100th were originals from the Fort Jackson/Tennessee Maneuvers period. Due to the losses, mainly infantry, in the battles for North Africa, Sicily and Italy, Army Headquarters in Washington stripped the 100th of personnel as replacements for its weakened units overseas. This happened on a major scale over two or three times. Realizing that the D-Day Invasions and the battles for northern Europe would require even greater demand for infantry replacements, the US Army HQ in Washington made a drastic change of policy in March of 1944. It canceled all its programs like ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program), and most flight training to provide for infantry replacements. These men were the best and brightest and in colleges across this land. Now they were beginning their infantry basic training and entering divisions like the 100th being readied for overseas. The older original soldiers were amazed at all the bright, but young, sometimes frail, whiz kids that they were having to go into battle with.

In January 1944, after the Tennessee Maneuvers, the 100th proceeded directly to Fort Bragg, NC and not back to Fort Jackson, SC. When I arrived there on the 5th of September there was no training period to integrate us new people like the ASTP crowd that arrived a couple of months earlier. By 26 September we were on our way to Camp Kilmer, NJ, a POE (Port of Embarkation). Our time was spent getting properly equipped for war, putting our weapons in cosmolene, etc. We lost our Lieutenant, Platoon Leader, at the last minute and got a new one whom I never met personally until we were aboard ship. Camp Kilmer was named for the poet who penned “Trees”. We got a pass to visit New York City and the majority of the older original soldiers (mostly NCO’s) came from the NY/NJ/CT/PA area, got two passes. That seemed fair to us as many were married or had family homes to go to.

An Army Air Corps (12th Tactical Air) unit was directly across the street from us. The contrast between us and

them was hilarious. Clearly evident was the Army's emphasis on regimentation. We were in ranks as platoons by squads, mess gear in our right hands only, knives and forks hanging on the handle of the mess kit, etc. Directly opposite us was a circus. The formations were very loose with many gaps. I guess attendance at meals was an option for them. But, the major discrepancy was their uniforms. No two men dressed alike. I guess that was optional too. The reaction to our differences was also funny. They got weirder and we got more robotic. In addition to the Air Corps unit, the 103d Infantry Division and other units would be in the same convoy. Of course we didn't know any of this until much later.

We boarded a train to reach the docks around Hoboken, NJ. It was an ordeal with all our gear, weapon, back pack and even a horseshoe shaped blanket roll over our packs. We trekked from the train to the ferry docks dragging our barracks bags. It was in the dead of night, sparse illumination glistening off steel helmets and rifles. It was almost like a stage or movie setting as the jam packed ferry crossed the Hudson River to a similar but bigger dock in New York. Another back breaking climb up to another dock. While waiting to board the big liner a band played, coffee was offered. I was already too hot for it. And we still had to face another gang plank up to the ship. This was followed by a treacherous descent down to E Deck. Our aisle of hammocks was right against the hull of the ship. E Deck was the lowest deck used for the troops. The aisles in our area were barely wide enough to enter. We were given strict orders that nothing was to be put on the floor (deck). Our hammocks were attached to pipe frames four high. We had to put into our hammocks our rifle, helmet, pack, and barracks bag. The space was further limited by the sagging load from the hammock above us. The remaining space was too confining to sleep in and I never did. I tried to lay down on my hammock and heard the water rushing by on the outer side of the hull that was only about one quarter of an inch thick. Each night I found a space on a hatch or against a bulkhead and slept under the stars.

The convoy formed at sea off the Long Island coast on 7 October. We were on the *USS George Washington*, the largest ship in the convoy. The central line of ships was the larger transports. On both sides of us were columns of smaller troop ships. Beyond them were still smaller Victory and Liberty class supply ships. The outer ring around us was a cordon of fast Destroyers and Destroyer Escorts. At the rear was the *USS Solomons*, a baby flat top (aircraft carrier). We had a couple of Blimps overhead for a few days at the start. It suddenly grew warmer. The explanation was that we were going through the Gulf Stream. I spent my nights looking up at the sky for hours and you start to get acquainted with the star patterns and notice that the Big Dipper that was to your right ten minutes ago is now to your left. This was part of convoy strategy of having a zigzag course. A submarine would try to line up against the side of a ship which would give them the biggest target for their torpedoes. By changing course frequently the big target side of a ship becomes a much smaller width of the ship. Also a convoy can travel no faster than the speed of its slowest ships. It is the strays that subs love to pick off.

The beautiful weather we were experiencing had to be because we were on a more southern course across the Atlantic. The division band gave concerts from the aft hatch to crowds of GI's stripped to the waist for tans. About six days out the cruise ship atmosphere ended as a storm came up that grew into a two day hurricane. The stories later shared in the pages of the 100th Infantry Division Newsletter were about near collisions, almost capsizing and finally abandoning our course and running with the wind. The impact on a ship as big as the *George Washington* was far less than on the smaller ships around us. Whenever the stem rose out of the water and the propellers were in open air, the whole ship shook and made banging, thumping and squealing sounds. The storm passed after 48 hours and the convoy turned around and resumed its course in good weather. About day ten, land was sighted and we were informed that it was Africa. We still didn't know our destination, but we could now eliminate England.

A couple of days later we could see land on both sides of the ship and it was announced that we were entering the Straits of Gibraltar. It was here that we had two beautiful visual experiences. We were all hanging over the railings to watch schools of dolphins playing in our bow waves. It was early evening and the light was soft. As we left the straits behind us it grew darker. Soon you could not distinguish the land from shore or water. Then a small city's lights appeared to starboard. It appeared like a gorgeous diamond brooch lying on black velvet in a jewelry store window. It impressed me so that I later looked it up in atlases and maps and believe it to be Ceuta on the North African coast. We went to sleep assuming that we would be continuing east towards Sicily or Italy. In the morning we arrived off the coast of Southern France. The port city of Marseilles was intact, but the harbor facilities were destroyed and made unusable by the German forces prior to their retreat up the Rhone River valley

to the north. We later learned that Axis Sally, on her broadcast from Berlin, welcomed General Burress and the 100th Division. She was a turncoat US citizen working for Dr. Joseph Goebels' propaganda programs. It was 20 October 1944.

Since the harbor was blocked by sunken ships, we had to leave our barracks bags and load the rest of our pack, gear and weapon and climb up to the deck. From there we climbed down cargo nets into landing craft that were bobbing up and down below us. It felt strange as these craft would thread their way to shore floating right over parts of ships scuttled and lying on their bottoms in the water. They approached a beach made up of fist sized stones called a shingle beach. They dropped the front ramp and off we marched through the western end of Marseilles. The city had been taken weeks before our arrival by the French Army units that had joined the Allied Forces after the fall of Algeria. It was all uphill to our staging areas above and west of the city. The French troops we saw were dressed in baggy white pants and turban like headdresses like that Punjab character in the Orphan Annie cartoon strip. It was all perfectly safe, in spite of the sound of occasional gunfire in the city and anti aircraft fire at German observation planes overhead. After our long time at sea, with our lack of exercise, the climb to the Delta Base Staging Area was an ordeal. It was only 12 miles, but very steep. These were fields hemmed in by rocky ridges. The only concessions were rough wooden shacks for our cooks to prepare food and latrines.

The next day we pitched our pup tents on the rocky hillsides to permit better drainage as it had started to rain. It did look slovenly, but the Army made us come down and rearrange our tents in precise rows where they originally intended us to be. Mother Nature had the last laugh. Once we got the place looking like we were all in the Army, it began to pour. Being on the lowest ground around, the rain water ran down and through our camp grounds that night. It was inches deep inside our pup tents. Now that the troops were all ashore, it was time to get the supplies and major pieces of equipment such as jeeps and trucks and artillery off the ships and degreased. And, by the way, they let us move our tents back to the hillsides. Next I got to spend a few days working on the docks loading trucks. I was amazed at the sheer brilliance of the engineering and planning that I saw there. Example, the big Army truck called the "Deuce and a Half" came off the ships in crates that were only about four feet tall. Our job was to strip off the wood crates they came in. Another crew moved in and took the wheels already with tires mounted from the bed of the truck. A small crane lifted the front and the front wheels were mounted. A similar process mounted the dual rear wheels. The wooden bows, canvas came out of the bed. The windshields were folded upright, framed and canvassed. Lastly came the gas, oil and a battery. They jump started it and drove it away in less than a half an hour. Another day I was loading field rations on to trucks to be brought to storage dumps. There were C Rations in cans. One can held the meal: pork and beans, ham and eggs and meat and vegetable stew; another can provides the powdered beverage, candy, cigarettes etc.

Then there are the K Rations that come in a waxed box. They come in a breakfast, lunch and dinner mode and were the type most commonly given to infantry troops. Each box contained the meal, beverage, candy, tissues, hard biscuits, etc. To me the most valuable part was the wax box the meal comes in. I would open the ends and fold it flat for later use. Later, I would ignite one end of the box with my Zippo lighter, prop it up or put a stone inside it to keep it upright. The heat generated by one box could heat up one canteen cup of water for instant coffee or cocoa. Lastly comes the D Rations. These are small, thick chocolate bars, approximately 3 inches long by 1 inch square. These bars were loaded with vitamins, especially vitamin D and something to prevent them from melting—ever. I stuck so many of these bars into my pants that it was hard to bend my knees. I passed them out back at the camp.

We got an opportunity to visit Marseilles. We walked to the nearest town of Septemes and caught a Toonerville Trolley down into the city. Even though this was the first stop it was already over-crowded and people were hanging on to the outside. Everyone heads for the main drag called La Cannabierre. The houses of ill repute were easily identified by the long lines of soldiers outside waiting their turn. Memories of the training film we were subjected to at Fort McClellan, AL, were still too strong for me to take any such risk. After a lot of walking and rubbernecking, I caught an early trolley back to camp. I feared that those who waited too long would not be able to get back at all. The 399th Regiment had already departed for the front when we left about a week after landing. We were crammed into the trucks and driven north along the Rhone Valley with an overnight in pup tents in Valence. The next night we stopped in a park in the center of Dijon. The final leg went through Langres to an assembly area in Saint Helene near Rambervilles. We were six miles from the front held by the 45th Infantry Division. The trip was very uncomfortable due to overcrowding. With the canvas top to protect us from wind and

rain, only those sitting near the back of the truck could see anything.

Let me explain the big picture about this front and how it developed. In November 1942, American and British Forces landed at three locations on the North African coast. This allied force included Patton's Seventh Army. They joined forces and attacked east toward Tunisia. Field Marshall Montgomery was pursuing Rommel's Africa Corps westward into Tunisia. Rommel defeated the Americans in a battle at Kasserine Pass. Patton took over the defeated unit and they were critical to the final defeat and capture of all the remaining German troops in the spring of 1943. Rommel personally escaped to fight again in Normandy. With Africa secure, a more confidant US Seventh Army invaded Sicily and proved themselves equal, if not superior, to the British Eighth Army under Monty. The VI Corps in Seventh Army under LTG Lucian K. Truscott participated in two more landings in Italy. They were then withdrawn, rested and reinforced to invade Southern France in August 1944. The invasion took place on the beaches between Cannes and Toulon. General Patch was the new Commander of the Seventh Army. The main attack was carried out by General Truscott's VI Corps comprised of only three divisions: the 3rd Infantry Division, the 36th Infantry Division and the 45th Infantry Division. After the beaches were secured, the French First Army under General de Lattre landed and attacked along the coast line toward Toulon and Marseilles on Truscott's left.

Truscott raced toward the Rhone to cut off the retreat of the German 19th Army out of Marseilles. He also sent a Task Force Baker on an end run further up the Rhone River where it waited for the retreating German Army at Montelimar. With artillery and air power they destroyed a huge part of the enemy force and captured 15,000 prisoners and 4,000 vehicles. The French II Corps of de Lattre captured in Toulon and Marseilles 47,717 German prisoners. As our convoy went through the Montelimar area the landscape was still strewn with burnt out vehicles and the stench of burned flesh, both human and horse. These early victories made further progress northward easier until they reached the Germans waiting in prepared positions in the Vosges Mountains of Northeast France. The same three divisions of the VI Corps (3rd, 36th and 45th) had been fighting since they landed on 15 August. They suffered many losses in personnel and were exhausted. The arrival of the 100th to replace the 45th on the left and the 103rd to replace the 36th on the right was their first chance to rest and re-enforce their units. The old and famous 3rd Infantry stayed in place in the middle between the two new, green divisions to provide stability and assistance if needed. These three divisions were moving northeast trying to close up to the Muerthe River. On the other side of the river the Vosges Mountains began to rise ridge after ridge. In the history of warfare, no one has ever succeded in attacking through these mountains. The objective of the 103rd on the right flank of the VI Corps was the city of St. Die. The 45th Division on the left flank had a bridge and a bridgehead over the Muerthe River in the vicinity of the city of Baccarat, famous for its fine crystal. The objective of the 100th Division was to capture the city of Raon l'Etape and then attack the passes through the Vosges to reach the open ground of the Rhine Plain and the city of Strasbourg.

Around the 9th of November, the 397th Regiment was trucked over the bridge on the Muerthe River into Baccarat. Here we leave the big picture that is learned from the unit histories and report things from the viewpoint the individual soldier which is usually limited to the squad or platoon level. We hiked up a trail to the woods northwest of the town to find the unit from the l79th Regiment, 45th Infantry that we were to relieve. These kind of reliefs were usually made at night to reduce the risks of enemy attacks at a very vulnerable time. I don't know what we expected, but we were shocked. My 1st Platoon consisted of 38, the full authorized strength, clean, neat soldiers. We shook hands and wished good luck to 18 or 19 dirty, exhausted, and now I know why infantrymen were called, Dogfaces. The immediate problem was there was no foxhole for about 20 of us to get into. I shunned the opportunity to get into one of the holes left for us because it was so wet and muddy. My fustidiousness was soon knocked out of me as the first layer of sweat and grime began with dawn and the digging of our own new holes began. The first attack began on the 12th of November as a pleasant walk in the woods because EASY Company was in reserve, F and G Companies were up in front of us leading the attack. We crossed a ridge and were climbing down into a valley with a road at the bottom and the beginning of another, higher ridge. This is when the artillery and mortar shells started landing on us.

We were getting our introduction to ‘‘tree bursts". Shells that strike limbs and branches high up in trees have a more damaging effect and cause more casualties than on more open ground. Boy, were we new! Our surviving NCO's brought us to the drainage ditch along the road, organized us into a skirmish line and ordered us to FIX BAYONETS and charge uphill to the next ridge. As we moved up the hill, my eyes spotted a suspicious area

which as we approached it, turned out to be a well camouflaged machine gun nest. Thank God it was silent. I passed it to the left and soon passed one of its former occupants. In the Vosges, it was rare to ever see the enemy, except like this one already dead. Similarly, our dead and wounded were scattered behind us. The war at this time seemed to be dominated by artillery and mortar fire.

There was a sameness to the next days of forests, ridges and valleys, mountains. We did see a village once and our airplanes were strafing nearby. It was all a blur with a few highlights. One of those was the night we climbed the side of a mountain. We were digging in the dark and I was told that we were on the extreme left of our battalion. I was alone in the last hole, but I should be on watch for a contact from someone from the 399th Regiment on our left. I guess I was in a state of panic because I stayed awake all night with a hand grenade in my right hand and held the ring for the safety pin by my left forefinger. Fear was brought by forest noises of falling branches or animal movements. Next morning, I was detailed with several others to go down the mountain and meet the jeep and trailer that was bringing up some hot food. My Sgt. Danny Lynch was in charge. I struggled with a cardboard box of bread and a big round pan full of turkey. It wasn't so heavy as it was awkward. On the way back up the mountain, the German artillery started to plaster us again, so I left the bread and ran with the more valuable turkey. The complaints over the lack of bread caused Danny to go back and find it. I truly felt shamed.

Another memorable incident took place when we tried to cross a firebreak on the side of another mountain. We took casualties. A second attempt was made causing more casualties. One of our medics went out to help the wounded. Our medics are not armed in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. They wear a Red Cross arm band and have white circles with Red Crosses painted on their helmets. The German sniper shot him right through the red cross on his helmet. On our third try we made it across and were proceeding down a road when we suffered the most severe artillery barrage ever. It was planned to catch us after crossing. We scattered uphill to our right to get away from the road and began digging like madmen. Many of us had refound our religious roots before this event, but I prayed and promised that day to the max. In my contortions at the bottom of my hole, I had pressed my helmet so hard into the freshly dug soil that when the shelling stopped and I relaxed my pressure, two roots popped out from the dome shaped imprint of my helmet. They made a perfect horizontal and vertical cross that told me my prayers had been answered. During the shelling and the digging I saw a jeep with two occupants come up our road. They were traveling too fast and the shelling was too loud for them to hear our yells as they passed by. They were ambushed a little further up the road. It was our Regimental Commander, COL Ellis and his driver.

It was another one of those valleys with a road at the bottom. This time in order to reduce my exposure, I tried to leap from the road over the ditch and twisted my ankle severely. I yelled in pain and rolled into the woods. Someone rolled me over and asked me where I got hit. It was my Platoon Sergeant, Pete Petracco. I told him I sprained my ankle. He said to stay put. Medics and stretcher bearers were following behind us and would take care of me. Sure enough they came along, but I could not let them carry me. They took turns letting me lean on them till a jeep brought me to the Battalion Aid Station in the captured town of Bertrichamps. I spent a night there observing the surgeon and the Chaplain at work, but there was nothing they could do for me. Next day they recommended that I go to my company's kitchen. I was surprised to find about six or seven others already there. That night our CO, CPT Bill Garden, came in and told us how badly it was going and our buddies needed us to get back to the lines. Next day we all were brought back in a jeep and trailer. It was to a place called St. Blaise la Roche. The night before the 2nd battalion captured the town, or part of it, after a long nighttime march. The buildings that they occupied were the HQ's and CP's behind the main German line of resistance. Throughout the rest of the night, German patrols and individuals came in to report. They were merely added to the already crowded group of prisoners in the cellar. On about 25 November, the 397th halted in place, while the following 399th passed through us and continued the attack.

We did not know it at the time, but the Vosges campaign was over for us. Many things happened in St. Blaise. The sun even came out a little. We were served a Thanksgivings Day Dinner. Wonderful as it tasted, our stomachs were violently opposed to real food. Church services were held in a real church. I think we were still bearing arms even into church. Interestingly, we Christian soldiers attended any time an opportunity was given whether it was with Chaplain Teeter or Father Burke. It took peace time to break us up into our schismatic groupings once again. We got some replacements for some of our casualties. An interesting pair, were two Irish

youths. They were born in the US, but their parents returned to the “Old Country”. They could volunteer for service with the Americans or the British and chose our side. They were as smart as whips and could hold their own with our Whiz Kids. Meanwhile the war was still going on. Similar to us, the 399th was halted about 10 or so miles further on into the mountain passes and now the 3rd Infantry Division clogged our roads to pass through the Vosges to the Rhine Plain. They, in turn, were soon halted to let a French Armored Division have the honor of liberating Strasbourg.

This relaxed atmosphere was great for rehabilitating my ankle as most surfaces were flat and time was not pressing. I could walk many steps before another twinge of pain would strike. We were ordered to begin a road march back to Raon l’Etape. This movement to the rear caused some small panic in the local French population until it was explained that we were just being relocated to another front. A convoy of trucks coming back from the front was talked into giving our column of troops a ride to the staging area. The whole division was transported by trucks from Raon l’Etape and arriving in Ernolsheim on the 28th of November. The 2nd Battalion road marched to Weinbourg and on the 30th the first platoon of E Company was sent to Sparsbach with a section from our weapons platoon. Our mission there was to maintain a roadblock and provide flank security for the battalion. I have two vivid memories from Sparsbach. On the road approaching the position we held, we saw a disturbing sight. Hanging from the roadside shrubbery and low overhead tree branches and embedded in the road were small strips of matter with nothing longer than one half an inch. The pattern of these pieces led us to believe that an individual standing on that spot was struck by a shell from a tank and that was all that was left of him. It had to be direct fire because we were in defilade. Artillery or mortars would have left their mark on the road and trees. Our instructions were to be alert for tanks operating in that area The other memory was much happier. When not at our post, we lived in a house nearby belonging to an old French couple. One evening I was offered a cup from a big black iron pot. Squeamishly, I tasted it. It was delicious. It tasted like oyster stew. A knowledgeable country boy told me that she was boiling fresh milk to kill the germs (it was called pasteurization—invented in France).

We were finished with our campaign through the High Vosges mountains in Alsace. In general, our attacks were in an east to northeast direction toward the Rhine River. The 397th left 167 dead and 511 wounded. In addition, there were hundreds of MIA’s (Missing In Action) which means that no body was found or they had become POW’s (Prisoners Of War). Later, many were liberated from German prison camps called Stalags. So it was a common practice for the Army to send out an MIA telegram which was soon followed by a final killed telegram to parents and families. My mother received an MIA telegram which I still have. It must have been while I was back at the Battalion Aid Station with my sprained ankle and the company clerk didn’t correct the records or something. I was never missing except on paper.

Our new front was now in the Province of Lorraine in the Low Vosges. The hills were lower in height. The landscape was more open and less forested. The direction of our attack was Northward through the fortified defenses of the Maginot Line and across the German border into the Siegfried Line. The 100th Division’s objective was the city of Bitche. Bitche was built around a butte like hill that was topped by a fortress called the Citadel. The main street of the town ran around its base in a big circle. Throughout its long history, this citadel/town had never been conquered. Following WWI, the French made it the heart of its Maginot Line. Just east of Bitche was Camp de Bitche for above ground support facilities. Underground, for miles in east and west directions, were tunnels with narrow gauge railroads leading to many pillboxes. Each pillbox provides, by interlocking fire, the protection for its nearby pillboxes. Everything needed was contained under ground. In WWII, the Germans captured France by going around the Maginot Line through Luxembourg and Belgium. They later tested their ability to destroy parts of the Maginot Line and could not. The troops in the Maginot Line surrendered at the direction of the defeated French government. In the 100th Division’s attack, the 397th Regiment was on the right flank with the 2nd Battalion also on the right flank adjacent to the boundary with the 45th Division’s 157th Regiment. Around 1 December ‘44, we began our movement north from Ingweiler.

These movements were made in the dark of night due to the enemies excellent observation from three hills: 296, 370 and 375. The 3rd Battalion was trying to take those hills, but Hill 375 was proving very tough. The field artillery fired a TOT (Time On Target) with little effect. The 2nd Battalion, after taking the town of Rothbach on 5 December went over to assist. A TOT is an intense barrage from multiple sources for a longer period of time. In order to protect our own troops from the TOT, they withdrew back down the hill. The German troops left their positions and followed our withdrawal to avoid the effects of the TOT. My major memory of the event was the

deer and rabbits leaping over our prone bodies in their flight to escape from that hill top. The Germans abandoned that hill under cover of darkness. We moved on to take Reipertsweiller. The 397th Regiment now moved up a valley towards Mouterhouse. The unusual aspect of this approach was that we could look down on the road and its towns and villages as we worked the ridges. Our progress was only lightly impeded by mortars and small arms fire. On 7 December we were positioned in the woods south of Mouterhouse with E Company on the right and G Company to the left. G was facing a walled cemetery. E Co. was looking at the adjoining church. Beyond this the land sloped downward into the town, factories and railroad sidings. Beyond that the wooded hills rose higher than our positions.

Our two companies were going to rush into the town simultaneously. Concerned over my bum ankle, I crawled forward as far as possible so I wouldn't be left behind. On signal, we took off. The enemy reacted immediately with the usual weapons plus a new one, a dual mounted anti-aircraft gun called a Flakwagen. Due to the ferocity of all that fire power, the attack stalled and retreated back into the woods. About twenty of us made it to the shelter of the church. We were joined soon by a few G Company men fleeing from the meager protection of the cemetery. I considered a dash around the corner of the church to its massive front door, but the intense fire was chewing the bricks out of the corner. Four or five of our men had a bit more cover at the other end of the church and made a dash for the parsonage and moved in with the priests. Artillery and mortars were causing havoc on the back up platoons waiting in the woods. We could hear someone yelling instructions vaguely. Then a runner was sent down. He made it half way before getting cut down. Now there were two bodies laying on the slope. Next came a memory that I will never forget. Our platoon sergeant, Pete Petracco, who was in charge ever since our new platoon leader, whose name I never got to know, got killed in the Vosges. Pete was the kind of guy who lectured us before we first entered into combat that he didn't want any stupid heroics. He was also the doting father of a new son called Jody, named for the baseball legend Joe Dimaggio. Watching the young runner die, he could not send another man down. He came himself. As he came by the boys body, he stumbled, fell forward, lost his helmet. He then somehow, SWAM to safety. He used his arms like a swimmer combined with powerful leg thrusts to carry him to the shelter offered by the church.

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He boosted, I believe it was Buddy ¥ew1g from G Company, up the brick wall to break open a stained glass window. Somebody, maybe it was Buddy, saw that the interior looked clear inside and dropped in and opened the front door. We started the parade of dashers for that door. Behind the high altar there was a timber platform with a piece of stained glass removed from the area of Jesus' knees. The Germans had built a snipers perch up there. Darkness came fuirly early and the crowd in the church grew in numbers. We reorganized and continued the attack into the town. I vaguely remember that our path took us down and through the railroad siding area. The next day we were back to climbing the forested hills north of the town. It was at this time that I was sent back as a guard over some prisoners . That assignment was in deference to my sore ankle. The scariest part was walking back to my unit all alone. All soldiers worried about being killed or wounded and developed mental mechanisms to help cope with those thoughts. It sort of ran like this. The odds were that you would not get hit, but if you did, and it was not life threatening, you get out of there. It even had a name, it was called a MILLION DOLLAR WOUND. Most men would seriously consider giving up an arm or a leg for the opportunity to get out of the war.

The next week seemed like the high Vosges all over again. With nothing but forest in every direction. It is very hard to get oriented. We were told that we were on a hill above Camp de Bitche and to dig in well because we might be here awhile. Two new replacements were brought up. Since we all had a good start on our holes, we suggested that they dig their hole behind ours. The word came down that one man from each hole could go for chow. Food came up, when it was safe, to a point out of sight in the rear.

Our two new guys came with the Jeep and trailer that brought the food. I told the new guys to go eat since they didn't have a hole started yet. My partner came back after eating and sadly said that the two new guys got hit by a mortar round on the way to chow and were killed. I had to pass them going and coming. It makes you really wonder what role fate has in our lives. Our platoon guide, Staff Sergeant Eddie O'Rourke, on the very first day we went into combat back in the Vosges, was severely wounded and sent to a hospital in England. After healing, they sent him back to rejoin the company in April. The next day he was severely wounded again. FATE, again. The only other noteworthy incident that occurred at this time was our laundry promotions. The company was

brought back to Mouterhouse for a shower bath, our first chance to bathe since Marseilles. Imagine, if you can, our delight at this scene. On a foot bridge over a stream, six or so showerheads were mounted from a pipe. The waste water went directly into the stream. We disrobed and threw our clothes into separate piles for pants, shirts, etc. Then we walked naked over the packed snow to our showers. The water was not even warm, but it was welcome. Next, we walked to a tent with a stove and got towels and fresh clothes. These were clothes collected and washed from a previous group. Some of us PFC's got stripes and some of our NONCOM's became PFC's. On another occasion we were walked all the way back to get a cup of coffee and a donut from the Red Cross ladies. I would rather have had the rest in my hole. Hey, maybe it was PT in disguise.

Back to the Big Picture. Hitler unleashed his last desperate gamble known as the Battle of the Bulge. The surprise and ferocity of this attack decimated some newly arrived divisions and forced some old, experienced divisions who were sent to that area to rest and rebuild, to retreat. Hitler's objective was the port of Antwerp. This would deny the allies the needed port facilities and split/surround all the British Forces plus the US 1st Army. Reserves, especially the 101st Airborne at Bastogne, helped blunt this major German offensive. Patton performed a miracle and pulled out much of his armored divisions to attack the southern flank of the bulge. This caused a ripple effect in Patton's 3rd Army. His remaining divisions had to stop attacking, spread out and go on the defensive. That was still insufficient, so our 7th Army had to do the same. We stopped our attacks and started side slipping our units to the west to take up part of the 3rd Army's former area. On 21 December 44, our battalion was trucked to the west near Petit Rederching. We took up new positions near Kleinmuhle with two memorable events. Our kitchen crew came up and cooked fried eggs! I love breakfast. I could eat breakfast three times a day. It never happened again while we were in combat. The other event occurred one night while we were manning a road block. The noise of various types of artillery, rumbling like freight trains overhead, had became common. But, on this night one such salvo of shells all exploded like fireworks in the sky. Much later I got an explanation for this event. I was told that our Ordnance had developed a new fuse for artillery shells called POSON. Its purpose was to duplicate "tree bursts" where there were no trees. These fuses sent out a pulse which exploded the shell upon contact with a solid object. Unfortunately, at this stage of its development, a cloud heavy with moisture would also set it off.

After a few days we were on the march again. We went northwest for many miles through Bettviller, by-passed Rimling, and through Guiderkirch and Erching. We were in open terrain, snow covered, sloping upwards to our left. I only saw ours, and maybe one other platoon, at most thinly spread out. I believe the remainder of the company were in a building that we had passed. It was Christmas Eve and the next day we were to change places with them and have a Christmas dinner. While digging and looking around, I saw a reddish stone marker that upon examination I decided was the German border. Before it got dark, Pete Petracco sent for me and Joe Baclawski. He pointed out a shell hole in the fields beyond our line. After dark, Joe and I were to go out there and establish a listening post. Up ahead we could hear the noise of vehicles and later music from loud speakers. Joe was taking his two hour nap, when I saw movement to my front. It was coming in short rushes, shifting directions, just like infantry are taught. When I was certain that I was not hallucinating, I pulled on Joes boot to waken him. I don't remember if he fully awakened when I realized that my foe was not a six foot storm trooper but a big hare. I was only glad that I didn't give the warning shots and stir up the whole line.

Dawn came and Joe and I returned to the line. Unbeknown to me at the time was the fact that F Company was on the other side of the ridge to our left. We were pulled out of the line and started retreating, but I didn't know why. We trudged by the building where we were supposed to be enjoying our Christmas dinner. Later, I learned that F Company was attacked and lost its Jeep, trailer, Christmas dinner and its issue of the new reversible snow parkas. It was that loss that made our positions in-defensible. The retreat also taught me another negative lesson. We had to share the road with some tanks. In the squeeze through some one of the little villages, I watched the tanks destroy the homes on every corner of an intersection in their hurry to get through. I began to think of armor as a herd of elephants, and easily frightened into stampeding. Later, I learned from the unit histories that we were on the OPL (Outpost Line), and retreated back through the MLR (Main Line of Resistance). Not ever having been on the defensive before I wasn't aware that this retreat was a normal part of a defense in depth. Now our battalion was in reserve positions behind the MLR.

As an adjunct to the Battle of the Bulge, Hitler had planned another big attack against the 7th Army which was spread too thin for adequate defense. Hitler called it Operation Nordwind (North Wind). Its objective was a pincer

attack around the 7th Army, recapturing the Savern Pass and the City of Strasbourg. Since the Bulge had been halted, some of its follow-on forces were redirected to beef-up Operation Nordwind. The Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower, based on intelligence from ENIGMA, directed the 7th Army to retreat to shorten the lines of defense and to establish better positions for defense. This plan was opposed by General De Gaulle, now the Head of State, for France and the US Generals Jacob Devers and "Sandy" Patch, Commanders of 6th Army Group and 7th Army, respectively. When the attack hit on 1 January 1945, every unit in 7th Army lost its MLR except one, the 100th Infantry Division. The Division to our left, the 44th fell back 5,000 yards which left the 100th's left flank wide open. Our battalion had to move from its reserve positions to try to fill that gap. On the right flank of the division was the 106 Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 45th and 79th Infantry Divisions. The 106 Armored Cavalry was a lightly armored unit of a type that gains, or gives up, terrain easily and quickly. Infantry gives up terrain grudgingly. They would rather fight it out than fall back and have to dig a new hole. The I06th gave up all the terrain that the 397th Infantry Regiment had previously captured since arriving in this new area. Their pullout endangered the 45th and 79th Divisions' positions and forced them into a drastic retreat.

The 106th pullout had the same effect on the right flank of the 100th. As the waves of German troops moved south they could have flanked and rolled up the 100th. Initially, the 398th and 399th fell back and extended their lines to meet the threat. The 7th Army sent up two regiments of the 36th Infantry Division from the Army reserve and attached them to the 100th. This stopped the attack. Except for the losses in the Rimling area, the rest of the 397th retained their original MLR And, it was the only place in the entire 7th Army front that did. The big German attack called NORDWIND began on New Years Day. Now, we were the ones who were in concealment. The enemy had to come out and expose himself to our defensive firepower. It was a totally new experience for us.

Instead of trying to tell you the story from my limited point of view, the following pages were duplicated from the 100th Infantry Division Association Newsletters. They tell the story from several individual view points. The first is by Don Hildenbrand who was captured in Rimling and tells of his experiences as a POW. The second article was an eye opener for me because it explained things that I was a part of, but did not even know. It was written beautifully by Rufus Dalton to provide a Big Picture of the 2nd Battalion. Rufus' article sought a response from people like me. My response became the third article to be published on the Battle for Rimling that halted Hitler's NORDWIND offensive.

The Battle for Rimling by Rufus Dalton **Response** by Richard P. Drury

On 2 through 7 January, E Company was occupying positions west of Gare de Rohrbach. Specifically, we were dug in on farm land between the road and railroad tracks, looking downhill towards Gross Rederching. There were three strong impressions I still hold from that time and place.

First. I was sitting on the edge of my hole eating when artillery shells started dropping all around us. In golf terminology they were pin high. They had our range perfectly, but for some reason I remained sitting upright as shells erupted from the ground within thirty feet of my hole. There was no panic. The shells buried themselves and exploded upwards in patterns shaped like ice cream cones. I quickly realized that they had to make a direct hit to hurt me. I promised myself never to dig in the woods again if open ground was available. Why didn't they teach that in basic training?

Second. I, too, watched the crippled US bomber limping back from Germany, trailing smoke, low altitude, but it wasn't a B-17 Flying Fortress. It was a twin-tailed B-24, I think it was a Martin Marauder. The B-17 had a single tall rudder. My heart sank as they bailed out. I am sure they thought that they had made it back to our MLR and it was safe to jump. But from my angle of view it looked like they landed near Moronville Farms which was the staging area for most of German attacks on Rimling and had caused the 44th Inf Div on our left to pull back over 1,000 yards. The 100th Inf Div did not pull back which left our division's left flank wide open. The 2d Bn, 39 Regt reserve, was forced to move over towards the gap created by the 44ths withdrawal. I wonder if anyone knows what happened to those poor aviators? Rufus mentioned the times we were strafed by the P-47s. They had orange-red noses, or tails, I forget which. We never did find out whether they were ours or theirs. The rumor mill said they were captured P-47s that the Germans patched up to deceive us.

Third. I saved this for last because it seems unbelievable. We heard the arrival of armored forces on the road from our rear. For the next hour, or more, we watched a parade of French tanks and armored personnel carriers. They did a column right in front of our holes, then by platoons they did a left flank and started to roll down hill

toward Gross Rederching. We knew they were French because they had the Cross of Lorraine painted on them. This went on so long I took a nap. When I woke up I asked what happened, did the Frenchies give 'em hell? I was told that they came back and left the same way they came in. Nothing happened. I hope someone can corroborate this event or was I hallucinating? Maybe someone at a higher level knows how to explain such a tremendous waste of power at a time when it could have squashed NORDWIND like a bug.

Around 7 January, E Company won the prize and occupied the positions that made heroes of and decimated K Company. Since this was the end of the line, it was easily out flanked. Therefore, we had our holes mainly facing the enemy, but some like mine faced to the rear. It was a strange set up with all our lines of communication running from west to east. From the fully exposed 2d Platoon on the left and 1st Platoon in the middle, everything came from or went to the right and eventually to the CP in town. In this wide open landscape there was a rectangular plot of ground set off by a line of trees and shrubbery. It was in the bases of these growths that the 1st Platoon had their holes. Pete Petracco's hole was in the center facing the enemy. Mine was a three man hole to the rear and left of Pete's in an opening where there was no growth and facing in the opposite direction. The 2d Platoon was losing personnel and asked for replacements. Some other guy and I were chosen and told to report to Pete's hole that night.

While waiting outside of Pete's hole for instructions the artillery barrage started. Rufus described it as "excelled any barrage that I have ever been under or even heard before". We were told to go back to our holes for now until the barrage ended. The other guy left, but I was just as comfortable there as I would been in my hole so I laid there. I noticed that it was pretty crowded in Pete's hole. Now I know that probably Rufus and his radioman were also in there. The barrage lasted much longer than anyone expected or had experienced before, but my worst took place in the Vosges Mountains. We had finally made it across a firebreak after three tries and were on a road when it hit us. Its intensity drove us away and up hill from the road. We were digging and praying like madmen. A jeep came up that rough road so fast that they could not see us off the road or hear us above the bursting of artillery shells all around us. It was our Regimental CO, Col Ellis and driver on their way to an ambush and death.

I wasn't back at my hole long when the barrage stopped and we could hear the screeching sound of the tank treads and the screaming of the accompanying infantry all around us. We all froze and they all rolled on by us passing around each end of our wooded plot. Soon after, Pete had us moving in a column like Indians, fast and quiet, towards the east. I was impressed, when the flares popped overhead. We all froze, erect, not going to ground even. We picked up our speed and crossed a road and dropped down into a depression (it was labeled as a quarry in our unit histories). A German tank came back along the road looking for us as we took cover in the quarry until they had passed. We continued on down the hill and in the next 15 to 20 minutes dawn rose. If we had been a little later in getting to the quarry, we would have been clearly visible to the tank's machine gunner. We trudged across snow fields to the positions of our 81mm mortars of H Company. Only now have I learned that it was Rufus Dalton and his compass that led us out of there to safety.

The mortarmen's holes looked like the Ritz-Carlton to us. They fed us and we took a short rest. I remembered thinking that there was no more MLR out there in front of these mortars. Maybe we could stay and provide perimeter protection for the mortars. We soon got the word to get back to Rimling and join the other remnants of E Company there. As we started back north toward Rimling across the snow fields with the mass of Hill 375 to our left, I realized how exposed these poor mortarmen were. I foolishly worried about them. They were tested all right and their accomplishments were immense and recognized by H Company receiving the Presidential Unit Citation. They didn't need any help from riflemen. Thank you, Rufus, for being there with your skills and knowledge at that crucial time. I knew of your name, but always assumed that you were one of the FO's in the Rimling Church tower. If you don't mind, I will tell you what happened next to the men you helped save.

We trekked across the snow fields and entered Rimling from the south, near the Gulsing-Rimling road. E Company occupied the first two houses that we approached. The CP was on the right and the others were across the street. The street scene looked like this. Just beyond the CP a side street sloped down to a bridge. We didn't know it at the time, but that was to be our escape route later. Beyond this street was a house and the Rimling Church. Artillery FO's worked out of the steeple, but had a front room in the farmer's house across the street. (I have a fabulous story to tell you about this farmers house when I revisited it in the '60s.) The next building was not a home but some kind of local government office. We are now returning to our starting point but on the left hand side of the street. The next building was on fire, then an open space before the E Company building across

from the CP. Behind these buildings on the left begins the steep rise to Hill 375.

After a short visit with fellow survivors, Sgt Danny Lynch's squad was sent to occupy the office type building across from the church and next door to where the FO's were quartered. We were warned that many of the buildings in town were occupied by German troops. Be alert. The buildings first floor was 3 to 4 feet above the street. We checked the basement, local civilians lined the walls. The first floor was mainly one big room. It must have been our former battalion aid station based on the amount of discarded equipment and the amount of religious pamphlets laying about. The Chaplain practically lives with medics in the field. The stairs to the second floor turned on a landing with a window. The second floor had smaller rooms. Most of the 6 to 8 men we had chose to stay on the second floor rear with its two big windows with excellent fields of fire on the hill descending into our back yard. I went up to check the attic and found that most of the roof had been blown away. I exchanged waves with the FO's across the street. I knocked out some tiles from the roof to make a concealed firing port and saw someone walking on a street above and to the right. I didn't hit him, but I sure got him running fast.

I don't know if I was assigned to it or just assumed the post, but I usually stood at the front entrance at street level. I was standing there, reading one of the religious tracts, when I heard a thunk–thunk to my rear on the street. I whipped around to see a tank coming towards me. It was already past the FO's quarters. How could something that big get so close like that. As it went by me a head popped out and waved. He went down the street beyond the two E Company buildings on the edge of town and turned to face the hill behind us. He fired and I had never before felt such concussion. I ran up the stairs to the window on the landing in time to see his second round strike. Two shots—two kills. The smaller German tank was burning. The larger one I believe was a Jagd Panzer, or Tiger tank, it did not burn, but was stopped dead in its tracks and the turret and gun slid forward into the ground. Anyone in the tank that was not lying down was cut in half. These tanks were not 300 yards from our windows. When I got back to the front door, the tank was approaching. It came in hugging our building. Soon the crew got out and stepped across from the tank onto our window sills on the first floor. They brought their gear, such as small arms and those little Coleman stoves. I learned that it was not a tank, but a tank destroyer—lighter armor, but bigger gun. They said that they had put thermite devices in their gun breech and on their motor. They had been having problems with the tank.

I don't know if this is true or not, but at least it represents how we perceived our CO, Capt Garden, as having the wisdom of Solomon. We heard on the rumor mill that the higher ups wanted us to leave our buildings and set up a defensive position. Night was approaching and the ground under the snow was frozen solid. The Capt. Garden's alternative solution was to patrol our area all night. Two patrols would alternate, one hour on and one hour off, through the hours of darkness. I was the first scout on the first patrol and every alternate one for the rest of the night. Our route left town, turned right, left up then down to a frozen stream bed. At this point was a shrine on the left. It was a crucifix with a little gabled roof over it to protect it. I'm sure we all did some hard praying each time we passed that shrine that night. The road climbed steeply and was heavily wooded. The woods stopped and the road leveled but still rising until it came to about a half acre sized flat area surrounded by an embankment. I recognized it as the "quarry'' where we had hid from the German tank. After 15 to 20 minutes, we withdrew back to town. Then the other patrol started out.

The next days' big event occurred when I left the front door to check out the rear window from the landing. I was stunned to see three German soldiers already through the back fence and about fifteen feet from our rear windows. Apparently, no one upstairs had seen them. They may have come down to us from a building up the line. I shot all three of them and they fell close together. I put a few more rounds into them to be sure. Later Sgt Lynch went out to check on them and they were still alive. I believe he had them put in the cellar with the civilians.

We were dreading another night of patrols when the word was passed that we would all make a run for it that night. I believe it was around 22:00 when we took off down to the street by the CP, down to the bridge and uphill to the road to Beuviller. Huffing and puffing, we began to count noses. My God, Olsen wasn't with us. It was like a jail break when we took off, but nobody remembered seeing Olsen in the last hour or so. It was like a kick in the stomach. He was well liked. What could have happened? Then I remembered how Olsen could drop off to sleep, anywhere, anytime. Later we learned that he survived as a POW. I would love to read or hear his story.

Our spirits were down. Then came a sight, straight out of Hollywood. This defeated mob on the road saw over to our right on a rise—our tanks, hub to hub, 10 to 12 in a row! They were waiting for the last stragglers to clear

the town of Rimling. It was a wonderful and reassuring sight to see and realize that a good solid MLR was already in place. That security helped as we bedded down in the straw of a barn for our first good night of sleep.

Rimling Revisited

I took a job with the Army in Europe as a civilian in 1960 and remained until 1982. On one of my several visits to Rimling in the ‘60s, I stumbled onto the Guising-Rimling road. It was more of a farm track than a road. It was d ja vu all over again. Off to my left I watched an old farmer working around near the old 1st Platoon positions on Hill 375. Dropped down the hill into town and pleased to see it all spruced up. I parked and entered what was the old Battalion Aid Station. I thought I would check out the window on the landing. A door on the second floor opened above me and startled both of us. I explained that I was an American soldier and fought in this building in January of 45. His questions were trying to get me to be more specific as to the time. I seemed to be able to satisfy him when I said that it was when the tank stopped outside the building, but his excitement only increased. He was one of the civilians in the basement. He said that our military doctor delivered his son just before the attacks drove the aid station away. He was proud to tell that his son was now a medical student at the University of Strassburg. I was about to leave when he insisted that I meet someone. He would not take no for an answer. He led me next door to the house of the farmer where the FO’s were billeted. We entered by the big door used by the wagons into a courtyard and approached the rear door. It was still stitched with bullet holes, climbing upwards and to the right. He knocked, shouted and entered somewhat like Kramer on Steinfeld. We were in the kitchen with the lady of the house. She was obviously annoyed. She was busy chopping up kraut, not dressed for visitors. She had silver hair streaming down, but somehow he got her to understand that I was there at that time. I watched a radical transformation take place. She set down her big knife, smiled and got out three of the tiniest crystal glasses I have seen and poured each of us a schnapps.

Here is the old wife’s tale. She was trying to protect her home. She had the American FO’s in her front room. She also had German soldiers in her backroom. She did her damnedest that they did not meet and destroy her home. She showed the Ami’s post cards and pictures of her husband, a French soldier, now a German POW. She showed the Jerry’s pictures and postcards from her sons who were drafted into the German Army.

Alsace and Lorraine have been alternately German and French and bilingual for a long time. So Hitler made them German again. Also to draft their manpower. How many of our mothers could have handled it like this Rimling mother. They wanted me to stay until her husband got home from the fields. I begged off and as I drove out of town, I saw him leading a wagon down the street. He was the same farmer that I saw working around the old 1st Platoon area on top of Hill 375.

Back to the story

We did not know at that time, that we would be holding our positions for almost the next two months, in this same general area. The 397th Regiment would be on the left flank of the division and 2nd Battalion would be on the right flank of the regiment. Each battalion would have two companies on the line and one in reserve. Being on the line was actually easier than being in reserve. That's because the companies in reserve were given a wide range of necessary, but arduous tasks to perform. While on line you were always two men to a hole, two hours on and two hours of sleep, and 24/7 as they say now-a-days. But in this static defense posture there was time to read. The Army issued Big Little Books in a size designed to fit into your pocket. Somewhere I had managed to relieve/recycle a flashlight from a fallen foe that was very cleverly designed. It was flat to fit your jacket pocket. The light had additional red and blue filters and a lid that folded down over it that allowed only a slit of light vertically. It allowed me to read in my hole during night time hours. I remember reading the Pulitzer Prize winning book, Paul Revere and the World He Lived In by Esther Forbes this way.

Some other highlight events that took place on line were my hunting experiences. First the wild boar hunt. Occasionally we had a hot meal brought up to the line. One man from each hole would go down the hill and into Hotviller where the E Company CP was located to eat. I was on the second shift and on my way back up hill. As I cleared the last buildings of the town, I looked to my right across the draw and saw a strange sight. Bouncing down the opposite slope were a pair of strange looking animals. They were black and white and although pig-like they were different. They had big powerful head, neck and shoulders, but small rear ends and hind quarters that sort of bounced along. I figured out that they must be wild boars. I started running to intercept them and at the same trying to unholster my 45 caliber pistol. I was wearing that weapon because for a short time I was the Bazooka man. I wasn't fast enough to catch up to them. Panting I approached the first hole and asked if they had seen them come by. Since they had rifles, I asked, "Why didn't you shoot them?" Obviously, these were older, smarter men than me and were probably hunters. They didn't want to be caught in a hole in the ground with two wounded wild boar, thank you.

Many weeks later, concertina wire barriers were set up in front of our positions by the men on reserve duty. Then later, in front of that, trip wires were set up to fire off flares to illuminate our front and any intruders. These precautions soon revealed to us the number of animals that were out there roaming around in no man's land. We actually saw sheep approaching in the day light one time and were authorized to shoot to drive them off or kill them. This time I had a carbine. To my amazement, my sheep walked away with several bullets in him. Yeah, I know what you are thinking, but I know I hit her because she jumped as each round struck her. The real lesson learned is keep the M-1 and let the rear echelon guys have the carbines.

Another major task that fell on the reserve companies was the construction and installation of our "Portable Foxholes". Under the direction of our engineers, we cut and preassembled wooden boards into panels. New holes were dug with better thought as to location and spacing. The panels were deep enough for one man to stand up to his armpits and the second man to lie down and sleep. The two long side panels were kept in place by the narrower end panels. Then the dirt was shoveled back and tamped down around the panels to hold the sidewalls firmly in place. Loose floor boards were laid on a cleat running the length of the side panels about ten inches above the earthen floor. This kept the soldiers and their gear dry and out of the water. In a serious downpour, the loose floor boards could be lifted and the excess water bailed out with our helmets. Next came a wooden roof covered in canvas. This protected the sleeping man and the gear but left an opening for the man on duty to stand and watch the front. This roof was not attached, but could be tossed aside to provide freedom of movement. As the new replacing unit took over the positions, they got fresh straw for the floor and a blanket that had been washed.

Another novelty and benefit of our static defense was the artificial moonlight we used. The weather was usually cloudy. These were not scattered clouds. This was like a blanket of continuous clouds which made it very dark whenever the moon was not visible. These clouds were at a very low altitude. Somewhere in the rear echelons, searchlight units would come on and begin banking their beams off the clouds to illuminate specific areas. Under these conditions, I didn't need my flashlight to read my book. Sometimes the lights would go out and you knew that the reserve companies were sending out patrols into no-mans

land. When the patrols came back in, the lights came on again.

This brings up the subject of patrols. It was something I felt that I could be good at and I was trained to do at Fort McClellen. It was just the luck of the draw that E Company's 1st Platoon was tasked to do a specific reconnaissance patrol by the battalion S-2. It was in mid-January, the snow was at least knee deep. It was a clear moonlit night. Six of us with Sgt. Marcheterre in charge were delivered to the S-2 at a Maginot Line pillbox. The S-2 pointed out our lines and where we were to pass through them. The terrain sloped downwards on wide open snow covered fields and then rose again to an equal height. Along that height was a row of equally spaced trees that indicated there was a road there. One of the trees had a ladder angled up into it. Our mission was to determine if there was any indication that the tree was being used, possibly as a listening post. This whole open area sloped downhill from the woods on the left to the woods on the right. We were told to return by way of the woods on the left to determine if the Germans were present or used these woods for any purpose, then return.

I had more confidence, and had a plan, that Sgt Marcheterre and the others bought into. I was to be out front a couple of hundred yards as first scout. Next came Sgt. Marcheterre and three guys in a diamond formation and one following us well to the rear. My major concern was taking fire from the woods on both our right and left. The diamond formation would be able to provide fire support and ease of movement in any direction it had to go. Our wide spacing didn't give anyone much of a target. I looked back about halfway and was shook up to see that as we broke the snow in our passage it looked like someone had wiped five greasy fingers across a clean white sheet and at the end of each black line was one of us. We did our job as we were told and found that the area around the tree had only undisturbed snow. Similarly, in the triangular patch of woods, there was no evidence of use or disturbed snow. Sgt. Marcheterre reported to the S-2 while we waited outside the pillbox. Then we were sent back to E Company in reserve positions.

This routine patrol wouldn't merit this much discussion except for what followed. We felt that we were dangerously overexposed for such a minor mission. We also felt that we would get fired upon. Either no one saw us or they withheld their fire so as not to give away their positions. We didn't know at that time that we were dealing directly with the S-2. He apparently followed us with his field glasses the whole way. Within a couple of days I was on my way to Paris on a 72 hour pass as a reward. I was told that the S-2 said that it was the first patrol that he knew for sure executed its mission properly. I will save the story on my visit to Paris for later and stay with the theme of patrols. I found patrolling easier than digging holes for portable foxholes, stringing wire or other work oriented jobs, so I volunteered for them. What was fascinating is that one of the last patrols I went on came in early March. We were assigned the same route only this time we were to go beyond the row of trees with the ladder and find the enemy positions. It was a much larger group with more firepower. The weather was warmer, the snow was gone and it was a dark night, Thank God. As first scout I wanted a lot of distance between me and the main group and got it. It was easy until we went over the hill and down the back side. By sheer luck, I almost stumbled into a large well built position. It even had a telephone hanging on the wall similar to your kitchen wall phones today. A couple of men joined me. I sent a message back to spread out and cover me as I was going down further and would be back, if lucky. The ground flattened out and had a lot of scrubby growth. I soon realized that some of that growth was man-made. I could hear voices and see dimmed lights all around. They apparently left their fighting positions and grouped up for comfort. I went back to those waiting for me in the hole. We didn't feel safe until we passed the tree with the ladder. The S-2 was pleased with the confirmation as to their exact position.

I will only throw two more patrol stories at you. A Jeep took me to Regiment. The another took me to 1st Battalion's B Company. The CO was only a 1st Lieutenant. I later learned that he was a West Pointer and they did not get their promotions as rapidly as reservists. My imagination worked overtime as to why I was going on a routine patrol on the opposite side of our regimental front. Maybe we were going to be moved to this area. Also, I heard they maybe would be organizing a special unit for patrolling. They had something like that in one of the other regiments. We had a regimental I&R (Intelligence & Reconnaissance) Platoon that I once hoped to be assigned to. This mission was one that took place every night. All I did was accompany a squad from B Company from their lines, through a mine field, down a

steep valley into the town of Urbach. We went into a building they used. In the basement, the windows were blacked out, so we had light. I was aware that these men did not like me and treated me rather coldly. When I asked why, they stated their resentment against the I&R Platoon. I said that I was from E Company and a dog face just like them. The tension relaxed. They were led to believe that someone from the I&R Platoon would be coming. The rest of our time went well. Just before dawn we cleared the area. Each side, German and American, sent these patrols into the valley town of Urbach to ensure that the other side did not occupy the town in force. I made the two Jeep rides back to E Company. Never ever got any explanation as to why or what that was all about.

My last patrol story had several unique features. Directly across from the 1st Platoon's position, there was a steep draw with a tree covered slope that rose to an elevation above us. It had to be very early in March. We had not yet been informed that we would be going on the offensive with a huge attack by all of the 7th Army on 15 March. So we were surprised to find out that our patrol was to be in our own front yard. The other unique feature was the patrol leader. He was Pete Petracco, our newly battle field commissioned 2d Lieutenant. He was the first officer I ever heard of to go on a patrol. It was quite dark and I was the 1st scout. It was a steep climb until we reached a small level area. In it were two rows of rifles that had been hooked together by a clip near the muzzles. On the ground were packs and helmets. Most of the patrol were still on the slope below, only a few were watching me crawl out into the clearing and remove a pack for study by the S-2. Our best guess was that at some earlier time, a German working party got nervous and abandoned their equipment.

The significance of this patrol became apparent later during the big attack on 15 March. This was the route used in the initial attack. I learned from Keith Bonn's book, *When the Odds Were Even* that another 397th battalion led the attack, but E Company was assigned to them to provide flank security after we got past the German mine fields.

We had a big adventure one day. I believe it was Jack Faulkner and a few friends who took off one day while we were on reserve duty. They visited one of the major Maginot Line fortifications and came back excited with souvenirs. The next day I made the same type of visit alone. I found the stair well that went down about five or six floors to a level that had a tunnel with a narrow gauge railroad tracks. Off this tunnel were various rooms. I collected several telephone ear and mouth pieces and a German helmet. The noises I heard coming down the tunnel made me cautious and I hid. After their passing, I realized that I better get out of there as I wasn't armed. I remembered the stories about how the Germans had used such tunnels to get behind our lines from one of our troop newspapers.

When we got back on line, we used my little telephone parts to hook up with the commo line from the CP to 1st Platoon. We couldn't talk, but we could listen. I remember one exchange in which our officers griped a bit about how easy it was for the newly commissioned officers in comparison with the difficulties of struggling through OCS. At first qualified personnel were offered an opportunity to be commissioned, but they had to go back for a short course called "Charm School" and then were assigned to a platoon in another division. I know of only one person who accepted this and he was not very well liked. It was later changed so that acceptees were permitted to remain with their own units. Then there were a lot of men like Pete Petracco and Rufus Dalton who accepted these battlefield commissions.

Now about my three day pass to Paris. I was the only one on that first patrol that I described to get such a pass. Such passes were rare. Most of the men who got a pass for R&R (Rest and Recreation) went only to the rear areas of the front for a few days. Most of these were operated by the units, except Hotel Ederle (that is as close as I can come to remembering it's name) which was run by the division. I got a ride on a truck to Hotel Ederle where I got clean clothes and a bath, my pass and a ticket on a train to Paris.

Along with other soldiers, we debarked at Gare Saint Lazare a big railroad station that our Hotel Saint Lazare was attached to. It was winter and Paris was in short supply of fuel and electric power. So my room was like an ice box. The single light bulb that hung from the ceiling was so dim that you could watch it pulsing. Of course this was partly due to the 50 cycles that Europeans use versus our 60 cycles in America. The biggest thrill came when we went down to dinner in the main ballroom. An Army Air Corps band came in and set up to play for us. It turned out to be the Glen Miller, Army Air Corps Band, with the drummer, Ray McKinnley directing. Major Glen Miller, who flew separately from England to Paris, was

missing. His remains were never found and it is still a mystery.

Some of the best musicians of the Swing Era volunteered to join this band. The music was great and to this day my taste in music still favors the big dance bands of the 40's and 50's. They created two top of the charts hits while in Paris: Mamselle and Cest se bon.

The next day I walked down the Champs de Elyses from the Arc de Triomphe to the area of the Louve Museum. To my astonishment almost all the cafes and restaurants were military messes. The curbside parking was filled with military cars and trucks. I departed briefly from my sightseeing to find the PX. I believe I found it in the area of Galleries Lafayette. Not being a smoker, I took my ration in cigars instead of cigarettes, just for a change. I continued walking in the area of the Madeleine Church and up Boulevard Haussman seeking the famous Follies Bergere. Two or three cigars later, I barely hung on to my breakfast until I got my ticket for that evening's show. Fortunately, there was a tiny Drogerie right across the street from the ticket office. Holding some cigars in my hand, I pantomimed my swirling head and gasped my stomach convulsions. The druggist immediately beamed and came out from behind his counter and escorted me to a small chair in the corner. He soon returned with a glass of some milky fluid and had me drink it. He then pantomimed ten minutes by use of his fingers and pointing to his watch. After ten minutes I was certain that I was going to live again. I asked him, with my meager French, "Combien, sil vous plait?" as I began emptying my field jacket pockets of those damn cigars. When I offered them to him he became so excited that he exited the room shouting. He went to fetch his wife, whom he brought to meet me. I never expected such a display of gratitude in my life.

I have just realized that in listing my highlights of those two months spent on the Winter defensive, from Rimling in early January to the big 7th Army offensive of 15 March, I have made it appear like a good time. During this period our real foe was the weather, not the Germans. It was one of the coldest winters in recent European history. After a period of time, I noticed that I could not tolerate being in a warm building. My feet would ache and seem extremely hot. My only relief was to sit outside until the pain subsided. Another example of this problem occurred simultaneously with one of my most stupid blunders. We were in the midst of a big thaw in the days just before the big 7th Army attack. We were occupying three holes overlooking the meeting point of several draws and separated from the rest of the platoon. My feet were paining me so much that I tried to get relief by removing my shoepacks and letting the snow and ice that was melting and dripping into the hole, cool off my feet.

Our hole was to the right rear and above that of my friend Ken Siebe. I was also bored and watched Ken reading. I thought I could have some fun by crawling down into the draw below Ken's line of sight and traversing across the slope below Ken's hole. On my approach up the slope, I stumbled onto a burned-out rifle smoke- grenade. When I was within fifteen feet of Ken, I rose up, yelled and tossed the grenade. I have to compliment Ken's speed of reacting. He got his M-1 and got off two or three rounds at me, the attacker, before he heard my voice and pleas stopped him. I felt so bad and dumb at what I had done as I tried to comfort Ken as he got back his breath and composure. Shortly afterwards, the phone rang from the CP questioning the firing. I don't know who replied or what explanation was given, but I never heard another word about the matter. I fully expected to be disciplined or at least get a lecture. Fortunately, Ken never held it against me and accepted my apologies.

The problems of trench foot/frozen feet got so bad that the commanders were held responsible whenever a unit had a higher than average incidence. Periodically, a Medic was brought in to examine our feet. One such incidence I remember vividly. It was at the E Company CP in Hotviller. We were brought out of the line in small groups. Cpt. Law was in charge. I don't know whether he was the EXO or CO at that time. When the Medic got to me, he looked solemn and jabbed the soles of my feet with his scissors. It was obvious that I didn't feel anything. So he called Cpt. Law over and demonstrated again with his scissors. Cpt. Law muttered something to the Medic and they moved on to the next man. I fully understood the rationale, there can be no easy way out of infantry units. I also remember that Cpt. Law's arm was in a sling at that time, too.

We were pulled out of the line a couple of days before the big attack and replaced by, I believe, the 68th Infantry Division. The night before the attack, we watched the preparatory artillery barrage in awe. The skies to the North were lit up by exploding munitions in a continuous line from Zweibrucken to Pirmasens.

There was never a second of darkness from the flashes of the explosions as it went on for hours on end. I felt nothing but pity for the poor souls who had to endure it. Later we were moved into position in the dark for the attack, in of all places—Hotviller. I always assumed that we were a reserve company in the lead attacking battalion. But, I learned from Keith Bonn's book, *When the Odds Were Even*, that another battalion of the 397th Regiment led the attack, but E Company was attached to it in order to provide flank security on the left after we got through the mine fields.

If I may steal the words of that other famous author, Snoopy, "It was a dark and stormy night–". We were in a slow moving line along the main street of Hotviller as the attacking companies ahead of us crossed over our old MLR, across the draw and up the route of my previous patrol. We were too bunched up, but this street was at the bottom of steep hills on both sides to become alarmed. Our helmets and other metallic equipment reflected light from their wet surfaces. Standing in a doorway to our right as we shuffled along was the Catholic Chaplain, Father Burke, reading the 23d Psalm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of death . . . " to us in passing. (That supports the history in Keith's book because the 2d Battalion's chaplain was Reverend Bonner Teeter and he would have been with the main body of his battalion. Every battalion had its own chaplain, but the majority were from Protestant denominations, a smaller number were Catholic and there were only a few Rabbis. Most soldiers attended any religious service we could. Man were we euchamenical in those days.) We were close to the former E Company CP when a stray shell did scream into our midst. A soldier about ten places in front of me yelled, "I'm hit" and fell to the ground. His nearest pals dragged him into a walk-in basement of the building on our left to treat his wound. The piece of shrapnel struck him on the rear shoulder. Fortunately, it burned through his field jacket and clothes and burned his skin. It was a minor event overall, but to me its importance was that it took place in a spot that I had walked by so many times. We continued forward again up the familiar path past our positions, across the draw and through the mine fields on the hill top. After a short march, we took up positions to defend the flank and rear of 1st Battalion's attack. We didn't get any sleep the rest of that short night because we had a ringside seat watching a battery of multiple barrel rocket launchers. The Germans called them *Nebelwerfers*. We called them Screaming Meemies. The noise they made was their most frightening impact. The lst Battalion hooked right to cut the main road supporting the German Forces in the whole Bitche area. We rejoined our battalion as it moved past going in a more northerly direction toward Schorbach and eventually to the German border and the Siegfried Line.

The next night we moved in on Schorbach and the sight I saw sent shivers up my back. Packed tightly against the walls of the church, about four feet high and three feet deep, held firmly in place by chicken wire fencing, were skulls and other human bones. My immediate thoughts were, "Those NAZI bastards". It was later explained to me that European church burial grounds were too small. After centuries it became standard practice to remove the older bones to make space for the more recent burials. My frame of reference was built on the movies, comic books and the training films of the "Why We Fight" series.

Another unusual event occurred on our way north. We found a depot for German supplies. The Germans were famous for mechanization and *blitzkrieg*. In actual truth they still relied mainly on horses. The ones still here were dead, as was an armored vehicle. I guess it was left there for repair or cannibalization. While examining it, we came under an artillery attack. I sat on this armored car admiring the pattern these exploding shells made. Then someone smarter than me yelled out, "White Phospherous, take cover".

It became a road march towards the German border. We were taking a break near an exceptionally smelly ruined cottage. We made our American contribution to this well used German outhouse when a couple of Jeeps pulled up outside. Out of the second one stepped our CG, Major General Burress. He made a very Robert E. Lee type impression on me with his soft spoken Virginia drawl, refined looks and a florid complexion. You just knew he could talk comfortably with anyone at any level. We were only about a squad in numbers and I can't remember why there were so few of us alone like that. He asked if we were ready to do twenty miles a day? I remember saying, "Not in these damn things". Our shoepacks were excellent for snow, mud and water, but had no arch support, felt mushy and were too heavy and warm for serious marching.

Around the same time he had a similar talk with Cpt. Law who told him the same thing. I was pleased

to read this in one of the articles Cpt. Law published in our 100th Division Newsletter. I had no delusions that this problem could be cured soon. Supplying shoes to the front line troops would be a logistical nightmare. The very next day, The Company E Supply Jeep pulling its trailer rolled to a stop near us and said pick out your shoes. The trailer was filled with shoes tied together in pairs. They were donated by our own rear echelon troops. I grabbed a pair that looked like paratrooper boots. Someone customized a pair of dark brown Army shoes by adding a leather cuff. Bless him for being willing to part with them, whoever he is. They fit perfectly and seemed so light that I could float. The sensation was similar to how I used to feel after a Sunday afternoon wearing rental skates at the local skating rink. Then taking off the heavy skates and putting on your own shoes. It seemed like a miracle. I kept those shoes until I got discharged.

The next few days were an amazing speed march to the Rhein. We really could have done it in our shoepacs. We would march and watch truck loads of our troops pass us by. Soon the trucks would return and we would load up, then catch up and pass them. This leap frogging process took us through the German border posts and through the Siegfried line to a German army kaserne in the outskirts of Pirmasens. There we got some sleep. Our platoon was sleeping on the floor of a very modern kitchen with permanent, fixed, large cooking pots as big as stoves. These could make soups or stews for hundreds in one pot. The next day we made it to the Rhein plain town of Neustadt by late afternoon.

With a tank at the head of our column of trucks, we were told not to fire unless fired upon. Just keep moving as fast as possible. We went through villages and towns feeling secure when we saw all the white sheets hanging out the windows to indicate surrender. The eeriest experience was when I spotted, straight ahead on a small hill, an anti tank gun aimed right down the road we were traveling. It was manned by two German soldiers. I guess they were hoping to be taken prisoner, all we did was wave at them. Our mission was to reach the Rhine. As we came out of the hills down into Neustadt, it appeared that we were going to stay there overnight. We dismounted, evicted families and began to occupy their homes. Instead, there must have been a change of orders, we loaded up and headed north towards Ludwigshafen. In the dark, we occupied an apartment block in the Ludwigshafen suburb of Oggersheim. Later I lived for ten years in the nearby city of Worms and passed through Oggersheim often. Directly across the Rhein River was the larger city of Mannheim. All the connecting bridges had been blown up. Less than ten miles beyond Mannheim lies the historic city of Heidleberg. It was by-passed to preserve the ancient buildings.

What happened next is a major turning point in my life. We were still settling into the Oggersheim apartment, we hadn't been there more than an hour, when I was sent for by our platoon leader, Pete Petracco. I was getting a ten day leave to England. It was the first time enlisted personnel were included in the quotas for this type of leave. I felt that I could not accept because I only had $20.00 of US currency. I was astonished when the men in the room, all started handing me money. I must have had about $80 to $90 and pushed out the door. I later learned that Company E got a quota for one NCO and one enlisted man and each platoon leader was asked to submit the name of its most deserving man. The names were put into a helmet and the names were drawn. Sgt Martinetti's name was drawn for the leave to the French Riviera. He had been moved up to platoon sergeant when Pete became an officer. Then my name was pulled for the trip to England. I don't know if anyone else ever got this opportunity during wartime in our company.

I was grateful, but I had no foreknowledge of what was waiting to happen to my platoon or I might not have gone, or I might have groveled in my thanks. It was an all night trip in the back of a truck to Sarrebourg and division's R&R Center. After bathing and clean uniforms, the next leg was a train to Paris. A day later we were shipped to Camp Lucky Strike which was a staging area just north of the big port of Le Harve. It was actually the seaside town of Etratat. Troops were billeted here to wait for available shipping space and delays due to weather and German submarine activity. Three days later we made a night crossing of the channel to Portsmouth. A train got us to London. We were billeted at the Red Cross Club at Marble Arch. After a few days of sightseeing, I took the train to Edinborough, Scotland to do some more sightseeing there as well. I had two memorable experiences on the train. Going north a British soldier shared our compartment. He was going home for leave for the first time in three years. He was serving in the India/Burma theater. Each American soldier was given a packet of British ration coupons to allow us to purchase foods and other items. Since he had a family I gave them all to him. He seemed genuinely

delighted. On the return train to London, two Englishmen joined me, but not together. Jovial and pleasant, they taught me a card game that was fun at low stakes. It became apparent that my new companions were con artists as the stakes doubled when ties rolled over. These were not two strangers, but a well rehearsed team. I quit before I lost everything. I sat and stewed about it for awhile. Then I told them what I thought had just happened. I said that I'm going to get off at the next stop and call the police unless they volunteered to give me back half my losses. They did and I thanked them for the lesson.

At the Rainbow Corner Stage Door Canteen there was a woman who volunteered to help write letters home for the troops. I was turned off by the language used by her as well as a bunch of airmen surrounding her. Upon inquiry, I was informed that she was Fred Astaire's sister, Adele. She had been his dancing partner before he became a moviestar. Now, she was Lady Cavendish. Covent Garden Opera House had been converted to a giant dance hall. I went and marveled at the speed and quality of the British dancers, especially their Quick Step. I had seen most of the major tourist attractions and went down to Bournemouth an upper scale seaside resort. The next day I checked into the dockside area of Portsmouth. That night while in line for boarding, we were lined up for a short arm inspection. This is something we went through periodically at American military bases. It always seemed like a big joke because no one ever seemed to have a venereal disease problem. The medic and two MP's came down each row shouting, "skin it back, milk it forward". As usual nothing was happening. Splat . . . the guy to my immediate left was grabbed by the two MP's. Apparently, some GI's were deliberately contracting diseases to avoid returning to combat. One part of their punishment was to serve an equal or more time in the service above and beyond their expected date of discharge.

Now we reverse the itinerary: a night crossing of the channel; a couple of nights at Camp Lucky Strike (Etratat–a place of great beauty that I returned to later with my family. I will describe it later.); Paris layover (Stars & Stripes story features the big battle the 100th Infantry Division is engaged in for the city of Heilbronn on the Neckar River); on the train to Sarrebourg I spot a Frenchman holding up a newspaper for the passing GI's to read, "Roosevelt le Morte". I cried. He was the only President that I knew in my lifetime. I saw some GI's I knew and asked the status of E Company at Heilbronn. I was crushed to learn the 1st platoon got wiped out. The next leg was by truck and Jeep to Heilbronn. I almost didn't want to go back. Walking to the company kitchen and supply located on the road climbing out of Heilbronn, I noticed beautifully printed pieces of paper blowing around my feet like leaves. I picked some up to examine and they were Reich Marks–Paper money. These surely must be worthless I thought and threw them back on the ground. Later they were redeemable at a reduced value when the Germans reestablished their new currency system.

I had two noteworthy memories from my overnight stay at the kitchen/supply point. I was awakened during the night by a shot and continuous screams of pain. Someone in a nearby building shot himself in the ankle. I don't believe it was intentionally self inflicted unless he was stupid. The next morning I was reissued my old rifle, helmet and other equipment in preparation for a ride up to the company. I opened the breech and inserted a fresh clip of ammo and then pulled a huge mistake. Having been away so long, I reverted to the physical motions used on an empty rifle and squeezed the trigger. The BLAM cleared my head by a foot or so because I was holding the rifle in a port arms position. Needless to say, I was very embarrassed.

I reported in to CPT Law as he sat on the stairs of a house in Prevorst and gave him a nice pocket magnifying glass for map reading that I had picked up somewhere. Since there was no 1st Platoon, I was assigned to the 2d with some other survivors. A little later SGT Martinotti returned from the French Riviera and we got a new bunch of replacements. The 1st Platoon was reorganized with Marty as the Platoon Sergeant with me and two other PFC's as squad leaders. Many of our riflemen were older NCO's who had been overseas for a long time, but had always served in rear echelon units. The need for infantry replacements was so great that rear echelon commanders were given quotas to fill the needs of front line units. These men never complained or showed any animosity to being led by three kids with no rank. Maybe it was because they were in awe of their environment. They did not know outgoing artillery from incoming and were always taking cover for no reason. We showed them how to approach street crossings and clear houses.

The next couple of weeks were exhausting as the 100th Division turned south to encircle Stuttgart. We marched days and sometimes nights like zombies as we criss-crossed our zone to clear towns of any organized resistance. The terrain was extremely hilly with deep valleys. Many German soldiers took this opportunity to surrender while others fought hard. We did get some wonderful food in this area. I found a farm yard with a backyard oven. I slung my rifle across my back and grabbed two big round loaves of hot black bread. As I walked toward the house someone opened fire on me. I hung on to the bread for dear life and zigzagged to the house to find the rest of the squad already frying eggs. We really looked forward to fresh eggs which caused a real funny incident. I was in a barn putting eggs in my helmet. The pile of hay in a comer to my right stirred and out stepped a feisty little old German lady. She really gave me a piece of her mind about the eggs. My German at that time was rather limited, but my desire for eggs was too strong to care what she was saying anyway. I got in the house and one of our men was barnyard familiar. He looked at my eggs and said no wonder the old lady got upset these are her glass eggs. I had never heard of glass eggs used to fool the laying chickens. I am still amazed at the bravery displayed by this old Schwabian Frau in leaving her hiding place and facing an armed enemy soldier to protect her precious glass eggs.

Eventually, we broke out of the hills and forests into the more populated Rems Valley. Stuttgart was to our west encircled and cut off. Then a strange thing happened that you will not find in any history book. The 100th Division proceeded on to the upper Neckar Valley, a couple of battalions, however, were withdrawn from the line and trucked into Stuttgart. Stuttgart is a large, beautifully located city. It sits in a bowl surrounded by high ridges and hills on all sides except the north which is open to the Neckar River. On the opposite shore is Bad Canstatt, a smaller suburban city. Originally, I thought ours was the only American battalion involved, but I later learned that another battalion was sent to Bad Canstatt. Our 2d Battalion was loaded onto trucks and driven to the city. Our route into the city was on a road called the Alte Weinsteige (Old Wine Road) which angled down to the city center from the southwest ridge. As we descended this miles long old road we left vineyards behind to neighborhoods of posh apartment blocks over-looking the city center. Even had I known another battalion was in Bad Canstatt, I was very uneasy that our meager numbers could have any impact on such a huge city.

We detrucked and made ourselves comfortable in some of these luxury apartments for a few days. No attempts were made to take up defensive positions. We left the apartment only for an awards ceremony. I was surprised that I was one of the less than two dozen men to be honored. The site was up the street at a switchback that had a big circular viewing area over the city. BG Tychsen, the Assistant Division Commander, presented the awards. I got a Bronze Star for Heroic Achievement at Rimling. I don't recall anything that I would call heroic. I think the intent was more to reward those that our superiors felt were doing their jobs better than the average. Once again, Pete Petracco was a big influence in my life. Bit by bit we learned why we were there.

The French Army was on the right flank of the US Seventh Army. All armies, corps, divisions, regiments and battalions have boundaries within which only they can operate. This is for control efficiency and the reduction of casualties by friendly fire. The French zone of operations to the right of the 100th Division had no major German cities and they wanted one for political prestige. And there sat Stuttgart, cut off, but not yet occupied by the 100th. The French rushed in some troops and tried to claim it. They were given an eviction notice, with a deadline or the 100th would attack them. They left. And we left to catch up with the division in Neu Uhn on the Danube River. The French forces made similar such actions against Italy. When the Anglo-American armies were rushing into northern Italy in the final days, the French mounted attacks over into Italian territories along their common border. This last minute show of force was designed to give the French a seat at the table for peace negotiations between the allies and Italy. This incident is in the history books, by the way. And US forces had orders justifying the use of force if French units impeded their advance.

The following is strictly rumor. The 100th Division held its final review of the troops at the German Airfield at Goeppingen. It included every unit. Infantry were marching in massed battalion blocks with bare bayonets. Motorized and special units rolled by. Even our Piper Cub spotter planes flew by. What was the occasion? A group of high French Officials came to present honors to the division. I was told that

originally the French might honor the 100th with a leather shoulder strap, like the fouragerres given to some American units in WWI. But, their noses were out of joint over the Stuttgart incident.

The 100th was now an occupying force covering the distance from Stutgartt to Uhn. The Division HQ was located in the center in Goeppingen. We conducted searches in the forests and nearby towns and villages for weapons and German Army holdouts. Other Divisions streamed on by into Bavaria and Austria. One of them discovered the Dachau concentration camp outside of Munich. Our battalion was in Neu Uhn on the Danube River, less than two hours drive from Dachau and Munich. A short time later two men from each platoon were in a truck convoy headed for Dachau. It was our job to observe and report back to the other soldiers in our unit what we had seen. I am glad that we saw it when we did. Dachau is a highly visited tourist spot for thousands of visitors every year. In the sixties, while living in Munich, I became a member of the Dachau US Army Golf Club built on land adjacent to the camp. The commander of that field artillery unit was living in the house that used to belong to the German commander of the camp. You should know that this camp was the first one the NAZI's ever built. Its purpose was not to hold POW's or kill Jews. These were mainly political prisoners like dissenting religious leaders, radical students, mentally unbalanced, etc and some Jews. We toured the shower baths where they were gassed and the few crematory ovens that are still to be seen. But, close by the crematory, we saw a small blood soaked plot with the hanging tree, the firing squad wall, the beheading block and the pit where they were kneeling to be shot in the back of the neck. These sights and almost all of the cell blocks are gone. Today's visitor sees beautiful lawns and shrubbery in an almost peaceful setting.

Our job in Uhn, a lovely old city with the tallest gothic spire in Germany, was to guard a bombed out German munitions factory. Across the street from it was the camp of the slave laborers, mostly Slavs from the eastern front areas. We were there to keep them out of the factory because there were several incidents of similar slave labor groups that raided German villages for food and looting. I soon came to see the reality of the mission. On my off duty time I went into the factory and found a room filled with weapons of American, English and Russian manufacture. I found ammunition on the floor and had fun firing some of them like a bolt action British Lee-Enfield. The object of my desire was a small mortar which I kept for awhile until I tired of carrying it. The diameter of the tube was about the size of an American hand grenade. The tube and the bipod were attached to the base plate. It was all one piece and about 18 inches tall. The front of the base plate curved up into a handle so that it could be pulled like a sled while crawling in a prone position. There was another handle on the tube. There was a single circular level. Just get the bubble into the circle. It must have been designed for close combat situations by paratroopers. It would have been very dangerous for these weapons to get into the hands of the angry and hungry ex-slaves.

Somewhere in this time frame the war officially ended. There were smiles and a sigh of relief, but the search of villages and the woods for German holdouts went on. One sad event must be told. The high command leveled a curfew on the German population after dark. They also instituted the Non-Fraternization Policy. Our company was running jeep patrols at night. I was not aware of it, nor were any of my friends. It seems that the NCO's were volunteering to go on these patrols. In hindsight, it appears that liquor and ladies were the attraction. They went to the same well too often. One night on their return the Germans placed an R Mine on their route and killed four men from E Company after the war was over. The high command was concerned about two things: the NAZI's trying to make a last ditch stand in the Alps called The Redoubt and the creation of an underground resistance movement called The Werewolves. The Redoubt was a myth, but this incident may have been an attempt to start a Werewolves group. It probably failed for the same reason that Non-Fraternization failed, everyone was too tired of war.

I was a bit envious of those divisions that kept attacking into the Alps and Austria. I would have loved to have seen the Alps. Later, I found out the answer to why the 100th Division stopped in the Stutgartt to Ulm corridor instead of keeping on in the attack. I was reading an article in National Geographic on how they (Nat. Geo.) had to supply the maps because theirs were the best available for Roosevelt and Churchill and their planning. President Roosevelt created a Top Secret room in the White House which was later called the Map Room. There were pictures which showed the room and a map on the wall that caught my eye. I got out my magnifying glass and read 100th Division next to Stutgartt. This map and picture predated our entry into Germany. At the highest levels, it appears, the 100th Division was to occupy the

Stutgartt area many months ahead of its capture.

The 2d Battalion moved to a small town near Goeppingen. It was here that the big 100th Division parade and review for the visiting French High Command took place. The town had a Turnverein Building. This I understood because the town of my birth, Clinton, MA, had a section called Germantown and it had a large Turnverein complex for sports and social activities. So I checked it out. The gymnasium, I expected, but in the basement there was a Hitler Youth meeting room. The thing I remember the most was the rack full of what looked like German Army hand grenades of the type we called "Potato Mashers". These had the same size wooden handles, but instead of the can of explosives at the end there was an iron band to simulate the weight. I could visualize all the kids competing for longest and most accurate throws. The other major event that took place here was the day that we PFC's had to step back into the ranks and the old NCO's moved up to our jobs and had to earn the pay they were getting all along. It hurt a little but was entirely logical. There also was a big awards ceremony/parade held in downtown Goeppingen.

The next big move brought all the units into Stutgartt and its suburban towns. The 2d Battalion went to the town of Ditzingen. It was a couple of miles west of the end of the street car (Strassenbahn) line that took you to the city center (Stadt Mitte). Most of which was blown to bits, but parts of some buildings were still capable of being used like half of the Railroad Station (Balmhot), a hotel facing it for VIP's, and the Opera Haus which was the recreation center for us troops. I was in line for some Red Cross donuts when I saw Jack Benny give his necktie to a GI that had admired it. Bob Hope also performed for us. These shows took place in a large stadium down by the Neckar River next to the Mercedes Motor production plant.

CPT Law was our track coach. We trained on the meadow that we drilled on in Ditzingen. We only had our GI boots to run in. Just before the big track meet in the same stadium we got baseball shoes to run in. I won my trial heat for the 200 yard or meter (?) run, but got blown away in the finals. Many years later I went to a retirement ceremony/parade in that same stadium that left an indelible impression on me. There was a battalion sized unit of German, American and French troops and a marching band with each unit. These troops reflected their national characteristics in their formations, marching and their music. The German formation was densely packed. If a man got out of step it would be chaos. Their left arms swung across their bodies there was no room to swing fore and aft. Their music was heavily percussive. Even the wind instruments seemed percussive. Next came the Americans. Their spacing was more open. There was room for arms to swing, room for possible small errors in steps, but I didn't notice any. The French formation was very widely spaced out. Their steps, very fast, but short. Their uniforms gaudy. The music was mostly high pitched horns, cornets. Picture something like the Michigan State marching band at a football game. I am not making value judgments here, they were all good quality, but clearly an expression of their own military values.

Thanks to the atomic bombing, Japan surrendered in August 1945. Many of the Army divisions that arrived late in the war were already enroute towards Japan. What a sense of relief it must have been for them. They all got discharged earlier than scheduled to clear the pipeline. The troops remaining in Europe became agitated and even held mass demonstrations before the American Embassy in Paris. This resulted in the "Point System" to determine who would be sent home first. They gave each soldier points based on his age, years in service, years overseas, married men got points for their wife and each child, and lastly you got points based on the military decorations you had been awarded. This procedure resulted in a 100 points, or more, for some of our senior NCO's. While some of us "kids" only had 30 to 40 points. My point total was 44 points. Since the 100th Infantry Division had been earmarked as an occupation unit, I had hoped that I could remain with it. As a division was selected to return to CONUS (continental US), they would strip out and reassign all its low point personnel and replace them with high point men from other divisions. This created a lot of turbulence. It also created a big problem for the Army as what to do with hundreds of thousands of young men while they waited their turn.

The Army established educational programs, tours and travel opportunities, USO shows and home grown musical and entertainment, but the biggest role fell to the sports programs. I later learned that Rufus Dalton was put in charge of the Division level sports program and promoted to Captain. I participated on the 2nd Battalion track team, but mainly I was a happy spectator, especially for the division's football

team. I was eye witness to a major breakdown in discipline at a game against an armored division, I believe it was in Darmstadt. We won and wanted to tear down the goal posts. The locals anticipated this and sent out a platoon of MP's to guard them. I don't know how the Big Brass sitting in their boxes felt when the MP's were literally tossed aside, and some in the air. Another example of gross behavior by the troops occurred at Stuttgart Stadium. I believe it was at the Bob Hope show. The Army was very concerned about venereal diseases. To offset this danger, condoms were readily available almost everywhere. This was good because they made excellent garters to smartly blouse our pants just above our boots. Some wise guy inflated his condom to weather balloon proportions and it floated upwards through the stands towards the VIP section. This caught on very rapidly and soon the show was not as important as it was to watch the cloud of condoms being nonchalantly batted aside by even the female guests of the VIP's.

In mid-Fall the axe fell and I was reassigned out of the division. Seriously, it felt as if my mother had kicked me out of the house. I joined about a dozen or so other young GI's from the battalion toting our "B" bags to a waiting "Duece and a half". Along the way we would drop some one off at various kasernes as we wended our way northwards through Frankfurt, Giessen and reached our destination in the dark at Bad Wildungen. Germany has a lot of Bad cities or towns, but that is good. In German Bad means Bath, or Spa. These were usually places of healing, hospitals, clinics, hotels, wealth and fine dining. We could not see much in the dark, but we could hear the clashing of gears and the laboring of the truck's motor as we climbed a very steep grade over cobble stones, over a moat and into the court yard of a genuine castle.

The first sargeant welcomed us to the255th Light Signal Construction Company. The lights were on in the dining room for our late arrival. The only other great room in the castle was filled with double decker bunks. This was used for the lower ranks and transients like us, because this HQ of the Signal Company was not to be our duty station. The name of this castle is Schloss Friedrichstein. It was set on a rocky precipice above the Old Town of Wildungen. I remember looking down at the people walking on the streets with Tommy Young, who was formerly with the 399th Regiment. We were discussing how hard it would be to actually shoot and hit anyone below walking at a normal pace. We had at this point no knowledge of the more modern and beautiful part of the town with its avenue of fine hotels, the parks and gardens and the palace like Spa itself.

This site was selected long in advance and protected from being bombed in order to provide the HQ of the 21st Army Group of General Omar Bradley. The Armies he had control over were the 9th Army (Simpson), lst Army (Hodges) and 3rd Army (Patton). This was the primary combat force to sledgehammer the NAZI's into unconditional surrender. To the north of this group were the two British Armies under Field Marshall Montgomery which covered the flanks out to the sea. It was mainly made up of British, Canadian and other colonial troops of the old Empire, plus strong major units composed of Polish, Norwegian and others that had escaped from German conquered nations. On the southern flank, from Pattons 3rd Army to the Swiss border was the 6th Army Group composed of the 7th Army (Patch) and the French First Army (Tassigny). When the war ended, the Americans switched their logistical supply lines from France to Bremerhaven in Germany. The 255th Light Signal Construction Company started in Normandy constructing telephone lines from HQ of the Supreme Allied Commander (Rear) to wherever General Eisenhower was called SHAEF (Forward). This meant the erection of telephone poles and stringing of lines across France and into Germany. The only mortalities suffered by the 255th were 4 or 5 men who died from drinking poisoned liquor (Calvados). With the war over and the supply lines moved to the naval port of Bremerhaven, The old telephone line was abandoned and a new one built from Bremerhaven through Bad Wildungen to Frankfurt. Similar to bad Wildungen, one small part of Frankfurt was spared from bombing, but the rest of the city was destroyed. Long in advance the IG Farben Building was picked to be the future HQ. I worked for a year in the building and learned from our German employees how people used to flock to that area to escape the bombs. With the new telephone lines in place, the mission of the 255th changed to one of maintenance. The men of the 255th were spread out about 50 miles apart in small groups often or 12. Any break in this line of communication had immediate response teams closest to the scene on the move to restore the lines. These men rarely saw their leaders and worked pretty independently.

I didn't find out about a lot of this till later because after dinner on that first night in the castle I went to read what was on the Company bulletin board that I spotted as we jumped down from the truck. I read a list of available leave destinations, if anyone was interested, see the first sergeant. It took me a couple of days to get the courage to ask him if that offer applied to even new guys like me. He was delighted to find someone who would take some of his leave offerings. I immediately made a promise to myself that if I had to serve again, it would be in the Signal Corps. In fact when I enlisted in the reserves for nine years I had changed my branch to Signal Corps.

In a few days I was off to merry Olde England. The beauty of this trip is that everyone gets an overnight or two in Paris and a few days stay in Camp Lucky Strike (Etratat) waiting for a ship. Your week doesn't begin until you get to London. It was much more relaxed the second time around. Also, there was no longer the concern over the fate of your buddies or yourself to worry about. On arrival back at the castle, I was reassigned to a unit located in Giessen which was not too far away. Another new guy and myself were shown a room, the bath and kitchen on the ground floor. We could hear people moving around upstairs and we definitely could distinguish female voices, but we were pretty much left to amuse ourselves. About the third or fourth day we all went out and did some work in the city of Giessen. We were merely Gofers for these old professionals. Three of them could climb the same pole and do their work without interfering with each other. Certain poles have a strain put on them because the wires change in direction. The stress on the poles is counteracted by the use of supporting guy wires angled from high on the poles to the ground. I don't know if they were showing off for our benefit or not, but when they had finished up the job each man grabbed a guy wire in one gloved hand and slid down to earth. It was sort of like a Blue Angels air show where the tight formation flares apart. My personal adventures for that day were a failure at climbing with those spikes strapped to my legs. I tended to want to hug the pole when you should lean away from it. As a result, I would "bum the pole" their expression for falling. The other fear was at having to toss our line over a street car line and pull over enough to reach the next pole. I was not sure whether the street car line was active or not. It wasn't. I began to realize why these men were not interested in taking any leave. When it comes to ration break downs the infantry is the end of the line. Everything good has been picked over before it reached the dog face. These guys drew their ration allotments from the 255th AND the nearest troop unit in their area. Rations were the gold that paid for getting laundry done, the house cleaned and your bed warmed, I guess.

We were settling down for the oncoming winter. The prospects looked boring. Time for some interesting observations on life during the occupation. Back at the castle, Schloss Friedrichstein, the major gripe was that it had too few toilets and wash-up facilities which resulted in long lines in the mornings. Oh! They had a bath house at the bottom of our cliff top dwelling. The tubs had four or five different handles so that you could select which type of mineral water you wanted to bathe in. The bath house was located near a vast motor pool. The 255th actually had more vehicles than it had people. Coming from an Infantry Company which was authorized only two Jeeps and two trailers, I was in awe. Most of the vehicles however were highly specialized. One row was filled with truck mounted earth augers to rapidly dig holes for telephone poles. Another row was filled with multiple sets of reels mounted on trucks to transport and tension the wires, etcetera, etc. I saw an interesting sight in our vicinity in Giessen and investigated. I discovered a grassy piece of ground covered with white sheets. Spread on the sheets were coffee grounds drying in the sun. An enterprising GI was in business collecting the coffee grounds from the local mess halls. He dried it, packaged it and sold it to the local Germans who were ecstatic to taste real coffee once again. For years the Germans were forced to drink Erzatz coffee made from chicory, if they were lucky enough to get that. That thought brings back to mind the wonderful packages my mother used to send me during the war. She used to send me such unique items as sticks of pepperoni and tea bags. When I finished making my cup of tea my friends lined up for next. That bag was reused at least four more times before being discarded.

Then one day in late Fall, everything changed. The French government had a problem and sought humanitarian assistance from the 255th. Their problem was that river boat and barge traffic on the Seine River just east of Paris was hampered by sagging wires from temporary poles that were too small and low. A task force was quickly assembled and we were on our way to Gay Paree. We were located in a small

town called Ozior-Le- Ferriere. Our billets were in Chateau de Agenue. (The spelling is questionable here.) In the same vicinity were the home town of the French President, General Charles De Gaulle, and the estate of the Rothschilds, Chateau Ferrieres. The latter was occupied by a black transportation unit. I was in it only once, at night. My only memory of it is the narrow gauge tracks embedded in the stone floor. I wish that my knowledge of history was better at that time. If it were, I certainly would have gone back to see it in the daylight. This was the seat of power in much of European history. I will give only one instance. When Germany conquered France (the Franco-Prussian War), Bismarck chose this estate for his quarters. He was in awe of it and its contents and wanted to take some of it home. He left it all because the Rothschilds were too powerful to anger.

I managed to get a room of my own upstairs over the stables. My job was downstairs in the supply section. I heard that our guys erected very tall towers and raised the wires beyond any danger from passing ships. I confess that the perks of this job far outweighed my interest in going to the work site. The perks—we had permanent passes to the city of Paris for every weekend. Not knowing how long the job would take we didn't want to miss any one of them. On Friday afternoons the leave trucks left for town. Our parking place was on the grounds of the French Old Soldiers Home, which was directly behind Napoleon's Tomb on the Left Bank. It was a short walk to the Pont Alexander III Bridge and then one block to the Champs De Elysees, the heart of the city. We were amazed when the job stretched into its third month and we returned home in February 1946. Not long afterwards, they told me that my 44 points would soon make me eligible to go home. I thought about that and came to the realization that I probably would never get the opportunity to see some more of Europe in my life time. So I revisited the first sargeant and asked if it was possible to delay my rotation home until I was qualified for one more leave. He readily agreed and made me an offer of three stripes if I would reenlist. It was tempting, but now we all knew about the GI Bill of Rights which included an opportunity to get a college education. That gift to the veterans trumped everything else in planning the rest of my life. About a month later I got my leave and chose to visit Switzerland.

During the war Switzerland was neutral although it was surrounded by the Axis Powers. They had reopened their country for tourism and established a variety of vacation trips for a limited number of our military personnel. The City of Muhlhouse, France was the staging area where you processed and selected the type of tour you wanted to take. Some chose to spend their entire week at one resort, but I selected a tour of many cities. All travel was by train, efficient and quick. We stopped in Basie for sight-seeing and then rolled on to the Capitol, Berne, for two overnights. From Berne we took one of the most scenic train rides in all of the Alps through Interlaken and over the Bernese Oberland range to an overnight in the Rhone River valley town of Sion. Our train headed south rising up the wall of a dead end valley. Then it made a "U Turn", still rising, on the opposite side of the valley. Then it entered a tunnel which rose upward like a corkscrew inside a mountain. It emerged in a high alpine valley passing small villages as it headed south and dropped in altitude. We made a sharp turn to the east at the top of a sheer wall that fell thousands of feet to the Rhone River Valley below. We began a hair raising ride on a series of trestles and tunnels down to Brig, a town on the valley floor. There the train turned west following the Rhone to Sion and continuing on to Lake Geneva. After Sion we stopped for an overnight on the lake in Montreaux, near Chateau Chillon. Our last two nights were spent in Geneva where a few of us were invited to visit a Swiss home. Our host was a Swiss Army Colonel. He explained why, in his opinion, that Hitler never tried to attack them.

The major reason, he felt, was that the Swiss had a very good and well trained Army. They always have had one, and still do. With rare exceptions every able bodied man had to serve two years in the standing regular Army. Then they spend decades in the reserves doing weekly, later monthly training sessions locally, plus periods of field training in both winter and summer maneuvers. The latter stop during middle age, but they still retained their equipment and weapon at home until age 65. Throughout this time, rifle marksmanship is a national sport on a par with soccer and the majority of soldiers participated along with the civilians. They have created a force that is always up to date, cohesive and fully knowledgeable about the terrain it would have to fight on. He told us the Swiss Army has no General Officers except during war time. He also told us what to look for in our travels around Switzerland as clues to their defensive

positions. I would look for these while taking my family on skiing trips. Frequently, we shared gondola rides and lift top lunches with soldiers like these doing their winter training. The Germans learned from their difficulties fighting in the mountainous terrain of the Balkans. To attack Switzerland would require the Germans to pull out too many divisions from their two front war to be worth the effort.

There are two other aspects of this week that are worth mentioning. Coming through the Muhlhouse Reception Center for these tours, I was pulled aside and interviewed before being allowed to proceed. They were picking out the soldier who was to be publicized as the 1,000th, or so, to take the Swiss tours. I believe they found someone more photogenic or had a more interesting story. I felt lucky to even be considered. I think the reason I was chosen was that I stood out from the others because I wasn't wearing an Ike jacket like everyone else. General Eisenhower made this type of jacket famous. It was short only coming down to the waist. I was wearing the old style Class A Army Blouse, without my PFC stripe. It was bloused and belted in the back and hung down below your Keister. I am fairly sure that blouse was the reason that on several occasions I got the best seat at the table for dinner and extra attention from the waitresses. Draw your own assmnptions.

Following the completion of my dream trip to the Alps, my days with the 255th Light Signal Company flew by quickly. I figured that I better get some dental work done while I could by the Army, I confess that I have had a morbid fear of dentists since childhood. Much to my surprise, the technician at the dental clinic was an old acquaintance from Worcester, MA. I will not name him per his request. He was in Patton's 3rd Army and went AWOL from his combat unit and was living with a French woman near Verdun. He was serving an extra long tour as part of his punishment. I never saw him again in Worcester. So he may be still living in France today. He had personality and charm that benefited me by picking out the best dentist. I had an upper canine tooth that was healthy, but out of line. He removed it, did some fillings and a cleaning and got me ready for reentry to the civilized world. I was reassigned to a Replacement Depot. These used to be only for newly arriving individual soldiers, but now they were used to collect and hold soldiers pending availability of shipping home. There was an older Sargeant Major there who spotted my 100th Infantry patch and we chatted a long time. When it became known that we were both from the 2nd Bn of the 397th Regt. We looked for more linkages.

The topic focused on the ambush of COL Ellis, our Regimental Commander. All I ever knew about him was that his CP was rumored to be in the basement of a brewery in Baccarat. We were in a hell of a fire fight on a mountainside, trying to cross a firebreak about 40 or 50 yards wide. The first and second attempts were repulsed with heavy casualties. This was where one of our medics went out into this open ground to provide help to the wounded and was shot right through his Red Cross painted helmet. On the third attempt we made it across the cleared fire lane and into the forest beyond. The German artillery did their job and plastered the area we had entered. During the frightful shelling, a Jeep careened up the road and passed us by unable to hear or see us. It was COL Ellis and his driver on their way into an ambush. The Old Sarge told me MAJ Quinn, our battalion CO, was furious with his orders and went back to find COL Ellis. COL Ellis was on his way up to find us and take command. If this is true, it was hushed up to protect the families.

For some reason I can't remember whether my ship departed from Bremerhaven or Le Harve. It was a US Navy troopship, I believe the *General Brooks*. After a couple of days at sea, I was sitting on the deck with my back to the bulkhead when a sailor almost tripped over my feet while I was reading. It was Smokey Samolis. He and I were in the Grafton Street Junior High College Prep course together. Our friendship was even greater than that. We studied beekeeping in classes at the Natural History Museum together. And we were co-owners of a bee hive that we kept in his backyard. One day I dropped a frame and got attacked by the angry bees. I generously donated my portion of ownership to Smokey. It turned out that he was the electrician in charge on this ship. He got a pass for me so that I could go to his office and workshops that were located in the fantail area of the ship. He rarely ever went to the mess because he had his own fridge, hot plate, coffee urn and all the food he wanted. These princely possessions were gifts to him for his services keeping all the kitchen equipment running. His plan for use of the GI Bill were to go to Worcester Polythechnic Institute. Needless to say, the renewal of friendship, the freedom to roam about the ship, access to food and reading materials made this crossing of the Atlantic far more enjoyable. I out

processed quickly and efficiently through Camp Kilmer, NJ and at Fort Devens, MA. I was very happy to be alive and healthy and at home on 22 May 1946. As painful and fearful as it was at many times during my days in the Army, it was priceless in terms of the learning experiences I had. I made many promises to our Lord in times of duress for the gift of survival. I worry that I have not been as faithful to those promises at times. My objectives in life were humble ones in a sense of gratitude and hopes for the future. I was still only 20 years old so the war did not consume too many years. I felt hopeful now that a college education was possible. Also, I was a bit nervous as to whether I could handle it.