

Memorable Incidents of Enemy Artillery or Machine-Gun Fire

by H. Foster Mitchem, 397-C

1. Attacking a wooded area we were pinned down at the edge of the woods. An enemy machine gun opened fire. From where I was lying face down and hugging the ground, I raised my head and saw chips flying off the trunk of a nearby tree. These were the result of bullets from the machine gun hitting the tree about 4-6 inches above the ground. Suddenly another noise occurred. I thought at the time an enemy mortar shell or grenade had been thrown in my direction. The noise was the result of a terrified rabbit running from the woods and right over my rifle that was lying beside me. It scared me and my heart skipped a couple of beats.

2. We were dug in Manheim on the Rhine River. I was in my foxhole with my rifle lying on the ground across the front of the foxhole. Suddenly the German artillery opened up. When the fire let up a shell had broken the stock of my rifle.

3. We were in the attack and nightfall was coming on. We were in a pasture of a farm where we dug a foxhole and covered it with a door that we got from a nearby barn. The next morning, my buddy and I were eating a K ration breakfast package when an enemy shell came in that turned out to be a dud. The shell buried its nose into the ground about 15 feet in front of the hole. It was close enough to throw dirt onto the canned breakfast egg concoction. I brushed the dirt off my food and continued eating. We hoped the unexploded shell was just a dud, and didn't have some kind of delayed timer that could set it off later. It turned out to be just that—a dud. THANK GOD.

4. We were close to a battery of "Nebble Werfers". These were rockets that we called screaming meemies since they sounded so terrifying when they were fired. One exploded near me and a piece of hot shrapnel struck my elbow leaving a bruise but not tearing the skin.

5. From our dugout in defensive positions, at night we would send in a platoon of riflemen to occupy a beat up French town between our lines and the German lines. The town's name was Urbach. No one was in the town but we took turns sending a different platoon in at night to keep the Germans out. The Germans were aware we were occupying the town at night and were pulling out in the early morning hours of 5-6 AM. On this particular morning I was about to leave the broken down stairwell of the beat up house we had occupied and get into the narrow street to work my way back to our defensive position when the fireworks started. A shell exploded in the street in front of me. I jumped back into the house and observed a 4th of July display in February. A German tank was peppering the town with 88mm. shells. I heard one of our fellows who had left a little earlier calling for a medic from a hill outside of the town.

6. I was dug in at the top of a ravine. On the bottom of the ravine was a railroad track that led to a tunnel. At the mouth of the tunnel was a flatcar and a couple of box cars. WE had just arrived here and there was a group of displaced slave laborers from Poland or Russia, both men and women. Our platoon Sgt. had set his command post on one of the flatcars. Suddenly a German tank fired an 88mm. shell into the mouth of the tunnel. It severely wounded the Sgt. and decapitated one of the women living there. I watched four German medics arrive with a stretcher and place the Sgt. on it to carry him back to a German military hospital that we had captured earlier that morning. We were sorry to learn our platoon Sgt. had died from his wounds.

7. I was walking in a ditch beside a tank. Several of my squad was riding the tank and a squad of riflemen walked in the ditch on each side of the tank. Suddenly a rifleman a couple of men in front of me shouted they're behind the wood pile and he swung his rifle in that direction when there was a terrible explosion. The tank had been hit by a rocket shell fired by a German soldier behind the woods pile firing a panzerfaust. I'm wearing two hearing aids partially the result of that explosion. A good friend of mine who was riding the tank next to me was killed. Some years later I was able to visit his grave in France.