

New Years, 1944–45

by Robert Fair, 399-D

This was written in June 1945 while Corporal Fair, 399/D, was recuperating from wounds received in Heilbronn, Germany.

In the early morning of New Year's Eve, and immediately prior to the action described by Fair, his position intercepted a German patrol. After an exchange of fire leaving one German dead, the patrol withdrew, leaving this small group of American soldiers nervous and on the alert for the rest of the night.

December 31, 1944—1600 hours

It has already gotten dark and is beginning to get colder. There isn't any shelter on this bleak hill and no undergrowth or trees to cut the sharp lash of the winter wind as it comes down out of the north. Our noses and ears are cold and our hands are freezing, but worst of all, there isn't any way to keep our feet warm. Joe Butensky has already been evacuated with frozen feet, and if we don't get off of the line soon we are all going to have trench-foot. Our only machine gun is frozen and couldn't be fired regardless of how badly we needed it.

In addition to the weather and snow that covers all the ground, the fellows have got something else to worry about. Sergeant George Chestnut brought news that there are three German divisions massing in Bitche, the town below us, and our intelligence thinks they might be giving us a hard time of it before long. There are so few of us that I don't know what we would do if they threw anything larger than a platoon in our direction. We have all been thinking about that for the last few nights and it is no wonder that our nerves are as taught as a fiddle string.

December 31, 1944—2000 hours

It must be below zero! The past few days have been the worst in my life and I hope I never have to undergo another experience like this. We started out with sixteen men here eight days ago and now there are only six of us left. It wouldn't be so bad, but we haven't done a thing but sit here and wait for the Krauts' artillery to make short work of us.

The night is clear and I have the company phone to listen to, so things aren't as bad as they could be. The phone helps me pass away the time of night; there is always good b_s_ coming over the wire. Some of the men of B Company have a good sense of humor even if it is a bit morbid.

Things are certainly quiet. This isn't at all natural and one can't help thinking that something is going to happen. We have been waiting for something to happen for some time now. Surely the Germans know that we haven't got many men around here. Everything has been sent north to help out in the Battle of the Bulge.

I hope this is just another night.

January 1, 1945—0001 hours

It looks like this is going to be quite a year! I have spent the last thirty minutes digging myself out of my hole that those stinking Krauts caved in on me.

At 2330 hours I looked over in the east and saw the very best display of New Year's Eve fireworks that I ever saw. I guess the Germans decided to do a little celebrating of their own and they cut loose with a few bloodcurdling *Nebelwerfers* or "Screaming Meemies." These are rockets that leave a stream of fire behind them that looks a lot like one of those red neon signs back home.

After the first projectiles landed pretty close, I decided to make a dive for my hole.

No sooner did I get in the thing than there was a tremendous explosion overhead and some of the logs caved in on me. I think I will be spitting dirt for the next week or two.

I sure do wish it would get light. A couple of minutes ago, the Germans must have started attacking up the hill across from us. There is one hell of a racket going on over there. With tracer bullets flying all over

the place, it looks a lot like the Fourth of July shows we used to see at Fair Park back home. The Americans have red tracers and the Germans have every other color in the rainbow.

All of this is happening over a thousand yards away and the sensation feels like when I watched the Little Rock Travelers play baseball from a tree out beyond the center field fence. There goes a bunch of tracers and after a few seconds I can hear the rata-tat sound. Interspersed is the woomp of our mortar shells landing. Good old Dog Company.

The company phone has suddenly come to life and I can hear familiar voices asking for instructions to combat waves of enemy infantrymen.

It must be pretty important because Kennedy at the command post is getting Captain Brown up. Any time the old man is awakened, I know something terrible must be happening.

There is nothing to report from over here. I'm glad they decided to not attack this hill.

Guess I won't get any sleep tonight. Boy, I sure would like to be home!

January 1, 1945—0800 hours

I wish somebody would tell us what is happening. The phone went dead around four o'clock and Poore didn't bring up any chow this morning. There doesn't seem to be anybody around this section of the universe but us and I'm beginning to get worried. There was fighting all night and now the Heines are running all over the fields on the other side of the draw. We can see them but they are about five hundred yards away and aren't bothering us. There is no use firing; we probably couldn't hit anything at this distance and we might give our position away. If they don't know we're here I'm not about to tell them about it. As I said, I wish somebody would tell us what the hell is going on.

January 1, 1945—1400 hours

The only eventful thing that happened this morning was Sergeant Hall coming to pick up our frozen machine gun. I told him that it wouldn't work but he didn't listen to me. When I asked him what was happening he just mumbled that there were all kinds of trouble and he didn't know very much about the whole situation.

I've tapped all the telephone wires I can find but there still isn't any connection to be had. We have no business being in such a remote position anyway. I don't want to go wandering off looking for someone because I might run into somebody I'm not looking for, and that would be bad.

January 1, 1945—1500 hours

We are leaving this place! A little while ago, while I was trying to tap in on the company wire, Major Lentz came highballing out of the woods. He asked who was in charge and I referred him to Sergeant Chestnut. Chestnut had seen him coming and hurried over to where we were. "We've got to defend the head of this draw," he shouted with all the gusto of the 'heavy' in a high school play. "We've got to defend it at all costs."

Sergeant Chestnut is a slow and deliberate Southerner and he didn't grasp the seriousness of the situation right away. Nevertheless, after being rocked back on his heels by the first blast of the officer, he told Major Lentz that there were only six of us and there was a possibility that we would have a hard time holding off a company or two of blood-thirsty Krauts. This piece of logic didn't phase the Major, however, since he didn't have time to worry himself with mere technicalities. He came back with the remark that helps an officer through many a trying situation, "That is an order, Sergeant," and with that he hurried away.

So now we're moving out to "hold that draw at all costs." What a hell of a way to celebrate New Year's. I wonder who won the Rose Bowl.