

EPILOGUE

In 1985, while I was thinking about writing my original memoir, and may have even made a start, I ran across a remarkable book, purely by chance, in a bookstore I frequented. It was *V-Mail, Letters of a World War II Combat Medic*. This was probably the first of what has become a flood of 100th Division personal histories of one kind or another, and it remains one of the best. As I read the book I found myself re-living, albeit from a slightly different perspective, exactly the times that I was beginning to try to write about. As I've noted elsewhere, the book was a good *aide-memoire* for exact times and places I had gotten foggy about so long after it all happened. Moreover, there was also information in it about a 100th Division Association with a formal structure, a newsletter and annual reunion meetings, which I had known nothing about. Eventually, after I had contacted the Association and joined, I was able to put a notice in the newsletter asking anyone who remembered me to make contact.

Somewhat to my surprise I immediately heard from three men whom I had known well, and who seemed delighted that I had surfaced after all these years. Encouraged by this, I made further contact with yet another man. We were traveling on vacation close to where he had lived, and I found him by the simple expedient of looking in the telephone book—which I thought remarkable in this era of restless mobility. The Division association has an annual reunion every September, and in 1986 three of the four old comrades-in-arms were able to meet me there—that year in Pennsylvania—after a 41-year separation. I was flattered, and not a little moved, that they all said they were coming just to see me, two all the way from California, and the one I had already seen briefly, from New Hampshire.

A high point of that weekend occurred when we managed to get our old platoon sergeant, who lives near that reunion site, to come and spend an afternoon with us. I had sometimes hated and even feared this man when I was serving under him, although I had a nagging feeling—as early as 1946 when I wrote him a letter attempting reconciliation—that I was very wrong. But it was a time of great stress and much fear, and I was very young and immature in many ways. The regimentation chafed me and the war scared me when we got into it. I suppose now that I blamed him personally, as the nearest authority figure, for problems that were my own alone, unavoidable in the circumstances, and certainly none of his doing. It took me just a few hours that day to recognize clearly just how very wrong and unfair my regard of this man had been.

As we sat talking that afternoon the realization gradually grew on me that he too had been afraid, and had chafed under the regimentation. Much more significantly, though, he had also felt the enormous burden of leading and protecting us, the members of his platoon. He had felt responsible for us, almost as if we were his sons or younger brothers, in situations where that sort of responsibility was virtually impossible. He and we could do all the right things at the right times and still be killed or maimed by mindless forces at any moment. Some were killed, others wounded—he was wounded—and as we learned that day, so many years later, each instance was to him like losing a piece of himself. And yet with all that strain and impossible compassion he did continuously a superb job of basic leadership.

Those were some of the most poignant few hours I've ever experienced, but there is more. I felt then, and still do, the closest imaginable affinity to the men we saw at that reunion. Somehow the closeness, the intensity, of experiences we shared 40-plus years ago had survived intact, and this with literally no contact whatsoever with one another in the interim. The following June we went to California and visited two of those old comrades—one reason for the trip—and though we didn't talk much more about shared experiences it just seemed that we belonged together, like long-separated members of the same family. Now no less than 14 more reunions have come and gone, of which I've managed to get to 11. I've met many others from the old Company, and have made new friends among the Division veterans as well. The wonderful feelings of brotherhood and affinity remain strong.

The sharp-eyed reader will note that everyone in my original memoir is anonymous. I did it that way in the beginning because I felt it would give me more freedom to tell details without offending anyone unnecessarily. The *Newsletter* contributions could not have worked that way, of course, because we had no anonymous contributions (well, maybe one, and I don't think that will fool many who were there), but I saw no necessity to go back and change the original part fourteen years after writing it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In all probability there would never have been a “G” *Company Newsletter* without the inspiration and hard work of its Publisher, Richard A. Welke. In the beginning he did all the hardest work: kept the mailing list up to date, did the mailings, handled all the finances, and was responsible for the lion's share of finding all the people to send it to in the first place. And of course my debt to those whose *Newsletter* contributions are presented here is enormous. Merely listing their names again is inadequate thanks, but