

## 22. EVACUATION HOSPITAL

Later that evening, after a doctor examined my leg, I was loaded in an ambulance and driven to the 95th Evacuation Hospital in Epinal, France. Upon arrival they x-rayed my leg and then gave me a shot of morphine. A Chaplain placed a Purple Heart medal on my chest. I fell into a peaceful sleep.

While I was unconscious the surgeons operated on the wound, probed for more shrapnel and cleaned the area. I was carried, still under sedation, to a room and put to bed. I awoke the next morning still groggy from the medications. I was dressed in a white hospital gown, under a white sheet and a white wool blanket. My head was on a white pillowcase. There was one other GI in the white walled room. I turned to nod my head at him and noticed his left arm was in a cast with wire mesh where his hand should be. His hand was missing. I panicked - my reaction was that I was in an amputation ward and they had removed my lower left leg - but I could feel the leg. I lifted the blanket and looked at the leg, it was all there. A wire mesh covered my feet and ankles, keeping the blanket and sheet off my darkened toes – I had the beginning of Trench Foot. In a cold sweat, I laid my head back on the pillow and stared at the white ceiling.

An orderly came into the room and asked me if I wanted to wash up and shave. At this point in my life I did not have much of a beard, so I asked to wash up. The orderly brought me a pan of warm water, soap and a towel. All the comforts of home! A nurse visited me with a shot of Penicillin, the new wonder drug, produced from certain molds and used against a variety of infections. She pointed the needle at me and asked (with a smile) “which cheek”? She meant which side of my butt! That was the initial injection of the white, oily liquid - one shot every four hours for at least a month – day and night. Next, an orderly brought in a breakfast of eggs, bacon, and toast – the works. I was treated like a king.

Later in that first day in the hospital a Red Cross woman volunteer visited me and asked if I wanted her to write a letter for me. These women would write letters for us if we could not or did not feel up to writing. I asked for a V-Mail form and wrote a letter to my family telling as much as possible about my wound and situation. (A copy of my V-Mail letter is included in the snapshots and documents section). Later, near the end of December the Pentagon wrote my parents that I had been severely wounded and was recovering. It took me several letters and my discharge from the hospital system to convince my parents of the truth.

Another Red Cross woman volunteer presented me with a toiletry kit – remember, everything I had on me, except my dog tags, had been removed by hospital personnel and discarded.

Many years later, in 1988, I met a neighbor at a party in Tucson, AZ. We exchanged stories about our WWII experiences. He said he had been in charge of the Blood Clinic of the 95th Evacuation Hospital at Epinal, France in mid-November 1944. He guessed “that he did my blood work before my surgery”. Former S/Sgt. Tom James remains a good friend.

## 23. GENERAL HOSPITAL

After 5 days I was taken by ambulance to the US 100th General Hospital (no connection to the 100th Infantry Division) in Neufchateau, France, about 40 miles northwest of Epinal. This was a large, fully equipped American hospital. After the administration work and a quick



examination I was assigned a bed in a very large room with nearly 100 wounded GIs. About 30 beds lined both sides of the room and a similar row ran down the center of the room. Those who could walk helped the non-walkers. There was never a time when several nurses or male orderlies were not tending to our needs. Every four hours, day and night, I continued to receive a shot of Penicillin. Red Cross women volunteers visited us every day, handing out soap, washcloths, tobacco, candy, writing paper, etc. During my hospitalization I was operated on two more times.

*On the morning of December 10, 1945, while I was recovering in the hospital, the 100th Infantry Division began to attack the great Maginot line fortress of Bitche. The 2nd Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment reached the narrow valley in which the city of Bitche, Camp de Bitche and the College de Bitche were located. As they approached they began to enter the heavily fortified French Maginot Line. The regiment stopped and waited for the rest of the Division to catch up.*

The City of Bitche has established a web site. It can be accessed through the 100th Infantry Division web Site. Scroll down to the menu items and click on "Links". Then scroll down to the City of Bitche pictorial (on the left side of the page) and click on it. When the web site appears, move the mouse pointer to the upper right corner and click on "English". On the next web page click the pictorial "The City of Bitche"; the menu is listed on the left of the next page.

By mid-December I had been confined to a bed for about 30 days. A hospital orderly helped me out of bed, loaded me into a wheelchair and pushed me to a physical therapist. Over the next week or so he taught me how to use crutches and then to walk again.

*On December 16, 1944 a major event began that was about to change the Allies war plans. The German Army launched a massive infantry and armor attack through the Ardennes forest area of Belgium and Luxembourg. In the first few days they destroyed the American Infantry units in front of them and proceeded west toward the English Channel. This attack later became known as the Battle of the Bulge.*

In the hospital we knew nothing of this event. So it came without warning that on December 17th every person in the hospital was restricted to the area. Then we began to hear reports of Germans spies in American uniforms infiltrating the American lines to sabotage facilities. When night fell, we could see a portion of the northern horizon continuously lit up by exploding artillery shells.

*On December 19 US General George Patton turned his US Third Army to face from east to north and attacked the southern flank of the German offensive in the Ardennes. US General Patch stretched his US Seventh Army to the north to fill the vacated portion of the American line. The usual frontage for a US Infantry Division is about 5 miles; the stretched frontage was about 15 miles. The 100th Division had to abandon their bitterly fought gains; the 2nd Battalion, 397th Infantry was ordered to move ten miles west of Bitche to the vicinity of Rohrbach, Guiderkirck and Rimling. Company H and the three rifle companies were part of an outpost line north of Rimling; the German border was close ahead. The remnants of the Maginot line were to their rear; the Division's main line of resistance was to be setup there.*



## 24. DISCHARGE FROM HOSPITAL – DECEMBER 26. 1944

About the 20th of December along with many other recovered GIs, I was informed that I would be discharged from the hospital on December 24 and assigned into the replacement depot system. That system handled American troops on their way back to their units or replacements going up to combat units. Usually it took 2-3 days to complete the paper work and inspections for a soldier to pass through each depot. I was ready to return to Company H.

*December 23 and 24 were quiet for the 2nd Battalion troops on the line Captain Maiale recalls that some men were able to take a bath in a portable tub on a truck. The Company was served hot food and received their first liquor ration, 22 bottles for 95 men and officers. Captain Maiale called the Battalion Commander and asked if he could depend on a quiet night; the answer was yes. He divided up the booze; all of it was gone the next morning. Comment: At 95 men Company H was at 56 percent of full strength.*

On December 24 the Hospital Staff informed us that all discharges from the hospital had been cancelled until the day after Christmas; this delay was to assure that all troops were able to partake of the traditional turkey dinner. Rumors indicated no trucks were available to carry us to a nearby replacement Center; all transportation was involved moving troops to the battle in the Ardennes.

*Christmas day for the 2nd Battalion troops in Rimling and vicinity came with the situation unchanged. The Division was in a defensive posture for the first time since entering combat. The GIs waited for the traditional turkey dinner to be brought up to them in the afternoon. Suddenly, without warning, a large body of German soldiers appeared from behind them, at their left rear. In a short time the German attack threatened to isolate the 2nd Battalion. One company abandoned its turkey dinner, jeep, trailer and food containers. Company H lost two jeeps and abandoned two heavy machine-guns; then withdrew to Rimling and then to Guising, about 1.5 miles further south. Company H had its turkey at midnight and shared it with half the men in the battalion.*

## 25. REPLACEMENT DEPOTS AND HOT COFFEE

On December 26 I was discharged from the 100th General Hospital, certified fit to return to my unit. I began a 12-day trip through 3-4 replacement depots. I was not alone, thousands of American soldiers moved through the major replacement depots every day. Each of us was provided a cot in a warm building or tent and three hot meals. The supply section gave us clean, used wool clothes and boots, as needed. The recreation section provided movies and books, etc. Our medical and dental records were checked. Truck or train transportation was provided to the next depot toward our unit. Rumors ran through the replacement depot: All GIs are to be shipped north to help the Third Army stem the German attack. Each of us secretly (and many verbally) wanted to quickly return to our original units and our buddies.

*Back at the 100th Infantry Division battlefield, the Germans broke off their attack. During the next three-four days the 2nd Battalion, in reserve, had time to prepare their defenses around Rimling and Guising.*



Let's stop the war here for a moment and talk about COFFEE. You should know how important a cup of hot coffee is to a cold, stiff, freezing soldier at the beginning of a morning in the middle of winter, even one who is in the replacement depot system. I want to tell you how to brew the best tasting cup of coffee – at least the procedure we used. Standing outside our tent, in the cold blowing snow, a couple of us kindled a roaring fire, then set a #10 can (similar to a 3-pound coffee can) almost filled with cold water in the fire and brought the water to a boil. We stood around the fire in the warm smoke, stomping our freezing feet, and smoking a cigarette. Then one of us would take a hand full of ground coffee, more or less, and slowly drop it into the boiling water and wait for the water to boil again. Next we lifted the can away from the fire without burning our hands or spilling that great smelling brew, set it on the frozen ground and poured some cold water gently into the top of the boiling water. That caused the coffee grounds to settle to the bottom. Now we filled our aluminum canteen cup up to the brim with that delicious smelling coal-black liquid and tried to sip it without burning our lips, tongue and throat. Awesome! The greatest cup of coffee in the world! Now let's return to the war.

On New Year's eve the first major snowstorm of the winter covered much of the European battlefield with nearly a foot of new snow. The snow continued falling on and off for the next three weeks and the temperature dropped below freezing and held there. I recall the cold, snowy weather, but moving through the replacement depots I was not exposed it very often.

## 26. OPERATION NORDWIND

*What the American commanders did not know was that the Germans were setting up for their last major offensive in the West named NORDWIND (Northwind). It was to begin January 1, 1945. This German attack would result in bitter fighting during the worst winter in Europe in twenty years. Ambrose (p.386-388) wrote that fifteen American Divisions with 250,000 men were involved. The fighting ranged over a front that extended nearly 100 miles roughly along the Germany-France border from Saarbrücken to south of Strasbourg. The battle cost the Seventh US American army 11,609 battle casualties, including 7,000 dead, plus over 2,800 cases of trench foot. German losses were around 23,000 battle casualties; almost 6,000 soldiers were processed as POWs.*

For a large-scale map of Operation NORWIND, go to the division web site and click on the menu button "Historical Overview". Then click "Next" on the lower left of the next eight pages to the page titled "Operation NORDWIND in the Low Vosges" 1-7 January 1945. Elements of the 397th Regiment were defending the town of Rimling, which is located in the vicinity of the second "e" in "Sarreguemines".

(Another large-scale map is included in the snapshots and documents section. Rimling is located in the left center of the map. Note the important road network around the town. The French/German border is shown as a heavy dark line about 3 miles north of Rimling).

*There was little indication that the US Seventh Army would be attacked that cold, dark night. Out of the howling blizzard came yelling, screaming, hopped up German soldiers and their tanks. They attacked in three prongs along 50 miles of the northern border of France and three more prongs across the French eastern border, extending south to Strasbourg and Colmar. The objective of these six separate attacks was to converge on the Saverne Pass area*



*northeast of Strasbourg, thus pinching off the Sixth Army part (the 100th, 44th and 45th Infantry divisions) of the US Seventh Army in the Vosges Mountains in northeastern France. Then they planned to drive west, dividing the Allies forces in France in half. Hitler thought this would cause the US Third Army, under General George S. Patton, to withdraw his troops, which were attacking north toward the south flank of the Bulge.*

*By the end of 1 January 1945, the German forces had not made a decisive breakthrough between Sarreguemines and Rimling. However, the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division had forced the 44th Infantry Division to retreat more than a mile and captured hundreds of American prisoners. This action exposed the troops of the 3rd Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment, who now held the ground on the extreme left of the division.*

For another detailed map go to the division web site and click on the menu button “The 100th in Combat”. On the following page click on “Holding the Line Against NORDWIND, 1-7 January 1945”. Note the location of the towns of Rimling and Guising in the upper left corner; Bitche is located in the center of the right portion of the map. Also note the dotted lines showing German advances from 31 December to 2 January. (The “Final Plan for the NORDWIND Offensive in the vicinity of the 100th Infantry Division Sector” is shown in the snapshots and documents section).

*General Eisenhower ordered the U. S. Sixth Army Group to shorten its lines. The possibility of withdrawal from the Vosges mountains, which included the city of Strasbourg, caused French General de Gaulle and Prime Minister Winston Churchill to call for a meeting with General Eisenhower. General de Gaulle would not allow French territory to be given back to the Germans. In the end, Eisenhower changed the orders. De Gaulle had won. The orders were changed during the afternoon of January 3. The American troops were told to hold at all costs.*

*During the dark hours of January 5th and 6th, the 2nd Battalion moved forward to take over the positions in Rimling. Rifle companies E and F, and two machine gun crews from Company H spread out over Schlietzen hill north and west of Rimling. The remaining Company H machine gun crews moved into the middle of the town, and the 81-mm mortar platoon set up in a stream bed about 150 yards southeast of the town. As the day lengthened the 2nd Battalion troops gradually began to feel they were in a trap. Then they received the command to hold at all costs. Captain Maiale began to “feel the hour for which I had been born was approaching”.*

Early in the morning of January 6th, the 12th day of my journey from the hospital to my company, about 10 of us were loaded on trucks and driven to the 100th Division HQ. I spent the day in the vicinity of Division HQ along with a group of other wounded returning to their unit and some new, green troops destined as replacements to the rifle companies.

## **27. GUIRING, FR – RETURN TO COMPANY H - JANUARY 7**

After a hot breakfast, five of us were moved by truck to HQ, 397th Infantry Regiment. We sat around a few hours while our records were checked. When we were cleared to return to our units, we loaded onto trucks and were taken to our battalion or company HQ. I reported in at Company H HQ in Guising, France. The Company Clerk took my records and told me that I was the first wounded in action (WIA) that had been hospitalized to return to the company.



He also told me to report to the supply sergeant for new, clean, warmer clothing; a new sleeping bag and ShoePacs. Finally, I was to check with the cooks for something to eat and a ride up to the Company H Forward HQ in a town called Rimling.

I asked the Company Clerk for news of what had happened to the Company since I was hit. He began the story with, "Your machine gun section was wiped out in mid-November." A couple of days after I was hit, the 1st and 2nd Squads of my platoon were closely following two attacking rifle companies up a steep, forested hill. If I had I been there, my position would have been near the front of the 2nd Squad, in the middle of a line of about 15 men, who were carrying heavy machine guns, tripods and ammunition. The two rifle companies veered away from each other leaving a wide-open space. German Infantrymen counterattacked and ran headlong into the heavily burdened machine gun section. The two American machine gun crews set up their weapons but the Germans quickly continued down the hill, firing their rifles and machine pistols, and tossing grenades as they ran. Two men at the rear of the 2nd Squad turned to run down the hill. Five bullets hit Pfc. Lloyd Barnhouse; Pfc. Carl Birkhofer, the last in line, was not hit. He reported the terrible event to Captain Maiale.

In a few, short seconds almost all of my buddies and close friends were dead. Pfc. Owen Lindsey, who took my position as first gunner when I was wounded, was hit by five bullets and died while drawing his pistol. He was one week away from his 19th birthday. I was too stunned to talk. I walked outside to be by myself and wipe tears from my eyes.

*Years later Captain Maiale wrote that "this day (November 19, 1945) shall live in my mind as one of the bitterest memories of my life. To see six of my men dead around their two machine guns and around them about twelve men from Company E, also dead, was almost more than I could bear. They were in various attitudes (positions) of resistance. One boy still had his hand on the machine gun trigger. He was shot through the head. One still had his hands raised, I suppose he had tried to surrender. They never had a chance. When I finally made the rounds and identified the dead, I found that eight men were apparently captured, six were dead and two were wounded among my missing machine gun section." After Captain Maiale identified the bodies he sat down and cried. He cared very much for every one of us. This may have been the first time he cried for us, but certainly not the last.*

The Silver Star Medal was later awarded for "Gallantry in Action" to: S/ Sgt. Warren H. Bassett (Posthumously), Sgt. John A. Koval (Posthumously), Pfc. Owen L. Lindsay (Posthumously), Pfc. Lloyd C. Barnhouse, Pvt. Carl Birkhofer and, (although my memory is hazy) Pvt. Nile T. Shope (Posthumously). S/Sgt. Bassett was my section leader; the others were in my squad.

After an hour or so, I reported to the Supply Room. The supply sergeant issued me new clothes, a rifle, a pistol, ammunition, a new sleeping bag and other equipment. As he handed me the sleeping bag he mentioned that a 25-man section - half of the 2nd Platoon - was captured one night in their sleeping bags. The next morning all of their equipment was found scattered around on the ground. The 25 men were missing and presumed Prisoners of War. He speculated that they did not get out of their sleeping bags fast enough to confront a German Patrol. We wondered who was on guard duty that night.



The cooks came into the Supply Room while we were talking and offered me a meal before they took the hot meal of the day to the company in Rimling. I carried my new clothes, rifle, pistol and other equipment across the street, through the water puddles, mud, slush and snow, into a partially destroyed house. After dropping my new gear, I went to the kitchen area for a meal. After eating I slept for an hour. About 3 PM I awoke and dressed with:

- cotton undershorts, a cotton T-shirt, then upper and lower wool long johns;
- a khaki shirt and khaki pants, next a wool shirt and wool pants;
- cotton socks, then wool socks and lined, waterproof green field pants;
- ShoePacs with wool liners;
- a wool fur vest, then a waterproof green field jacket;
- a wool cap, under a plastic helmet liner, inside a steel helmet;
- a knee length, wool-lined parka (white outside and sand colored inside);

I buckled my cartridge belt, loaded with .30-caliber rifle ammunition, around my waist. Then, slung my pistol belt with my attached loaded .45-caliber pistol and holster, additional filled ammunition clips, filled canteen, trench knife and first aid kit, over my head and shoulder. Next, I pulled on my wool gloves and then, finally, my leather gloves. These gloves were similar to hunters' gloves: three fingers (the middle, ring and little) were covered in a conventional mitten fashion while the thumb and trigger fingers were covered in a conventional finger fashion).

I flipped up the white parka hood. I felt and probably looked like a big teddy bear. The temperature outside was a few degrees below freezing. Snow fell intermittently to a depth of 2 –3 feet, drifting to 6 feet deep.

I walked across the road filled with icy mud puddles to the kitchen and helped load the heavy insulated cans of food and water into a jeep. Our chief cook handed me 4-5 boxes of K rations for my personal use. I stuffed them in my field jacket and pants pockets. He motioned me to sit in the raised back seat; I cradled my M-1 Rifle in my lap. The canvas top was folded down; the wind and snow plastered our faces.

## **28. RIMLING, FR – JANUARY 7, 1945**

We proceeded slowly in low gear and in four wheel drive, through the silent woods and open fields, on a dirt, snow covered, country road. The sky was covered with heavy, low, gray clouds. The cooks told me about recent events: The Germans had attacked the 397th Infantry Regiment in Rimling on New Years day with tanks and infantry and had been repulsed. The 44th Infantry Division, stationed on our immediate left flank, had been pushed back. This left our flank open. A couple of days ago our battalion (Companies E, F, G, and H) had moved into and around Rimling, the most advanced left section of the 100th Division's position. Because of recent losses our battalion and company strength was about 50 %, probably less now. Another attack was expected on our position at any time. The 2nd Platoon of Company E, located west of Rimling was cut off and could not be supplied with food, water or ammunition. To the south, Company G had beaten off enemy infantry and tank advances. Officially this day was written up as a day of limited enemy activity.



As we climbed up a slight rise the Jeep driver commented, "Every time we drive over this flat high area and over the next hilltop, they plaster us with 88-mm artillery fire". I thought, drive fast! The driver moved as fast as possible over the slippery, icy, snow covered road. The Germans did not fire at us. We drove down a long, gently slopping hill into the southwest corner of Rimling, stopped behind a damaged house and made a radio call to the company telling them that we were coming in with food.

Rimling was a typical, very old, small, rural, farming town that had been either German or French for hundreds of years, depending which country had won the last war. There was an assortment of gray stone buildings, barns, houses, shops, sheds and other structures squeezed between each other; all jammed haphazardly together with narrow winding streets and alleys. A church with a tall steeple was located near the main intersection. Everything was buried under a foot of snow. I could not hear any sound except the Jeep engine. The town appeared deserted, empty and unoccupied. Many of the homes and buildings were partially or totally destroyed. The snow cover hid much of the damage. Where were our people? Where were the civilians?

It was late afternoon when we came to a road intersection, drove past a large barn on the right, then turned to the right around the backside of the barn. We headed straight toward a machine gun pointed at us from a large, first floor window. After we stopped several bundled up GI's came out from the front door and helped unloaded the food canisters and water. The Jeep driver pointed me to the front door. I walked into an entrance hallway and was directed down the steps to the cellar and into almost total darkness. Somebody pointed me to my Company Commander.

I reported to Captain Maiale and Lieutenant Laudone. A small candle burned on a box at their side. They motioned for me to sit on the steps. Captain Maiale asked me about my wound and recovery. He said he was glad to have me back. He pointed toward the corners of the cellar and said "Those are civilians, those are German prisoners (both groups of bundled up people looked like sacks of potatoes), and that is where we sleep". He commented that he was very sorry about my friends and buddies, who were killed in November, that we had lost quite a few men. He pulled out a map, pointed to north, then to our location and then showed me the main road network.

Basically, the town was built inside and around a rectangle (less than a half-mile on each side) formed by four main roads. Three dirt roads met near the southwest corner of Rimling, one from Guising (which we had taken to bring up the food), another from Gros Rederching, while the third, running west to east, was the southern side of the rectangle. The Guising (or western road forming the triangle) continued north, intersecting with the road forming the northern side of the rectangle, then continued further north, toward Germany, curving west around Schlietzen hill. A half-mile to the east the northern road intersected with a north-south road, the eastern side of the rectangle. About a mile further east the main road to the east from Rimling intersects with the road north to Guderkirch and south to Bettviller. The importance of Rimling is that many roads converge on it. Also, the Germany-France border is only several miles north of Rimling.

Captain Maiale pointed on the map to the house where we were located and to the close-by house occupied by Company F. He explained that the most forward troops of the 397th



Infantry Regiment, those guarding the open left flank of the division, were positioned in foxholes north and west of Rimling on Schlietzen Hill. That bare hilltop was the highest in the area and commanded all the ground to the north and west. To the south it extended in a long series of ridges running past Guising almost to Rohrbach. He also pointed to where our machine guns were located on Schlietzen hill and to the position of Company F riflemen. One rifle platoon was along the north road out of Rimling, a second platoon was in a north-south direction, west of the previous platoon, protecting our left flank and a third platoon was closer to town on the ridge parallel to the road forming the western side of the rectangle.

Our machine guns supported the forward rifle platoons and were set up in foxholes just behind them. A platoon from Companies E and G were spread out further south along the west side of Rimling on the Schlietzen ridge; two rifle platoons from Company L, 3rd Battalion were stationed on the flatter land east of Rimling. I was told later that these platoons were also at less than 50% strength.

Captain Maiale then pointed to the streambed where the Company H mortars were located, about 150 yards past the southeast edge of the town. This position was selected to guard the battalion rear area and provide support for the forward rifle companies. He commented that the Germans had kept the town, and particularly our positions, under artillery fire since early morning.

He finally asked me if I was ready to go up on the hill to our machine gun positions. I said, "Yes". I did not believe I had a choice! He told me to get ready to leave the house in about an hour after dark. I spent the time talking to the 8-10 Company H GIs manning 3 machine gun positions in the three-story house. I picked up my rifle and ammunition and checked for my K rations.

## **29. SCHLIETZEN HILL**

When the 6-man detail assembled, I noticed our Medic, "Beezer" Lombardi was going up on the hill with us. We took a moment to talk about the day I was hit; he had attended me. Our Platoon Sergeant Pasquale (Pat) Miele said, "Let's go",

We followed each other out of the house with 5 yards of space between us, pushing through the snow into the widening farmyard. T/Sgt. Miele turned right, passing the Company F CP. The house looked unoccupied. I wondered how many American rifles were pointed at us. Empty houses lined both sides of the road. I wondered about German snipers, but decided not to ask. The road continued north, rising slightly, along the sloping east side of Schlietzen hill. After 75-100 yards we came to the edge of town and turned to the left. We moved slowly up the hill, pushing through the snow and the drifts along what T/Sgt. Miele thought was a path, trail or dirt road. I do not remember trees, perhaps a few bushes. The quiet was total except for an occasional shell burst and a slight wind. Nobody talked.

We reached the upper portion of the ridge and crossed over the bare hilltop. No trees or bushes, just snow, this made for a clean field of fire for our guns. The snow was at least a foot deep. T/Sgt. Miele pointed to a six-foot diameter slight dip in the frozen ground; it appeared to be a bowl shaped shallow depression caused by the explosion of a block of TNT or a large shell. The position was unoccupied. I wondered why? Then I noticed that a white cloth



covered the gun, which was pointed toward the north. T/Sgt. Miele pointed north and said that several Company F riflemen were out there, between us and the snow covered, unlocatable road crossing our front. More riflemen from Companies E, F and G were guarding our left (west) flank. I thought, if the Germans attack with tanks they can easily break through these positions. I crawled into the depression and settled on the snow.

My foxhole buddy and I checked the machine gun - it was ready. My buddy said he would take the first hour of guard duty. I looked straight ahead, toward the north, toward Germany, wondering how far? The snow-covered, gently rolling ground fell off into what looked like a shallow valley. I looked more closely for the road that ran north and then to the west from Rimling. The map that Captain Maiale showed me indicated that as the road cleared the northwest side of Rimling it turned to the west and ran along the front of our position. I could not see the road. Clouds blew in from the south, behind me. It started to snow. I was cold and wet lying on the snow. I flopped on to my other side in the snow but could not sleep. I must have fallen asleep because my foxhole buddy shook me awake for my hour of guard duty. Later, the snow stopped falling, we could see about a half-mile, nothing but black fence posts sticking out of the snow cover, nothing moved.

### **30. GERMAN ATTACK ON SCHLIETZEN HILL - JANUARY 8**

About 1 AM a German soldier began to fire his Machine Pistol across our front, from right to left. We called that weapon a "burp gun" because it fired at a rate of 700 bullets each minute. Many of the rounds were tracers, bullets containing phosphorus, which burned in the presence of oxygen; they made a blazing light streak in the dark night sky.

The clouds moved away from the moon. The GI beside me woke up from the noise; we watched and listened. The firing stopped. The countryside became silent. Nothing moved. The firing started again. Clouds covered the moon. Time passed.

A tank engine started; the sound came from our right front, toward the German lines. After a few minutes, the engine noise slowly began to move from my right front toward my left. Was the tank following the road around the side of the hill? We could not see the tank or the road. I knew that a wide open, unguarded area existed out there to our left. Our line stopped just a short, but unknown distance to my left. During our briefing before heading up on the hill we were told that Company F had two platoons stationed in front of our guns and also to our left. T/Sgt. Miele told us several riflemen were in those positions. We could not see them. How far to our left were the riflemen? The situation seemed to be that we were alone. Our machine guns were useless against a tank; we could probably handle the infantry, but not the tank.

A heavy snow squall blew over us obliterating our view. We waited, listening to the slow progress of the tank to our left side. Where was the tank headed? Then German artillery and rockets began to explode all over our hilltop. I wondered why the Germans were sending only one tank if they are attacking us? Were the snowdrifts deep enough to bog him down or cause him to slip and lose traction? The noise of the tank kept slowly moving to our left front and then made a turn to our left side, around to our left flank. How far out there on our left was he?



Artillery and rocket fire continued to crash into our hill top position. I told the GI beside me to be alert; perhaps the tank would bypass us and move further south, behind us into Rimling. Also, that I was going to inform our sergeant and our medic of our observations. I grabbed my .45-caliber pistol and pistol belt with two clips of ammunition (leaving the M-1 Rifle in the foxhole), turned to my right and followed the crest of the hill, stumbling toward the east through the snow toward T/Sgt. Miale's foxhole.

I watched the firing across our front, expecting German soldiers to fire toward us. The moving tank sound continued from behind me. I found the foxhole and called for T/Sgt. Miele. He said that he had heard the tank moving and told me to go back to my position. I started back toward my foxhole, struggling through the snowdrifts and the windy snowstorm.

### **31. TANK ATTACK**

As I approached our foxhole, a large, black tank suddenly emerged out of the snowstorm, firing his machine gun. I could see flashes and fire from the muzzle; it was pointed in my direction. Then 8–10 German Infantrymen, clothed in their long gray overcoats came out of the snowstorm, close to both sides of the tank, firing their rifles. The machine gun on the tank turned to fire directly at me; I could hear the bullets pop and snap as they passed my head.

I dropped into the snow and observed for a moment; noting that more German infantry were spreading out behind the tank. I decided to return to T/Sgt. Miale's foxhole. I turned around and pushed through the snow, away from the tank and infantry. Where was that foxhole? I stepped off an embankment and fell off into space, rolling head over feet, finally stopping in a snow bank. I lay still listening. There was no noise; the artillery and rocket fire had stopped. What was happening up on the top of the hill? I slowly got on my feet and looked around. Nothing moved. I looked for a tree, mound or something to get behind. The snow made a smooth surface, hiding any cover. Had everybody on the hilltop been captured or killed? I turned toward the town; no buildings were in sight, only blinding snow. I waited for a sound or noise. Time passed.

The snowstorm stopped; now a strong, steady wind blew across the area. I started down the sloping hillside in front of me, slipping and sliding, pushing slowly through 2–3 feet of drifting snow, looking for a road or path leading into Rimling. I wondered if I was moving toward the town or to the left and away from the town, toward the German position? Suddenly a parachute flare exploded behind me, toward my right side. The harsh, dazzling light created full daylight. I stopped and stood still, lowered my face into my chest and pushed my dark gloves and pistol belt into my crotch.

I was completely covered by the white parka; except for the black ShoePacs, but they were covered over by the snow on the ground. I knew I blended into the snow-covered landscape and, to an observing German soldier, I looked like a broken tree trunk. I did not hear any rifle or tank fire on or from the hilltop. No sound, only the wind blowing the crackling flare. The flare crossed over my head, carried by the wind, and finally fizzled out. I slowly sunk down into the snow, listening. Nothing moved; except for the wind, I heard no sounds. I slowly stood up on my feet and stumbled further down the hill.



I slipped and fell into a depression in the snow; I had found road or path leading down the hill into Rimling. I stopped again, listening, and turned completely around looking for any movement. Nothing moved. Where were our riflemen and machine gunners from the hilltop? Where was the German tank and infantrymen? I figured that the tank and infantry had stopped on the hilltop to capture the American troops and their weapons. Was I the only one who escaped? Why is it so quiet? A heavy snow squall began, again limiting my distance vision. I turned to my right, toward the town and followed the depression in the snow down the slight slope. I began to hear the sound of battle ahead of me.

*Later Captain Maiale wrote, "...wave after wave of German Infantry hit us up on the hill and overran our foxholes. Company F Infantrymen were overrun by the first wave and the few who survived withdrew to the town. The attack in town began without warning about 3 AM. The Germans came with tanks and infantry".* Later we were told that our battalion position on the hill and in town was attacked by an estimated 200 German infantrymen supported by 10–14 tanks.

Walking cautiously south toward the Company H CP and the sounds of battle, I came upon a small wooden shed on my left. The shed partially hid a US 57-mm anti-tank gun, which was pointed toward me. I froze in my tracks but nobody was in sight or ordered me to halt. I did not remember seeing that gun as we walked up the hillside. Was I on the wrong road? I moved slowly past the gun noting the breech was open and damaged. I moved forward about 15 yards toward the first house on my left, slowly, at full alert, with drawn pistol.

## **32. TAKING COVER IN A HOUSE**

The two-story house was built of native stone; the walls were several feet thick. A large window faced west, toward the street. There was a 3-foot diameter hole in the north wall, which faced me, created by a shell explosion. I decided to take cover in the house. When I was about 5 feet from the house a firm voice quietly said, "Halt". I stopped dead in my tracks. The voice gave the daily password – like "Star", I said, "Burst". The voice said, "Come in". I climbed up into the hole. Someone grabbed me and jerked me forcefully into the room and pushed me to the floor. A voice said, "What's your name and outfit" I said "Eckard, H, 397th". A voice, which could only be from T/Sgt. Pat Miele, hissed, "Eckard, sit down over there (pointing to a corner) and be quiet". Another voice asked what weapons I had. I replied, "A 45". He said "Dam! That makes nine of us, and only one M-1 rifle, a couple of carbines and a couple of pistols". Later, someone told me the man speaking was 2nd Lieutenant Frank Rosse from Company F.

As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I counted nine GIs. I knew only one, T/Sgt. Miele, my Platoon Sergeant. What had happened to the riflemen and my fellow machine gunners on the hilltop? I wondered what units the other GIs in this room belonged to? I was glad to be among friendlies. I dug my chin down into my chest, huddled my body into a ball, closed my eyes, shut down my brain and rested. We sat quietly, waiting, listening to the sounds of an infantry-tank battle from down the road toward the Company F and H CP's in the town, perhaps 75 yards away. We continued to huddle along the walls of the room, staying away from openings where we could be seen. We watched out the windows – waiting. Something moved behind the house across the street. German infantry, carrying rifles, machine guns and mortars moved in a line toward the firefight.



Time passed. We could hear German tanks joining in the battle around the Company CPs. We watched the German infantry silently walk behind the houses on the other side of the street toward the fighting. I thought that if we did not take some action we might be cut off. However, that would be foolish; we did not have the weapons or men to engage the German infantry or tanks. So we sat, watching and waiting - maybe something will happen?

### **33. ANOTHER TANK APPROACHES**

Then we heard the noise of a tank coming toward us, down the road I had walked from Schlietzen Hill. In a short time he came into view, a big black blob, moving very cautiously down the road toward our house. We could hear his radio transmissions but could not understand the German words. He stopped at 10-15 yards from the house, near the 57-mm anti-tank gun, and rotated his turret so that the long artillery weapon pointed at the hole in the wall. He sat buttoned up. We could not see any German infantrymen around or behind the tank.

We sat quietly; nobody moved. I wondered when he would fire into the room and bring the house down upon us. We heard more tank artillery fire down the street in the area of our Company CP. I could hear our 81-mm mortar shells hitting in the streets outside our building and near our Company CP. We waited in absolute quiet, giving the tank the first move. His radio crackled with orders. Finally, the tank slowly retreated back up the road out of sight. We began to breathe again.

Lieutenant Rosse decided to leave our house and work his way to the Company F CP through the back yards of the houses on our side of the street. He ordered us to stay in this house until he returned. Then he climbed out of the hole in the wall and disappeared around the back of the house into the snowstorm.

The battle down the street intensified and then suddenly stopped. Everything became quiet. We sat quietly not knowing the fate of the GIs down the street. We watched for German infantry and snipers in the houses across the street? We waited for something to happen.

### **34. DAWN – JANUARY 8**

The heavy cloud cover began to dissipate; the first gray light of dawn showed and the morning sun shined through. The temperature remained well below freezing. Time passed. We sat in the house waiting for Lieutenant Rosse to return. We could smell the smoke from burning houses and barns. Nobody talked.

Suddenly the quiet around us was broken by a voice yelling something from the direction of the F Company CP. We waited, hunched back into the shadows in the corners of the room. He was yelling in German, in a loud voice, “come out with your hands up”. One of the GIs in our group crawled across the floor and looked out the window. He reported one lone American soldier, carrying a submachine gun, yelling toward the houses on the other side of the street. He was walking in the middle of the road with no protection or cover. Why didn't the Germans fire at him? We watched as 30-40 armed German infantrymen filed out of the houses, with their weapons held over their heads and stood in the street. Several other GI's from a patrol walked up the street to assist that lone GI - T/Sgt. Charles F. Carey, from the



## 2nd Battalion Anti-Tank Platoon.

One of the people in our house yelled, “Hey, we have a bunch of GIs in here”. By that time several GIs from T/Sgt. Carey’s patrol had walked further up the street toward us. They motioned us to come out while the others guarded the German prisoners.

As we exited through the hole in the wall and began to walk down the street, one of our group called “Here’s Lieutenant Rosse”. Several of us walked over to the snow covered body lying on the doorstep of the house next door to where we had hidden. He was shot through the forehead, probably by a sniper from one of the houses across the street. He died within 10 feet of returning to help us. He is buried in the American Cemetery at Epinal, France. I have visited his grave three times.

Lieutenant Rosse was later posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal for “Gallantry in Action” during the period January 5 – 8, 1945.

T/Sgt. Carey called us over to the German prisoners. He told us to search them. We removed their helmets and tossed them into the deep snow. Then we searched their clothes and threw all weapons, knives and personal stuff into nearby snow banks. T/Sgt. Carey ordered the prisoners to be marched down the street to the Company H and F CPs. We split the prisoners in half and about 20 were taken into the Company H CP and moved down the cellar steps. One of our German speaking GIs told them to sit down and be quiet. Our German prisoners outnumbered the American GIs. Later that day the prisoners were moved to Battalion HQ for interrogation.

*Captain Maiale* wrote about these events...“In one of the buildings near me a sniper was taking pot shots. There was a building across the street from me with no doors or windows visible to me. We suspected there were Germans in there. I took a bazooka and put two rounds through the walls where I thought the 1st and 2nd floor were. Then I had my machine guns put 250 rounds through each hole. Then my American Jew, Herbert Harvey, called out to them in German to come out, hands high. They began to trickle out. T/Sgt. Carey and his men were a big help to me then. There were only 15 or so Company H men and before the exodus was complete 47 Germans had surrendered. Between Carey and Company H we made up a Guard Detail and sent the POW's to battalion HQ”.

## 35. RETURN TO THE COMPANY H CP

I returned to our Company CP and reported for duty. Our officers and sergeants had conferred and made new assignments for the four heavy machine guns. One was set on each of the three floors of the house; the other gun was set in a large barn at the road intersection leading to Gros Rederching and Guising. Our defensive position had the shape of a triangle with 150-foot sides. The machine gun crew in the barn occupied one corner, the riflemen in the Company F CP another corner and the machine gunners in the Company H CP the other corner. I was assigned to the machine gun sitting in the living room, guarding the front, right and left ground level of our position. Other men were ordered to the two machine guns at windows on floors above me.



There were two windows and two doors in the living room. The main field of fire was in a western direction, through the 5-foot wide by 4-foot high window, into the front yard and to the 150-foot length of the Guising Road located at the far end of the yard. Stone and wooden farm buildings restricted my field of fire on both sides of the front yard. The far side of Guising Road was lined with houses built on the hillside, behind an eight-foot high stone retaining wall. I also had a good field of fire out the window to the road and buildings on my left. To my right, through a door was a hallway, opening to the front door of the house and the stairs leading down to the cellar. To my rear a door opened to what might have been a dining room.

The second floor gun and the attic gun were set to cover the Guising road. The Germans parked their tanks in a stone quarry southwest of town along the Gros Rederching road. The attic gun also covered a footpath used by the German soldiers to move into Rimling from the quarry area.

Our most forward gun was located outside of the house in a barn at the far-left corner of the yard. The barn sat on the northeast corner of the intersection of the Guising road and the road along the south of Rimling. The men assigned to man the machine gun in the barn were Pfc. Robert Gorell, from Alma, CA, as First Gunner; Pfc. Ellis Hall, from Granite Falls, NC, as Second Gunner and a third man, (name unknown) as ammunition bearer. Pfc. Gorell was Captain Maiale's messenger, flag bearer, bugler and also, a close friend of mine. Pfc. Hall served as the Captain's Jeep driver. Their orders were to stop any tanks or infantry coming toward the intersection from the stone quarry. They set up their machine gun to face the intersection and the road leading from the stone quarry. From my position, in the front room of the Company H CP, I could only see the backside of the barn.

The riflemen of Company F CP protected those men in the barn and the Company H CP. They were located in a house at the far right corner of the yard in my field of fire on the Guising Road, probably 150 feet away. Only a few riflemen were available; most had been captured up on the hill in the initial attack.

We waited for the next tank and infantry attack. German tank engines started with a heavy roar from the direction of the stone quarry. We were too physically exhausted to contemplate what could happen next. We did not have much time to wait.

### **36. ANOTHER TANK AND INFANTRY ATTACK**

The next attack began about 11 AM; tanks and infantry came from the stone quarry and moved first toward Gorell and Hall. Some infantrymen rode on the tanks, while others moved along the side of the tanks to protect them. I fired at German infantry moving behind the houses on the far side of the Guising Road and as they moved into the houses across the street in front of me. They were threatening both CPs.

Hall and Gorell watched the lead tank and infantry move toward the intersection; they opened fire. The tank crews returned fire with their machine gun at point blank range, slightly wounding both Hall and Gorell. The tank was also under fire from the Company F CP. The tank crew began to return fire at that house, perhaps 150 feet away. I watched the German tank artillery shells, from my position, as they flew across the yard opening in front of me,



along Guising Road.

As the tank moved toward the intersection, Hall continued to fire his machine gun from the barn, and Gorell sprayed the area with a submachine gun. The German foot troops scrambled to find cover. One of them was able to throw a grenade into the barn wounding the Co H ammunition bearer. The explosion blew manure, straw and debris over the gun and the men. The machine gun stopped firing. The lead tank turned east down the road toward the Bettviller – Guderkirch intersection. If he continued he would pass the south side of our house. Those of us in the Company H CP followed this tank's movements by the sound of his engine, at the same time we fired on any German infantry who exposed themselves.

German Infantrymen also come at us from the north, down the Guising Road from Schlietzen hill taking the Company F CP defenders under attack. All of our machine guns were firing as other GIs fired their rifles and carbines. Upon direct orders from Captain Maiale our 81-mm mortars, which were set up southeast of the town, and our Regimental Field Artillery fired continuously at our house, and into the barnyards and nearby streets. Germans snipers continued to fire at any target in our building. I lobbed a hand grenade through the front window, but cannot remember the target. I was too busy to be afraid.

Another tank now moved forward, taking the street intersection position that the first tank had just left. Although Hall and Gorell were now almost surrounded, they choose not to leave by their escape route. Instead they cleaned off the gun and began firing on the second tank. The tank then tried to swing around to fire on the barn, but the street was too narrow for this maneuver. Then the German infantry rushed the barn in an attempt to take the machine gun by force. Hall and Gorell fired at point-blank range; killed eight and drove off the rest. But one of the German soldiers threw another grenade, which caused a heavy barn door to fall on the two men. Once more hay and debris showered over them.

Those of us in the Company CP could only wonder at the silence as the machine gun stopped firing. Nobody in our house could see the other end of the barn where Hall and Gorell had set up the gun. Furthermore, we could not see the intersection; the barn and some closer buildings blocked our view. Neither could we cross the yard nor go around the other buildings because German snipers were active. We waited for the machine gun to begin firing again.

### **37. TIGAR TANK ATTACK ON “OUR HOUSE”**

Our artillery and mortars continued to fire at the intersection and our house. I could hear at least one tank creeping through the buildings and backyards to my left, out of my line of sight and fire. The tank was slowly moving forward, feeling his way, looking for us. In the room behind me, Lieutenant Laudone and two sergeants were at a better position to look through a window to see the tank. I turned and asked them if they could see the tank; they shook their head – “no”. They told me to watch out the window on my left while they frantically attempted to snap the two halves of a 2.35-inch diameter rocket launcher together.

In the early 1990's, at a convention of the 100th Infantry Division, I talked to Lieutenant Laudone about this tank battle. He recalled that the latch on the rocket launcher was broken, that they had assembled the rocket launcher by taping the two halves together. He also commented he had only two Bazooka rounds left to fire.



Lieutenant Laudone and the two sergeants had just managed to tape the two halves together when a Tiger tank appeared from behind a shed, creeping up on the left side of our house. A black Tiger tank was something to behold. It was monstrous, dwarfing American and British tanks. Goose bumps rose on my arms. I could feel the hair crawling on the nape of my neck. The only noise was artillery and mortar shells exploding and the growling tank engine.

The Tiger series of tanks weighted 55 tons, were armored with an 88-mm gun, several machine-guns and had a crew of 5 men. They were protected by armor varying between 10 to 39 inches thick in their front, and moved on 30-inch wide treads. They were powered by a 700-hp motor, which would drive them at about 23 miles per hour. The tank sat there about 10 yards from the southwest corner of our house; most of the tank's body was hidden from me by an old wooden building located between the tank and our house. The tank commander knew we were in the immediate area but was not sure exactly where. From the angle the tank approached the house I could see only about 3 - 4 feet of the long barrel of the 88-mm gun and a foot or so of the right front corner (the far side) of the tank. The tank was slowly bouncing on his springs, up and down. I will never forget the picture of the 88-mm gun bouncing an inch or two, up and down, then, up and down. (A drawing of a Tiger tank by Bill Mauldin, in his famous Willie & Joe cartoon and a frontal picture of a Tiger tank are included in the snapshots and documents section).

One of the sergeants whispered, "wait until he moves closer to us, so the full boggy wheel and some of the tread is exposed." The tank slowly moved forward, the gunner rotated the 88-mm gun directly at our house, then toward my window, then pointed the gun directly at my room, at me. The 88-mm gun looked like a long, telephone pole sticking out of the tank turret. Was he preparing to fire? What should I do? I began to shrivel into myself to present a smaller target. I have laughed at my actions in this engagement many times over the last half century. If the tank had fired a round or two, he probably would have brought the house down on us, perhaps starting a fire, which could have driven us outside, if we were still live.

The tank moved forward a few more feet; the 88-mm gun still pointed at me. Could that gunner see me in this room? I slowly turned my head and looked at Lieutenant Laudone and the others. They had taped the two halves of the rocket launcher together and were loading an 18-inch long rocket into the rear of the launcher. Lieutenant Laudone wound the wires from the rocket to the battery in the launcher and tapped the sergeant on the helmet. The rocket was ready to launch. The sergeant took aim through the window at the unprotected boggy wheel and tread. I was sure the tank was only a few feet away from us, outside the window, but it must have been about 8 - 10 yards. A moment before the rocket was fired, Lieutenant Laudone moved toward the rear of the rocket launcher to check something. The round fired and burning particles of powder flew into his face blinding him for a short period of time. The rocket flew true, into the boggy wheel. The explosion blew metal from the tank and wood from the nearby building against our house and into my room. As the dust cleared, the tank commander turned his gun turret away from our house. I expected the gunner to fire but then realized that the tank commander probably wanted to know if our Bazooka shell had damaged the turret or gun. The tank driver then started to move forward but his damaged 30-inch wide tread jammed into the boggy wheel, stopping forward movement. The tank driver tried to move forward several more times but could not break the jammed wheel loose. The driver then changed to reverse gear and backed the tank out of my sight behind the wooden building and then retreated. We took in a big breath of the dust-laden, frozen air!



We followed the sound of the tank's movement as he slowly moved back to the road intersection, now guarded by the silent machine gun. Captain Maiale came into my room. We listened as the tank returned to the intersection. We heard German infantry assembling around it. Suddenly, Hall and Gorell, who had dug out of the debris, began to fire again. Under fire the German soldiers screamed at each other, the tankers and at us. The fire so surprised and disorganized the Germans that they scattered, or tried to take cover behind the tank. We wondered why they did not turn the corner around the barn and rush at us through the yard. I continued to fire at German infantry trying to get into the house across the street directly in front of my gun.

The yelling increased in intensity as a German officer ordered his men and tanks to attack us. Then screams filled the air. We later learned that one of the German tanks had suddenly turned and backed up crushing the German Captain beneath the tank tread, killing him instantly. The attacks on our building and on the Company F CP continued. All of our machine guns were firing.

Remark: At this point in the battle, my recollection is different from that reported in *The Story of the Century*. The book reports a tank rumbled up the Guising Road, past the Company F CP. If the tank had moved north he would have moved through my field of fire. Maybe he did, but I have no recollection of a Tiger tank moving across my front. I believe the tank stayed at the intersection. This is an example of the confusion of battle and alteration of memory with time.

Hall and Gorell continued their steady fire and were able to keep the German Infantry pinned down, but a German soldier, in a near-by building, fired a Panzerfaust (a tank destroying, rocket like weapon, much larger and more deadly than our bazooka) at the barn. The old stone and mortar side of the building caved in on the gun and the two men. Gorell was killed instantly; Hall was blown about twenty feet and knocked out. The Germans did not realize that the gun was buried, or that the barn was now occupied solely by the dazed Hall. The German infantry broke off their attack and assembled around their tanks. Those of us in the company CP waited for some indication that all was well in the barn.

A while later, a man came out of a side door in the barn running toward me. I swung my machine gun to fire at him and then realized it was an American - Hall - he was a small, short guy. He headed for the front door of our house, just to my right. He tripped on the doorsill, stumbled and fell on the floor. Somebody grabbed him and pulled him deeper into the house. When he caught his breath, he moaned that Gorell had been killed. He guessed one of the German tanks had fired point blank at the gun, causing the barn to explode and collapse on the two men.

Captain Maiale came up from the cellar. Hall reported that he had searched for but could not find Gorell or the gun, and that the ammunition handler had been very seriously wounded. A combat patrol from our house was sent over to the barn. They returned in a few minutes and reported that Gorell was dead as Hall had reported. The gun was completely covered by fallen masonry. Later we were told the ammunition handler had reached the Company F CP, and was dying of his wounds.



German infantry began to infiltrate toward our building by working their way between the two buildings across the street from my position. Each time a group moved from the back yard to the front of the house I fired a full burst until they stopped moving toward us.

### **38. ARTILLERY FIRE ON “OUR HOUSE”**

Captain Maiale called Battalion HQ and again requested artillery fire on our house and the surrounding area including the intersection. He expected another attack immediately. We were ordered to stay back away from the windows and down near the floor to minimize our chances of being hit by our own artillery fire. The artillery and mortar rounds crashed into buildings, houses and the ground around us. I don't know why our artillery did not hit our house. One direct hit would probably set the house on fire, perhaps causing us to evacuate.

During this noisy chaos a German tank gunner began to fire his heavy artillery shells into the large, two-story, stone home across the street in front of us. These shots were fired at similar spaced time intervals, every 15-20 seconds. About 6-8 shells were fired at the same spot in the wall, making a 2-3 foot hole. I could not make any sense out of the German tanker firing into a house that I suspected was occupied by German soldiers. More tanks had gathered at the road intersection. They were moving around; slipping on the snow and ice. A tank began to fire his cannon or 88-mm gun across my front, at the Company F CP.

I was told to be on the lookout for T/Sgt. Carey and his patrol; they were returning to our immediate area. I noticed a GI moving cautiously along the outside of our house. He crossed the open yard in front of my machine gun, to the barns and buildings on my right - toward the Company F CP. From that position T/Sgt. Carey could see the tank(s) at the intersection. He radioed his patrol to get a rocket launcher and ammunition and join him. When they arrived he took the bazooka and along with several of his men moved from building to building out to my right. German snipers were firing at them. They finally reached a position where they could fire on the tanks at the intersection.

They fired a Bazooka rocket from the barn on my right; I saw the round fly across my front and disappear behind the barn at the intersection. A second round was fired. A heavy explosion occurred on the street behind the barn. Burning fuel and greasy black smoke, carried by the north blowing wind, flowed across my field of fire on the Guising road; I guessed the tank engine air intake or reserve tank of fuel had been hit. The German tankers screamed and yelled as they began to evacuate the burning tank. I heard American rifle shots from the building to my right. As the tankers emerged from the top hatch Carey and his men fired on them with their rifles. They killed or wounded all who emerged. Diesel fuel burned and ammunition exploded for hours.

Captain Maiale came up from the cellar carrying a box of captured German flares. He commented that he had a report that the Germans had earlier fired a white flare, and we received a heavy artillery barrage. He stepped to the door and fired every flare in the box. Our battle area was illuminated with white, red, and green flares and the effect so confused the situation that the German artillery stopped firing at us.

*Captain Maiale* wrote... “When darkness came, back they were again and this time they finished off F Company. They got them all except the company commander who was coming



down the street. They kept coming in, and my machine guns kept mowing them down. For some reason they were unable to locate my guns and me. However, the (German) wounded out there could see us and when they began pointing us out to the tanks behind them, I reluctantly had to place three of my best marksmen upstairs to kill off the wounded”.

The battle around our CP tapered off. The Germans tanks and infantry fell back to positions away from the intersection and our CP. Some other GI took over the machine gun and I went down into the cellar to rest. In no time I fell asleep. I was awakened and ordered to meet with Captain Maiale. He told me to accompany him, as his bodyguard, to a meeting of Company Commanders at the battalion CP. I picked up an M-1 rifle and my .45-caliber pistol. In the dark of night the two of us left the house and cautiously made our way several hundred yards to the southeast to the Battalion CP. I was stationed outside the house while the officers decided what to do tomorrow. After the meeting broke up, we returned to our CP. I went back to my machine gun that guarded the yard in front of the house. Although guards were posted, nobody slept much that night.

### **39. GERMANS IN US WHITE PARKAS - JANUARY 9**

I was not aware that after midnight German infantry again entered Rimling from the north and west. They moved silently through the streets and buildings and captured the Company F CP on Guising road, less than 150 feet away from our house. Some alert GI from Company F had pushed the send switch on a hand held radio so that we could hear the quiet German voices, but most of the words were garbled. We waited on full alert, expecting an attack through the yard toward our house. As time passed, the area became quiet.

Without any warning, I heard a voice yell out from the Guising Road, “Don't shoot, we are Americans”. I was unable to determine whether a German or an American was speaking. A group of people started to walk south on Guising Road, from my right to my left, crossing in front of my machine gun. Some wore German gray overcoats and others wore American white parkas. I could not see clearly in the frozen, gray, foggy night air. They looked like floating ghosts. I called for help. Captain Maiale came to my gun. He said, “Fire over their heads”. I fired several 5-second bursts over their heads. The group stopped; half fell to the ground; some moaned; someone cried out, “Don't shoot we are Americans, the Germans are making us cross in front of you”. Someone yelled, “You have hit some of us”. They slowly got on their hands and knees and then stood up, standing still. A moment later, still moaning and yelling at us, they bunched together and moved slowly to my left, toward the barn where Gorell's body lay. I hesitated to fire at the gray overcoats because I feared the Americans were forced to wear the German overcoats and the Germans were wearing American parkas.

A few more people raised up on their hands and knees and crawled toward my left, then stood up and moved behind the barn, out of my sight. One body lay on the street in the snow, in plain view. I wondered if I had hit one of our men. The area became silent. I waited with the machine gun at ready, but nothing moved. Everything was quiet. The ghosts had gone.

*The Story of the Century* reports that 30 men from Company F were cut off from the rest of the company and captured. Six men from T/Sgt. Carey's platoon were also captured. I assume these were the men who were marched across in front of my gun. Four of Carey's men escaped to the attic of the building.



All of the battle described above resulted from the northern prong of a two-prong attack, on the western side of Rimling, by the 17th SS-Panzer-Grenadier Division. As daylight arrived, the Germans struck east from Schlossberg Hill and quickly seized a hill slightly more than one half mile south of Rimling, behind our position. This southern prong attack forced parts of Companies E and G to withdraw southward toward Guising because they were unable to stop the German tanks and infantry. The withdrawal placed the German forces in a position to advance further to the east and, unless stopped, could cut Rimling off from the south. We were in a position to be surrounded. German infantry rushed east down the slope toward our 81-mm mortars emplaced in the creek area southeast of Rimling.

#### **40. ATTACK ON OUR 81-MM MORTARS**

*Rincker* wrote that our 81-mm mortar men noticed a large body of Germans approaching their position. The Platoon Leader, 1st Lieutenant Bradshaw, from Washington, DC, spread several of his men around the area with M-1 rifles and carbines. The attacking Germans were well armed with rifles, machine guns and mortars. Our mortar crews waited until the Germans were about 150 yards away before firing. Lieutenant Bradshaw called for the Germans to surrender. The German commander set up his machine guns and returned the fire. Our mortars fired and knocked them out. German infantry charged our mortar position.

The 81-mm mortar cannot shoot accurately at a range of less than 125 yards and its danger zone is about 100 yards (that would be setting the barrel to fire almost vertical). Our mortar men held the tubes with their bare hands and fired mortar rounds at the extremely dangerous range of 75 yards. The battle continued for about two hours before the Germans quit. There were 37 dead and 23 wounded and two got away. *Rincker* wrote... “A very good score for a mortar platoon that isn't supposed to fight that way”.

#### **41. SNIPER FIRE**

Back at the Company H CP, I was ordered to the machine gun in the attic and to stop the German soldiers using a trail leading toward our position from the stone quarry area. Each time one of us climbed (actually ran) up the stairway to the second floor, a sniper's bullet would slam into the wall on the right side of the steps. That impact area continued to grow in size to about a foot long and some depth into the wall. We were unable to locate the sniper.

We would set ourselves at the bottom of the stairs and then rush up past the point of impact. Rushing was not an easy task because of the thick layers of cold weather clothes we wore and the loads of ammunition we carried. Someone noticed that the wall where the sniper bullets hit was smoking and showed a small flame. After I successfully ran up the stairs, several tracer bullets slammed into the wall and started a larger fire in the lathe and plaster.

We couldn't just walk up to the wall and chip out the burning portion. That would have been a field day for the German sniper. I noticed a bookcase filled with books. I carried several armfuls of books as close to the burning area as I thought prudent, then crawled toward the fire on the floor. While lying on the floor, I threw the books at the wall until the smoldering wood and plaster broke off and fell away. The house did not burn; we were all relieved. However, at sometime while I was running up or down the steps, I must have turned an ankle because it began to swell and pain. Soon it hurt to stand on it.



The Germans kept moving toward us on the trail from the quarry, and I kept throwing machine gun fire at them. They would be hit by the bullets, fall down on the ice and snow and slip or slide out of my sight (a building blocked my view of the lower part of the trail). There must have been a bunch of Germans lying in the snow. Those infantrymen finally stopped using the trail and I backed away from the gun to rest.

## **42. A FAILED RESCUE ATTEMPT**

In mid-morning, I was behind the attic machine gun watching for German attacks. We were told that the 1st Battalion, 398th Infantry Regiment had been ordered to counterattack toward us from the vicinity of Rohrbach. They were to clear the Germans from the high ground south of Rimling and stop the possible encirclement of the town. A company of tanks was attached to the 1st Battalion for support against German tanks or tank destroyers (TD). I watched the counterattack commence about a mile away from us. The American infantrymen looked like small black dots moving over a crest of a hill toward us through the white fields of snow. American tanks moved over the crest of the hill behind the infantrymen and fired (toward us) at the German positions south of Rimling. German artillery, both short and long range fired on them. After trying to move forward and support the advancing infantrymen, the American armor quickly retreated over the crest of the hill and hid behind it. The German artillery then began to fire on our infantry. The American infantrymen and armor were stopped twice by German counterattacks within 1,000 yards of us. Those who could still walk turned and retreated over the crest of the hill, out of the sight of the German field artillery observers.

It soon became clear that we could not hold out much longer without reinforcements. We were virtually alone in Rimling. I wondered how this fight would end. Only our two officers know how close we were to being completely surrounded.

## **43. ANOTHER SNIPER**

Around noon I was ordered to the gun in the front room to guard the area in front of the house against another German attack. Their artillery was exploding around our house and the town as usual. I watched the house across the Guising Road looking for a sniper. The German soldier who had fallen to the snow covered road early that morning - when I had fired over the heads of a group of people - was still lying in the middle of the road. That soldier slowly got up on his knees, stood up, picked up his rifle and causally walked toward the house that hid the sniper. I was too stunned and in shock to sight the machine-gun on him. When I finally turned the gun to fire, he had disappeared behind the barn. I was unable to believe what had happened. Now we had another sniper in that building.

## **44. SNIPER KILLS T/SGT. CAREY**

As the afternoon hour moved on toward darkness, I was told to be on the lookout for T/Sgt. Carey and his patrol. They were returning to our area to rescue a sergeant and his bazooka team who were in a loft of a nearby barn. The barn was a part of the buildings used by Company F for their CP. The bazooka team had escaped into the loft when the Germans captured the Company F CP. Captain Maiale was standing in the hall on my right. I saw a GI who I assumed was T/Sgt. Carey walking across the open yard in front of my gun. A shot rang out; he ducked and turned to look back to his men and muttered something, which I did



not understand. From the angle of my position to him, and the building across the Guising road, I assumed the sniper had him in his sight. The next shot knocked his head back and he fell to the ground. Nobody was able to reach him in the open yard.

*Captain Maiale* wrote in an undated letter “Carey returned and the sniper took a shot at him. None of us could locate the SOB. Carey must still have been upset and his judgement impaired. He stood outside my door and waved his arms, yelling to the sniper to shoot him. I yelled to Carey but it was too late. The sniper had drawn a good bead on him and had hit him in the middle of the forehead”.

My memory of his death is in conflict with some of the details presented in *The Story of the Century*. That account gives more details of the magnificent work he did during these two days. He was credited with saving many lives during the battle for Rimling. I credit him with saving mine.

#### **45. WITHDRAWAL FROM RIMLING**

German artillery and infantry small arms fire continued to strike against and around our house into the evening hours. However, no combined tank-infantry attacks were made against us. As darkness approached, we were ordered to prepare to leave our positions and fall back when it became totally dark. Division ordered our regiment to establish an east-west line running roughly through Guising. Lieutenant Laudone called me to the cellar. I limped down the steps and reported to him. He said “Eckard, when we leave I want you to take one of the German prisoners back to Regimental HQ. You make arrangements with Barnes (our Jeep driver). After turning the prisoner over to the Military Police, you go to the Battalion Aid Station and get that ankle fixed”. That was great news, I would ride out of Rimling; the other troops would walk out through the snow. My guess was that about eight of us from Company H remained active, our two officers, a couple of sergeants and a few other men. My count did not reflect the men of our mortar platoon who had saved us from being surrounded.

I found Pfc. John Barnes and we exchanged our orders. He said he was to leave the house a few minutes before the troops evacuated. Both of us had been ordered to be certain that, whatever happened during our withdrawal, we must leave the town as soon as possible. All artillery units in the division and many long-range artillery units from higher headquarters were to fire at different times so that all the shells landed on Rimling at the same moment. In an artilleryman's language it's called TOT or Total on Target. The Germans would not have any warning before all the shells hit them simultaneously.

As dusk fell, German artillery and small arms fire stopped. The area became quiet. Perhaps they had enough fighting for the day. I left the machine gun position, picked up my M-1 rifle and some ammunition and went into the cellar to get the prisoner. He was a young German soldier about my age - about 19 years old - dressed in the usual gray overcoat. He had no hat or helmet.

Barnes, the prisoner and I stood in the front doorway waiting for the signal to leave the house. I somehow made that German soldier understand that if he made any noise or called to his fellow soldiers, I would shoot him in the head. I held my loaded .45-caliber pistol to his head and put a finger to my lips, indicating quiet. We had to assume that German snipers were still



on alert in the buildings across the Guising Road. If a sniper noticed us leaving and fired, we could become engaged in a fire fight and be unable to leave Rimling before the TOT barrage.

The wind blew the low hanging clouds away. The temperature was cold, below freezing. An almost full moon lighted the snow-covered ground. We were wearing our parkas with the white side out. I thought, that's great, the prisoner is in gray overcoat, just the perfect target to expose Barnes and me. The three of us were to leave the house first, before the others. Barnes, the prisoner and I had about 10 yards of open yard space to walk across to get to the shed where the Jeep was parked. Barnes turned and told me the bad news; the Jeep had not been started since he arrived at the CP. It had sat in the cold air for four days. Again I thought, great! Let's hope it starts. I wondered if I could walk out with the injured ankle.

As the time to leave approached everybody in the house was alert for any German activity. Barnes was told to go. He stepped out the front door, turning right toward the shed. I nudged the German prisoner out the door a moment later, fully expecting to be fired upon by a sniper. My prisoner walked 5 yards behind Barnes, looking straight ahead; his hands were down at his sides. I walked close to the German, holding my pistol against the back of his head, making sure he could feel the barrel. If I went down from sniper fire, he would also. My rifle was cocked and ready in my left arm. That was the longest, quietest, brightest, and scariest 10 yards distance I have ever walked. Barnes reached the shed and quietly pulled the doors open. The front of the Jeep faced toward the shed doors; the Jeep's canvas top was not installed. Barnes sat down in the driver's seat. I motioned the prisoner to sit in the front passenger seat and I climbed up into the elevated back seat. Barnes turned the ignition key; the starter motor noise seemed as loud as an airplane engine. The engine turned over but would not start. I knew we were going to alert the Germans and they would attack.

Looking over the Jeep hood, I saw movement at the front of our house. The shadowy shapes of the rest of men from the company moved out of the front door of the house, turned to their left, past the living room window, across the front of the house, then turned the corner and disappeared. We three were the last to leave. Barnes tried to start the engine two more times; the third time it caught and started. He did not wait for the engine to warm-up but slowly drove off across the front of the house. He moved between houses, sheds and barns and finally found the road and headed east toward the Bettviller intersection. I did not notice any American troops on the road until we had made the right turn to go south to Bettviller. I relaxed at this point and noticed the pain in the right ankle. We slowly drove between the lines of exhausted and dispirited American troops, leaving Rimling to the Germans.

*The Story of the Century* reports the withdrawal from Rimling began just after dark. It was managed so well that about 20 minutes after the last American unit had left town, the Germans launched a major tank-infantry attack to take Rimling, unaware that it was already empty. Our heavy concentrations of artillery fire, laid directly on the town, caught them unprepared and caused heavy damage.

Barnes drove to Military Police HQ. I turned the German prisoner over to them. He drove me to the Battalion Aid Station and I reported in. I was handed a cup of boiling black coffee. My sprained ankle was not a high priority, so it took a while for the medics to examine me. In short order I was carried to a tent and a bed. I undressed and fell into the first sound sleep in three days. I was restricted to my bed for 10 days, then released to return to my company.



Remarks: Over the years since 1945, I have regretted that we were unable to recover the bodies of our buddies and friends who lay in the snow covered streets and in the buildings around Rimling. We took out our wounded and our guns. I suppose we left the French and German civilians and a few of our German prisoners to fend for themselves. All of us who left the Company H CP that night have many regrets, unanswered questions, and different memories. We also are aware that we stopped a major German attack that might have destroyed our division and caused more havoc in our lines.

*Captain Maiale* wrote...“We received a commendation from the Army Group Commander for Rimling. Axis Sally called us the "Bloody Butchers of Bitche.” It seems that the Germans had lost the better parts of two divisions on our front. I think that Company H can account for about 500 of these”.

T/Sgt. Charles F. Carey, Jr. was posthumously awarded our nation’s highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor, for his “heroic actions” in Rimling during January 8-9, 1945.

Pfc. Robert Gorell (Posthumously) and Pfc. Ellis Hall were awarded our nation’s second highest decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross, for their “heroism and unflinching courage” against an enemy in combat, on January 8, 1945 in Rimling, France. I am unable to determine whether their ammunition handler received an award.

2nd Lieutenant Frank J. Rosse was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for “gallantry in action” during the period January 5 – 8, 1945 in the vicinity of Rimling, France

Company H, 397th Infantry Regiment was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for the battle at Rimling in January 1945.

## **46. HOLBACH, FR – WINTER DEFENSE LINE**

The Regimental Hospital discharged me about January 20th. By that date the 2nd Battalion was settled into winter defense positions in the town of Holbach located about 10 miles west of Bitche, France. (A large-scale map of the Bitche-Rimling area is included in the snapshots and documents section). The town is located in the lower portion of the center of the map. Holbach was a typical French farming town with houses built on steep hills and in valleys. Most of the houses seemed empty; I assumed that most French civilians were living in their cellars. Each company and platoon was assigned to houses at various locations around the town.

I reported to the Company H CP; it was located in a 2-story house built on the side of a steep hill. I was assigned to Company H HQ and ordered to drop my gear in the attached hayloft. Our officers and senior NCOs were housed in the upper rooms of the house. The French owners and their teen-aged daughter lived under the house with their few animals. I enjoyed sleeping on the straw in my sleeping bag; it was dry and warm.

Our situation was described in *The Story of the Century*... “After the withdrawal from Rimling, the division remained in static defensive positions of a winter line. Since the 100th was the only division on the Seventh Army front not to fall back under pressure from the German Army, it was ordered to hold while other divisions of the Army front were regaining



positions from which they could jump off in the spring offensive”.

“This was the locale for the long boredom of winter warfare. The endless cold and misery of foxholes, trench foot and nervous kidneys. The routine shift from foxholes to reserve positions in crowded, smoky houses. The shift back to the foxholes again - foxholes that we logged over, and propped up and floored under until they took on the aspect of permanent habitations. The walking or driving along roads deep in snow or slush. The two “hot” meals coming luke-warm from the marmite cans and half-frozen before you could wolf them. And the desire to puke at the thought of K-rations. The thawing weather came in early in February. The streams overflowed, the draws flooded, and the foxholes and emplacements filled with ice water. Everything was wet, and always everything was muddy. The old mud was hardly caked before it was slimed over with new mud”.

“And the military duties? We strung concertina (barbed) wire across all the likely approaches and then across all the unlikely ones. We dug new emplacements for weapons. We repaired communication wire which otherwise harmless mortar fire was endlessly knocking out. We shored up the sides of our machine-gun emplacements. And then we went into reserve. We also we took training on how to use the weapons we had learned to live with. Or we trained the replacements that the army called "reinforcements”.

A rumor began to filter through the company: The Bronze Star Medal was to be awarded to all troops engaged in the Rimling battle. A week later the rumor had changed: Higher Headquarters did not approve of that award. We waited for further word!

The battalion ordered work on a second and third line of defense in the event the Germans attacked and broke through our main line of defenses in the Maginot Line. My first assignment was to give technical assistance to the troops from Co A, 325th Combat Engineer Battalion, in preparing machine gun positions in and around Holbach. The engineers were blasting holes in the frozen ground, using blocks of TNT. They also cleared our field of fire. I marveled at how fast the holes were created with explosives compared to digging a foxhole with our small shovels.

All of the trees lining both sides of the roads were cut into, leaving deep notches facing the road. Most of the trees had blocks of TNT and Primacord fastened to them so they could be toppled instantly. All the engineers had to do was detonate the explosives and they had created a crisscross roadblock that could stretch for miles in case the Germans attacked and were able to penetrate our lines.

## **47. ROTATION TO A MAGINOT LINE FORT**

The part of the line assigned to our battalion ran through or between several of the large fortifications of the famous Maginot Line. During the 1930's the French Government built some 50 major forts in the Alsace and Lorraine region, between the town of Wissembourg, a small city at France's northeastern point, north of Strasbourg, and the major industrial city of Metz, to the west. In the gaps between those large cities the designers located a seemingly impenetrable swarm of smaller blockhouses. The major fort at Bitche, named Simserhof, had nearly three miles of tunnels, about 120 feet underground, made of stone and concrete.



A life zone was located at one end and a fighting zone at the other; secondary tunnels, stairways and elevators connected these two zones. Over 800 Frenchmen were to serve in this fort during combat. These French soldiers, their equipment and munitions were transported underground by trolley. The command and living areas were the roots, from which a long trunk tunnel led to branch tunnels, which led to individual bunkers (as many as 17) armed with a 75-mm cannon, mortars, and machine guns. Each of these large forts was a self-sufficient unit, a little underground city.

In late January my assignment to establish our fall back machine gun positions was completed. I was then assigned my first rotation up to a Maginot Line fort. In the early afternoon, I left my living and sleeping quarters at Company HQ, carrying all my equipment, gear and sleeping bag. I walked down the ridge road to the main road in the valley, crossed through the center of Holbach and then up another ridge road. About every other house had sustained some damage. The Germans knew we were in Holbach and had zeroed in all road intersections. They harassed us constantly with artillery fire, 2-3 shells each hour.

I walked into the 1st Platoon house and greeted the other 4 members of the squad who were assembled there. They had already spread out their equipment and bedroll and were cleaning up, resting or sleeping. I found an empty place and laid out my gear and sleeping bag. In no time I was asleep. At dusk our sergeant awakened us. We dressed and zipped up our white parkas - the last of five layers of clothing; then covered our steel helmet with the white parka hood. We then slung our pack and sleeping bag over our shoulder, strapped on our pistol belt and picked up our rifles and ammunition and went outside. A low, dark gray cloud cover moved slowly over our heads. The sergeant lead off, we followed in a line, about 5 yards apart. We slowly walked up a hill, through snowdrifts, past dark groups of trees, then up onto the cleared high ground where the Maginot Line fort was located.

During this walk to the fort I became aware that we were walking in a strange twilight. Then I realized that searchlights, located several miles our rear, were pointed to direct their bright light toward the bottom of the cloud layer. The resulting reflection gave the entire area an eerie dull twilight. Coupled with the snow-covered ground, I could see well enough to identify objects.

Our sergeant led us toward a large concrete structure perhaps 75 feet across and 25 feet high. Many American artillery shells had hit it in during the December 1944 attack. We were cautioned that several unexploded 4-inch diameter shells remained stuck (unexploded) in the concrete above our heads. We climbed over the rubble into the fort. Although previous artillery barrages had dislodged blocks of concrete from the inside walls, we found an almost dry place to sit down against the wall. We were scheduled to relieve the two machine gun crews on the line about midnight. I took off my pack, stood the rifle against the wall and pulled my sleeping bag up around my body and rested. Each of us could hear and feel the dull thud of German artillery or mortar rounds exploding around the area.

Just before midnight, we four machine gunners, lead by our sergeant left the dark fort and moved around and out in front of it. We walked down the snow-covered slope to the first machine gun foxhole. Two GI's climbed out and my 2nd gunner and I climbed in, trying to not disturb the snow cover and thus expose our position. The group then moved on to the next machine gun position that was out of my sight, leaving us alone.



We stood up on the firing step and quietly checked the machine gun and ammunition; it seemed to be in operating mode. We then began to inspect our home for the next 24 hours. Although the ground outside was covered by frozen snow, inside our foxhole we were standing in slippery, liquid mud and almost melting icy ground along the sides. The hole was dug about seven feet deep, 3 feet wide and six feet long. I took the first hour of guard duty; my partner sat on the rear-firing step and tried to sleep. I stepped up on the forward firing step, looking over the gun at the countryside ahead of us. Other than fence poles sticking out of the snow and a few trees, I could see wide-open countryside with no indication of German or American positions. I hoped that there were some American riflemen out in front of us.

We were constantly alert for movement because we knew that both sides were sending out patrols to locate enemy positions or bring back prisoners. Nothing moved. I was careful to not keep my head up for more than a few moments, studying the ground in front of me, because a German sniper might have me in his sights. Every so often a shell would explode around us or in the area in front of us. Otherwise nothing moved. The searchlight beam bouncing off the bottom of the cloud layer gave a spooky look to the snow-covered battlefield.

First light showed in the east, bringing another very cold day with a thick layer of clouds and cold mud. There was no movement or action in front of us. Every three or four minutes I would slowly raise my head up out of the foxhole to check the ground toward the German lines. A German mortar coughed sending a shell toward our line. They were not shooting at our foxhole. Other than artillery and mortar shells, both theirs and ours, nothing moved or made a sound. We broke open a breakfast K ration and then, later, a lunch ration.

The day turned into dusk and night without incident. We spent 24 hours in the foxhole, then were relieved for 24 hours in the fort. Nobody moved in the daylight. In any event, we spent about four days on the line and then, during darkness, walked back to our quarters in Holbach. Once there we rested, ate mostly warm meals and cleaned thick layers of mud from our clothes, gear and weapons. Then three days later, we again rotated up to the front line machine gun position.

## **48. COMBAT FOOD AND MUD**

I have not commented much about our food. The K-rations we opened were specially prepared meals that were packaged in a waterproof box about the size of a Cracker Jack box. Each box was labeled Breakfast, Dinner or Supper. We could carry three or four boxes in the large pockets of our field jackets. Each box contained a small can, about the size of a small can of Tuna fish. The contents of the can varied depending on the three meals, ham and eggs for breakfast, cheese for dinner and pork loaf or Spam for supper. I had no problem eating any item, but the pork loaf was very fatty. What I really liked about the rations was the very condensed fruit bar. Each box also contained a small packet of Nescafe instant coffee or some instant lemonade and a package of three cigarettes with matches.

My next most liked item was the bar of hard chocolate, a rectangular shaped non-melting moldy-tasting hunk of chocolate, measuring about an inch and a quarter wide, one inch thick and about four inches long. One bar would last a man all day if he could stomach an entire bar in a single day. It was hard and could hardly be broken up. One time I hit a bar with my rifle butt to break it apart. Somebody said it couldn't be shaved with a trench knife and it



absolutely refused to melt-even in boiling water. I remember reading that the chocolate bar contained 4,000 Calories. Talk about an energy fix! I ate every bit of every bar!

When we were eating K rations once a week they were very tasty but day after day they became a pain and many of us existed just on the fruit bar, chocolate bar and crackers. However, when you are hungry, even K-rations tasted good.

Sometimes we would be given a box of C rations. These were cans the size of Campbell soup which we would place on the engine of a Jeep (if one was available) or in a fire to heat. We all carried a small folding can opener; I carried only one eating utensil – a large spoon in my boot. For the most part we ate when we had time, there were days that we were too occupied with the events around us to eat.

On a day when all was quiet we measured the depth of the mud; it averaged 6 inches. It took some time to clean up after a period on the line. The mud was dried thick on our clothes and equipment. I happened to watch one of our sergeants scrapping caked mud from his rifle. He set the safety to on and laid the rifle stock on the hood of a jeep, holding the end of the barrel in his left hand. He then placed his left foot on the Jeep bumper. As he scrapped the mud from the stock, somehow, the trigger housing became involved with a hook on the top of the hood, which set the safety to off. As he continued scrapping mud, he pulled the rifle toward himself. The rifle fired and the bullet passed (only) through his knee. He was lucky. After he was evacuated to the hospital, we received lectures (again) on removing all ammunition from a weapon and then to check it the second time to be certain.

#### **49. GUARD DUTY, REST CENTERS AND RED CROSS WOMEN**

Each of us stood guard duty, day and night, at many guard posts and roadblocks around Holbach and the immediate vicinity. During the daylight hours we trained new reinforcements. Each company received new people to bring it up to near full strength. They were given briefings related to our defensive situation and additional training before they manned the machine guns on the line.

Rest Centers were set up at the battalion and higher levels. When our turn came we were trucked there for a few days of relaxation from the cold monotony of the foxholes. Each platoon had a quota. I was sent to the Division Rest Center at Sarrebourg. We had three hot meals each day, hot showers, a quiet place to read books, a place to watch a movie, time to walk around the town or just stay in our bed all day. All of our muddy, wet, torn clothes were replaced with used, clean, dry replacements. I was interviewed about the battle at Rimling. The interview was taped and sent to Radio Station WWSW in Pittsburgh, PA. They played it over the airwaves. Later the local station cut a record and sent it to me at home. I have it in my WWII records. Much later I recorded the record on tape.

One very clear, cold, beautiful blue-sky day in February a Red Cross truck drove into Holbach. Out jumped three young Red Cross women volunteers. What a surprise! You must remember that we were less than 1,000 yards from the line and here were AMERICAN girls. All of the troops in Holbach were given the opportunity to visit the truck for coffee and donuts. Most of the GIs just stood around, in clothes with mud up over our helmets, drinking coffee and eating donuts, looking at those young women. Thinking of home, no doubt.