

50. TRADED PISTOL FOR TOMMY GUN

Another cold day in early February, an American tank climbed the frozen dirt road up the hill to the Company H CP. The tankers probably had business in our HQ, but my eye was on one of the Thompson submachine guns (Tommy Gun) they carried. After discussing a trade - my .45-caliber pistol for his .45-caliber submachine gun - we agreed, shook hands and exchanged weapons. That afternoon, after the tank had left, I sat down in the hayloft to learn how the weapon worked. I checked the weapon twice to be sure that it was not loaded, then set the stock in my lap and pointed the barrel up toward the roof. I pulled the heavy, spring loaded bolt back and slowly allowed it to move forward, across the loaded clip, forcing a bullet into the firing chamber. I did not want to fire the bullet so I pulled the bolt back a bit and released it, in an attempt to cause the extractor lugs to grasp the rim of the cartridge and remove it.

Well, my plan did not work, so I allowed the bolt to go forward more forcefully, then almost allowing it to go under its own power and the round exploded. The almost 1/2 inch diameter bullet went through the roof, breaking several tiles. Needless to say everybody in the area went on full alert. At least I was smart enough to work with only one round or a bunch of .45- caliber bullets would have gone through the roof. The upshot of this excitement was a stern reprimand from Lieutenant Laudone. Later one of our sergeants quietly showed me how to become friends with the Thompson submachine gun.

After that incident I began to carry the submachine gun to the line. All of us liked the idea of increased firepower from that weapon, but I worried whether I could hit any thing with it. One evening while I was in the blockhouse bunker in the Maginot Line, I was ordered to go back toward Holback and meet a group of our Combat Engineers. They were hand carrying, locally fabricated wooden walls and floors to line our foxholes. The plan was for me to leave the bunker, go back toward a rear-wooded area, contact them and guide them to our holes. I was reminded to be on the lookout for German patrols in our area that night. Thus I was on full alert and carried the submachine gun with two fully loaded clips, taped together for a quick change. As I slowly pushed through the snow, back toward the silent woods, I saw several round, helmet-like objects bobbing just at the crest of a ridge - a group of men walking toward me. I crouched down into the snow.

I whispered "Halt". No response, they kept walking toward me. Because of the surface topography I could only see the upper part of their bodies. I looked at their helmets but in the darkness, I could not completely identify them as German or American. I could hear them speak but I could not make out the words, some words sounded like harsh, guttural German and some melting pot American English. I again quietly said, "Halt"; they continued to move toward me. I raised and pointed the gun at them, pulled the bolt back and released it, loading the weapon. That noise caught one man's attention because he said "My God, somebody just loaded a weapon." They all stopped in their tracks. I spoke the sign, one of them gave me the correct countersign. I told them to advance and be recognized. They were the engineers and were within a blink of an eye of being fired upon. They had no idea that they were so close to the line. Every so often when I think of these days in the cold and snow, I get the chills about how close I came to firing at them. The end of the story is we machine gunners were snug as a bug in a rug in our wood-lined foxholes, thanks to our engineers.

51. PROMOTION/COMMISSION

During February, after I was promoted to Corporal, I was ordered to the Company HQ. Captain Maiale asked if I was interested in receiving a battlefield commission as a 2nd Lieutenant Infantry Officer. I would be sent back to Paris for 7 days and then returned to duty. There was no assurance that I would return to Company H. I declined the offer. I explained that I was responsible for a section of machine guns - about 12 people and that was enough at my age - 19 years old. Furthermore I did not want to take the chance of being assigned to another company in another division. Later I was told that about 10 men in our company had accepted the same opportunity, were commissioned AND all had returned to our company, replacing officers who had become casualties.

Many times since I have speculated how my war, and later life, would have changed had I accepted the offer and been commissioned. Not too much was lost, however, because in December 1950, I was appointed an Infantry 2nd Lieutenant in the Army's Active Reserve.

52. MAGINOT FORT INSPECTION

One evening, while off duty in Holbach, several of us went up to a large Maginot fort on the line and slept there over night. The next day we took our flashlights and weapons and explored the underground fortress. We climbed down metal ladders for 5-6 floors and walked the long corridors and inspected adjacent rooms. Trolley tracks were still there as well as much equipment and ammunition. We had been cautioned to be aware that some of the tunnels ran underground toward the German positions in the direction of the city of Bitche. After 3-4 hours we had penetrated a good distance from where we had entered. We heard German hob-nailed boots walking on the concrete floor ahead of us. Needless to say we made a quick retreat and began to climb quietly up the ladders. We spent some time exploring the second level and found boxes of German hand grenades, both the so-called potato masher (with a foot long handle, used for throwing) and a box of new, small, hand sized concussion grenades. We took them to our quarters in Holbach and spent a part of a day throwing them down a hill so that they would explode just as they hit the ground. Fourth of July fire works in the middle of February.

53. MORTAR ATTACK

One last story about the boring days in the winter defensive line. Two of us were in the machine gun emplacement in the Maginot Line on a bright sunny February day. The snow was quickly melting to slush. The night before we heard several German patrols in our area, wearing hob-nailed shoes, walking on the paved road in front of our positions. That day I suspect that we had our heads up too high, enjoying the warm sunshine and were spotted by a German observer. A German mortar coughed - a shell had been fired. We ducked down into the hole. The shell exploded in front and to our left. Several moments later, another cough and the second round landed behind us. The next shell landed in front of our position. We were being bracketed and expected the next shell to land upon us. There was no place to go. We sat down in the very bottom of the hole, in the cold mud and waited. The German gunner fired again; the shell landed a couple yards from our foxhole. For some reason it did not explode. It was a dud. We sat, waiting, but for whatever reason the German gunner did not fire again. We had been taught a good lesson, don't stick your head up too often or you will be used for

target practice. We were very lucky because mortars are usually very accurate when operated by well-trained gunners.

Captain Maiale comments...“We spent our days wondering what to do with the time on our hands. When the days got warmer, we even played volleyball 1000 yards from the German lines. With remarkable suddenness the snow melted and spring came. It turned warm and the country turned green in a matter of days.” (A picture of Lt. Laudone and me playing volleyball during March 1945 in Holback is included in the snapshots and documents section).

On March 7 American troops captured the Remagen Bridge allowing the swift-flowing currents of the Rhine River to be crossed. In a matter of days, five divisions had crossed into Germany.

A clear, warm day, March 13, brought out the long dormant German Air Force. In mid-afternoon a bunch of us were playing volleyball on an exposed ridge. An American P-47 fighter plane strafed Holbach. We later learned the plane had been captured by the Germans and was piloted by a German pilot. With .50-Caliber machine gun bullets hitting the ground around us, Lieutenant Laudone and I ran for the closest hole to get below ground level. He was slightly ahead of me and jumped first, I piled on top of him. With only a slight smile on his face, his comment was “That was very close to assaulting an officer.” Later that day, I was again assigned to Company HQ to do whatever was needed for our company officers and senior NCOs. I wondered why I was given a new assignment on that day. It soon became obvious.

54. MARCH 15 ATTACK

On March 13 the division began to carry out plans for its part in the execution of the Seventh Army spring offensive. The XV Corps, (3rd, 45th, 71st and 100th Divisions), was to make the main effort to penetrate the Siegfried Line and those parts of the Maginot Line still not taken. The 100th Division was to attack from positions near the center of our defensive lines and move east to take the ancient fortress town of Bitche, the high ground surrounding the town and Camp De Bitche to the east. The town was a key location in the Maginot Line and had withstood all attacks for over 200 years. After taking Bitche, the 100th was to pivot northward, against the German Siegfried Line. When the various units in XV Corps had moved to a position to jump off, the 100th had a front only one regiment wide. Usually an Infantry Division has a front of about 5 miles wide.

The 3rd and 45th Divisions were to attack at 1 AM on 15 March, but our Commanding General chose to attack at 5 AM because the location of German minefields and other defense works were known only for a limited depth to the division's immediate front. The general did not want the attacking infantrymen to walk into uncharted minefields and defense works and bog down before daylight.

55. HOTTVILLER, FR

On March 14th I was ordered to gather my gear and report to Company HQ at 4 AM the next morning. When I reported in Lieutenant Laudone waved at me to join him in his jeep. His

driver took us northeast a couple of miles, toward the line, to the small village of Hottviller. (The reader may follow this route by referring to the large-scale map of the Bitche-Rimling area included in the snapshots and documents section. Follow route D-35 north out of Holbach, then turn east at the first main intersection toward Hottviller).

The first light of dawn came slowly into the sky. I saw no civilians, only American infantry troops and tanks spaced apart, moving quickly through the town. The town center was badly beat up. Rumor had it that the Germans had ordered all civilians out of the town when they captured it in 1940. Then they used the town and homes as a training site for village fighting. We drove through the town center and turned west. I was dropped off at the “Y” intersection of roads at the western edge of the village, beside the village church. Lieutenant Laudone told me to stay at the intersection, that later our company would leave Holbach and move to this intersection. I was to stop them and inform the officer in charge to disperse the platoons into the houses around the intersection and to await further orders.

After Lieutenant Laudone and his driver left I inspected the church and 3-4 of the houses around the intersection. The area around me was quiet; nobody moved or made a sound. I much preferred some noise or movement. I kept my M-1 rifle ready to fire. I wished for my submachine gun, which I had stowed in my bags in the company Jeep. I inspected an opening in the hillside at the level of the road. It turned out to be a short tunnel, about 10 feet into the hillside. I decided that would be a good place for protection, but it lacked an escape route. (In 1987, during a return visit to Hottviller, the small tunnel had been converted into a religious shrine).

I was not aware that the three battalions of the 397th were moving toward Hottviller from where the attack was to begin. The first battalion began the attack by moving northeast from Hottviller. Then Company E of the second battalion jumped off at 5 AM. The other two rifle companies remained in Hottviller. Before long I heard American rifle fire to the east and it grew in intensity. It sounded as if our attack had encountered the Germans a few hundred feet at the east edge of town. I moved to the cave for protection from German artillery, mortar and “Screaming Meemies”. These were technically called Nebelwerfers and were fired electrically from launchers in groups of six. They came in with a screaming noise that scared the hell out of us. They exploded with great concussion but not much shrapnel. I was not happy being the lone guard at this intersection because I could not make sense out of the rifle and machine gun fire. Were we taking the German position? If not, where would I go if a German counterattack was successful?

After an hour or so, the close battle noise stopped. I left the tunnel and sat on a low wall wondering what had happened. I had not seen any people for an hour or more. German artillery and rocket fire continued to fall in the town and around the intersection. Then two columns of American troops walked around a street corner, moving toward me from the town center. Company H had arrived. I walked up to an officer, reported and repeated Lieutenant Laudone’s orders. The officer turned to a sergeant at the head of the column and pointed to several houses; the platoons of machine guns and mortars spread out, set up their weapons and inspected the empty houses. (A picture showing Lt. Laudone and Capt. Maiale across the street from the church is included in the snapshots and documents section). We sat in the bright sunshine and felt good. Our 81-mm mortars began to fire over the nearby houses, supporting the attacking riflemen ahead of us. German artillery continued to fall around the

road intersection, searching for our mortars. Then Screaming Meemies joined in; they exploded violently in and around our positions, shaking the ground and jolting us.

In between shellings some of the GIs began to take pictures. I asked Corporal Jim Henderson from the mortar platoon to take my picture with the church in the background. (The picture of me in front of the church is included in the snapshots and documents section). I posed, he snapped and I took 3-4 steps toward him. Then the “Screaming Meemies” came in on top of us. Jim and I ran a few steps and jumped into a ditch along the road. GI’s from the 2nd Platoon yelled “Medic.” One of the rounds had landed just about where I had been standing for the picture, another near the steps of a nearby house. After the smoke and dust had cleared, we noticed the scramble of people toward two of our new reinforcements. They were sitting just outside the doorway to a house about 20 yards away from us. We later were told that they had died at the Battalion Aid Station. Most of us did not know their names or where they came from.

The battalion gained its first day objective. The regiment drove more than a mile that first day. This action removed pressure from the attack on the Maginot forts and caused the defense of the Maginot forts area to collapse. We remained in our position in Hottviller for the remainder of the day and the night, under artillery and rocket fire.

56. SCHORBACH, FR

On the 16th, at 7:20 AM, after packing our gear, mortars and machine guns, we marched out of Hottviller, perhaps 2-3 miles east toward Schorbach. (See both large-scale and detailed maps for the road network from Hottviller to Schorbach – in the snapshots and documents section). The *Regiment of the Century* reports... “Schorbach was a comparatively large village, but wholly uninhabited. It was virtually a ghost town. Upon entering, we passed a church and adjacent yard that had a shrine-like affair that might have been part of ancient Greece. It was about twenty feet square, and the walls were a series of columns stretching to the roof. Between the columns, steel bars permitted a view of the dead of bygone generations”.

“We could not help but notice a shelf which extended the length of the building on which were neatly stacked long human arm and leg bones to a height of five feet. Piled to the top of the shelf and filling the remainder of the shrine were skulls and the other small rib-finger-feet bones. An estimate of the number of individuals represented was impossible, but a medic put the age of the bones at 300 years. What were these bones doing here? Why hadn't the people been decently buried?” I could not get that sight out of my mind for a long time.

57. BITCHE FALLS

Our battalion moved into the woods after passing through Schorbach; attacking through the positions of the 1st Battalion northeast of Schorbach, bypassing German strong points. The attacking companies captured many German mortar positions and remnants of a nebelwerfer unit. We advanced eastward toward the intersection where the road east from Schorbach (D 162) and the road north from Bitche (D 962) join.

We then left the paved road and moved north into the woods. Every so often I thought about my situation - well, at least I was not carrying the 53-pound machine gun tripod. Most of the time I was close to one of our company officers or senior NCOs. We walked along the wooded hillside in a single file, catching glimpses of the two forward infantry companies attacking across the level ground around the road intersection. At one point we passed bloody bits of gray fabric hanging on a large tree. A shell hole had been carved in the ground beside the tree. I concluded more than one German soldier had been blown to bits. By noon the attacking companies had taken the hill southeast of the crossroads (Hill 345) and the higher hill further to the east. While assaulting these two peaks our battalion had been harassed by small arms and automatic weapons fire from another German strongpoint. Resistance was light.

Although *The Story of the Century* reports the regiment received only small arms resistance, we encountered plenty of artillery, mortar and rocket fire. Casualties were mainly caused by Schu-mines. These mines were difficult to detect. They were fabricated as a small wooden box (about 3 x 4 x 5 inches in size) containing a block of TNT. The box was buried in the ground; only the small metal detonator and metal pin stuck up above the ground. When you stepped on the pin, the explosive force was just enough to blow your foot off at the ankle.

During that afternoon we sat in the woods, taking artillery fire and watching our division combat engineers repair a partially destroyed bridge on the road to Bitche, located about ¼ mile south of the intersection. The Germans had not only blown the bridge but also buried many Schu-mines around the bridge and zeroed the bridge in for their artillery. The engineers worked under artillery fire while repairing the bridge. Several of their crew stepped on Schu-mines while moving logs around to repair the bridge. In one situation, a medic knelt on a mine as he administered first aid to one of those engineers. I felt sick.

About 3 PM we moved out of the woods, crossed the road, moved southeast across the valley and up the steep hill east of the bridge (Hill 345). Captain Maiale set up his Command Post just behind the crest and told me to dig in for the night: he meant dig the hole for Lieutenant Laudone and himself. I also dug a hole for myself and was almost totally exhausted from the climb up the steep slope and the shoveling.

When these northern approaches and escape routes from Bitche were taken, the 398th Regiment advanced from the south and entered Bitche. In the late afternoon of the 16th of March the 100th Division captured the town of Bitche, its Maginot Line forts and Camp de Bitche. After five long years Bitche became French again.

Those of us who participated in the capture of Bitche were later -after the war was over - inducted into "The Society of the Sons of Bitche". (My membership card is shown in the snapshots and documents section).

58. YELLOW JAUNDICE

It is my belief that I experienced the first effects of the Yellow Jaundice (Hepatitis A) virus during the late afternoon of March 16, without understanding that I was becoming very ill. I accompanied one of our officers around the area as he inspected our machine gun and mortar positions. When our evening hot meal arrived I lead a detail of men down the steep hill to the

road by the bridge. Each of us picked up a very heavy, insulated can filled with food or water. When I reached the hilltop I was totally exhausted. The cooks served greasy pork chop sandwiches for the evening meal. I usually ate any food and every bit of it, but not tonight, not greasy pork chop sandwiches! I found out later that one of the signs of Yellow Jaundice is that you cannot stomach greasy food. I was a part of the guard detail around our CP for a couple of hours just after dark. Later during the night our battalion was ordered into reserve for the next day.

59. TOWARD THE GERMAN BORDER – MARCH 17, 1945

On the 17th, the third day of the attack, our battalion was loaded onto trucks and jeeps as a part of a motorized column behind the rapidly advancing front. I was told to get in one of the jeeps at the front of the column. I sat down in the front right seat beside the driver, my submachine gun lying on my lap. My right foot was positioned outside on a small footrest. I was ready to jump out if the German artillery found the column. The Germans had pulled out; they were no longer even fighting much of a delaying action. Resistance consisted of mostly sniper fire. The 397th Regiment moved east toward the German border. Later in the day we moved north toward Breidenbach, which was about 3 1/2 miles from the border. Oh, how I wanted to get across.

Our column turned east toward Walschbronn, then north toward Dorst to remove a few snipers. Now we were less than a mile away from the Border. The first rifle company of the 100th Division to cross the border was Company K, 399th Regiment, at 2:31 PM on 17 March. Although our battalion and regiment zigzagged in a northern direction along the French side of the border, we were headed toward the city of Zweibrücken in Germany. Then we were to turn east toward Ludwigshafen and Mannheim, Germany. We were charged with “seizing all available means of crossing the Rhine River”.

The 2nd Battalion moved into houses in Waldhausen for the night of the 17th. Our attack had gained 10 miles. On the 18th we remained in our position, holding the division’s left flank and consolidated our gains. Our patrols were unable to contact the rapidly retreating Germans. Large formations of American bombers with fighter escorts were flying toward Germany. We were relieved on the night of the 19th and placed in reserve.

A couple of days later I reported to First Sergeant Jordon that I felt lousy and did not feel like eating. He told me to lie down and rest in the warm sunshine, in one of our trailers packed with duffel bags. As we traveled through the valleys, German shells were hitting the bare mountain ridges off to my right. I was very uneasy and scared but too sick to care. What was happening to me! Later that evening, when we stopped, our medic came over to check me. He asked me how I was doing; I said “lousy”. He looked at my eyes and at my fingernails and told me to get to the Regimental Aid Station. I asked why and he said, “You have a good case of Yellow Jaundice”. I was angry, I wanted to get into Germany, and we were so close.

60. LEAVING COMPANY H - AGAIN

That night I was evacuated from the company to the Regimental Aid Station. The next morning six of us were loaded on stretchers, carried to a waiting ambulance and transported to an evacuation hospital in Nancy, France. The doctor who examined me remarked that I

might be evacuated to the ZI. The US Army designated the USA as the Zone of the Interior (ZI) - WOW! I guessed that the hospital system was returning as many patients as possible to the States so that they could accommodate the expected large number of wounded from the Rhine River crossings.

61. EVACUATION FLIGHT TO ENGLAND

The next day, about 15 of us, all infected with the Yellow Jaundice virus, were loaded into ambulances and driven to a nearby airfield. We climbed into a twin engine propeller C-47. A C-47 is the military version of the famous Douglas DC-3, as it is known in civilian life. Although very sick, I was excited to experience my first airplane ride. The plane took off and flew west across the English Channel. As we approached the English shoreline I began to understand that my combat time in Europe was over. I did not expect that I would be a very weak and sick soldier for about five weeks. The plane flew over London, continuing to an airfield about 90 miles further west, near Devizes, England. We were then moved by ambulance about 18 more miles further west to the 143rd General Hospital in Bath, England.

In the two days after I was evacuated, the division made a 92 mile motor march to the Rhine River at Ludwigshafen. They encountered many freed Russian, Greek, French and Polish slave laborers along the highway. Most seemed bewildered by their sudden liberation.

Elements of the 100th Division crossed the Rhine River on April 1, 1945 and passed through battered Mannheim. The division turned southeast toward the virtually leveled city of Heilbronn on the Neckar River. After crossing the river under fire, a 12-day battle ensued. After the battle for Heilbronn was won the 100th continued 20 miles deeper into Germany in a southeast direction

In the Pacific, on April 1, 1945 US troops began landing on Okinawa, Some 300,000-ground troops fought for eighty-two days before the Japanese Commanding General knelt in full dress uniform, before his headquarters and cut out his entrails with his sword. About 110,000 Japanese died - nine for every American.

On April 12, 1945 President Franklin Roosevelt died. Vice President Harry Truman was sworn in as President. Later that day he was first told about the development of the Atomic Bomb.

The same day American and Russian forces met at the River Elbe some 75 miles south of Berlin. Germany was cut in two. Leading elements of the US Army were 50 miles from Berlin.

62. RECOVERING AGAIN FROM JAUNDICE

As for me, I spent the rest of March and three weeks of April recovering from Yellow Jaundice. The treatment was complete rest and a high sugar - low fat diet. That meant lots of hard candy, vegetables and fruit. Near the middle of April I felt well enough to ask my doctor to give me a pass for a day of sight seeing around Bath, England. I took in most of the sights in that old Viking City and some of the bars. I returned to the hospital and began to feel sick. When I awoke in the morning the Jaundice had returned. The doctor admonished me "I told you not to drink alcohol". He explained that although I was in superb physical condition the

Jaundice virus could destroy the liver when alcohol is present. I was almost 20 years old and “knew it all”. The war in Europe was rapidly moving to a close. We had daily reports about the rapid Allied troop movements into Germany and most significantly, the Russian attack on Berlin. It was time for celebration; I did not want to worry about my liver! I needed another week in bed to recover. I was discharged from the Hospital in late-April.

Note: A comment on Yellow Jaundice or Hepatitis A: When I returned to my Company, shortly after the war was over, I was told that the 100th Infantry Division had sustained more casualties from Hepatitis A during the first five months of 1945 than from German action. I recovered rather quickly. Many men were very sick; in fact some died from the Hepatitis A virus. *Rincker* writes that he was hospitalized for two months (July/August 1946) and was as sick as he had ever been.

Another Note: I have not been accepted as a blood donor since contacting the Hepatitis A virus. I have been turned away because the virus remains in my blood stream.

On April 24, 1945, my regiment was transferred to the 100th Division reserve. The next day, all units of the 100th were officially assigned to Seventh Army reserve. For the first time since early November 1944 no unit of the division was in a combat situation. On the 26th my regiment was ordered to move about 30 miles southwest to cut off and surround German troops in the Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt area. On 30 April it moved again, about 20 miles east to the Geislingen area.

63. A FURLOUGH IN LONDON

My orders were to take a 7-day furlough in London, then report to a replacement depot in Birmingham, England on May 1, 1945. I wanted to visit London to celebrate my 20th birthday on April 29. However, I did not have any money or identification, nothing except my clothes and dog tags. The Red Cross Office in the hospital loaned me \$20.00 on my signature, and I was on my way to London on a train.

64. MY 20TH BIRTHDAY

I was in London on April 29, 1945 visiting the USO, sightseeing and partying. I met a US Glider Pilot, who looked with wonder at my Combat Infantryman Badge and Purple Heart. He had just returned from the parachute and glider troop drop across the Rhine River. Because of the situation, he could not be evacuated and fought with the paratroopers and glider infantry troops for a week before being evacuated. He seemed to have plenty of money, and I was broke. So we made a perfect match until his money was spent, then we parted.

On April 29 Hitler married Eva Braun and made his last will. The next day he killed her and then himself.

65. RETURN TO COMPANY H - ENGLAND TO GERMANY

On May 1 I started a 10-day trip back to Germany and my company by boarding a train in London for the 100-mile trip northwest to the Replacement Depot at Birmingham, England. I was anxious to return to my friends and buddies. After several days in the Birmingham Depot

I boarded another train to Southampton and then a British troop ship to cross the Channel to France. We were fed greasy mutton stew for two hot meals during the overnight voyage to Le Harve, France. Ugh! We disembarked from the ship and were moved by truck to a nearby Replacement Depot. Our records, clothing and whole body was again checked. These inspections took a couple of days; later we left Le Harve on a train for Germany. I finally crossed the Rhine River and into Germany over the high wooden railroad trestle bridge at Mannheim. We were told it was the only railroad bridge available to cross the Rhine River.

On May 6, delegates from 49 countries met in the Fairmont Hotel, San Francisco, CA to form the United Nations.

66. VE DAY – MAY 8, 1945

On May 7, 1945, the military forces of the German Third Reich surrendered unconditionally, effective May 8.

The end of the war came quietly for me. I have no strong recollection of the day or events. I suspect I was on a train moving southeast through Germany toward the large city of Ulm. The announcement came as an anticlimax to most of the troops around me. Most of us just shook the hands of GIs around us and went off to a quiet spot to give thanks. I gave a silent prayer for my survival. I was among strangers, all of us in the replacement depot system were strangers to each other; we belonged to units stationed somewhere in Germany. None of us knew exactly where our buddies and friends were or how many of them had survived the last days of the war.

67. AN ACCOUNTING

I had gone into combat and had come out with a shrapnel wound in my left leg, from an artillery shell but the leg seemed to be OK. My high school buddy, Dick Bragg, had been killed in France. My closest buddy and my second gunner, Owen Lindsey, had been killed in France as well as most of my 14-man machine gun section. To my knowledge, at this time, only Sgt. Carl Birkhofer had not been wounded; all the other men had been killed, recovering from wounds in hospitals in the US or already discharged.

The story of the Century reported that in 185 days of sustained combat, 916 100th Division men had been killed, 3,656 wounded and 180 listed as missing in action. The Division had advanced 186 miles, beaten the best elements of five German divisions and liberated many cities and towns. In 1994 *Michael D. Doubler* wrote the 100th Division sustained battle casualties of 4,790 and non-battle casualties of 7,425 for a total of 12,215. Those figures indicate a turnover of 86.7 percent.

The 397th Infantry Regiment had suffered almost 400 men killed; about 1,300 wounded in action and about 300 missing in action. About 82% of the men who had come over with the combat line companies had become a casualty. We had captured 6,835 prisoners and 157 towns.

Considering time on the line for all Infantry Divisions in the US Seventh Army, the 100th ranked fourth, behind only the 3rd, 36th and 45th, and ahead of eleven other divisions. The first three divisions were in combat in Africa, Sicily, Italy and invaded Southern France.

68. OCCUPATION DUTY I – WEISSENHORN AND UHINGEN, GERMANY

About May 10 I arrived at the Company H area in Weissenhorn, Germany, 10 miles southeast of Ulm. Captain Vincent Laudone, our former Executive Officer, now commanded our company. I was told that in early April 1945, just as the regiment was preparing to cross the Neckar River to assault Heilbronn, Captain Maiale was promoted to Major and transferred to the regiment as the Operations Officer.

Other men told me that on April 14th, German artillery shrapnel severed a leg artery on Sgt. Carl Birkhofer. He was one of the original men in my squad and was not injured when Owen Lindsey and others were killed in a mid-November 1944 battle. Our medics worked frantically to stop the flow of blood, but because of the battle situation he could not be evacuated and bled to death. With Carl's death that left only three of my original section alive, Marshall Moran and Lloyd Barnhouse (both somewhere recovering from their wounds), and me.

I was also told that the Company had just completed the move to Weissenhorn. Higher Headquarters had assigned the 397th Regiment an area about 700 square miles, encompassing 315 communities, towns and cities. The 2nd Battalion was responsible for guarding 47 towns and villages. Road blocks were established at all entrances to the town, and guards were set at factories, hospitals, bridges, public utilities, roads, bridges and German Army supply dumps. Because the sector was so large, we used jeeps for patrol duty. In addition to a mobile radio, each of us carried loaded rifles or carbines.

At the beginning of the occupation a curfew was established for the entire German population; they were only allowed on the streets from 11 AM to 1 PM each day. In a short time the curfew was extended from 7 AM to 8 PM. We did not encounter much trouble from the German population; only small children, women and old men remained. The surviving members of German military forces were being held in prison camps. However, we were constantly on the lookout for deserters, firearms, ammunition and civilians who might be inclined to harm us. Many villages needed to be thoroughly searched. During this initial period of occupation, all American soldiers were prohibited from "fraternization" with the German civilians, particularly women.

One day I was assigned guard duty on the eastern side of a wooden railroad bridge crossing the Danube River, which flows through Ulm. American Engineers had rebuilt the bridge. As I recall, it was the only railroad bridge into southern Germany. All members of the guard were briefed that we should be especially alert for any sabotage attempts and allow no person to cross the bridge. At that time, all European countries used wire lines to close and open track switches. The wires run along the rails on small posts about 10 inches above the crushed rock. During the early evening I noticed a group of civilians climbing up a slope toward the tracks. I called to them to halt, but they continued to climb up the slope toward the tracks. I called for help from the other guard and began to run toward the people with my rifle at ready. I was so intent on watching that group of people that I failed to notice the switch wires and tripped. I

flew into the crushed rock along the tracks, landing on my right kneecap. I do not remember what happened to the group of people. The other guards called an ambulance and I ended up off my feet, again, in a hospital for a few days. No serious damage was done only great pain and loss of dignity.

When we were not on a guard post or patrolling in a jeep, we were kept busy with training schedules or organized athletics. Some of us helped construct several baseball diamonds, volleyball courts, and other recreational facilities. On the weekends we swam in a tiled Olympic sized swimming pool and spent time inspecting the war damage around the area. All of our dirty, worn clothing was turned in for new uniforms. We looked like new recruits.

American Military Government units were beginning to organize the civilian government and selecting officials to run the cities and towns. Each city/town required a mayor or “Burgomeister” to head the local government. Water and power systems needed to be repaired to maintain our health, as well as the German population. We were constantly occupied searching for German soldiers, former Gestapo agents and Nazi officials. We learned that civilians were cooperative and would turn in Nazi officials who were hiding in their midst. Most German civilians were engaged in black-market dealings and picking up American cigarette butts in the streets. Money had little value. Chocolate candy bars, fruit, food and cigarettes could be used as a medium of exchange

A vivid memory of this time in Germany was long lines of people or large groups of people walking the roads, going in all directions, carrying everything they owned. For the most part these were people that were ex-slave laborers for the Germans. They were returning to their home or country or just wandering about aimlessly. We called them DPs (displaced persons) and established checkpoints along main roads to control the flow and to keep order.

By the latter part of May we were housed in German homes, sleeping in huge German beds, each under a fluffy feather comforter. We were eating three hot meals each day and received mail on a daily basis. Hot water was available to wash our faces, shave our light whiskers and take a shower. During my trip through the Replacement System I was issued leather boots; some of the troops still wore their ShoePacs. These were soon replaced; now all of us had ankle and arch support. Life in the Army was getting better!

Another vivid memory of this period was guarding German soldiers. I can still see an open field area, about 3-4 football fields in size, filled with thousands of prisoners. I was one of three American soldiers guarding them. I carried a submachine gun with two clips of ammunition. The German soldiers were dressed in their gray, heavy wool winter uniform. The sky was clear and the sun was hot. I wondered what we three guards would do if the prisoners rushed us or just walked away. Fortunately, they were just as happy that the war was over as we were and caused no trouble. They also understood that we would eventually feed them. Later in the afternoon our Military Police moved them to a stockade.

German farmers received an exception from the curfew to work in their fields and tend livestock. Headquarters realized that one of their first priorities must be to help the farmers plant crops to feed their people. Seeds had been shipped from the USA, Canada and England. We provided the seeds to the farmers. German farmers began to complain that wild animals were eating the young sprouts; they were as hungry as the civilian population. Since all

weapons and ammunition were prohibited, the US Army sent out a notice for GI hunters. I volunteered for the hunt. The woods around the area were cared for by German Foresters; they cleaned out the underbrush and cut roads for firebreaks on a checker board pattern through the woods. On the appointed day about twenty GIs, with M-1 rifles or carbines, were strung out along a road in the woods while members of the Old German Hunters Union walked through the woods to scare the game toward us. We had been warned to allow the game to cross the road, through our lines, then, and only then, were we to turn around and shoot. In the excitement several ex-infantrymen forgot to wait and bullets began to fly near me. I hit the ground thinking – you go through the war and then get shot in this situation - no way! Somehow, we reduced the wild game herd, gave the Germans some meat to eat and saved the crops - without killing any GIs.

In an attempt to impress the population of our austere presence, our officers and NCOs emphasized unit discipline, military bearing, and military courtesy. Inspections were held to improve personal cleanliness and the appearance of vehicles and equipment. Daily retreat ceremonies (lowering the flag) were initiated. We saw the film "Two Down and One to Go" which explained the redeployment program and the system of points for discharge. Patrol and guard duty continued. When off duty we played baseball, volleyball and basketball, relaxed and wrote letters. I wrote to Owen Lindsay's mother in Decatur, GA. For a synopsis of our correspondence see Appendix B.

I was assigned as Acting Section Leader in the 1st Platoon of Company H. Our strength was increased by new reinforcements from the States. The new people were assigned to six weeks of training emphasizing the actual combat experience of men from the Company. We had them in class during eight-hour days, teaching the fundamentals of soldiering, stressing all infantry weapons, with emphasis on the Heavy Machine Gun and the 81-mm Mortar. Other subjects included demolition, combat intelligence, communications, mines, booby traps and German sabotage. The new men lived in the field the last week of their training under simulated combat conditions.

In early June I asked all the men in my section to sign a large red, black and white Nazi flag that I had liberated from a German civilian. During the next few days they wrote their names and home addresses. The majority were from the eastern USA: NY, PA, MI, NC, MD, IN, NJ, VA, MS, and AL. I brought the flag home with me; it remains in my war trophy box along with a liberated German P-38 pistol.

On June 6, 1945, 38 men, all over 42 years old, left the division to start their journey to the USA. Two days later Company H moved from Weissenborn to Uhingen. My assignment as a machinegun section leader continued, but our machine guns had been turned into the Company Supply Room. My section often was given guard or work details or I was given special assignments around the Company area.

69. PROMOTION & MOTHER'S POEM

A couple of days later I was promoted to sergeant. My mother celebrated my promotion by writing a poem for me:

OUR SERGEANT

He's a Sergeant now, our boy so dear
Two years ago; he left us here
To serve his country in time of war
And live to witness much cruel horror!

His friends were killed by the Nazi beasts
It grieved his heart, quickened its beat
To fight to the finish, to reprieve this act
And give the Nazis' their rightful smack.

We know how cruel these master minds
Planned this war, to be won in due time
And they'd rule the world with savage hand
Making their slaves in every land.

Our Sergeant knew that "Right" would win
God rules this world thru thick'n thin
We see His works, tho' man tries his best
To do man's will but Gods stands the test.

Yes, a Sergeant is he, so stalwart and strong
A man to be proud of; away oh, so long!
But someday we hope his home will behold
The boy who left us, but a few more years old.

On June 26, 1945, the delegates of 50 nations signed the charter of the United Nations

70. COMPANY H CITATION

During the morning of July 4th, a division review and parade was held in Stuttgart, Germany. Company H and the 3rd Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment was each presented the Distinguished Unit Citation for the fighting at Rimling, France in January 1945. We were cited for defeating the combined attacks of two German divisions, which were supported by tanks, super-heavy tank destroyers, artillery and rockets, during the last German offensive in the west, Operation NORDWIND. We were very proud that our effort was recognized.

The formal citation was dated June 9, 1945. My company was cited by the Army Commander with Battle Honors - Citation of Unit – and awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for outstanding performance of duty in action. The citation read: "COMPANY H, 397th INFANTRY REGIMENT is cited for outstanding accomplishment in combat on 8 January 1945 and 9 January 1945, in the vicinity of Rimling, France. Under the pressure of a savagely-prosecuted attack by numerically-superior hostile forces which forced back adjacent elements, Company H staunchly held its ground, threw back assault after assault and by its gallant and unyielding defense prevented the encirclement of the battalion by the enemy. The initial hostile attack in the night by infantry mounted on tanks was dispersed by the deadly fire of the company's heavy machine guns and mortars, and subsequent daylight tank-infantry

attacks were also repulsed with heavy losses to the enemy. Attempts at infiltration by hostile soldiers wearing American parkas were thwarted and the opposing riflemen killed or forced to withdraw. Sixty-three prisoners were captured by the company and an estimated four hundred casualties inflicted upon the attackers in the heroic action in which every member of the organization reflected great credit upon himself, his company and the Army of the United States”

71. MOVE TO LEONBERG, GERMANY

We moved from Uhingen to Leonberg, a town some 10 miles west of Stuttgart on the 7th of July. The division was assigned an area of 50 by 80 miles to occupy. Leonberg was a small farming town with an Autobahn passing through it. We marched in a column of platoons to our assigned street. Captain Laudone, through interpreters, ordered the German people, who lived in the houses we were to occupy, to leave. They had one hour to remove whatever possessions they wanted and were told they could return to their homes only for one hour each week. We were ordered to do no damage or looting. The German owners unexpectedly cooperated and took only personal items that were not needed for our comfort. They also expressed a desire to aid in the care and cleaning of their homes. They were permitted to enter the homes for an hour each day under close surveillance to clean up. Everyone seemed satisfied. As time passed many of the women did our laundry in exchange for chocolate, cigarettes, sugar and food.

After several weeks without incidents we were permitted to go into the town and explore the countryside. (Three pictures, taken in July 1945, showing me and other Company H GIs are included in the snapshots and documents section).

By this time the war had been over for two months. Most of the German civilians had made an easily recognized transition from the stunned and sullen people we encountered in early May. I suppose they had accepted their defeat and had by now observed that we Americans were not tearing their country apart and were not raping their women as the Russians were doing. Most of the population continued to be women, small children and old men. The soldier age group had not yet returned from prison camps.

The Stuttgart Municipal House, in the center of the battered and blasted city, was made into a Red Cross Club and a large movie house. Late each afternoon there were concerts with the best section reserved for military personnel. Many trucks were made available to take us to and from Stuttgart.

General Eisenhower signed an order to relax the non-fraternization rules. What we were doing was now legitimate.

On July 16, in the remote New Mexico desert, near Alamogordo Air Base, in tight secrecy, the first atomic device, called Fat Man, was detonated on a 20-foot wooden tower. The scientists were not sure whether it would merely explode, destroy New Mexico or wipe out the whole world.

About this time frame, during a division review, the 2nd Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment was awarded a second Distinguished Unit Citation, for its actions during the April 3-12

battle for Heilbronn. Company H, 397th Infantry Regiment is one of the few US Army units which have been awarded two Distinguished Unit Citations.

72. GERMAN POPULATION SEARCH – JULY 21, 1945

On July 19th all units in the American Occupation Zone received “SECRET” Operation Instructions for “Operation TALLY-HO”, the systematic search of all civilians, homes and buildings. It came as a complete surprise to both the Germans and most of us. I was awakened about 3:30 AM the morning of July 21, with orders to dress immediately and report to the company orderly room. All officers and NCOs were called for a meeting. We were told that the battalion's three rifle companies were assigned to various areas for search duty. In addition, 15 Guard Posts were assigned to Company H. Assignments were distributed. I was placed in charge of Post 10 located on the east side of Leonburg at the Autobahn. Two of my men and I would man Post 10.

My orders were simple: stop everybody and check them for identification, weapons, ammunitions, proper trip tickets, and orders. No person or vehicles were allowed into or out of Leonberg without a check of their papers. All Allied personnel were to be checked for orders and identification. We were to arrest all ex-German soldiers without proper discharges, all civilians with firearms and stop all convoys and check all trip tickets and orders. In addition, if any civilians, except farmers working their fields, were out of their homes before curfew they were to be arrested. Each of us in charge of a Guard Post was given a small slip of paper, explaining our authority in the German language.

We were ordered to pick up our Guard Post members, load into waiting Jeeps and to be at our posts before 5 AM, two hours before curfew expired. The officer in charge ordered me to hold everybody with a violation until he returned about 10 AM.

As I stood on the autobahn looking east toward Stuttgart, I could see for miles through the wispy morning mist. The 4-lane road made a long, gently curving left turn into a wide, shallow valley and then headed into the city. There were a few homes along the Autobahn, all associated with the farms that lined the road. In fact, a farmer and his wife were in the fields on the right side of the road just before dawn, working the ground with hand implements. We did not bother them.

Germans civilians began to emerge from wooded areas along the road on their way to Stuttgart. Most carried a pack, or bag or pushed a two or four wheeled cart filled with goods that they intended to sell or trade. Because they were breaking the 7 AM curfew, I ordered my men to stop them. We showed them our orders that explained why they were detained. After searching their bags and persons, we moved them to a small hill off to the side of the road to await the return of our officer. We did not find any weapons or improper identification. In no time I had about 20 people on that small hill. Most were unhappy to be detained, no doubt wondering what their punishment would be.

After the sun came up, a young woman, riding a bicycle, drove out on the autobahn from a farm road and turned away from us, toward Stuttgart. I called to her to stop. She kept peddling down the slight grade. I called to her twice more without any notice on her part. I turned to Pfc. Casimer Lubinsky, from Detroit, MI, and ordered “Fire one bullet on the road,

near her, but don't hit her". Lubinsky carefully sighted his rifle and fired. We saw puffs of dust jump up from the road surface. The woman was so shocked that she lost control and fell on the road; the bicycle skidded away. The farmer and his wife, who were working in the field on the right side of the road, began to wail and cry. I thought, "They think we shot her". The people on the mound began to scream loudly at us. My concern was what do we do if the 20 people attack us? Some of the men were shaking their fists at us, acting as if they might rush us. However, that didn't happen; the woman picked herself up from the road, raised the bicycle and walked back toward me. I pointed her toward the crowd of people on the mound. They comforted her. I hoped that she would learn what to do when the words "Halt" or "Stop" were spoken in English.

In a couple of hours our officer returned with a German speaking interpreter. Most of the people were released with a warning. The rest were detained for our MPs. We remained at the Autobahn Post until well after the evening curfew but found no persons in violation. Later we were picked up and returned to the company area.

The next morning I was awakened again before dawn. After breakfast my detail of men was driven to a large farm factory building near the edge of town that housed many Displaced Persons (DPs). My post was at the main gate to the building. I was ordered to keep the DPs inside because other troops were to search the entire premises for weapons. Actually this was a slave labor camp – rumors persisted that they worked in a nearby underground aircraft assembly plant which was located under a nearby mountain penetrated by an Autobahn Highway tunnel. Many of the ex-slaves remained in the building because they did not want to go home, and others had no family or home. My orders were also to keep the local Germans away from the DPs. I suspected the DPs would have loved to get their hands on certain members of the local German population.

I accompanied the troops searching the DPs and building. By noontime the building was swept; many guns and knives were confiscated. While walking through the building and inspecting the living and sleeping quarters we received a heavy infestation of fleas. Later that day we were deloused with DDT to get rid of the fleas. While we stood nude a medic covered our entire body with the powder. Then we were issued new clothes.

In the afternoon while I was resting from the search and guard duty, our Battalion Commander and Captain Laudone walked into my post without warning and found me asleep. Only the persistence of Captain Laudone's request and explanation saved me from being court martialed for "Sleeping on Guard Duty".

Each "Mail Call" regularly brought letters and packages for home. Mother wrote me every day; Marilyn wrote each week. My mail did not arrive each day, when it did arrive I had a stack of letters to read and answer.

On July 24, President Truman, in tight secrecy, decided to drop the Atomic Bomb on a Japanese city.

On July 26 I was issued a Class B Pass allowing me to be absent from the Company H area, when not on duty, from 11:30 PM to 5 AM on any day to visit any place within the limits of the Stuttgart metropolitan area. The US Army began to reduce their strict control over its officers and NCOs.

73. GOING HOME I – REDEPLOYMENT TO USA – AUGUST 10, 1945

The “old GIs”, those of us who had shipped over to France with the 100th were anxious to get home; we knew that the war with Japan continued and we probably would be a part of the invasion of the Japan homeland. Rumors floated around that the division was to return to the USA in early September 1945. We were to be given 30 days leave, then meet at San Francisco, ship to Japan, offload from the ship into landing barges and participate in the assault on the Japanese homeland in the US 10th Corps area. The invasion, consisting of 1,000 ships and a million men, was scheduled for November 1. The Islands of Japan would be conquered, but only after an estimated year of fighting and one million casualties. The planners predicted 100,000 casualties during the landing phase.

Most of the people in the world were not aware of the events listed below. The US Government, because of wartime secrecy, did not announce them. Only a very few people in the world knew anything about an Atomic Bomb.

On July 30, 1945, the US Cruiser Indianapolis was in the Pacific Ocean about 650 miles east of Guam. She had just delivered the first Atomic Bombs to the Air Force on Tinian Island. A Japanese submarine torpedoed the ship causing it to quickly sink; about 900 of the 1,200 men crew jumped in the ocean. They endured four days without water in a sea of sharks, 317 survived.

On August 6, the first Atomic Bomb exploded at 2,000 feet over Hiroshima, Japan. An area of 4 square miles was erased.

On August 8, Russia declared War on Japan.

On August 9, the second Atomic Bomb was exploded over Nagasaki, Japan.

On August 10, Japan sued for peace.

The same day, August 10, the 100th Infantry Division was alerted for deployment to the USA. We were going home! In a few days an advanced party of officers and men from the division traveled to the port of Marseilles, France to make travel arrangements.

On August 15, the Emperor of Japan informed his people that the war was over.

On August 17, the division was ordered to prepare for redeployment from the ETO. We begin to dream of home. Would we be on the boat before the peace was signed? We were ordered to prepare to leave Leonburg on August 27, and to sail from Marseilles on September 10. August 27th passed and we remained in Leonberg, Germany. Wartime censorship kept the world and us from knowing of the pending Japanese surrender.