GEORGE AND ME

The Saga of an Infantryman in World War II and The Company With Whom He Fought

by

Tom Bourne, Jr.

DEDICATION

To the memory of the members of Company G who went into Hell with us, but who could not come back. They are truly our “loved ones” as they would be if they were our brothers, as they were in all but blood.

From the last page of the original *Combat Company*:

IN MEMORIUM

Pfc. Rudy Amezcua
Pfc. Adam J. Arzo
Pfc. Seth A. Cockrell
Pfc. Carl E. Henry
Pfc. Alby J. Kapsner
Sgt. Vincent Q. Kelly
Pfc. Donald W. Rector
Sgt. Warren T. Schneider
Pfc. Vito Sciara
Pfc. George R. Tetterton
Pfc. Francisco J. Vasquez
Pfc. Paul E. White

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

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There You Stand

There you stand
Tall and brave
Hand held in a four finger salute
Eyes straight ahead
Determined
Fierce

There you march
Strong and bold
Feet set in a pattern
Wind brushing against your face
Steady
On beat

There you watch
Scared and unsure
Rifle at your shoulder
Friends around you falling
Shaking
On the verge of breaking

There you cry
Mourning and sorrowful
Head bowed down
Eyes brimming with tears
Somber
Melancholy
Shattered

There you stand
Proud and tired
You have served your country
Made a difference
Boastful
Yet regret overcomes

You are a hero
And shall ever be remembered
By those who love you
Those who care
Forever

Hannah Goldfield, age 12
Veterans Day 1999

I. BACKGROUND

In the fall of 1987, just after I retired from my job as an architectural specifications writer, I wrote a memoir of my life during the years of World War II. I called it *My Good War*, with apologies to Studs Terkel, who had recently published his book of interviews with people who had lived through and participated in what he called "The Good War." The rationale was that the experiences of unremarkable people, in which group I certainly belong, could be worthy of notice if they happen in remarkable times.

I covered my life during the time from the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 to my discharge from the Army in April of 1946. The core of this was an accounting of my year and a half as an infantryman in Company "G", 399th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division. This time lasted from March 26, 1944 through October 12, 1945 (with a two–month break while I was hospitalized), and was roughly divided into three six–month periods. The first of these involved training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the second, combat actions against the Germans in the Vosges Mountains of France and into southwestern Germany, and the third, as part of the army of occupation, most of that time at Pforzheim, Germany.

Since writing my memoir I have had a rather vaguely defined ambition to write and edit a history of Company "G" during those 18 months, with the thought that the story would come from those who experienced it—to the extent that I could locate them and persuade them to participate. There is a little paperback book, *Combat Company*, which is a history of "G" Company from the time we boarded the troop ship in New York through V-E Day, written by members of the Company who had experienced it all, and published in Germany in the Summer of 1945. My book I envisaged as being different from—but supplementary to—*Combat Company* in that the stories and other contributions would be personal rather than an overview of the complete story. We have all the facts; this would be illustrative of many of them. From the beginning it seemed that it could be a cumbersome, time–consuming, and probably expensive process. I thought about it from time to time in the following years, but never did much about it—or so I believed.

It was at about this time, at the second 100th Division reunion I attended, that I met Richard Welke. He had been in "G" Company, though we had known each other only casually, if at all. Neither of us could be sure. Nevertheless, we struck up a warm friendship, and commenced a regular and frequent postal correspondence that still continues, although now it's primarily e-mail. Over the course of many months, our correspondence led us into a search for other members of the original Company. We had each met a few of our fellow veterans, and, through them, at subsequent reunions, the Division records we were able to access, the Veterans Administration, searching out–of–town telephone books, lately the Internet, and other means, we have so far managed to find, or find out about, 116 men who had at one time or another been assigned to Company "G". Of these, 45 were either deceased when we learned about them or have passed away since we found their whereabouts. This amounts to almost 40% of the 300–odd men who we estimate may have passed through the Company ranks from the time just before we were shipped overseas in October 1944 until almost exactly a year later in October 1945 when the Division started making preparations to go home. By then a great many of us had been transferred to other units slated to stay

in Germany for a while longer, because we didn't have enough discharge points to go home with the 100th Division.

Once we had gathered all those names, we decided we should do something with them, The result was the establishment of the *"G" Company Newsletter*. We started it in late 1989, and to date have managed to put out over 35 issues, at the rate of approximately one every four months. We have basically informed our readers that their old buddies still exist and where they are, provided news of each others' current activities, reported on official and informal reunions when we get to see one another, and—the point of all this—urged them to share with us memories of Company "G" in the war, and their lives since that time.

In this endeavor we have had some success. Many of our readers have responded, some with only a sentence or two, others with quite detailed accounts, or extended quotations from wartime letters. The memories have ranged from almost contemporaneous accounts written down long ago to memories recently dredged up from the mists of time. In every case, they are at least interesting, and some, I feel, are valuable historical documents. We have found old unit newspapers and other wartime documents to publish excerpts from as well, and we have reprinted all of the original *Combat Company*.

So, now I have my memoir, plus all this additional material, and it seems to me that I shall not be able to get much more information for my history, and that this, therefore, is the time to put it all together. I have taken my original memoir and incorporated in it, at the appropriate places, material originally published in the *Newsletter* as contributions from our readers, including some items of my own that didn't get into the original memoir.

A note about sources. Fortunately, I did not have to rely solely on my memory in writing the memoir; memory plays strange tricks over the course of 40 or more years. *Combat Company* has of course been invaluable. The official 100th Division history *The Story of the Century* has also been useful, as has the 399th Regiment history *399th In Action*. I was also able to confirm some dates and places in *V-Mail, Letters of a World War II Combat Medic,* by PFC Keith Winston, a very moving book edited and published by Sarah Winston. Winston was in the 398th Regiment, I in the 399th, but both were parts of the 100th Division. Finally, after I had written the first draft of the original memoir, I discovered that my father had saved almost all of the letters I wrote him during my time in the Army. There are only two from basic training days, but, with only a couple of apparent gaps, the rest of the time is covered. There are 76 letters altogether, all completely legible and clearly dated. Thus it is possible to pinpoint in many cases exactly when and where many things happened without relying on fallible memory. Much of the letters' content has little relevancy to what I have tried to write here, but there is some useful information. I have included passages from the letters where appropriate. There is also a small portfolio of sketches, some of them incomplete, that I wrote in the early 1950s, which recall a few episodes much more accurately than I can from this vantagepoint in time.

II. THE BEGINNING

Everyone in my generation remembers indelibly where he was on December 7, 1941, when one of the most shocking acts of violence in modern-day America took place. On that Sunday I, soon to be 17 years old, was at home, which was Maplewood Farm in Woodstock, Vermont. I was not listening to the symphony broadcast on the radio, as so many were that afternoon. I was probably reading. It was the middle of one most difficult winters of my life, before or since, and I retreated to reading often. I don't recall if anyone was in the house with me, but I do remember that that the phone rang in the early afternoon and someone, probably my mother, who was having lunch at a neighbor's, told me that Pearl Harbor in Hawaii had been bombed by the Japanese, and that I should turn on the radio—which I did, and heard the beginning of it all.

I reflect now with some amazement that my life was not really affected very much by the war for a long time; over a year and a half was to elapse before it did. My hard Winter—which is not really a part of this tale—continued, and with Spring and early Summer of 1942 came high school graduation. Because of wartime travel restrictions we were denied our senior class trip—for which we blamed the principal! There was much talk about gasoline rationing, and a few older boys left school to join the services, but the war didn't really touch most of us—yet.

That summer I worked at the Woodstock Inn as a bellhop. Because of travel restrictions business was way off, and I believe the Inn—open only in the summers then—closed for the duration of the war at the end of that season. The bartender that summer was a Viennese opera singer refugee (he taught me how to play chess), and a self–professed Communist Englishman was working in the kitchen. Because of the concerns of an over–zealous house man, both were investigated by the FBI, and apparently both were cleared of whatever he thought they should be charged with. However, a male guest with a lot of luggage, who was apparently German, did not fare so well. He disappeared one night and was said to have been interned as an enemy national.

I went off to Yale that Fall, and here again near–normal conditions prevailed to a great extent—at first. However, the university was terribly over–crowded as young men tried to cram in as much education as possible before war overtook them. Classes were accelerated, and no one had gone home for the Summer. We lived in several different dormitories in the course of the year as we kept being displaced by the military, and by Spring most students were in uniform as the Navy V-12 program began a massive influx on the campus.

My 18th birthday was in March, and, in apparently normal physical condition, I seemed sure to be drafted. However, if 18-year olds in college joined the Army inactive reserve they were guaranteed inactive status until the end of the school year in June. I went to enlist – and flunked the physical! I weighed 128 pounds (at 6'-1" height) and had to be at least 135 pounds to be eligible. The doctor said I could have another chance if I could gain the weight in a month. After a month of milkshakes and bananas I was back—and now weighed 132 pounds! It seemed I was on the right track, so I was sworn in, with the admonition to continue over-eating. (I think I weighed about 123 three years later when I was discharged.) Sometimes I wonder what would have happened had I not been so eager. At the time it seemed the right, albeit rather easy at first, thing to do.

I was academically, socially, and emotionally unprepared for college, so I had been doing badly and not learning much except how to ingest alcohol. After my enlistment I ceased doing badly and did nothing at all in the ensuing weeks until the end of the academic year. Finally, in June 1943, after a couple of weeks of vacation at home, I reported for active duty at Fort Devens in Massachusetts, and my own personal "Good War" finally began.

III. THE ARMY

At the Fort Devens reception center, where five or six days was the usual stay, I spent some time in a spot that became very familiar during the next few months: washing pots in the mess hall kitchen. Processing, however, was rapid, thorough, and impersonal. My weight, or lack thereof, was not mentioned. I was fitted with two pairs of boots which were, with their eventual successors, the most comfortable shoes I had ever worn, and to a lot of other clothing whose fit was laughable by comparison.

What followed for me after the reception center seems in retrospect a sort of dream–like interlude, a time suspended in almost delightful unreality. It was a long, slow ride on a troop train west through Massachusetts and New York to Cleveland, Ohio, and then south through Cincinnati, Kentucky, and Tennessee to Fort McClellan near Anniston in northern Alabama, where 13 weeks of basic training awaited. While I was on KP at least some of that trip, I rode in a boxcar that had been fitted up as a kitchen. Much of the time between meals we sat in the open doors watching the rural countryside basking in the soft Spring air roll slowly by. Farmyards, villages, pastures, wood lots, and country roads unfolded endlessly. Later in the journey I sat and slept on a pile of duffel bags between cars, for legroom. After three or four days—I've forgotten just how long it took—my hair was packed solid with cinders from the engine smoke.

Much of basic training passed for me in a sort of fog. I'd never been away from home before, except to college, and that hadn't been any sort of success. Our group of trainees were mostly college–delayed enlistees like me, destined to return to college after basic training in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). I have a clear memory of a three–mile march near the beginning of training which left me almost totally exhausted, and then another ten–miler some weeks later which was no strain at all. This was an edifying example of what physical conditioning could do. I learned how wonderful even a bad cup of coffee (and that my first ever) can be when it is really needed. All in all, though, it was a confusing, dehumanizing time for me. How strange it seems to me in retrospect that, according to my letters home, I was seriously thinking of ways to get out of the ASTP program!

Probably my lack of success with the college I'd had was something to do with it, and another aspect was that the only program open to me was something called "basic engineering," which didn't interest me at all. Then too, there was the misguided—but perhaps understandable then—urge to see "action," whatever I thought that might mean. That peculiar idea was with me for a while. Later I was successful in getting approval for a transfer to the 10th Mountain Infantry Division—the "ski troops"—which I never followed through on. Considering their later high casualty rate in the storming of Monte Cassino, and other actions, in Italy, I may have been fortunate.

At this point, establishing a format that will be followed to the end of this, appears the first related item from the *Newsletter*. One of the inescapable things about war is that the participants are young. We were very young, and for the most part unsophisticated and innocent. Most of us—certainly all from the ASTP—were 18 or 19, and even the most experienced of the officers and non–coms in the Company were seldom older than their middle 20s. This characteristic of callow youth is very humanly illustrated in many of the contributions to the *Newsletter,* one of which is excerpted here.

We printed a tale about one ASTP trainee, Hugh Gillin, much later a sergeant in our Third Platoon. He was undergoing Field Artillery basic training at Camp Roberts,

California—before he made it to “G” Company—when, in his own words, from an oral history tape:

> “One day we were doin’ calisthenics and I had taken my field jacket and I had taken chalk and I’d put a couple of bars on there—as a joke, you know—and I forgot I had ‘em on there. We’re out there takin’ PT, and the lieutenant stops and says, ‘Captain Gillin, will you come here a minute?’ Oh my god, ‘Captain’ Gillin. Yeah. So my punishment for impersonating an officer, he says, ‘Tonight you will dig, with a mess kit spoon, a six by six by six foot hole outside your latrine. And don’t ever impersonate an officer again.’ And I said, ‘Yes, sir.’
>
> “I really believed him. So that night I got a spoon, after we got done, and I’m out there beside the barracks and I started to scratch down. I thought, there’s no way I can dig it six by six by six deep with a damn spoon. I can’t ever do that. So, when nobody’s lookin’, I go in and get the fire shovel next to the sand bucket. I went out and started digging with that. That wasn’t much help. So I dug around there, and I thought, I’ll outline six feet by six feet on the surface here, and scratch that up and hope he never comes by to see it. So I did that, and put the shovel up, and went to bed. He never came by and saw it.”

IV. ASTP

The ASTP was made up of college students, and potential students, who had joined the Army with the prospect of continuing or initiating their college studies for some undefined military benefit. Some of us had had a year or more of college and had been subjected to the usual 13 weeks (for some, 17 weeks) of basic training before being assigned to colleges for academic training. Others, younger, had no college experience and were trained for only a few weeks before being slated to be sent as well to various campuses. All of this came to an end in March of 1944, when the basic need for cannon fodder began to outweigh vague academic training goals, and the ASTP was deactivated.

I recall making an effort to apply for ASTP “area studies” so that I could study Russia back at Yale. This only succeeded in delaying my transfer, however, so when all my basic training classmates were shipped off to Auburn University—and coeds!—I was left behind for a time. Nevertheless, by the end of September I found myself in lovely, but sometimes strange, Charleston, South Carolina, a participant in the ASTP program at The Citadel, the “Military College of South Carolina,” an emphatically coed–less and very odd place to me.

I’d gotten a slight taste of the rural South of those days in Alabama; now I would have some experience with the urban South at Charleston. Many things were certainly different from my life in New England. In Alabama we’d seen, on marches and exercises off the Post, rural shacks in advanced states of dilapidation, full of people. Grass and

weeds grew high and lush in spots near the cabins, evidence, to me at least, of use of the open for toilet facilities. That stands out in my memory. In Charleston one of the sharpest, and most shocking, memories is of black people, speaking a strange dialect we were told was Gullah, stepping off the sidewalk into the gutter to let us walk by. The population of the city was swollen by thousands of servicemen, mostly from the nearby Navy Yard, many of who were Northerners; racial tension was high. Bus drivers were armed, ostensibly for their protection, and more than once during my stay there the newspapers reported a black serviceman shot by a bus driver, usually in the legs, for refusing to sit in the back of the bus.

Charleston is beautiful with its old homes and lush sub-tropical vegetation, but in those days it smelled badly most of the time. If the wind was right one could smell the fertilizer factories on the Ashley River north of the city. No wind was required to smell the sulfuric odor of the water in the storm sewers. Cockroaches were constant companions and a source of amazement. They were everywhere in great numbers, as much as two inches long, and with the ability to fly.

The Citadel looked something like a French Foreign Legion stage setting for *Beau Geste.* Our barracks were rooms off galleries surrounding an open square devoted to close order drill and other military activities. The galleries were on four or five levels of white stucco, and the whole place was very, very spit-and-polish. I loathed it on sight, and the very basic engineering studies, far too easy to be any sort of challenge at first, proved soon enough to be way beyond my limited capacity in that area. I did little academically. What I did get to do was to explore Charleston quite thoroughly, and to read Russian novels. I think I got through most of Dostoevsky that Winter. At the end of the term, around January 1, 1944, we also got furloughs and I got to go home for a week or so after just about six months away.

As the short South Carolina Winter began to turn to Spring, rumors flew that ASTP was to be deactivated. At about the time in the middle of February that our officers were vociferously denying the truth of this, it happened, and within a very few weeks we all had transfer orders. I'd have flunked out anyway, I thought, so I was not terribly upset by the development.

V. THE "CENTURY"

My orders sent me to Company "G," 2nd Battalion, 399th Infantry Regiment, 100th ("Century") Division, then at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina. It was March 27, 1944, just past my 19th birthday, and my "Good War" was about to become very much more real, with my assignment to the 3rd squad of the 3rd Platoon, where I eventually became the B.A.R. (Browning Automatic Rifle) man.

The 100th Division was activated, at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in November 1942. Its original mission was to be the training of infantry replacements for the combat infantry divisions scattered, literally at that time, all over the world. There was a cadre of experienced non–commissioned officers, many of whom stayed with the Division throughout its original active life. Under their tutelage, and with their assistance, many hundreds, even thousands, of enlisted men and officers became combat soldiers and went off to war. This continued right up until the time in the Summer of 1944 when, the Division having finally received its own overseas shipment orders; though men continued to be transferred in, no one was any longer shipped out. Soon enough we would all ship out, together.

By 1944 the Division had acquitted itself with merit in a mammoth maneuver exercise in Tennessee, and had subsequently been relocated to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Here, in March of 1944, the Division received a large contingent of some 4,000 soldiers from the recently deactivated ASTP. I was one of this group.

For the next six months we trained, sometimes hard, especially near the end, sometimes not so hard, but always we trained. We learned to live with almost constant hard physical activity and not much sleep. As a matter of fact, we learned how to sleep soundly and restoratively during ten-minute breaks. We had weapons training, field maneuvers, physical conditioning, and we got to know each other very well. As a matter of fact, although I would never have admitted the possibility at the time—because I felt over–worked and abused—we were very well and skillfully trained, for which we had ample reason to be grateful not too much further along. Always in the back of our minds was the knowledge that sooner or later we would be somewhere in combat with the enemy. Now it seems to me that we always expected to be sent to Europe, but I don't really remember whether that was true.

A long story started in the *Newsletter* in 1990 and continued in installments for several years. This story was told through the medium of the letters home from the Army of Alfred C. "Bud" Stimes who entered the Service from the family farm in Illinois. Bud was homesick sometimes, hungry always—and he tried conscientiously to share his new experiences. His family kept all of his letters and he was able to edit and transcribe them for us on his "1947 Model" Underwood typewriter. They are warm, sometimes funny, and are a valuable insight now into the feelings of one participant in the life of a young soldier in 1944. We printed them just as he sent them to us (though they're edited down a bit here, as they were sometimes repetitive). Bud introduced the letters for us with the following:

"My parents were dairy farmers at Capron, Boone County, Illinois and I joined the army at age 18, on February 6, 1944 at Fort Sheridan near Chicago. We had only a few weeks basic training at Fort Benning at a time when ground forces were increasingly engaged in the Mediterranean and Pacific theaters and the cross channel invasion was immanent.

"Over 90% of my letters were preserved by my parents, aunts, uncle and others and were returned to me many years ago and preserved in two shoe boxes kept on my closet shelf in Broadview, Illinois for over 40 years. I missed cookies and cold milk in each letter. You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. I was looking at crops while I wasn't thinking about food. What a chow hound!"

He gave us letters starting in March 1944, after he reached the 100th Division from his basic training Post, Fort Benning, Georgia, his correspondents included his parents, Mr. Boyd, editor of the *Boone County Courier* in Capron, two aunts and an uncle, and his sister. He headed the first group of letters:

COMING TO FORT BRAGG NORTH CAROLINA FROM FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

March 27, 1944. "Our trip was slow and dirty and very tiring. On Saturday morning we got in our O.D.'s and packed our barracks bags. I loaded them in a baggage car on a siding about 6 miles from our barracks. We hauled them on a truck and came back for an early dinner. By noon we were marching the six miles afoot. It was plenty warm with blouse and furlough bags. I got your latest letter before you left and the cookies the day before. No gift can have been more welcome as that train ride was torture. A trip of 450 miles in the amazing time of 30 hours. We have four meals on the train served in the baggage car. All there was to do was read and eat so I am glad I had some cookies. Our train wasn't a Pullman so we didn't spend a very enjoyable evening. Every freight had the right of way and in one siding we watched 5 trains with stream line engines go by. All pulled freight cars and were headed south… Don't believe the ads about troops traveling in comfort… On the way up here, the grain is 6 inches high and everyone has a garden growing. The whole state is covered with cherry and peach blossoms in full bloom. Frankly, the South disappoints me inasmuch (as) I haven't seen one plantation. Some towns have beautiful homes but the R.R. tracks are lined with shacks…"

March 28, 1944. "… The South has fewer cotton fields than the average person expects. For miles there is little to see besides pine trees and swamps. I have seen more saw mills than cotton gins although there are several cotton gins and warehouses.

"None of the farms are large or prosperous looking compared to the Middle West. There are no large plantations as the movies depict but all kinds of shacks. No matter how poor the house looks it invariably has a shining tin roof. All rural buildings seem so weatherbeaten and a painted house is an oddity. Some of the cities are stately looking with fine houses and paved streets but the villages of poor homes far outnumber them.

"None of the fields are over 10 acres and the barns are only large enough for a cow and a few mules. Two familiar objects absent from the landscape are fences and outdoor billboards… I am thankful my roots are still in Illinois."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

March 27, 1944. "This is Fort Bragg in North Carolina and the weather is superb… When we got off the train a band greeted us and we were glad to touch good earth… This camp is 100% better than Benning. We are now in a line outfit and therefore our basic will be cut short. Everyone is glad there is no more ASTP. Our outfit is the 100th Division. We move to our permanent companies at 4 o'clock. All of us are split up into this large division and I drew Co. G. It is a rifle company and I will have to start all over as we have been separated. There are advantages as we have better mess halls and nice dayrooms besides a super–duper PX. In a line outfit we get insignia and a better deal. No one was sorry to leave our dear non–coms. I have retrieved my barracks bag and it hasn't been damaged."

March 28, 1944. "I am in the 100th Division which is being reorganized. It is a line outfit and is vastly superior to our basic training center… In this outfit we practice with the real McCoy and not imaginary objects. No one is permitted to transfer to the Air Corps… I can say that I personally think the infantry is tops.

"This camp has everything and then some. We are next to a mess hall which pleases me immensely as the cooks know how to dish it out. There are conveniently located chapels, PX's, and theaters within 2 blocks. Also we have a service club with civilian employees and an opportunity for every sort of recreation… We are on line with an airport runway and huge cargo planes go roaring over at low altitudes all the hours of the day. Also to the north of us is a firing range which sounds like popcorn popping all the time."

March 31, 1944. "Yesterday afternoon we marched 5 miles in an 1 1/2 [*sic*]. Some walking is hard when the sand is ankle deep… I have $14 left so it will last till we get our supplementary pay around the 10th… The movies are 15¢ and a carton of candy bars for 96¢. Our chow is so good there is little excuse to eat too much sweets. Tonight I bought 2 pints of ice cream for15¢ a pint. At this camp we have cereal for breakfast and plenty of desserts. Tonight we had roast pork and for dinner the best fish I've ever tasted. Of course we always have 2 or 3 vegetables. I have gained about four pounds but my waist is one inch smaller… Maybe I will get into Fayetteville over the weekend, but they tell me one is soon glad to get back to camp. There are four chapels within sight so I have no excuse for not attending… Last Wednesday Lt. Gen. McNair and 5 other generals reviewed our 100th Division. One of the sergeants was awarded the first Expert Infantryman [*sic*] Badge. Two large bands played and the whole division passed in review. We were in formation at the right of the stand. It is impressive with all the flags and vehicles and artillery. The days aren't too warm but spring isn't too far distant. I will close as they sell two sheets per envelope and I must come out even."

FIRST DAYS AT FORT BRAGG WITH THE A.S.T.P. TRAINING PLATOON
Company G, 399th Infantry Regiment,
Led by T/Sgt. Michael Doherty

March 28, 1944. "As you already noticed I have a new home… our basic training here will be hurried up … today a shipment of college fellows in the ASTP joined us [I was in this group]… This summer we will go on maneuvers and after that we might see an ocean. There is a desperate shortage of vigorous infantry divisions so they are yanking all the young fellows out of the Air Corps and colleges to form it… Our morale is good when we can point to our shoulder patch and say we are in the 100th Division… Our food is excellent and facilities are better in general… to our north is the firing range so we have plenty of sound effects … Today I had a physical exam and finished up my shots. I washed out my underwear, socks, & towel in no time flat so I am learning fast."

April 6, 1944. "I hit the hay at 11:15 and I really fell away to slumberland as we had a 7 mile fast march in 1 hour 45 minutes and half of it was through ankle deep sand… Tomorrow night we have a tactical problem from 6:30 until 3:30… Today we had instruction in field fortifications, barbed wire entanglements, defense from mechanized forces, recognition of enemy equipment, and recognition of U.S. equipment… One day we had 3 hours of first aid and field sanitation and we learned the use of sulfa drugs and bandages in our first aid pouch… Also I could use some clean sheets that are beyond salvage. I want them to wipe my rifle as I cut them into 2 inch squares and run them through the bore … soon we will have a supplementary pay so I need no money."

April 12, 1944. "Last night I attended the 100th Division boxing matches and they had some high caliber talent. Our company champ won the heavyweight and was it a fight! … We have now been issued everything except bayonets. Our leather gloves would cost a civilian a pretty sum if bought in a store. They are for plowing through barbed wire. This will be my first time I will eat out of my mess gear… Tomorrow I have table waiting which is clearing off the table and cleaning the floors. It is a relief for the KP's… We practiced a half hour today with the whole battalion as there is to be a review this weekend. (Then lots of questions about the baby chicks, the price of oats, spring planting, the new horse team, and the school elections.)"

April 16, 1944. "Some hermits sit in the barracks all the time writing letters but I see all the good movies and then write letters. On the other hand some of the veterans of this company never get much mail but they have time to play poker and shoot craps. I haven't received a regular payday since I was inducted… I am never hungry for pop or candy but I average a pint of ice cream daily… Yesterday I purchased some patches to sew on my shoulder and it took me all afternoon to sew on 4. I kept sewing my sleeves together… (After a night exercise) at 11 o'clock we started back to camp across country. Over hills and dales, but mostly over bushes and logs. Several soldiers fell down in McPherson's creek, but the worst for me was wet feet."

April 18, 1944. "(Thanked mother for boxes of donuts and magazines.) I ate two donuts and two Ping candy bars for my lunch on our compass course this

morning. I carry them in my mess can so I am always prepared. We walked a compass course of 3 1/2 miles this morning in groups of three. The highlight was a jaunt through the swamps about 150 yards deep. Everything here is either a sand dune or a swamp. This afternoon we started range procedure for the rifle. We have all kinds of training on sight and sling adjustment, sighting, use of score book, rapid fire, and trigger squeeze. Next week we are on the range and then our training will be sufficient for us to join the regular company… Our detachment started at 90 and is now down to 24… It is rumored that all ASTP men are being transferred and the 100th regulars get P. of Embarkation… As to your questions, I wear my dog tags at all times and we have pillows and mattresses. We have two wool blankets and a comforter in cold weather. Once a week we turn in our soiled sheet and pillowcase. We have one sheet, so it is a problem to use it. For one thing I don't thrash around like I used to as a civilian… I am thankful for the sheet (I received from you) as we can't get patches or even a cleaning rod to clean our rifles."

April 20, 1944. "I can buy Look magazine and each Sunday I buy the Baltimore American which is a Hearst paper… I attend the movies 2 or 3 times a week depending on the caliber of the show… I am going to Fayetteville this week or bust. Our barracks is thinned out now and we have lots of room.

April 23, 1944. "On our radio we can listen to Chicago weather reports… Some days last week have been as bad as any August day in Illinois… Our furlough list came out and I am 37 out of 41 so I ought to home in July or August. Yesterday the ex–ASTP boys were addressed by Maj. Gen. Buress. He assured us that we are now official members of the 100th Division and that we would have proper training before seeing overseas service. Several scores of officers have been shipped overseas and our whole company has only 2 Lts. When we are supposed to have four 2nd Lts., one 1st Lt., and one captain… Our clothing is rugged and doesn't wear out rapidly. We wear our green fatigues most of the time and they are merely overalls… Last Friday I witnessed a bazooka demonstration. It is more technically known as the rocket launcher… They shoot out exhaust to the rear and the rocket the other end."

April 22, 1944. "Tomorrow I am going to town and learn some geography. Your $5 bill was welcome as I could see very little in my wallet… Today we had practice (rifle) firing complete with flags and targets and all the accompanying oral commands… We trainees work harder than the regular company but only one week of basic remains to be completed. I feel I am earning my $50 whenever I do get paid."

April 26, 1944. "Today we wound up our range shooting… I qualified on the record shooting and I got a score of 43 out of 45 on rapid fire at 200 yards… It takes 3 hours to clean the rifle after it has been fired… The rifle is very accurate once the sights are set and you know how to assume the positions. On rapid fire we stand erect with one cartridge in the chamber and a clip of eight in our belt. We have 51 seconds to fire them all and we do it from the sitting position. We also fired slow at 500 yards and I got 4 bulls out of 8 which isn't too bad. The other range we fire at is 300 yards. It is fun to shoot but oh! all these hours of cleaning it takes to clean them properly. Tomorrow we join the regular

company and start out by going through the infiltration course. I don't know what it is about so I will write the details in my next letter… Payday in 4 days."

The 100th division was at near full strength after we ASTP men arrived on the scene, but very quickly large numbers of fully trained soldiers and officers were transferred away as combat infantry replacements. The Division commenced then to complete the basic training of former students who hadn't finished it. Other ASTP men, myself included, had already had 13 weeks or more of basic training, and had "tested out," so we had been assigned to the regular platoons from our arrival. In comparison to the other newcomers, we almost got to loaf through their training days. During the course of that Spring and early Summer, however, the training for all intensified. We received many transfers in from the by then over–staffed MPs, Army Air Corps, Coast Artillery, Signal Corps, and many recent draftees as well, until we again reached full strength. Quickly enough it became obvious to all that the 100th Division's training mission had been fulfilled and that it was soon to become a combat division in its own right.

VI. MORE TRAINING – MAY & JUNE

LETTERS SENT HOME FROM FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

April 30, 1944. "… We are now done with (rifle) firing so once we get the carbon out it will remain fairly clean. Also I have fired the carbine… The carbine looks and feels like a toy, but it still is a deadly weapon. On Thursday we went through the infiltration course. We crawl 75 yards with live machine gun bullets firing just over our heads. To make it interesting they had barbed wire and smoke pots all over. It was a hectic 10 minutes and when we were finished up we had a coat of red clay on us. Almost 4 hours were required to clean up… Tomorrow is payday and also we change into our summer uniforms… Our food is plentiful and tasty. We even get berry pies that remind me of mother's… We are now ready to be assigned to the regular company… I am getting quite proficient in the art of sewing and laundering…"

April 30, 1944. "… I have been doing nothing all week but cleaning my rifle … a pitted rifle … makes for perpetual gigs… I have had no free time to write letters because my rifle comes first… I am gaining weight and weigh 164 pounds with civilian shoes and two suppers in me. Our chow is excellent but we live on eggs three meals a day. The QMC purchased the surplus eggs of the country and we get them for breakfast, in salads, vegetables, and they even put hard boiled eggs in today's meat loaf… This morning I sewed on buttons, a shoulder

patch, and a tear in my fatigue shirt … in my next package … send me one worn out toothbrush to clean my rifle."

May 3, 1944. "… Last night we had a night problem from 5 to 5 so consequently we had today to ourselves. I went to Fayetteville this afternoon after sleeping until noon. My copilot is Richard La Fleur from Plymouth, Massachusetts. Yesterday everyone (the ASTP training platoon) was moved into different barracks. Our night work was a raiding party and setting up camp under combat conditions. We didn't have over two hours sleep… Tomorrow night we have a 4 hour 10 mile hike. Next Saturday my new squad goes out to the combat firing range so that means more rifle cleaning. Our company has a large group of older men in service who are scheduled for Port of Embarkation. Incidentally there are several thousand more air corps men who are being transferred to the infantry… We are 11 miles from Fayetteville… There aren't huge crowds on weekdays like there is on weekends."

May 4, 1944. "… At 8 this evening we hike for 4 hours and the route is 10 miles. Of course we carry our house, weapons, and household utensils… Tomorrow we arise at 5:30 and go out and capture a Nazi village. We fire live bullets and Saturday we go on squad combat firing tests which means we go walking along and targets appear. We then deploy into battle formations and shoot at the targets… Most of our work comes at night and soon each squad goes on a 3 day problem… On Wednesday we had raiding parties and so we captured all the company commanders and the battalion commander as well… My chief complaint against night problems is that I miss the movies."

May 9, 1944. "… Last night we spent out in the field. There was the usual raiding parties and after 1 o'clock we had a tactical bivouac…Tomorrow our company is to be spot checked by the officers from division and it includes everything from sox to the barracks… When all this red dust gets to circulating you almost choke. It gets into everything… the damn mosquitoes around here are as big as Illinois flies but they can't get our heads as we have been issued head nets and we all look like brides or bee keepers. My wrists are full of bites… a mosquito sounds like an airplane when it gets under your helmet. Our whole division is being filled up with ex–M.P.'s and anti–aircraft and coast artillery men… They are going to get infantry basic even though most of them are T/5's or corporals. It proves that the United States is through with defense and urgently needs infantrymen to hold the ground and mop up…"

May 10, 1944. "… Some fellows make work out of letter writing, but it comes quite easy for me … we get hot and tired after traversing the obstacle course and then do 25 push ups. This morning we had instruction on the 30 cal. machine gun… Most weapons are simple and sturdy, but they still cost the taxpayers a neat penny. Each morning we have a half hour of close order drill and then a half hour of bayonet drill… Each week we are supposed to have 16 hours of night work … they are serving pork and eggs every meal. They never have beef like the advertisements depict. We have beef tonight but of course they will put it in stew…"

May 12, 1944. "… The hours of bayonet drill seem to be long but the days themselves just fly by … nothing but hot sun. This morning we had our 50

minutes run after we finished a half hour of close order drill, physical training, and bayonet drill. I can guarantee that there was several pooped out GI's afterwards. Last night I saw Betty Grable in Pin Up Girl. I wasn't too well pleased with the show but the finale was 100 chorus girls doing close order drill. They inspired us, but the hot, dusty drill field will cure that… Every night we stand retreat at 5:30 and after chow we are free. I worked harder at home, but everyone still likes home the best, including me. Tonight we had our first beefsteak in 3 weeks. Don't let anyone say that the army gets all the prime beef. All the beef I have seen is not prime, but only choice. I suppose it is shipped overseas [I was not as preoccupied with the quality of the food as Bud was—though I can remember first hearing the old joke there that the food here is lousy, and we don't get enough of it—but I do have one clear memory of being served one day some "beef" that was very lean, dark, and stringy. Some among us swore it was horse meat; others said that in all probability it was goat. We ate it, whatever it was.] … All the old men of the company have been taking shots and physicals and are scheduled for port of embarkation shipment this coming week. All the non–coms are remaining… Also we now have our full quota of officers… Last Tuesday we crawled the infiltration course at night and it sure resembles a battle."

May 14, 1944. "… They opened our swim hole yesterday. Yesterday afternoon we had a regimental review and my feet were really hot dogs … our Lt. barked commands. He is a short, stocky, good natured Irishman name of Sullivan. His nickname is baseplate and he looks it… The novelty of going into Fayetteville has fallen off with me so here I am. I looked at my draft registration card and it says I weighed 140 pounds. My weight now is 162 pounds with GI shoes on. A dreadful calamity happened as every dayroom ran out of cokes…"

May 18, 1944. "… We just came in from a divisional parade and review. We paraded for a Marine General and members of the Chinese military legation… It is in the 90's today and the dust almost chokes us when the whole battalion moves as one. Last night we had our regular weekly 12 hr. problem. We three rifle companies attacked the weapons company of this 2nd Battalion but since we were held in reserve we didn't get to shoot our blanks. On the way out we were the advance guard and the heavy weapons company ambushed us and threw out a smoke screen. We put on our masks and proceeded to drive them back. This was one problem in which we were permitted to sleep. Also yesterday afternoon was supposed to be free time, but our platoon rode out 12 miles on the combat firing test with live ammunition. The whole squad moves out and when the targets come up we build up a firing line and then proceed to pepper the cardboard targets. Yesterday we arose at 3:30… Our company was inspected by the Inspector General's Dept. so we were scrubbing everything until 10:30 at night and then getting up at 3:30… We moved out of the way at 6:00 AM and walked four miles to witness a demonstration on how the Medical Corps cares for and evacuates casualties. I was very impressed as there was $250,000 of equipment and scores of men … we were given a clean bill by the Inspector General. They examine everything from a private's socks to the payroll records. Last Monday night we did 15 miles in 4 hours. On Monday afternoon a few of us went through the bayonet assault course. Before we stabbed at the air, but here

there is realistic Japs and Germans. Of course there are a few obstacles like a river that is four feet deep and about 25 yards of knee deep mud that we are supposed to run thru. Following that is a long hill with barbed wire to crawl under, fences to jump, and the log wall. The wall is about 15 feet wide and 8' high and we have to roll over it and between the walls are piled logs and stumps that are mean. Everyone is bruised stiff and tired. Tomorrow our platoon is alerted for fire squad which means that we lay around the barracks waiting for a fire … signed with mosquito bites."

May 19, 1944. "I have been sewing and shining shoes and I have the best intentions of shining my rifle only it is locked in the rack… The bayonet assault course … is supposed to be the toughest ever devised … it is the cause of several bruises and torn pants … at the end everyone just fell down and panted for five minutes… On our night march the honeysuckle was very pleasing to smell but when we stop the mosquitoes dive bomb us."

May 21,1944. "… Everything is wet with sweat whenever we do any physical exertion. It is especially true when our packs are on our backs. There is an artificial lake about a mile from here with complete swimming facilities. Have mother send my swimming trunks as it is next to the highway and no nudity is permitted… We are going on mountain maneuvers in West Virginia this coming August. Another reliable rumor is that we have the sailing date set for this division [*We were ceaselessly assaulted with rumors, most of them baseless. The West Virginia maneuvers were totally imaginary—the sailing date may not have been, but it didn't make much difference for apparently no actual date was included.*] … One nice thing about the army is the opportunity to take a shower. I guess it is vastly different on maneuvers… The mosquitoes sound like P38's and sting like hornets."

May 23, 1944. "… This afternoon we go out for a 24 hour expedition or problem … its main purpose is to test the individual soldier on sanitation and first aid when on a hike and in a bivouac area… There are going to be simulated casualties and we are supposed to apply first aid for any types of casualties … we are supposed to have two hot meals in the field … yesterday afternoon (with Dick La Fleur) went into the Highland Cafeteria (in Fayetteville) and it is swell. It is air conditioned and the decorations are Scotch with all the plaids, etc. I ordered and enjoyed baked fish and just for the record we drank 3 pints of milk. Of course we rounded out the meal with salad, pie, rolls, olives, and sweet potatoes. It only cost me $1.08 [!] so I figure I had my pennies worth. Then we went to the Colony which is Fayetteville's finest cinema… It sure seems funny to go into air conditioned buildings and be cooled off…"

May 25, 1944. "… Today I went swimming for the first time. A heavy rain delayed us, but the whole battalion walked down later on. Of course the pond was muddy, but it had a nice sandy bottom and excellent bath house facilities. This morning we had obstacle course and the like, but for once we had a pleasant duty to perform. On Tuesday… we marched nine miles with full field pack and the mercury near 100. No breeze and all I had to drink was salt water. All I drank was 2 1/2 swallows… We pitched camp and after I got done with my usual latrine digging I had chow. The medics quizzed us on first aid … and the

practice of sanitation… I slept under the mosquito net. In the middle of the night we get up and go on patrols for 2 hours against the other companies… In the morning we had lectures on malaria control… I dislike the warm, putrid drinking water. The cooks serve nice cool drinks with our meals…"

May 30, 1944. "… Today I worked in the pits on the transition firing range. Pits are located at ranges of 2, 3, and 5 hundred yards. We hold up pasteboard silhouette targets and keep our heads down when the lead flies. It is something to hear live lead singing overhead… The worst part of the detail is the showers of sand that rain on us when the bullet hits into the bank in front of us. It isn't all work as we both read magazines and shot the breeze over the field telephone. Not many men can hit the targets at 500 so we rest while they aim at 200 and 300 yard ranges. … we always had to throw out small lizards and toads so we wouldn't crush them. Yesterday … we ate 2 meals in the field and got to bed about 1:00. As usual we had night raids after dark and G Company always wins even when we're against the other three companies. All day long we dug foxholes and practiced camouflage and the like and loafed around … Another natural curiosity here is the abundance of ants. You can't sit down without getting your pants full of the sociable creatures… Today they picked 2 men to drive jeeps and three others for radio work…"

"Note: A Company G, 399th roster from this period of time lists 193 enlisted men. Pvt. Alfred C. Stimes is the 172nd name on this roster." [*I have a roster dated 7 Jun 44 which has 250 names. Stimes is 227th on this list. I am 145th.*]

I got another furlough, around the end of May, when I went home, and a couple of weekend passes later which I spent in Washington DC. I have a very clear memory of getting off a train in Fayetteville on a still, hot early morning in June and hearing the news of D-Day. After that, we all knew that we couldn't expect much more time in North Carolina. As it turned out, however, we didn't hear our first "shot fired in anger" until early November. By late July we knew the Division was slated to go overseas, and by the end of September we were on our way.

Back to Bud Stimes:

June 9, 1944. "Today is a busy one for 68 men. They are all going P.O.E. and they are being interviewed and checking equipment. It will leave exactly 11 of us privates in the third platoon. [*Impossible to understand at this date. If so many truly did leave—and there were probably even more—I can still count from the June 7 roster at least 27 from the 3rd Platoon as then constituted who went overseas with the Division in September. All of the 27 were not ASTP, though, and that is what Bud might have meant–though I still think his count would have been off.*] Only privates and PFC's are leaving. Since 5 of us 11 are on furlough it will really keep us busy for details and the like. I got up at 5:15 and reported for a pit detail at 6:30 and then found out that we weren't to report until 7:30. I guess we were a victim of army red tape. Yesterday I pulled targets in pit number 13 and this morning the same. We got done at 10 and came back into camp and witnessed a demonstration on the 81 MM mortar… Every week we study the weapon of the week and the infantry regiment is armed with several types of

weapons. In another hour I go on an unusual guard detail. Two of our blossoms have been AWOL so they restricted them to the barracks… My shifts are from 4–6, 12–2, and 8–10. The men are being kept under surveyance [*sic*] until they leave with the P.O.E bunch next Thursday…"

June 11, 1944. "… I first heard the invasion news early in the morning. In Fayetteville they blew the sirens and rang the church bells. I hope they can do the same when peace returns. Ike sure has done a good job so far as the invasion goes… We are losing all of the original privates and PFC's of the 100th to overseas shipment. All that is left is the non–coms and a few officers. In the past few weeks we have received transfers and volunteers to the infantry from the medics, MP's, coast artillery and the air corps… Last Sunday I was the mess sergeant's assistant or known to civilians as KP. Tomorrow I get the same and actually I welcome it. The hours are long but the work isn't too hard. All the rest of the company go out to the rifle range and pull targets. For every man that is firing the rifle it takes 3 men to mark scores and the like. This past week I have worked two days out on the transition range. It means shooting at cardboard targets shaped like a man. A lot of dirt is kicked up by the lead slugs and it is darned hot in the pits… Yesterday we had blackberry shortcake and was it good and the berries were fresh. A couple of times we have had fresh strawberry shortcake but the treats aren't often enough…"

June 13, 1944. "… I hope Illinois isn't like Ft. Bragg today. It is just like standing in front of a blast furnace. All this sand and dry air makes one feel like he is in a desert… One welcome relief is our shower rooms and the nights are cool enough for sleeping… I am glad I finished my basic before all this heat. The detachment finishes basic this week and next week they will be assigned to the company. This morning those of us who had gas masks and weren't on detail went through the gas chamber. Today they had chlorine inside instead of tear gas. The first time we go in with our masks on and the second time we go in the gas and then put on our masks. Fourteen men are eligible to be on furlough at one time. I think it will be July or August for me. I am gaining weight… At times I yearn to mow the lawn and do some carpentry…"

June 17, 1944. "… The furloughs are 10 days plus 2 days travelling time plus 1 day of grace plus a 7 hr. head start… Everything is in an uproar because new men assigned to permanent squads are moving in. On Thursday we lost all the P.O.E. men. We have been short of detail men… I have had KP, prison guard, regimental supply office detail, and police and prison detail. Today I loaded empty cartridge cases and shell cases into a truck and hauled them to the salvage warehouse. I was prison chaser on Thursday and I had two prisoners working in a theater. They give us live ammunition for the job and we were especially watchful as the previous day a guard was severely injured by his prisoner…"

June 19, 1944. "… There are very few midwesterners in this outfit… Whenever a good movie arrives we invariably go out on a night problem… Yesterday it was 110 and this noon it was 102… Payday is on Friday… I have almost $30 and payday brings another $24.80… About all the money I spend is on pressing my uniforms, ice cream, and movies… Tomorrow night I go on

regimental guard and it isn't too bad because we ride in a jeep. There is a rumor that a P.O.E. shipment goes out in July and all us ASTP boys are the ones to fill it. I hope I can go with the division as I have a grand bunch of officers and pals…"

June 23, 1944. "My night's usual round of entertainment is done so I will get to this delayed letter. I have spent my customary $.35 as follows: 15 cents for a movie, 15 cents for a pint of ice cream, and 5 cents for a coca cola… The barracks have no attic so the upstairs is like a furnace room… On early Wed. morn we rode 33 miles on a truck convoy and started our 2 day bivouac. It was field work in squad tactics and compass courses. We were located about 25 miles due west of here and still we were in Fort Bragg. They run us ragged in both day and night compass courses and the terrain is quite rugged. There are a few run down farms and a few trails through the area and I believe a person could get lost for several hours if he lost his compass. The highlands are second growth pine and scrub oak while the lowlands are thicker than our jungle at home. At night we made a tunnel for a hundred yards through the mass and we couldn't see the sky. I found black, rasp, and blue berry bushes but we didn't have time to touch them. I still won't trade 40 acres of Boone County for all of Fort Bragg… They brought out our chow and we ate good. I bathed in my helmet and I still find it impossible to get all my foot in… All I got was one chigger in me right where my belt goes and he really tickles me. I was lucky not to get a lot more or even ticks… The latest rumor has the whole division going up to Fort Dix on July 28 for P.O.E. It has been widely circulated and it might be true… The lights are out so it is my cue to hit the hay."

June 25, 1944. "… We go out in the field tomorrow and remain until midnight Tuesday. I rather enjoy these field expeditions, but 90% of the company has poison ivy from the last expedition. Since I have nothing but a few briar scratches it makes me a 'field soldier.' It is amazing how dumb some city guys are about nature and the open spaces. The company commander even is in the hospital with the ivy… [I remember that one man was threatened with loss of pay for the time he was hospitalized with poison ivy. Perhaps the captain being hospitalized too forestalled this threat.] I imagine the hay was moving in Illinois today and all I did was loaf… One of our sergeants from Penn. went home on furlough and pitched hay for 6 days. Keep some of those cherries in a can as I can easily use a piece of pie and some cool milk when I get home. One of the sergeants in our barracks blew his top today when someone booby–trapped his foot locker… Give dad another pat on the back for his part in 'Backing the Fighting Fifth' (war bond drive)…"

June 30,1944. "… We leave tonight at seven for the three day problems. Everyone is rather irritated over the fact that there is no passes whatsoever this weekend… It was originally scheduled for midweek, but today's physical fitness test postponed it until this weekend. This morning the XVIII Corps tested G Company for physical fitness for combat duty. We represented the 2nd Battalion and as usual we came through with flying colors. 70 is a passing mark and we did 90.17 and for the grand finale we did a four mile forced march in 49 minutes and 6 seconds and we had full field plus rifles. Needless to say several men got

sick and I still feel like I have been shocking grain all day. Before the great jaunt we had a 300 yd. Dash in 45 seconds, 11 burpees, 75 yd. pick-a-back, creep and crawl 75 yards, and wound up with 24 push–ups. It really kept the medics busy with the smelling salts. Some guys really had to step on their guts to make it. I can truthfully say it made me feel like hell. For breakfast all I ate was a cup of coffee, 2 salt pills, and one piece of toast. We did so well I guess it was worth the effort… All this training must be the last phase of our training that the colonel spoke about. One advantage of field work is that you can't dirty your khakis and so I save on cleaning bills. On Wednesday I fired the rocket launcher or bazooka and the rifle anti–tank grenade. It makes more noise than a cannon and kicks like a mule. While we fired the artillery was shooting their Long Toms about 300 yards away. They are 240 millimeters and they really pack a wallop… After July 7th they have to give me a furlough before I go overseas. This morning they called 10 men out of ranks and they move out tomorrow. Now this makes us ASTP boys the veterans of the whole company outside of the non–coms… I hope the hay gets harvested and the cherries aren't all bird food…"

VII. AND STILL WE TRAIN – JULY & AUGUST

LETTERS SENT HOME FROM FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

July 4, 1944. "I spent the day recuperating from a three day problem. We hit bad weather and got rain 2 nights and all three nights were quite cool. In fact the mosquitoes must have been numbed by the cold. Everyone who went on the problem looks beat out… These problems have a top priority… We underwent the physical fitness tests on Friday morning and that evening we started the problem. I know we were all fatigued before we started and it rained before we could pitch tents… The next day we walked all through the woods and at night we stopped and camped. Since the moon shone so bright we put up our mosquito bars and no tents. We were some sorry looking specimens when it rained. Everyone was soaked and I wonder why we don't all have pneumonia. They had food cached at each end of the bivouac areas but we had to do all of our own cooking. I thrived on it, but I think it was the water that made me miserable. All those hikes through the jungle lowlands didn't please me either. The only compensation I found was the blackberry bushes throughout the area… During our cross country jaunts I saw my first growing fields of cotton and tobacco. All the problem was off the reservation and we were in some fair farming country… We had to ford some deep creeks and we really slogged thru the mud. For the grand finale we marched 14 miles back into camp in 4 hours…

This coming weekend our platoon has to run the course so it rules me out of two weekends. Our 3rd platoon helped fill out the 1st and 2nd platoons when they ran the course…"

July 4, 1944. "I am spending a miserable 4th of July in my bunk. Yesterday noon we came in from a 3 day problem. My back, head, and knee all ache plus blisters on my feet… When I woke up on Saturday night or I mean Sunday morning there was small rivulets beneath me. Everyone woke up with a wet hide… During the day we trekked through some rough terrain and I dare say the lowlands are as thick as any jungle. We also passed through some mighty nice looking farms… Of course all the buildings aren't too fancy, but every family is large and invariably they all own a jalopy. I ate lots of blackberries… We have to run through another problem with our own platoon. It is scheduled for this coming weekend … I feel a little fortunate as I didn't get any poison oak… Today the P.O.E. shipment left and 9 guys left. That makes us ASTP men the veterans here. I guess 1/3 of the company is under 19 and another 1/3 are under 24. There are few men over 30 in age so I guess we must be a young outfit. When we came back they also had our pay ready so it cheered us a little…"

July 8, 1944. "… The spring was dry and hot, but what little summer we have had has been quite cool with quite a bit of moisture … tomorrow night we go out on another three day problem. We got stuck for two weekends in a row and the three before these two we were restricted… On Thursday night I embarked on the biggest undertaking of my life. We left at 9:15 on a 25 miles hike and we finished it in 7 hrs. and 40 minutes. [*Most of the things Bud reports in such detail are long gone from my memory so many years later, but not that 25 mile hike. I will never forget that. It was a big deal, and no one who completed it could help feeling a little proud of himself.*] All we had for breaks were 5 minutes of rest per hour. We are a good infantry outfit as most of us finished… Some people really went through a lot of torture to complete it. One of our sergeants couldn't get his shoes off. I got some nasty blisters, but who didn't? I shudder to think of walking for another three days, but we all suffer together… For 8 days I haven't seen a movie and I have been to the PX but two times. I did see one USO camp show and it sure pepped me up. They are asking for volunteers for the paratroopers, but I am perfectly satisfied with the infantry… Some of the fellows said they saw my name on the list in the orderly room for promotion to PFC… It really takes something to make a stripe or two in the infantry… I got a feeling that we will head for France… Our long sought after trip to the (Myrtle) beach has been postponed… This training we are getting now is really fast and furious with few breaks…"

July 13, 1944. "Our squad goes out this afternoon on a squad combat firing test. It means a dirty rifle when we come back and tonight the whole company goes out on a night problem until 2 in the morning … On Sunday afternoon at 5 we started our 22 mile trek on a 3 day problem. We arrived at our camping area in the middle of the night and my tent mate and I made our canvas home. Our efforts were rewarded by a nice little downpour of 4 hours duration… They gave us the missions to destroy enemy installations and we did cross country walking to get there… One night it rained so hard we got disgusted and

took our provisions to a farmhouse. The woman cooked our veal cutlets and made us some coffee. We rewarded her with all the excess groceries. They bring us out our food in a jeep, but we have to prepare and cook it. Our only facilities are bayonets, knives, helmets, mess kits, and a few stray tin cans. We fared fairly well on our cooking, but one night some dogs stole our bacon and part of our bread. This farmhouse was a typical farmhouse with 3 rooms and no cellar, but a shiny tin roof. Their outhouse didn't have a pit and a family of chickens lived behind the stove. However, we were hungry and the meat sure was delicious even if there was other odors. That evening we walked 1 1/2 miles into a small village on U.S. No. 1 highway and we feasted ourselves with pop and cakes. We had a few hours off one afternoon so we took a busman's holiday and walked 2 miles to a gas station for pop and cookies. The blisters on my feet have changed to callouses… On these problems we get dirty and smelly and we are all glad to go back to camp. We rode back to the barracks in GI trucks."

July 13, 1944. "… We are hardly even living in the barracks any more. If we aren't out on a 3 day problem it is some night problem… For 6 days I couldn't even go to the PX to say nothing of a movie. Most spare time is consumed in cleaning equipment and especially our rifles as we have fired them this past week… I guess we are soon going to change scenery and our C.O. said the hour wasn't far away… These three day problems take us off the reservation proper we meet a lot of the natives. They are good natured and treat us O.K.… The All–Star game was 4 days history before I even knew about it… The army must be a good life as I haven't been sick since I entered… They cancelled all three day passes here … If we do ship out I think it will be to some camp in Maryland or New Jersey and then over east… All the physical misfits have been transferred and we are a hale and hearty crew. The radio inside the barracks is going full blast on some revival broadcast. It is all we hear on these radios except transcribed programs… Today is good flying weather and the planes have been distracting me all day…"

July 16, 1944. "… These three day excursions out in the pine woods really separate one from the affairs of the world… The papers say that a hurricane is headed north on the Atlantic coastline. This month has had plenty of moisture. There had been a drought and this spring was abnormally hot and dry… Tomorrow morning I have to be ready to move out to the rifle range… I work in the pits, but I rather enjoy the job…"

July 20, 1944. "… Today I threw live hand grenades and I have fulfilled all of my POM requirements (Progress for Overseas Movement). I crave a change of scenery, but overseas vets in here say this is heaven compared to battlefields… I had a change yesterday when I went on the range and fired the Browning Automatic Rifle. My score was 187 which qualified me as an expert. The automatic rifle weighs 22 pounds compared to 9 lbs. for the M-1 rifle… We are almost prisoners. We have new battalion and company commanding officers and they both are very strict… All three day passes have been curtailed and they took away our Class A passes… Last Saturday a bunch of us got disgusted with the whole affair and took off to town. They missed us and put us on pit detail on Monday. It isn't my idea of punishment and it was an experience. We pulled

targets on the machine gun transition range. It is really something to have machine gun bullets flying overhead. I got caught up on my reading so you hear no complaints from me on that deal… Guess I'll close now and dub my shoes."

July 23, 1944. "… We had a good meal in the service club cafeteria. Yesterday afternoon and evening I ate my customary steak and cream puffs as well as malted milks… We are moving soon and they are hurrying all remaining furloughs… I will be home in August… They have erased all quotas and are actually asking men if they have funds to carry them home… The way Germany is crumbling it looks like we might be too late. Things may be over before we expect, but I still think there is a rough trail ahead. Right now we are going through a lot of tactics and battle formations. It gets quite boring and I actually wish I'd get some KP soon…"

July 24, 1944. "… The way some guys get their furloughs is to be on KP one day and leave the next afternoon… We leave here in the afternoon and if we're lucky we get the 5:30 train to Washington. Sometimes some guys have to wait until the 11:30 at night. Our furloughs legally don't start until midnight… I guess I got some cellar cleaning practice yesterday as I volunteered to sort out the trash of the company. It got me out of inspection and drill and it didn't exactly break my back… The guys I run around with come from all over the union. Our platoon is the best in G Company and we stick together. I have friends from N. Dakota [*Fett*], Kansas [*Gillin*], Wisconsin [*Pointer*], Illinois [*several*], Penn. [*Nailor*], Vermont [*me*], New York [*several*], Mass. [*La Fleur*], and N. Carolina [*Raymer*]. We sure have a lot of arguments, but nobody takes them seriously. I guess we act silly as we put up an exhibition when we go hiking…"

July 26, 1944. "… This is being written on the 2nd story porch of the barracks… We do PT, bayonet drill early in the morning and then for the remainder of the day we do tactics… Today I was the table waiter which is a fancy name for a scrubman. Our mess hall is the honor mess hall of all the battalion for the third straight week. It is us little guys that scrub it clean and make it so. Right after dinner they had a dental survey of the 2nd battalion. All they did was shine a light in your face and look in your mouth. Almost everyone including me got a classification of 1-C. It means the teeth require minor repairs… The battalion commanding officer told the non–com school that all of our training has to be completed by Sept. 3… I saw the 'Battle of China' film which is the last in the why we fight series. The company is quite empty now with so many guys on furlough. I think I have an even chance to leave this week. I didn't send laundry and my clothes are ready from the cleaners. I hope you haven't forgotten about how to cook…"

FURLOUGH AND RUMORS OF OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT

"The furlough came through. I was with hundreds of GI's that boarded the filled, late evening Atlantic Coast Line passenger train at the Fayetteville depot. I rode in a vestibule until the Rocky Mount stop when I got aisle standing room inside the car. At Washington I boarded a coal fired Pennsylvania Railway train for Chicago with plenty of seating room and lots of soot. I caught a late afternoon diesel powered C & NW train to Capron and looked like a chimney sweep when I

greeted my parents and sister. I arrived after grain shocking time and just before threshing time in pleasant August weather. Wimpy, my German shepherd–collie dog, still remembered me. My purebred Chester Whites had been merged with the farm's larger swine herd. That was the summer my father learned how to grow sweet potatoes from a new Kentucky born neighbor. It was the first summer my father didn't operate the threshing machine for the south of Capron threshing ring. My mother cleaned and pressed my khakis while I wore my farm denim clothing. She filled me with lots of home cooking and fresh berry pies. My high school classmates were scattered with most serving in the Pacific area. I noticed the shortage of labor on northern Illinois dairy farms. I visited relatives and friends in Chicago on the way back to Fayetteville with a full day at Riverview Amusement Park and lots of roller coaster riding. My letters begin with my return to Fort Bragg."

August 22, 1944. "Today I am back on the old job after an uneventful trip down here… I find lots of new faces here and several familiar ones absent. All the old pills are shipped out and replacements are more kids… I guess we leave here in September… Today of all days we get scrambled eggs, lamb stew and lamb patties… Guess we maybe will go to Europe, but we'll be sure when we arrive. I'll send some stuff home as soon as I find a box. We are going to have all our unserviceable equipment replaced by new…"

August 28, 1944. "… The weekend has been quite cool and I slept under two blankets. Everyone wears his field jacket, so I guess maybe fall is on its way. I just cut off my divisional insignia and we're supposed to turn them in. Today we had a lecture on military censorship and related subjects. Everyone will be happy that we are moving. Tonight I go on guard duty for which I volunteered. Of all things we guard the trash and garbage cans in the company. Some men have been throwing away excess GI equipment so now they guard the cans. To my mind it will be a lot simpler to sort out the trash every day…"

August 30, 1944. "This has been a hard day for all of us, but I am still not finished. I go to school for flame throwers tonight at 7:30. We are to receive instruction in case someone has to use it someday. I received my first promotion [obviously, to PFC] along with 19 of my distinguished friends [not I!]. Today our platoon had training with tanks. We all rode on tanks and it is like hanging on to a bolt of greased lightening. They run over 10 inch pine trees and turned around on a Willkie button. It was as hectic as my roller coaster… The regiment is full of new overseas equipment. They ought to be passing it out in a day or two… We don't have change of address cards yet and they ought to give us them pretty soon…"

August 31, 1944, in August 30 envelope. "I just came in from the field… We went through rifle anti–tank grenades all morning. I learned the use of the flame thrower so it looks like I am becoming the all around man in the squad. Learning something new takes the monotony out of life … I was in the supply room this morning and it is just filled with new clothes and equipment. We know we are going (overseas) because the general said so, but everyone has a different idea as to when or where…"

VIII. MAKING OVERSEAS PREPARATIONS

Sept. 3, 1944. "… I am still down in Dixie. Today has been about the hottest it can get before it is hell. Everyone is wringing with perspiration. The sun is setting and I am writing this on our little back porch. Now that the sun is down the gnats are out and do they irk me! Gnats, cockroaches, and ants are the most numerous of insects here, but we are also troubled with flies and mosquitoes. One old timer in this company says he didn't mind the tropics as much as this … All company equipment is packed and crated… I worked until 10 one night loading heavy crates on trucks… Yesterday all our weapons were inspected by the ordnance department. Half our rifles have been declared unserviceable, but I still have my old faithful. (Note: I remember the serial number 1037911 50 years later.) Those who ever get new weapons have a day's work cleaning off the packing grease. I think we might be a little late for the fight in France, but we might be used for army of occupation … I get a lot of enjoyment eating sandwiches and milk at the service club and going to Fayetteville for a steak dinner. Most of the time we just talk and most of it is about the war… I hope you noticed that I now wear a stripe and earn an extra $4 a month… We are a happy bunch… I'll sign off and write again maybe when I ride the waves."

Sept. 4, 1944. "… Today and yesterday have been the hottest on record here. I couldn't stand on the pavement with my civvie shoes. The soles are wearing thru and I guess I'll toss them in the ocean. We aren't supposed to take them but everyone is taking his. Today we turned in part of our unserviceable equipment. One floor of the next barracks is full of new equipment. No more passes are to be issued after Sunday night… All married men were told to make arrangements immediately. Way last July we heard that training ceased on the 10th of Sept. I scoffed at the rumor at first, but it proves how a rumor can become a fact. I just came back from a delicious steak sandwich and three pints of milk at the service club. I didn't think much of today's scrambled egg and prune breakfast… Tomorrow we go on a 2 hour hike the first thing…"

Sept. 10, 1944. "… I have been up in the first city of North Carolina… Raleigh is a nice city full of hotels, churches, and monuments. There are very few soldiers there compared to Fayetteville… This afternoon our battalion went to the theater and we had a demonstration on handling German prisoners of war. Most everyone thinks we will leave within 2 weeks and I think New York is the destination… On Saturday I worked hard on the targets on the rifle range… The

targets are raised and lowered by a counterbalance on a pulley system. It isn't a snap and you're glad when the day is done."

Sept. 10, 1944. "… This next week a big Inspector General Department [inspection] is scheduled. They checked up and found we have 3 AWOL's … I left camp on 5 o'clock Saturday with 2 friends and we were back in 24 hours. It was a hair–brained trip and we got going within 10 minutes after the idea was conceived. We caught a bus to town and by 7 we were on the way to Raleigh. Two Negroes driving a furniture van picked us up and before we had traveled the 60 miles to Raleigh we had 15 soldiers in the van … we arrived at the hour of 8:30… The fun started when we looked for a room and could find none. However, three different rooms were occupied by men from our company. I ended up sleeping on a mattress on the floor with a bedspread for cover. It was a welcome change from the GI life… I didn't get paid last month… In your next letter send a ten–spot as all I have is a five. I don't owe anyone and I don't like to borrow… I'd sure hate to arrive overseas with empty pockets… In the near future I am sending home my furlough bag, shoes, and other odd items. You needn't send any 'Lifes' as a kid up here gets it on a subscription. As fast as I read my magazines someone else is always anxious to read them…"

Sept. 14, 1944. "… It looks as if we may be here for another 2 weeks. This morning I was issued a new kind of intrenching shovel and a new bayonet full of cosmoline. The shovel is super as it can be used as a shovel or a pick. [*This was just plain wrong, as we soon learned. These things might have been useful in the sand of Fort Bragg, but not anywhere else. To dig a hole fast enough and deep enough to make it useful one needed a standard D handle shovel, which were available, but never to the extent that they were needed. Two men taking turns using a regular shovel could finish a hole much faster than was possible with both using their own entrenching tools. Most of these tools were soon discarded in combat.*] Cleaning anything packed in cosmoline is a messy job. It is a brown grease that is dissolved by boiling water and soap, but it messes up everything. We have most of our new equipment, but I still need a pack, shoes, and a blouse. I sent home my bag full of unnecessary stuff… Earlier this week we had lots of work on chemical warfare. Everyone thinks Hitler is going to use gas. We are well prepared both on the defensive and the offensive. It is a good thing I get paid today as I have exactly 22 cents in my pocket… Yesterday morning a hurricane headed this way, but it hit the sea and then hit New York and New England…"

Sept. 19, 1944. "… The water is thick around here. At least 4 inches have fallen in the last 12 hours… there is 16 inches of water flowing past our barracks in a regular river. This morning and yesterday morning I filled in as latrine orderly. A snap job and a swell chance to take it easy. Last night we turned in our khakis and now we wear our winter O.D.'s. I still need to be issued shoes and a pack and then I am ready to go. Yesterday we had another clothing check… About all we do is pack and unpack our duffel bags… The next stop is New York… At 11 this morning we are going to practice getting on the trains. It is the expression called a dry run…"

Sept. 23, 1944. "… The division starts moving around Saturday or Sunday and our turn comes the first of the week… I have every bit of equipment now except one pair of shoes and a haversack. Since I have been in Co. G I have always been in the third platoon. Yesterday I was transferred to the second platoon… The higher ups think I am a good automatic rifleman so they sent me here to fill in a vacancy… The day before yesterday I hit KP and fared excellently as the cooks weren't too bad natured. On that day we had fresh rolls, donuts, and roast beef … While walking back from the Arsenic and Old Lace movie through another regiment I saw them all packed and ready to move… Our passes have to be turned in for good on Sunday…"

Sept. 23, 1944, timed at 0930. "… Last night and this morning I have been on regimental guard. So far I have put in 7 hours… Right now I am in the prisoners room writing this letter. We have 3 guards on duty in this room and there is but one prisoner in here. The rest of the prisoners have been farmed out to their respective companies [*We had one man in the Company—and I don't know if it is he who Bud refers to here—who quite good–naturedly and undramatically kept disappearing. He never went very far, and he freely admitted that he was just hiding out in hopes that he would be overlooked and left behind when we started our overseas movement. As I recall, he left with us in due course, still under guard, and his performance in combat was as respectable as that of most of the rest of us.*] … They allow up to 50% of the men to be sent out on 12 hours passes at one time at the port of embarkation… Any mail sent here will probably be forwarded to wherever we go…"

Sept. 23, 1944 timed at 10:30. "… They still haven't got me a pair of shoes or a pack. I'll never wear shoes unless they fit so I guess I'll have to wait until POE to get my shoes. Everyone is busy throwing away excess junk and marking new clothes and equipment … As to your question about a P.F.C., it is an honor in the infantry and you have to work for it. More men in combat areas are privates than PFC's. According to regulations only so many men can make it regardless of your ability or length of service. [*Everyone got it in December though, after about 5 weeks of combat action.*] We say that a PFC in the infantry is worth a corporal in the cavalry, a sergeant in the artillery, a staff sergeant in the Air Corps… After we leave the country 5 days, they mail our change of address cards with our overseas address…"

"My change of address card to my Winnetka aunt was postmarked Sept. 15, 1944 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It was my last piece of mail from Fort Bragg. My last two letters written in the United States were written under military censorship. My Sept. 29 and Oct. 5 letters were from Somewhere in the United States. We remember now it was Camp Kilmer, New Jersey and part of our overseas experience."

IX. OVERSEAS AND FRANCE

By the time we finally went overseas, to southern France, in October 1944, we were a mixture of personnel. Our hard core was most of the original cadre, almost all of whom were non–commissioned officers. Mature men, some of them regular Army, superbly trained and experienced themselves, they proved of literally inestimable value when the going got rough. Most of the rest of us, young, callow, inexperienced, and certainly far from professional, had going for us four or five months of rigorous and thorough training directed by this same cadre. Although this had been often unpleasant and usually arduous, we had good reason to be profoundly grateful for it before we were through.

Bud continued:

FORT BRAGG TO FRANCE

"September 25, 1944 postmarks on my August 31 change of address cards gave my correspondents an APO 447 number c/o Postmaster, New York, NY. The *Story of the Century* divisional history book says the movement to the New York Port of Embarkation began Sept. 24 as long lines of waiting Pullmans with prearranged seats were filled as the 100th Division band played martial strains and that the entire division arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on Sept. 30. I remember it being a warm day and Pvt. Mike Sirokoman's success in opening the Pullman car window at our lower berth. Then he left for an all night card or craps game and I had all of a soot covered bed when we arrived at Camp Kilmer."

Sept. 29, 1944, from Somewhere on East Coast. "… From now on we have our mail censored so we are all worrying about reading what we write. Once mail is censored there isn't much to write about like we used to. I can understand how those fellows overseas feel when they write… We get passes in the next few days and they say the transportation is excellent. We are still in

quarantine now doing lots of important jobs. There is a swell mess hall here and the food is exceptionally good even if it is GI. The PX is something out of this world compared to what we have had. I am a little doubtful if I'll ever get to meet my sister (a WAAC Signal Corps corporal at Fort Monmouth, NJ) as the army doesn't let you do what you want…" "This letter was passed by U.S. Army examiner Lt. Richard A. Kerr."

"My strongest memories of our Camp Kilmer experience are the issuance of the newly designed Shoe Packs rubber winter boots and the rumors that we would land in Norway to liberate that ally because there was lots of snow and ice in Norway and special boots were needed. I don't remember whether I received size 11 1/2 AAA GI shoes at Camp Kilmer, but I do remember being issued size 11 1/2 B combat boots after the European War."

In a few days we found ourselves aboard the troop ship *SS George Washington* (once a German luxury liner, interned and then seized by us during World War I, that had taken Woodrow Wilson to France for the peace negotiations at Versailles in 1919), at the foot of 42nd Street in Manhattan. Here we stayed for a day watching, I clearly remember, commuters swarming from the ferries to the cross–town trolley cars in the morning, and reversing the process at the end of the day. On October 6 we sailed.

By some incredible stroke of fortune, our Company was designated for "police and sanitation" duty. While this meant that we spent a lot of time cleaning out toilets, picking up assorted trash, and dumping garbage overboard, it also meant that we had the run of the ship, which other troops did not. Most importantly, we had the freedom of the topmost deck, where we could get acquainted with the crew and relax in relative solitude—not to mention fresh air—and the crew's mess, which was open 24 hours a day and where was dispensed an unending stream of strong coffee and enormous sandwiches. I learned how to splice rope on that top deck, a skill that I still have, although it has never been of much use to me.

Sometime early in the trip it became known that we were slated to sail south to the latitude of about Miami, there to join a large convoy, proceed to the Straits of Gibraltar, and thence make our way to Marseilles, France. The crossing, though long, was mostly uneventful. We had an escort of destroyers and other naval vessels, and the convoy was large and probably hard to manage, but no enemy presence was met. A rather violent storm (called a hurricane in Division tradition, but I really have no memory of it) claimed our attention for a day or so, but we heard of no losses or damage.

Bud said of the trip:

LETTERS SENT HOME IN OVERSEAS MOVEMENT
September & October 1944

"After my Oct. 5 letter was written we rode the Central of New Jersey railroad from Camp Kilmer to the ferry across the Hudson River where we boarded the George Washington transport with all of our equipment. My troop assignment card shows 40 punches out of a possible 50 and is stamped E-3 and soldier entitled to midday meal as he is performing additional duty. The additional duty was the Police and Sanitation detail for the topmost deck and the issuance

of a yellow armband that looked like the military police armband with slight alterations. Our crowded E deck hold was first below the waterline with all confined to quarters at our departure. Several of us P & S workers were topside on the senior officers' deck with a clear view of the Statue of Liberty when we headed overseas October 6 on a warm, sunny day. We saluted the Statue with our mops and brooms and became like sailors. The merchant marine crewmen were friendly and helpful and showed us the rope locker where we could hide if we wanted a return trip to the United States. Our yellow armbands enabled us to leave the crowded E-3 hold for the fresh air and overnight sleeping on the top deck when hurricanes weren't raging. A division chaplain needed the portable organ stored far forward on the lowest deck and I remember the exciting journey to the far reaches of the largest army troop ship. My sailor duty was the most pleasant of all tasks assigned to me by the U.S. Army. I only wrote one letter on our voyage."

Oct. 15, 1944 V–Mail, from Somewhere at Sea. "... Our trip has been far from uneventful. (A line inked out was probably about our hurricane experience.)… I haven't been sick a moment… right now I feel like Columbus must of before he hit land… There is plenty of food and it doesn't taste bad … Most of the time we sleep, read old magazines, or else play cards or checkers… During the day I have a fatigue detail that keeps me busy and gives me freedom of movement… We wash in salt water…" "This letter was passed by U.S. Army Examiner Lt. Angier."

Another, more recent, recollection of the time at sea came from Dick LaFleur, of the Second Platoon. He recounted for the *Newsletter* an incident on the top deck of the *George Washington,* "officers' country," where we got to go, sometimes because of our police and sanitation duties, sometimes just because we wanted to; to wit:

"Among many escapades with Fred Drew, including our occasional disappearance from field lectures on the M–1 rifle to hitch rides at Pope Field, the delightful Atlantic cruise in October 1944 holds a special place in my memory. Distressed by the odors below decks, we arranged to spend every night except that of the Great Hurricane on the officers' deck. Many an hour was spent sitting on the benches, gazing at the stars and exchanging views philosophical, before spreading our blankets behind stacks of life rafts. At dawn, we raced from our quarters sublime and returned to reality in the form of preferential dining and the police of the decks.

"With movies and other activities for the commissioned men, we never saw another soul on the sun deck after dark, except for the night we heard what seemed to be a lonesome whistling and the approach of footsteps. The visitor walked directly toward us. Being extraordinarily polite soldiers (hadn't Sgt. Joe Diaz hand picked us to help our new Lieutenant Lahti fetch his luggage from the station and get him settled in his new quarters, and had he not told of his request for the two men on whom he could rely in action to come?)

"Well, we properly introduced ourselves as Captain So and So, and Lt. Something Else (Fred outranked me because he had been in the Air Corps). I

don't know what I sounded like but can you imagine Drew disguising his voice? Needless to say, the man we bade sit between us was our very own platoon leader. After what seemed interminable mumbled pleasantries we excused ourselves, walked gracefully to the nearest passageway, whereupon we fled to our bunks below.

"Our next encounter was at the same bucket in which we three dunked our messkits in a delightful farm field outside exotic Marseilles. It was the evening meal, and his expression was not clear in the dusk, but I believe his brief inquiry as to whether or not we enjoyed our ocean crossing had a slightly cryptic note.

"There was not any way that our habitual absence from sleeping quarters went unnoticed, and might well have been the subject of one or more casual conversations, but we were never to know for certain that we were marked culprits. As you know, when we first suffered group trauma, we were prevented from displaying our mettle for the lieutenant as he was summoned to a staff meeting under that fateful tree by Baccarat."

In November 1945, just one year after this time, Jack Pointer, our Third Platoon runner, was still in Germany, assigned to Army of Occupation duty with the Third Division in Witzenhausen, when he decided to put some of his recent memories on paper. Luckily for us, he shared them with our *Newsletter*: Here is what he had to say about our ocean crossing:

"One year ago tonight (I November 45) the 399th Infantry Regiment was committed to action against the 'Jerries' somewhere around Rambervillers, France, if I remember right. So now I am going to try and write from memory what happened each day of combat that I went thru, altho it wasn't much compared to what some of the boys have seen who have been with the Third Div. all the way from Africa. I have been officially serving with the Third Div. Since 6 October 45, just exactly one year to the day after leaving New York for this continent of Europe.

"My company, Co. G, 399th Infantry, 100th Division, was the first company to board the Army Transport 'George Washington.' That was on Wednesday, 4 October 44 at Pier 84, I think, but I know it was at the end of 43rd Street, and I watched the 42nd Street ferry come and go all day long back and forth from 125th Street in Jersey. I used to ride that ferry when I was in NY with the NY Battalion in June 44. We were the company assigned to take care of the police of the boat, that is why we were first aboard. It turned out to be a good deal, because that gave us something to do while we were out at sea and besides that gave us three meals a day instead of the usual two that the other companies which weren't pulling detail got. Some of the fellows could see their homes from the pier but couldn't get off the boat to say good–bye to their folks at any time during our 2 day stay in the harbor while the boat was being loaded. At 0900 on Friday, 6 October 44 the big boat with 7 or 8000 men aboard backed out into the Hudson River, swung around, and headed out to sea. Everyone was ordered down below the deck, but I disobeyed orders and stayed 'top side' anyway because I wanted to see all I could of the states.

"I didn't get caught so it didn't matter, it was more or less a foggy day and at 1000 the last bit of the states was fading into the fog. The last thing that could be seen was the parachute tower on Coney Island which I had made a jump from several months previous to this time. That nite and every nite at 1900 we used to go down to the garbage room and work for an hour and throw overboard all the garbage for the day. It could not be done during the daylight hours because of the submarine danger, they could follow the garbage trail floating on the water and catch up with us and then things would not be so good. During the day we had nothing to do but sit around, go to the movies on deck, read, watch the water go by, and occasionally for the first few days a navy patrol bomber would fly over us. I was on the flag ship of the convoy, it also carried Gen. Withers A. Buress, our CG. On our right was an aircraft carrier with quite a number of new planes it was ferrying across. At nite the fellows used to sleep out on deck because the weather was so nice, all the stars were shining and everything was so quiet and nice. I used to very seldom go to bed before 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning because I liked it so well out on deck at nite. One nite about 2200 I could see red flames and the outline of one of our destroyer escorts right in the middle of them, and I thought for sure it had been hit or caught fire, but in a few minutes I saw it was only the moon rising out of the ocean in a very swift manner. Well, it was time for our nice weather to end so we had a storm. The biggest storm the ship had gone thru while being used as an army transport ship. The wind blew at the rate of 80 miles an hour and the waves on the ocean were 40 or 50 feet high, they used to come crashing over the bow when she would dip under. Lots of the fellows were sea sick and thought they were going to lose their insides, but I guess they didn't altho one fellow did get the appendicitis and got an operation. The storm only lasted for three days and then it gradually blew in a different [way] than we were going. Then one morning we woke up and saw what happens when a submarine gets after a couple of tankers and torpedoes them. They were burning and sinking as we passed. Some other boat had already come to the rescue. It was down around the Azores somewhere where it happened. One morning about 1000 some thought they saw land and everyone hauled out their field glasses and sure enough, there was the coast of North Africa and Spain. It took us all day to get to the Straights of Gibraltar and it was about evening when we passed thru them. There (were) all kinds of fish jumping out of the water, I think they were porpoise fish. The Rock sure looked nice and the cities of Tangiers and Oran were lit up and it looked like a movie. We sailed along the coast of N. Africa all the next day and enjoyed the scenery and some time during that nite we changed our course and headed for the coast of southern France. Of course, we could not go all the way thru the Mediterranean without a nice little storm, so we had one. Not so bad as the one in the Atlantic, but more choppy and it seemed a little harder on some of the fellows, I still was unfazed by it. Then came the day of Friday, 20 October 44 and the storm was blowing itself out and the sun was beginning to shine."

We made our landfall at Gibraltar, and, after a short stop at Oran, for which I never learned the reason, reached journey's end at, indeed, Marseilles. On October 20

we stepped onto foreign soil, and for most of us it was the first time. The harbor was so choked with the recent wartime wreckage of shipping that the *George Washington* could not reach a dock, so we were unloaded into landing barges designed for combat landings on beaches. From there we were carried to a rain-soaked, very muddy, plain at St. Antoine, just outside the city, where we set up a tent camp and went to work cleaning cosmoline off brand new weapons which had accompanied us in crates on our boat trip. Almost immediately after our arrival, we were disconcerted to hear that "Axis Sally," broadcasting on the radio from Germany, had "welcomed" us to the ETO. So much for wartime security. Here it was that I first had a chance to try out my high school and college French, and, to my astonishment, found that I could actually communicate a little with the few local people we met. I thus became the Third Squad very unofficial interpreter.

Bud Stimes' recollection:

"The convoy reached Marseilles on October 20. Company G unloaded the next day after finishing their police and sanitation details. We unloaded on landing craft that moved through the cluttered harbor. Then trucks took us through the narrow streets to the Delta Base Staging Area which was quickly named the Marseilles Mud Hole. Dick La Fleur and I pitched our tent on a fence row for our first night on the continent. Any plowman knows that fence rows are higher and drier than plowed fields."

October 23, 1944, from Somewhere in France. "We are now in cold, muddy France, but I have seen the sun a few times… We call this puddle we're on home. Today our mail service caught up to us… Yesterday I was on a loading detail (on the docks) in a city (Marseilles) and when we came back the whole outfit moved. Imagine our roaming strange fields in quest for our tents at 9 o'clock at night. Luckily we found our tents, but someone has one of my blankets and raincoat… Our squad leader didn't even deliver us our rations this morning. Don't worry about me because I have mastered the art of opening tin cans and the prospects are better every day. (The case of U.S. Army corned beef from Argentina on the Marseilles dock lasted until we reached the Vosges Mts.) This noon we took a powder and did our second piece of bartering. Cigarettes for some straw to sleep upon. They threw in a quart of wine to seal the bargain. French wine tastes more like vinegar than what the poetry books say. My pals all had a taste and the French farmer was happy. It is an old fashioned country but I like the people and now we are on some farmer's field. It is just like the field back of the woods… I am writing this by candlelight and in a dinky tent. Things could be better… I guess it will be a long time before we get hot showers and beds to use. Life in a tent is crowded, but I am getting used to it. I thought the transport was bad enough, but we would all be glad to be back on it. We are living in a field at the edge of a large city. The farms are small, but people get along. What amazes me is all the charcoal burning cars. I also can see a railroad and those small boxcars amuse me also. I am tenting with my old buddy Richard La Fleur and we get along swell … for my Christmas something to eat would be super and a hunting knife if possible. It is time to turn is as we have to conserve our candle as well as get up early tomorrow…"

"This letter was passed by U.S. Army examiner Lt. Richard E. Lahti."

Jack Pointer continued his account:

"Land Ho! And we headed for the beautiful port of Marseille [*sic*], France, a place I had studied about quite a bit in my geography book in the grades. When the anchor dropped at 1400 that sunny afternoon, the saying went around something to the effect 'I knew they would drop that thing, it has been hanging out all the way.'

"The harbor was full of sunken boats and our boat was too big to go all the way to a pier, so we stopped in the middle of the harbor and loaded on LCI boats to take us to shore. Of course, we were first on the boat so naturally we should be the first off the boat, but that was not the case—we were the last off the boat, which was the next day. The nite of 20 October 44 we had our first air raid. The city blacked out immediately and so did the boat. The antiaircraft guns on the shore cut loose but it didn't amount to much. I think it was just a little bit of German reconnaissance, anyway that nite on the radio, Berlin Sally welcomed the 100th to the port of Marseille and ours was supposed to be a secret voyage. The next day we said good–bye to 'Pop', the fellow who fed us after our short bit of garbage detail each nite and all the rest of the crew we had gotten to know. I had to help the colonel down the rope net—he only stepped on my face and mashed my nose a little more than it previously had been in high school, he was a Colonel, so I couldn't say much and he didn't attempt to. It was raining like the dickens and never thought I had seen so much mud, but I was due to see a lot more thru this 'Sunny France.' We hiked about 10 miles to our bivouac area where we pitched our pup tents and stayed for 6 days while we got our vehicles and stuff together. The field was nothing but a mud hole and how us fresh from the States boys disliked that. There I ate my first K rations. Boy, they were wonderful, I thought, and we swiped some extra ones when I helped work on the docks for a day at Marseille, the chocolate was very tasty. Howard Hall and I slept together in our pup tent and had it pretty good with a little Coleman burner to keep us warm. 6 days without a bath was getting pretty bad and there was no place to take one except in my pup tent, so one day I got buck naked and took a bath in my helmet which was the last one I got until December sometime altho I did get several unofficial baths by falling in creeks and getting rained on and miscellaneous other ways."

One afternoon during this time a friend and I walked and hitchhiked to the nearby town of Aix-en-Provence. Here we went into a tiny restaurant on the central square and had—along with profuse apologies for shortcomings from the proprietress—a lovely, simple meal that I still remember with great pleasure. It was a thick potato soup, fresh white bread (a real rarity then), and fresh grapes. That was all there was to it. I don't believe there was even butter for the bread, but it was perfect, and the beginning, I think, for a love of France that I still have.

While we were in Marseilles we had other opportunities to move around the area, both for limited recreation opportunities and work details on the docks, unloading our

supplies. Which category is involved in the following anecdote I am not sure, but here is my transcription for the *Newsletter* of a story given me verbally recently by one of the participants. I called it:

SHORT STORY

In the tale that follows, “the names have been changed to protect the innocent,” as they used to say on the old “Dragnet” radio and television shows. Just how that worked, or who is innocent, we don’t know, but here’s the story.

Back in the Fall of 1944 a certain infantry company found itself just outside Marseilles in France, making final preparations prior to entering combat. At one point, two Second Lieutenants, leaders of the –nd and –rd platoons, L---i and C---r by name, decided that some R & R at one of Marseilles’ bistros was called for. While seated at the bar testing the quality of quite a lot of the local cognac, they were approached by a high–ranking and experienced looking non–com who inquired of them if they had any use for a Jeep. “Certainly,” came the prompt reply, “how might this be accomplished?” For they had had to hitch hike into town, and the prospect of their own wheels for the return trip was a bright one. In return for the treat of a few cognacs, the sergeant directed them to a nearby dock where, even as they spoke, many Jeeps were being unloaded from a ship. “Simply get in line with the others,” our lieutenants were told, “and when your turn comes, get in the Jeep and drive away. When you get to the guard at the entrance to the dock, just ask him which way the last vehicle in your convoy went and go in that direction.”

It all seemed logical enough to our heroes, so off they went to the dock and got in line. When their turn came, they mounted a brand–new Jeep, with chalk marks where unit insignia went, and commenced to drive off. For some reason, Lieutenant L---i, who was driving, discovered that the horn didn’t work. While Lieutenant C----r shook in his boots with fear that they would be discovered and prosecuted for grand theft auto, Lieutenant L---i indignantly called this defect to the attention of the officer supervising the unloading. A loose wire was discovered, and quickly fixed, and our heroes were off. As instructed, they asked which direction the convoy had gone, and sped off in that direction.

Upon returning to the Company, they informed the Captain of their new acquisition. He commended them for their alertness and expeditious conduct and promptly assigned a driver to the new vehicle. A few days later the Jeep, still covered with its shipping chalk marks, was pressed into service as the Company joined the rest of the Division in a long drive up the Rhone River valley to their combat area. Not long after that, however, word came down from Battalion headquarters that it had been discovered that the Company had an unauthorized Jeep that must be returned from whence it came. Sadly, this was accomplished, but no embarrassing questions were asked, and our enterprising shavetails never heard any more from the episode. In the Company’s first taste of combat a day or so later, both were wounded. Happily, however, both survived and, we hope, are reading this account along with you. To our knowledge, neither has ever had any further larceny on his record.

I was curious about and interested in this new environment, but we weren't there as sightseers. That was brought home to us with a jolt one day when we were issued live ammunition and hand grenades, the first we'd seen away from the firing range in training camp. No, we weren't tourists, we were infantry, and for my part, I was suddenly afraid. Fear is the one emotion that I lived with continually from then on whenever I was in combat or it seemed imminent.

Back to Bud:

"The 399th Infantry Combat Team left on 2 1/2 ton trucks for the 7th Army front on the morning of Oct. 29, 1944."

X. COMBAT – FIRST BLOOD

I remember almost always being afraid, but for some reason, though I was never even remotely heroic, I always stayed where I was supposed to be and went where I was told. Why, in the face of such raw fear? The overwhelming majority of the others did as I did, though I've no idea whether they were as scared as I was most of the time. Yet there were some that couldn't face it when the time came. A few broke down completely and were sent away, a few others were adamant in their refusal to face the danger and were given rear echelon assignments guarding baggage, or whatever else they did. Most of us, however, just faced what we had to face, and I doubt that many of us could have said why. In retrospect, there seems to me considerable likelihood that our long months of training—together, as teams—had more than a little to do with it, at least at the start.

Our attitude toward those who fell out this way was revealing. There was no disbelief in the sincerity of the dropouts, no scorn, no bitterness that I can recall. There was rather feeling sorry for them and maybe some fleeting envy. This was an advance taste of the enormous tolerance of the combat man for the non-combatant. Life is too fragile, to temporary, to waste any of it on anger or recrimination, and the combat life is too awful to wish it upon anyone who doesn't have to be there, for whatever reason. As I reflect on it I can't recall any feelings manifested of elitism or martyrdom, either one of which would have seemed well justified, given the conditions we endured during the next five or six months.

Flashes of clear memory alternate with long obscure periods from this vantagepoint in time, but I do remember a long "six-by-six" truck convoy ride up the Rhone River valley in the autumn air. Blasted military vehicles, mostly German, appeared by the roadside, attesting to the running battles and air attacks in this area during the weeks just passed and adding to our feelings of apprehension. One night we camped near a vineyard where a farmer was willing to sell us wine for 10 francs a canteen cupful, although he couldn't understand why we wanted new wine barreled only days before. Several large casks were emptied, and many of us were ill later, to put the kindest light on it. We went through Dijon, I recall, and perhaps three days after we started—military truck convoys don't move very fast—we arrived somewhere in the vicinity of Épinal and St. Dié, in Alsace. Between us and the Rhine lay the Vosges Mountains—old, moderate elevations more like our Catskills than the nearby Alps—which were to be our home, to use that word very loosely, for the next four months.

Briefly, although we knew nothing of this at the start, of course (and, indeed, we never had more than the vaguest idea of exactly where we were), the 100th Division was to participate in a slow push through these mountains until after Christmas. Then, on the eastern side, we were to occupy static positions in or near the old Maginot Line until the middle of March. Finally, we would participate in the final big push that ended, for most of us, two months later, near Stuttgart, Germany, where the Division was when the Germans finally capitulated.

Here is how Bud Stimes described the first days of combat for the *Newsletter*:

LETTERS SENT HOME FROM FRANCE
MARSEILLES TO THE VOSGES

Nov. 3, 1944, from Somewhere in France. "… Things have happened fast and furious and I have no idea when this will be mailed or by whom. I have seen more of France than any of the boys did in the last war. There are fields full of dead cattle and one place with 4 unburied German soldiers. I have no conception of the war because I haven't had a paper since I left the states. I know that I've been thru a little tough going, but only God knows what is ahead. I've spent a few happy hours here and did see a little of the countryside. The future looks dark, but with God's help I hope to pull through. I have so many buddies and I'd sure hate to see them fall. The infantry really takes a beating here… Since leaving the states I haven't received a Courier (hometown newspaper) or even a haircut. I hope to enjoy those packages because my birthday (19th) is just a few days off. There are so many young boys and married men it doesn't seem fair. Whenever you send anything remember I have to carry it around. Send me expendable supplies like candy, airmail stamps, [*It is incredible to me at this late date that we had to actually buy stamps to get our mail out—and 6¢ airmail stamps if we expected the recipients to see it before the war was over. I believe V–Mail went by air at the surface rate, 3¢, but you could only write on one side of a very small sheet.*] cookies, jam, soap, and gum. But better yet keep writing letters, because we will enjoy them as soon as our mail reaches us. All this rain and mud has soured me on France forever. There is no future to this down life. I hope everything goes well back home now and forever. I am glad to be able to look back at a pleasant home and school life. Give my love and regards to all my old friends. There is nothing back home to compare to all this miserable life we lead. A bright spot is when we get hot chow and rest assured that none is wasted. I am O.K. now and please don't worry. Time is short so I had better close now. Goodbye and God bless and keep you."

"June 16, 1994 Recollections. My high school graduation Parker fountain pen was lost in the Marseilles mud hole. This letter was written with a very dull pencil. I had trouble reading this 50 year old letter. This letter is very pessimistic and not in my usual upbeat style. Now I realize this was our fifth day in the combat zone. I remember my chapped lips received in riding atop an Army truck as air attack guard in our three days ride from Marseilles to the eastern France front. I remember our bivouac next to the fox cage in the Dijon zoo. I remember walking with other 2nd platoon men in blacked out Dijon to find a French bistro that admitted us. I remember that I had little money and that Quartermaster soldiers treated us to several bottles of the finest French champagne that made me light–headed. I remember returning to the zoo as our cooks were preparing pancakes and as I jumped into the pup tent I knocked down the tent pole with my head and upset our little shelter. Richard La Fleur was very patient that early morning. I remember how much equipment I carried in eastern France. In addition to the Browning automatic rifle I remember taking turns carrying the air marking panels bag, the bazooka, and bazooka rounds. For a few days I remember carrying a full size spade Fred Drew obtained from the Engineers. Others carried the full size axe. Our gas masks and overcoats had been discarded along a mountain road. I remember our first squad bedroll that was too

huge to handle. Very quickly we learned to make two men bedrolls with distinctive knots we could feel in the dark when delivered to our new, forward position. I remember how the November nights were long, cold, and wet. I remember the day we were in reserve and toiled many hours to get a fire going for a pile of sawn boards on a hillside. Fred Drew and others used our full size axe to cut to the interior of a stump to get to some dry kindling wood. The fire was smoky, but comforting. I don't remember that our wet clothing and equipment got dried. In those Vosges Mountains I still remember one of the most comfortable night's sleep in my life. Our mattress was fir branches, a shelter half, and a blanket. The blankets on us had a shelter half for a bedspread. As usual Clarence Manganaro slept in the middle between Dick La Fleur and me. We awoke with three or four inches of snow serving as an extra blanket. I remember wearing the same underwear for weeks underneath our O.D.'s, fatigues, sweaters, field jackets, and raincoats. I remember how difficult it was to open and close buttons and buckles with cold fingers in wet gloves. I remember how uncomfortable our shoepacs were. I was always looking for regular GI shoes and rubber overshoes. I remember it took about two hours to eat a K–ration hard chocolate bar and then time to awaken your guard relief. I remember reading the Lightning News and other propaganda leaflets dropped on and fired at us by the Germans, every word on ration and ammunition boxes, and a few wet copies of Yank magazine and the Stars and Stripes newspaper. I remember the early November day when our full strength 40 men 2nd platoon replaced a platoon of the 157th Inf. Regt. of the 45th Division with about 13 soldiers walking off the hill. Our Sergeant Whitehead visited with their platoon sergeant and talked about their pre–war old army service together. The war stopped briefly and there wasn't enough foxholes for all of us. The mathematics of casualty rates entered my consciousness that day. I still remember our occupation of a barn in Neufmaisons in the early dark of night and the promise of a dry bed on hay and straw. Dawn's early light showed that the roof tiles were blown off in an earlier bombardment and we awoke wet and cold as usual. I never liked our K–ration menu as some did. I remember one tasty homemade meal when we gathered walnut sized potatoes in a muddy field and flavored them with envelopes of K–ration bouillon powder on Sergeant Doherty's little stove burner. I remember three brown squares of toilet paper included in the K–ration boxes and how it was carefully kept inside our helmet liners until time for its use. Sometimes French paper money was used for this purpose. We learned to dry our wet socks under our waists with body heat and to change socks daily. Trench foot and yellow jaundice probably accounted for as many casualties as the Wehrmacht. [*For more on this subject, see page 165.*] Some mail and packages reached us in those early November days. I vividly remember Pvt. Robert Geiger opening a package from home and expecting food treats and dropping a pair of bedroom slippers in the mud of eastern France. It was a time of endurance and perseverance in the cold and wet and our assignment was moving in the dark nights and wet days toward Germany with lots of equipment, weapons, and extra ammunition." [*Bud got this exactly right, but, as we shall see shortly, he had only about 15 days of this. He was wounded on November 13 and spent the next 4*

months away from his unit, recovering in hospitals and convalescent treatment centers.]

Jack Pointer also continued his account of this time:

"One Sunday morning 29 October 44 we had our duffel bags packed and our full field packs on and at 0800 the 399th Inf. was on its way to the front lines some 400 miles away. We took the Rhone River Valley up and enjoyed the scenery and the weather wasn't too bad for riding in an open 2–1/2 ton truck. The first nite we stopped at Valence outside of town in a big field and had fires and everything as if we were back in the States. The next day we passed by nothing but the remains of the armed forces of Mr. Hitler's that tried to escape the trap from the invasion of southern France but the US air corps shot them up and they were bumper to bumper with everything from tanks to bicycles all burned and knocked out. Foxholes along the road were numerous and many other signs that war had been in this area not too long before we arrived.

"That night we stopped in Dijon and slept in the park, I think I could go right to the tree under which Howard and I pitched our little tent. It was right next to Reynard or the fox's cage. The Lt. and several of the other boys slept in the truck that nite so they wouldn't have to pitch a tent. The next day we moved on for the last lap of our journey. Toward late afternoon we could hear the big guns and then we knew we were getting close. We drove on the small roads to the back woods where we would bivouac and noticed how the branches had been shot off the trees from the artillery tree bursts. We pitched tents and were told to dig a fox hole. Very few did dig a fox hole because they thought they were too far from the front. We were actually on a line with the 240s about 7 miles behind the front lines. Shortly after the big guns cut loose—everyone thought it was shells coming in and took off for the nearest ditch or some kind of cover. We didn't know the difference between in coming and out going stuff at that time—we were just as green as we could be. Right after that you could hear the shovels just a throwing the dirt out of the ground and most everyone had a nice fox hole. That was 31 October 44 and what a Halloween nite with scares for us new boys, fresh from the States. The next nite the 1st and 3rd battalions of the 399th went in and relieved two battalions of the 45th Div. We heard the unbelievable story of how the trucks brought the boys up to the front parked bumper to bumper with no dispersion as we had been taught in the States. The 45th told them the enemy is that way, there is the hill you are supposed to capture, go get it, good–by. The second battalion was in reserve at that time and so we had to move closer to the front lines. We turned in our duffel bags and they told us we would get them later, we did get them later—after the war was over. All GI equipment was taken out of them and used to issue to the troops as we need them. Some personal property was unlawfully taken too but nothing could be done about it. Some of the fellows with false teeth left them in their bags thinking they would be able to get them in a few days—how they were fooled. We still spent the nite in the same place for the nite of 1 November 44, the day the 399th was committed to action against the Germans in World War II.

"2 November 44. On this day we were alerted to go up a little closer and take over reserve positions and sort of get used to being a little closer to the front. They called for one man from our platoon to go to battalion for a detail. We thought it would be just for a day or two and Smoky told me to get Cpl. Thayer for the job. It turned out that his job was going to be pretty permanent because he was assigned to Bn. GRO. It was a bad deal for him in a way but he got out of a lot of suffering that some of the front line boys had to go thru. (He joined us again in January when we were at Glasenberg in a house.) We were supposed to move out on trucks that afternoon, but they didn't come and we waited some more. It was raining and we had no tents or anything so we curled up on the ground in groups of five or six men and tried to keep warm under our rain coats. I believe I was more afraid that nite than at any other time (even more than on Nov. 13). The waiting made me so nervous that I was shaking all over. I tried to hide it but most all the other fellows were doing the same thing.

"3 November 44. After a miserable nite the trucks finally came and we left about 0900 in the morning to move 6 miles forward and just in front of the 105s. We stayed on the reverse slope of a hill with the company on two sides of a muddy road that the chow jeep couldn't get up under its own power. There we turned in those gas masks that we had been lugging. Apparently there was very little danger of a gas attack. We were to get them back when the word 'Cherrigas' came down from Army. It was one of those dark sections there at nite and I fell in the mud many a time when I was running a message for Lt. Calder. Nash was sent to be a regimental MP from that place too. Rained all the time and I was plenty wet. We got warm chow once a day and we also turned in our mess kits and let the kitchen wash them and bring them up when they fed us. Jack Porter was Capt. Clark's body guard and they had as good a hole to live in as anyone dug.

"4 November 44. Same as 3 Nov.

"5 November 44. We moved to another place just a mile or so away. There was a lumber factory near by where we stole all their lumber to make fires and keep dry but we were still wet.

"6 November 44. Moved up to the front lines. We saw men from the 45th Div. Coming back and they gave us little remarks to encourage us but they were black as they could be, tired with big beards and all their clothing wet. I wondered how long before we would look the same. The company was about 500 yards behind the front and the 2nd platoon went up on line with Easy company. Our platoon had to go out and get ammunition for them and bring up chow. Our bed rolls didn't get to us that nite, but Fritz and Smoky found a shelter half tent and two blankets. It rained like the dickens and so Lt. Calder, Fritz, Smoky, Molise and me slept in the tent of course my feet didn't fit in it. Actually we didn't sleep at all that nite. One or two men were killed from E Co., and that is where Lt. Jabo of E Co. got hit and he died in England 3 or 4 months later. That nite we prepared to pull out of that position and way after dark the 2nd Plt. came off the line and we went back to our position of 5 Nov. We had to hang luminous dial watches or wrist compasses on the man in front of us so we could follow. The mud was up to

our knees and plenty of the guys fell down when we crossed an overflowed creek and were completely soaked.

"Part of the above for 7 Nov. 1944. Molise fell on his face in the mud in the old position again. Election day and we didn't know outcome for a mo.

"8 November 44. We had church out in the field with Chap. Fraser, and Communion. That is where I got the bible I still have with me, because I left my other one in my duffel bag.

"9 and 10 November were spent moving around in that same area."

It was just beginning for us, a way of life completely different from anything any of us had ever experienced before. This was to go on, with infrequent and brief let-ups, for the better part of the next six and a half months—until the war in Europe was over. What was it like? Fear, dread, terrible reluctance to move when our prospect was "moving up" (to the front, to attack, or whatever, as differentiated from "moving back"—most welcome phrase) are the vivid emotions that stay in my memory. I've read considerably since then about troops in war who were anxious to fight, looking for the relief from boredom or tension that action provides, and other similar attitudes, but I can truthfully say that I never felt that way. Perhaps those feelings are for high ranking officers and military historians who write books; perhaps sometimes they're pure bravado; perhaps other troops are trained and motivated differently than I was. Maybe some accounts are down–right lies. Whatever the reason, any such feelings were totally overshadowed, for me, with fear. And yet we—most of us—always went. I always come back to that, with a little awe from where I sit now, so many years later.

What else was there besides fear? Well, there was constant, grinding fatigue, there was hunger a lot of the time, there was everlasting wet, there was dirt, there was illness (almost everyone had perpetual diarrhea, or dysentery, and the incidence of infectious hepatitis became a military secret for a while, so widespread did it become), there was almost constant, unremitting noise, there was blood and pain, and death—death for strong and healthy young men in their late teens and early 20s. Everyone knows what an awful shock the sudden death of a child of high school or college age is. We almost got used to it, God help us.

Bud wrote home:

Nov. 11, 1944 V–Mail. "… Today is Armistice Day, but it isn't much of an event for some poor soldiers. This A.M. we passed thru a war devastated French town (Baccarat) and they were celebrating with a lot of color and excitement… Everyone who writes this outfit has the idea that we landed safely in England with the largest convoy ever. On my 19th birthday (Nov. 8) things happened that I can always remember. We sure have moved around this cold, rainy hole of a country. None of us have been hurt as yet, but I have seen the results on both our men and theirs. We have all attended church services whenever possible and I for one have benefited immensely. I wish this thing a speedy conclusion. We are a little out of touch with the world, but I guess F.D.R. is still the C. in C. I am safe so far, but we sure spend some uncomfortable hours… We hardly ever get settled in a spot before we are off on another direction. Somehow we keep each other going and we finally make it. I would write this airmail as I have stamps

now, but no paper. Living conditions are primitive and we think we are fortunate if we can keep dry. There is more rain here than California…"

First battle action, can anyone who's experienced it ever forget it? We had moved through forests and isolated framlands to the "front." On the way we'd passed Jeeps loaded with large objects encased in mattress covers going the other way. Graves registration people at work—the large objects were dead bodies. Most of them had probably been just like us a few hours before. We passed a file of men, a few dozen at most, being led by a lieutenant and a couple of sergeants. They had a hollow-eyed, half-dead look we'd never seen before, but were soon to know well. They were part of the 45th Division, and we were relieving them from 30 straight days on the line. The few dozen men were not the remains of a company but of a whole battalion. Having fought for many months up the spine of Italy and then from the south of France, the battalion had probably been nowhere near full strength for a long time, but full strength was 1,100 or 1,200 people, and now there were, apparently, only 50 or 60. We suddenly saw very graphically where we were. Second Battalion was in reserve. Suddenly we heard the crash of nearby artillery shelling. First and Third Battalions were under fire, we were told. Casualties were heavy. Next we heard that it was our own artillery fire, misdirected. Was this the way it was going to be? Sometimes, yes, we learned as we progressed through that dismal winter, even if not really often.

Our turn came next. Early the next day we found ourselves—"G" Company—advancing along a cleared area paralleling a road in the thick woods. The enemy was out there we'd been told, but we advanced several hundred yards in eerie silence; we saw people running from a house at a crossroads up ahead, Oh God, maybe they've pulled out; we've scared them off. There was nothing—and then suddenly there was everything: rifle and machine gun fire, mortars, artillery, everything. We had walked into a rather obvious trap. Our scouts disappeared entirely; some of them we never saw again. A couple were killed outright, and the others ended up in a P.O.W. camp in Strasbourg. (As we shall see, they were released a few weeks later when our troops overran Strasbourg, and returned to us.)

I was near the road, with my B.A.R., when the firing started, about halfway between Company headquarters in the woods behind and the house at the crossroads. I dove for a shallow dith on the far side of the road. Here I was very visible and completely pinned down by rifle and machine gun fire, and seriously concerned about mortar shells, which didn't seem to be being wasted on me, at least for the moment. Here, as I lay wondering how I was ever to get out of this alive, It suddenly, incongruously (and erroneously I have learned, I was a couple of days off) occurred to me that it was Armistice Day, November 11, which seemed ironic.

Presently, from the edge of the woods across the road, a man who had been close companion during training days, and who I shall always remember with profound gratitude, called to me. He would cover me with his B.A.R. fire, he said, from his somewhat less exposed position, and when the Germans stopped firing I was to get up and run across the open road to the relative safety of the woods. It worked, and that's one reason I'm here today. But somewhere in the course of all that I left my own B.A.R. behind.

The awful day finally ended and the early nightfall brought apprehension and confusion, along with pitch-blackness. Our Company commander had been badly wounded, and the executive officer, second in command, had sustained a superficial wound, and had become convinced that the front line was no place for him. The C.O. was invalided home and the Exec. Spent the rest of his time with us back at Battalion headquarters with the cooks and company clerks, frightening replacements with horror stories about life at the front.

We got our first chance to dig real foxholes that night, and didn't do well at it. An occasional mortar round or artillery shell and some harassing sniper fire kept our nerves on edge, as did the crying of the "wounded" from the area between us and the enemy (pretty surely recordings through German loudspeakers, we decided, although I have recently talked to people who were there also and who have assured me that one of our own men was indeed lying out there, and that he was later found dead). I felt naked without my B.A.R., and very vulnerable in this uncertain place. By the next day someone gave me a sub-machine gun (a notably ineffective infantry weapon) dredged up from somewhere, which I carried for a day or so until another B.A.R. was found for me.

One episode from that eerie and frightening night still stands out sharply in my memory. Exhaustion was just beginning to overcome fear when, with no warning, a bloodcurdling, sub-human scream came from very close by. I had instant visions of a commando attack or something worse. What had really happened was that a very tall, always uninhibited, comrade-in-arms had not made his foxhole long enough, was having very painful leg cramps, and was expressing his displeasure about the condition. Against, I thought, all principles of common sense, he decided to spend the rest of the night on the ground beside his hole. Dawn revealed him in one piece, unharmed by stray shrapnel fragments or bullets.

Well, we'd had our baptism of fire, near a place called Neufmaisons, at "Purple Heart Lane," as we began to call it. We'd been blooded and I don't suppose any of us was quite the same person as before ever again. We all felt, I think for one thing, quite a bit older than we'd been a few short hours ago. "G" Company lost 56 of its members that day, which is about a 25% casualty rate. The casualties included five out of six of our officers. Six of the 56 were killed, the rest wounded or taken prisoner. Some of the wounded—and the prisoners—came back to us later, many did not. We never had such an awful day again; the first was our worst. And yet, most of us were still around, and we were all quite suddenly a lot smarter. We got a new Company commander too, who turned out to be a superior leader in every way, and who rapidly gained from all of us the respect and loyalty his predecessor could never have known anything about.

And now back to Bud.

> "June 16, 1994 Recollections. On September 22-27, 1978 my wife, Melpomene, and I were in France with a tour group that included 25 100th Division men. The sun shone, the countryside was peaceful and beautiful, the food and wine were delicious, the hotels were very comfortable, the people friendly, and our feet were dry and porters carried our luggage."

PURPLE HEART LANE DAY – NOVEMBER 13, 1944

"The 50th anniversary of the 1944 landings and campaigns of the U.S. Army in France created widespread interest in the United States and other parts of the world. I just finished reading Stephen E. Ambrose's *D–Day June 6, 1944 – The Climactic Battle of World War II*. The author uses interviews with over a thousand survivors in writing a very interesting and detailed history. I could identify with many of the participants who experienced and remembered this major campaign from a soldier's perspective. Many remembered events a few yards to their right and left and a rifle shot ahead. The recent media coverage stimulated other veterans to search their memories of distant World War II events and place their experiences into the historical record. My letter writing gap extends from the November 11 V–Mail letter written on our bivouac hill outside of Baccarat on the Meurth River to my November 22 letter written from the 23rd U.S. Army General Hospital at Vittel, France near the headquarters of the 6th U.S. Army Group.

"These are my memories of those November 12 and 13, 1944 days when our Company G, 399th Infantry Regiment was one of the assault companies leading the 7th U.S. Army attack on the strong German defenses blocking the Neufmaisons–Raon L'Etape road and a gateway through the High Vosges. Hundreds of tall, straight pine trees were felled across the narrow highway by German demolition squads with many land mines planted. We advanced through pine forests and mostly uphill. On November 12th we dug foxholes in the forest and were within German artillery range. Since then I learned it was called Foret de Petit Reclos. I remember one concern with artillery shells on our positions, but I remember more strongly that not many of us had much sleep in the snow covered, wet ground. We knew we were close to the German lines on a very dark night. I don't remember eating much breakfast on early Monday, November 13. I had lost most of my appetite for cold K–rations, but I probably ate something.

"With day's meager light we advanced through the forest with wet clothing and equipment. I remember the news that Sergeant Joseph Will of our 1st platoon was evacuated with a shrapnel wound in his lower leg. He was one of our well–liked training sergeants in the A.S.T.P. training platoon. I had been issued his M–1 rifle #1037911. We both agreed it was zeroed in one up and two clicks to the right. Our second platoon was the support platoon in the November 13 advance. Much later I learned that the name of the strong German resistance center and our objective was Le Rouge Vetu. The day was overcast and the ground was wet. I had little sense of direction with no sun to orient me, but I knew that the German army, the Rhine River, and Germany were eastward and that our sister regiment, the 397th, was advancing on our right. I also knew that we were part of a major offensive by the U.S. 7th Army. [*I wonder at this memory. I can specifically remember none of that, though I'm sure it is all true*.]

"We stopped in the forest with our 1st and 3rd platoons ahead of us. The first squad of the 2nd platoon was sent as a contact patrol to the 1st platoon of the 397th on our right. Sergeant Carl Whitehead took us rightward (to the south) on a route well above a forest trail. The walking was difficult on the slippery slope with our full combat equipment. We reached the 1st battalion after they had taken hill 409. I remember how exhausted they looked. We were unwashed, unshaven,

and mud–covered and probably looked the same to them. We returned without incident to our original forest edge position.

"My next memory is our lying down behind trees next to a cleared field before the fortified farm house and awaiting orders. There was heavy machine gun and mortar fire falling on our leading 1st and 3rd platoons. Dick La Fleur, Clarence Manganaro, and I were lying prone behind a very large tree and trying to finish our breakfast or beginning our lunch. Our fingers were numb and our gloves were wet. Our B.A.R. team faced the enemy from our tree line. We knew we were in a serious situation. It was about 11 A.M. Sergeant Michael Doherty was a few yards to our right and had one of the fastest dug foxholes in the world. We noticed the bullet hole through his field jacket left sleeve where his stripes had been. Did he say something about the luck of the Irish?

"About fifteen yards to our left Captain Clark and our platoon lieutenants were standing together and examining a map and looking at the cleared field and the fortified farm house. To our rear the heavy machine gunners from H company were coming forward in short and noisy rushes when their equipment hit the ground. Then the mortar shells began exploding in the trees above us. From the corner of my left eye I saw the tree burst that exploded above our standing officers and knocked them to the ground. The second or third tree burst shell exploded above our B.A.R. position. A tree branch the size of a baseball bat hit me on my left leg. I felt like I had been hit by a swinging baseball bat and couldn't understand how a fallen stick had that much force. The snow covered ground was covered with tree parts and was blackened. A few yards to our right Delos Lowell was disabled permanently by this mortar barrage. I wasn't aware of anyone fleeing rearward from our zeroed in position. The 3rd and 1st platoons came back into the 2nd platoon position. Dick La Fleur noticed a few drops of blood and a hole about the size of a cigarette burn on the back of my left thigh. Then I examined my trousers and determined that I had a shrapnel wound and not a tree bruise. Later at the battalion aid station I saw the gash in my left foot. I knew I was wounded in action and needed help.

"The barrage lifted and I sought a medical corpsman. They were busy attending the cluster of our fallen officers. I was able to walk on my left leg and felt the usual coldness, wetness, and numbness we all had endured. I remember that Captain Melvin D. Clark was in shock and many others needed medical attention. I offered to help carry his litter back to the battalion aid station, but the corpsman said I should evacuate myself if I could. There would be a long wait for litter bearers so I moved rearward by following the telephone wire to battalion headquarters and the aid station.

"I was one of the first to reach the battalion aid station. Part of my clothing was cut away, my wound was dressed, I was placed on a litter, given a morphine shot, and drank my first shot of whiskey. The medics were careful to unlace my slightly damaged shoe–pac boots and save them for the next soldier. The whiskey warmed me and I was semiconscious from the morphine shot on my litter. Dry blankets kept me warm. I don't remember being loaded on an ambulance. I do remember that I was carried on the top tier on the left side and

that there were four litter cases and a wounded soldier sitting by the driver. All seemed to be Company G soldiers and two were from our weapons platoon."

When he read this in our *Newsletter*, Daniel Capozzi wrote to us:

"When he [Stimes] wrote … about … Purple Heart Lane, he described the action as it was, I remembered the details, I was there! He wrote about November 13, 1944, his being wounded and leaving the battle area in an ambulance with other litter cases and the 4th Platoon Sgt. Sitting in the front seat. That was me! Sgt. Daniel L. Capozzi. He told the story with his usual exact facts."

Bud went on:

"On the ambulance trip to the 27th Evacuation Hospital we stopped on a road and the back doors were opened. I could read the ten stars and I saw and recognized Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, 6th Army Group commander; Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch, 7th Army commander; Maj. Gen. Edward H. Brooks, 6th Corps commander; and Maj. Gen. Withers A. Burress, 100th Division commander. One of them said, "Well done, men, you did a great job today." A few weeks later General Devers visited our hospital room on the top floor of the Grand Hotel (23rd General Hospital), Vittel, France and presented Purple Heart medals to some of the other seven soldiers in our room.

"Some hours passed before I was examined by a surgeon about 10 P.M. at the 27th Evacuation Hospital. The more seriously wounded preceded me into the surgical tent. My two deep incisions on my left thigh were done about 1:00 P.M. I remember the blood covered sheets on the tables and floors in the surgical tent and the many operating tables at the end of a very busy day. I remember that Sergeant Carmelo Paratore was on the next table. Before I was anesthetized I thought that the surgeon only had to make one little snip to remove his shattered arm. Carmelo was my guitar playing assistant squad leader in my third platoon days. Weeks later I met him briefly in the 23rd General Hospital at Vittel and he had his shattered arm attached to lots of wires and splints and he was ready for an evacuation to England for restorative surgery. My recovery from surgery was rapid and I was placed in a ward tent. The ward nurse said I could have some solid food. The mess hall was long closed and the only food available was boiled cabbage. I ate three platefuls. When I woke up the next morning a Purple Heart medal was on my pillow, but I cannot remember the breakfast meal. The ward tent was filled to capacity. A forward artillery observer officer was on the cot to my right with many powder burns and slight shrapnel wounds from a short round.

"I was part of the U.S. Army medical evacuation system for four months. My stitches were removed on December 6 and I began walking again. I never did find any size 11 1/2 AAA shoes and I slopped around in size 12 D combat boots. Pajamas were replaced by O.D. clothing after Christmas, I returned to full duty in G Company on March 16, 1945 in time for the entry into Bitche on the Maginot Line. It was then I learned more details on our Purple Heart Lane day and that G Company held its position with a heavy loss of men and all but one officer and had named the place Purple Heart Lane.

"In my first letter after our November 13 battle I wrote, ' I was carrying the B.A.R. We got into an awful mess and it sure was a dark day I'll always remember. It made me mad as hell and I wasn't scared a minute although I sure was praying hard. It happened fast and I didn't have time to be scared. The walk to the aid station was long and hard, but what bothered me the most was all these (penicillin) shots… Right now I sure could use a haircut, but I am finally cleaned up since getting into this hospital…' This was written November 22 on a V–Mail letter to my sister. I was in the first week of my nineteenth year.

"I have strong memories of those November 1944 days 50 years ago in Eastern France. I still have to look up my Social Security number every time I use it."

William Matthews of the weapons platoon also offered a vignette of this time:

"I remember, for what reasons who knows now, that we ammo bearers had taken the machine gun belts out of their boxes and were carrying them draped around our necks, Air Corps fashion. Fortunately, we lived to correct this mistake! Later that evening, I remember after we had fallen back a little a single bullet passing through the trees. A few minutes later someone came and got me. My buddy, Bill Hollingsworth, had gotten that bullet in the thigh. After the war we attended each other's weddings, but over the years we have lost track of each other."

Jack Pointer's reminiscence continued:

"11 Nov. 44. That day we changed sectors. We went about 30 miles to the north and crossed the Meurth River I believe at Baccarat where they were having a big Armistice Day celebration. The convoy got mixed up there and we had to wait on the trucks for a half hour. We got off the trucks and walked to an area outside the town and stayed there. Nice spring water there and we saw a couple of Jerry planes getting chased home. Rain there as usual and a little snow in the morning. We turned in blankets for sleeping bags there but we didn't get either for a few days. E Company was on outpost about a half mile ahead of us that nite. Me and Molise did quite a bit of digging that nite but slept good.

"12 Nov. 44. That morning we got up in the dark and rolled up and turned in our rolls and got hand grenades and all the stuff for an attack. We caught up with E Company where they had a couple of Kraut prisoners. Then we moved off in a single file, Bn column. Gero the 300 radio operator got the stock shot off his carbine, F company was at the head getting quite a bit of fire from Jerry but mostly all small arms. Then in the afternoon the artillery came from Jerry and our stuff started to come in too but it landed on our own men and killed the artillery officer so he couldn't direct fire away from us. The first man in our company to get hit was the first man of the first squad of the first platoon S/Sgt. Will. After waiting in the rain about late afternoon we pushed off again and didn't run into Jerry that nite. We stayed in the middle of the road and dug in but I just curled up under a tree in my raincoat and tried to sleep. It snowed and every one was weak from exposure the next morning when I went around to wake the boys. Fritz and Smoky and Buddy [Lt. Calder] were feeling pretty bad too after digging most of

the nite and listening to a fierce artillery duel where the US won by destroying a bunch of Jerry artillery.

"13 Nov. 44. The day of the Baptism of Fire for me and the whole company, altho we had been under small arms fire prior to this day. It snowed the nite before and most of the men were sick from exposure when I went around to wake them that morning. The only thing we had to eat was the K rations that we got the day before. We got the company together anyway and moved off with scouts out and 1st and 3rd platoons leading the 2nd and weapons in support. Up and down those hills between Baccarat and Neufmaisons. They sure were hard with the snow on them to make me slip and then the woods was so thick in places that I had to run back and forth all the time to keep the squads going in the same direction. The first platoon captured a couple of Krauts who came in and gave up and the Bn. Cmdr., Lt. Col. Spiegle was there to tell them to go on back to Bn. with them. Jack Porter found one of the weapons of these Krauts, it was a burp gun. We had to move on tho and we only went a couple hundred yards and we came to the edge of a clearing where the trees had been cut down and the brush was still lying on the ground. It was open from all sides and could have grazing fire from 700 yards distance. The company was halted and scouts were sent forward to investigate a house at the crossroads of the Baccarat–Neufmaisons road which 3 Krauts had been seen leaving for the woods back of it. The house was declared cleared by the scouts and I had been sort of inquisitive and went up there right behind the scouts leaving the company and platoon behind. Kasney heard some noise in the woods to the left flank so he stood up with his BAR ready. The 3rd platoon went around to the right and saw five Krauts carrying something which later turned out to be the mortar crew that accounted for so many of our boys. I went back to Calder and Capt. Clark called for all his platoon leaders and they figured out the 'School Solution' which wasn't the right one for this particular place. Then it came, an explosion by the house. Everyone thought it was a mine that one of the boys had stepped on. Then all hell broke loose and were right in the midst of a trap which gave out with mortars, 88s, and all types of small arms, mostly automatic. Capt. Clark was hit, so was White. Kerr was behind a tree and me and Buddy heard another shell coming. I jumped along side of Kerr and Buddy went 10 yards further to the next tree. He got hit and called for me. I crawled up to him and tried to open my first aid pouch when another shell came in and Kerr picked up a little bit but not enough to stop him from staying on. Calder was gone. I guess he got up and ran. All I could hear was men calling for MEDIC. I saw Fritz and Smoky coming back on the right when a shell landed right next to them and blew them away but they didn't get hit. I was in a ditch on one side of the road and a Kraut was on the other side in the ditch. Every time I showed any sign of life somebody would open up with a burp gun on me and chew up the trunk of the tree I was behind. The only thing I could do was play possum."

When this appeared in the *Newsletter*, we appended the following note:

Regretfully, the manuscript stops here. We don't know why, though it certainly seems possible that, so soon after it all happened, it was just too much

for Jack to go on with. He recalls that he just got busy with other things and didn't have time to continue his writing. We're fortunate to have what he did complete.

Then–Sgt. William S. Joyner, who we shall meet again in his role as Assistant Editor and memorialist of *Combat Company*, sent the *Newsletter* a reminiscence of this time that is quite different from anything else we have, and, I think, very expressive and moving. He called it:

A SNOWY BAPTISM

"End of the line, you guys. All out." The sergeant's Brooklynese call reverberated down the line of olive–drab, two-and-a-half ton trucks that had slid to a stop in the messy roadside slush.

"It had begun to snow earlier in the afternoon, a mid-November snow, the first of the Fall, while our convoy made its way up the winding road in the Vosges foothills. The roadside firs were already white, contrasting sharply with the muddy ground of the roadbed churned by the tires of the transports.

"I jumped out of the truck clumsily, weighed down by the walkie–talkie radio strapped on my back in addition to my M–1 rifle and other gear. No longer protected from the wind by the truck tarp, I was glad I hadn't thrown away my overcoat earlier when it had seemed that Indian Summer would last forever.

"The roadside sign read, 'Baccarat – 2 kms.' That seemed to ring a bell. Of course, the delicate French crystal I had only seen in the window display of the poshest shop back home in the States. This had to be where that stuff had been made. Damned incongruous—the reality of war had caught up with the crystal fairyland. A few rounds of the artillery shells I could hear thudding in the distance could shatter every goblet left in the warehouse, if in fact there were still any in town.

"This vision of elegance evaporated as we formed up our platoon and headed into the woods along the ridge line outside of Baccarat. When I had an opportunity, I pulled out the celluloid overlay for our company, which, when superimposed on the area operations map I kept in my musette bag, outlined our area of responsibility in the attack scheduled for the next morning. Our objective was the crossroads hamlet of Neufmaisons. Nine houses? Was that goal worth dying for?

"It got colder when we stopped near the top of the ridgeline in the starless dark accentuated by the evergreen cover for the night. I slept fitfully. My thoughts kept going back to that breathlessly hot day at Fort Bragg the previous June when I had been called to the Base Chaplain's office to be given the news that my older brother, a captain in one of the Utah Beachhead divisions had been killed, machine–gunned at a crossroads on the road to Cherbourg.

"My saddened but proud reaction to the news had welled within me in the form of a poem that had already been present in the my subconscious simply waiting for the occasion:

The Norman waves roll in tonight
And ebbing leave their flotsam beached
The bodies there now waterlogged,
Which yesterday were quick with life,
Were sacrificed unselfishly
For Freedom's sake.

They walked the path where courage led
They knew that path would end in death
Or victory, most nobly won,
And so without a backward glance,
They plunged ashore to wage their war
For Freedom's sake.

Can we who live love freedom less
Than they who died without a word,
Or hesitate to count the cost
When asked by them to do their best?
No, we must give, if needs, our all
For Freedom's sake.

"What would the crossroads at Neufmaisons look like in the newly–fallen snow come dawn? It was snowing even harder when my radio crackled with a message from Battalion. 'O.K., Company G, move 'em out.' The ice–covered firs in the early morning light appeared crystalline."

It seems a little strange to me that no one else mentions a memory that I have of, some of us at least, stopping for time in a huge, empty warehouse in Baccarat, out of the wet. Though I don't think we actually spent a night there, we were sheltered long enough to start small fires to warm and dry us a bit and heat the powdered coffee in our K Rations. I too thought of crystal while we were there, but saw none.

One more anecdote from that time came to the *Newsletter*, from Bernie Jerding:

"When we got hit on 11/13/44 I took one of the company back to battalion aid. Tried to return to the company with a couple of aid men, but we got caught by dark on the way back. We didn't feel like trying to approach the company in the dark after what happened so we slept across their stretchers, planning to get back the next AM. In the morning the aid men decided to return to battalion. I started back to join the company. When I arrived at where I had left the outfit no one was there! There was lots of evidence of our being there—ammo, K-rations, etc., but no people. I was scared! Thought the whole outfit might have been captured! Just then I heard something or someone approaching. I hid and waited. It was Ron Fett. He had been sent back to the line to recover something left behind. When I called out to him I think I scared him too. He explained that in the

next 30 minutes an artillery barrage was scheduled to hit where we stood. Obviously, we both got out of there and back to battalion."

Now we turn to something a little different, with which we were very impressed when it came to us for the *Newsletter*.

XI. PRISONERS OF WAR

In 1992, one of our First Platoon scouts on that fateful day for so many, died from complications of diabetes. Shortly before he passed away he was able to complete for us an account of his experience as one of our first POWs. We were much moved when his wife told us that it was one of his last wishes that she send it to us. He called it:

CAPTURED
By
John J. Heron, Jr. (Pfc.)
Company G, 399th Infantry

It was a cold November morning as we worked our way up the snow covered slope in the Vosges Mountains. I was second scout for the first squad of the first platoon, George Company, 399th Infantry Regiment of the 100th Infantry Division. This was our first day in combat. We had been in reserve of Easy and Fox companies in the 45th Division line for one afternoon but nothing had happened. We didn't know where we were going or what to expect, when we got

off the truck there was a signpost that had the names Baccarat and Neufmaisons on it.

We had been walking for quite a while when we began to reach the top of the hill. Suddenly I saw two Jerries off to my left under a pine tree. I whirled and shouted, “Come out with your hands over your head!” They stood up and came out from under the tree. It didn’t register with me at the time but later I remembered that they didn’t have overcoats on so they could not have been there too long, as it was cold. I turned them over to someone to take them back to the rear and we continued on for another 50 or 60 yards.

We broke out of the woods and into a clearing. About 600 yards away, across a blacktop road was a burned out house. To the right was a dirt road and then more woods. We stood there for a minute looking over the situation. Captain Clark came up and said, “Scouts out, search that house for a machine gun nest.” The first and third platoons were in front so we started moving out in combat fashion, run about five yards, drop and roll over, cover your partner, then get up and run again.

There were Richards and DeFusco from the second squad, Weber and myself from the first squad. The third platoon scouts were Vasquez and Rector and two others whose names I cannot remember. We had gone about 200 yards when we ran into three barbed–wire fences. One third platoon scout had wire cutters and cut a hole thru the wire. We continued on, circled the house, threw a grenade in the cellar, and came back to the front. We stood there and discussed the situation, and decided the two scouts from the 3rd platoon should go back and tell the captain the house was clear but it looked like there were foxholes up to the right.

As they ran back toward the company, the rest of us lit up a cigarette, which is what we always did back in training. It didn’t mean anything at the time but as I reflect back, it gave the appearance that there was no danger. We saw the company start coming out of the woods before the scouts had gotten back. Then the artillery barrage started and we rushed for the ditch. Rector dropped right in front of the house where there wasn’t any protection and was hit almost immediately. The rest of us lay in the ditch on the other side of the road.

Suddenly there was a shell that hit very close and Weber said, “I’ve been hit.” I looked up and saw Vasquez wasn’t in the ditch, his body had been blown out into the field. I asked Weber where he was hit and he replied, “In the little finger.” I crawled up to him and looked at his helmet, and there were seven holes in the helmet but none had gone thru the liner. I bandaged up his finger. About that time the barrage stopped and DeFusco hollered, “Let’s go.” We jumped up and crossed the road. I looked up to the right and said, “There are Jerries coming down the road,” and started to aim my rifle at them. DeFusco called, “Drop your rifle, Heron, they’re right on top of us.” There had been positions to the left that were closer and they were standing in the road looking down at us.

They marched us up to the house and around to the right side and lined us up against the wall and searched us. It didn’t occur to me but both DeFusco and Weber said they thought that they might shoot us. When we had passed Rector he was badly wounded but still alive. There was a short conversation and

one of the Germans had gone back around the corner; there was a shot and he came back to where we were. Weber, who understood some German, said the soldier was told to shoot the wounded man. Then they marched us up the road to the right past the raw dirt we had seen, which turned out to be foxholes. We went down a steep hill and at the bottom was a bunker that appeared to be their company CP. From there we were marched thru a woods to a house that was either their regimental or division CP. We were asked a few questions, fed, and bedded down on the floor.

We stayed there until late the next afternoon when we were loaded into a Volkswagen bus that was powered by burning wood [*sic*, *probably charcoal*]. Every time we came to a small hill, we had to get out and push the bus up the knoll. That night we stayed in another house. We were joined by two POW's from the 45th. The next day we were moved to a house out in the middle of nowhere. As we waited more and more POW's arrived. About 11:00 PM we were told to get dressed, and were marched along the road about a mile where we came to a railroad track. We stood there until a train came along, and we were loaded into the last car. There were about forty of us by then. After an hour and a half we arrived at a railroad station with the name of Strasbourg. We were detrained and marched south for about an hour and a half to a large building.

We were moved to a large barracks where there were 20 other POW's. They had arrived early in the day and told us that there had been a shipment out that night of 150 POW's to a camp in Germany. They had been told that there was a shipment out every Wednesday Night. The next day we were interrogated by the officers. They knew a great deal about the division and officers, but their information wasn't current enough to know that Captain Clark had become the company commander. The next day we marched out to a railroad track and were ordered to dig a trench along the tracks. The air raid siren sounded in the afternoon and we marched about a mile down the tracks to a road tunnel under the railroad tracks. We stayed there about an hour until the "all clear" and then went back to digging.

The next day was the same as the day before except there was an air raid in the morning and another in the afternoon. Sunday we did not work, and were allowed to walk around the inside of the compound. It was built in a block "B" shape except it had two cross sections. There had been vegetable gardens in the open sections of the "B" and there were still cabbages growing there. There were faded Red Crosses painted on the roof. The building might have been a hospital, some time in the past.

Monday we returned to work on the trenches. There was a long air raid in the morning, and there were two raids in the afternoon that lasted most of the day. We went out again Tuesday and spent the entire day either in the shelter or marching to it. We could hear a lot of activity of planes diving and anti-aircraft fire. We could also hear the explosion of bombs. Wednesday we were put to work in the attic of the barracks. A young German soldier came up and said good-bye to an older guard. He said he was being shipped back to Germany, there was still one railroad bridge left. It appeared there would be no shipment out that night.

The next morning was Thanksgiving Day, and the camp commander came up and told us that the city was surrounded. He said that it probably would be taken in the next couple of days. He stated that they did not plan to fight, they would wait until the fighting was over and then would surrender. He warned us to stay away from the windows. It was late Saturday afternoon when we were liberated by elements of the 79th Infantry Division. They decided that we should stay where we were for that night and they would move us the next day. The next noon their cooks fixed us a Thanksgiving dinner and then we were trucked to the Repo-Depot in Épinal. After being reoutfitted we were returned to our unit.

In all we were POW's for fourteen days. We were not mistreated in any way and except for the instance with Rector we didn't encounter any brutality. As for food, I think we were fed in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Every morning we received a bowl of coffee, a tablespoon of fat, a tablespoon of jam, and a slice of bread.

We were hungry, and constantly thought about food. I remember that we all fantasized about what we would like for our Thanksgiving dinner. I am sure we couldn't have continued on that way, or it would get to you. I don't think any of us had mentally accepted the fact that we were prisoners and might spend months or even years in a prison. I think this realization would have come when we actually entered Germany and were interned in a prison camp.

Whenever I am asked how I was captured my stock answer has been, "I was in the wrong place at the wrong time," and my response to how did I get away is, "I was in the right place at the right time."

When we printed this in our Newsletter it inspired two of our readers to write us of their own personal involvements in, or observations of, that POW episode. The first was from William "Buckeye" Smith:

"After reading John Heron's memoir 'Captured" sad memories were brought back from my years in WW II. You see, I knew Don Rector personally. I also knew that Don had been shot in the head, but I assumed it was from a sniper. Thanks to Pfc. Heron, I now know the truth.

"Don Rector to me was more of a friend than just a G.I. buddy. We were together almost from the start. Don hailed from Eaton, Indiana and I met him in '43 at Camp Haan, California. He and I were assigned to the same A.A.A. gun section and buddied from then on. In May of '44 we were transferred to the 201st Infantry Regiment at Camp Carson, Colorado, both to Company L. In September we were shipped to the 100th at Bragg. We ended there in Sgt. Irvine's 3rd Squad, 3rd Platoon.

"I had talked with Don on that fateful day he was killed. He told me, 'I think I'm gonna make it home from this war all right.' Fate was the hunter and Don's luck had run out. Later I was put in Hq. Platoon, but my heart remained with Lt. Siemasko and the men of the 3rd Platoon."

The other letter came from Jack Porter:

"Thank you very much for … Heron's 'capture' memories. Their capture was often a topic of conversation in First Platoon. I could even take part, because

I was standing with Captain Clark, and saw them cut the wire at the German position. Shortly after that, all hell broke loose, and Captain Clark was down with a bad wound, and even I got nicked.

"It may even be a bit of wartime trivia. I wonder how many infantry platoons had four scouts captured, then recaptured, to spend the rest of the war in combat against the enemy? Probably not too many.

"I knew all of them well. They were extremely fine guys. Heron was usually a quiet one. Weber was sort of irrepressible. I can't remember his ever being 'down.' Leonard Richard and I were pretty close; we used to play Casino together whenever an opportunity presented. Got a kick out of Heron's account of Ernesto DeFusco in the capture. … He was a handsome kid—looked like Perry Como, but better looking. Great in combat, but was never the talkative type. Apparently, he said more during the capture than he ever said to me when I had the platoon, Now, I realize he probably never said anything unless he thought it important.

" … Was interested that Heron restrained himself to writing 'only' about his own experiences. There was much more that they talked about when in a group: an incident about a 'new wallet,' that I think concerned Weber; Richard's interrogation by a German officer, who was a Dartmouth graduate; and much conversation about food. Also, it was interesting to see Heron's comments about how the Germans treated them. Although always hungry, all the guys seemed to think that the Germans tried to treat them as well as they were able. In turn, I don't think that First Platoon was *ever* guilty of mis-treating a prisoner. We always remembered *they* had been good to our guys."

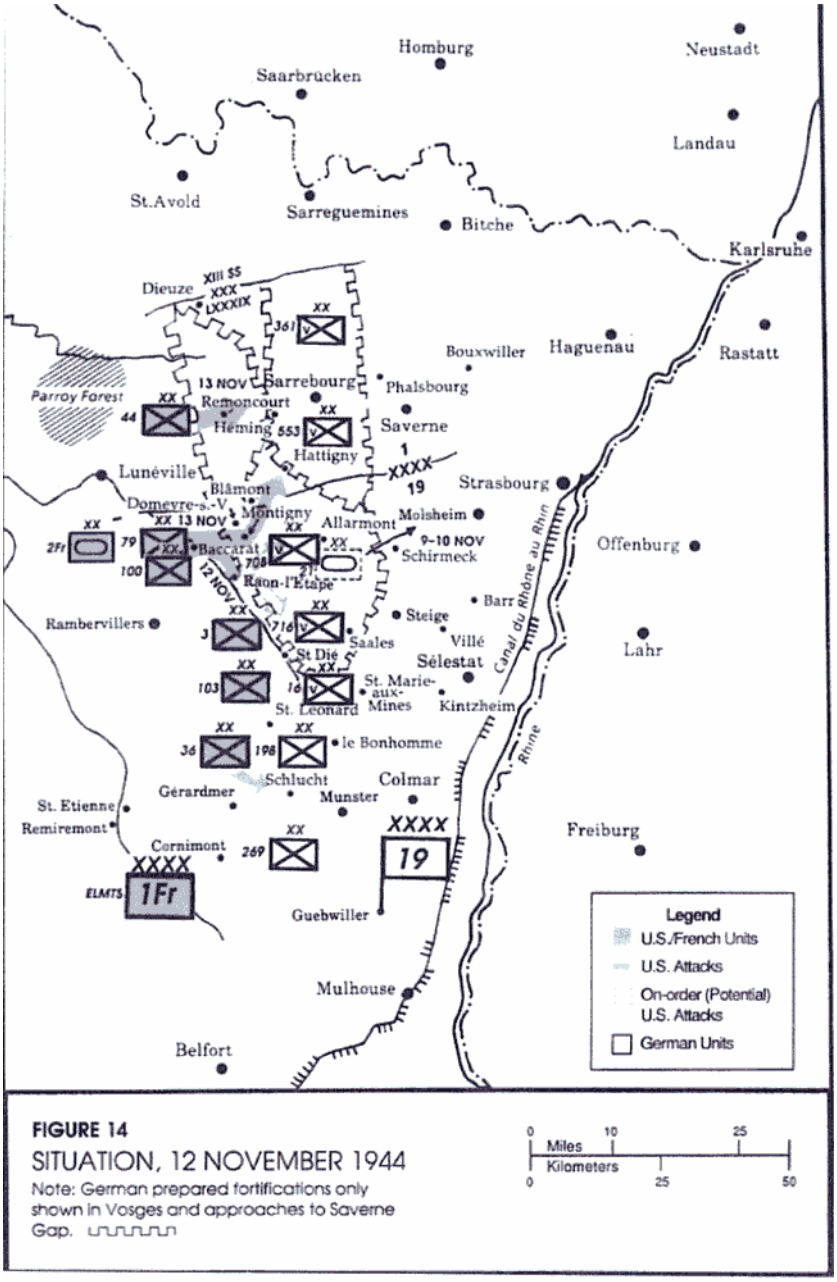
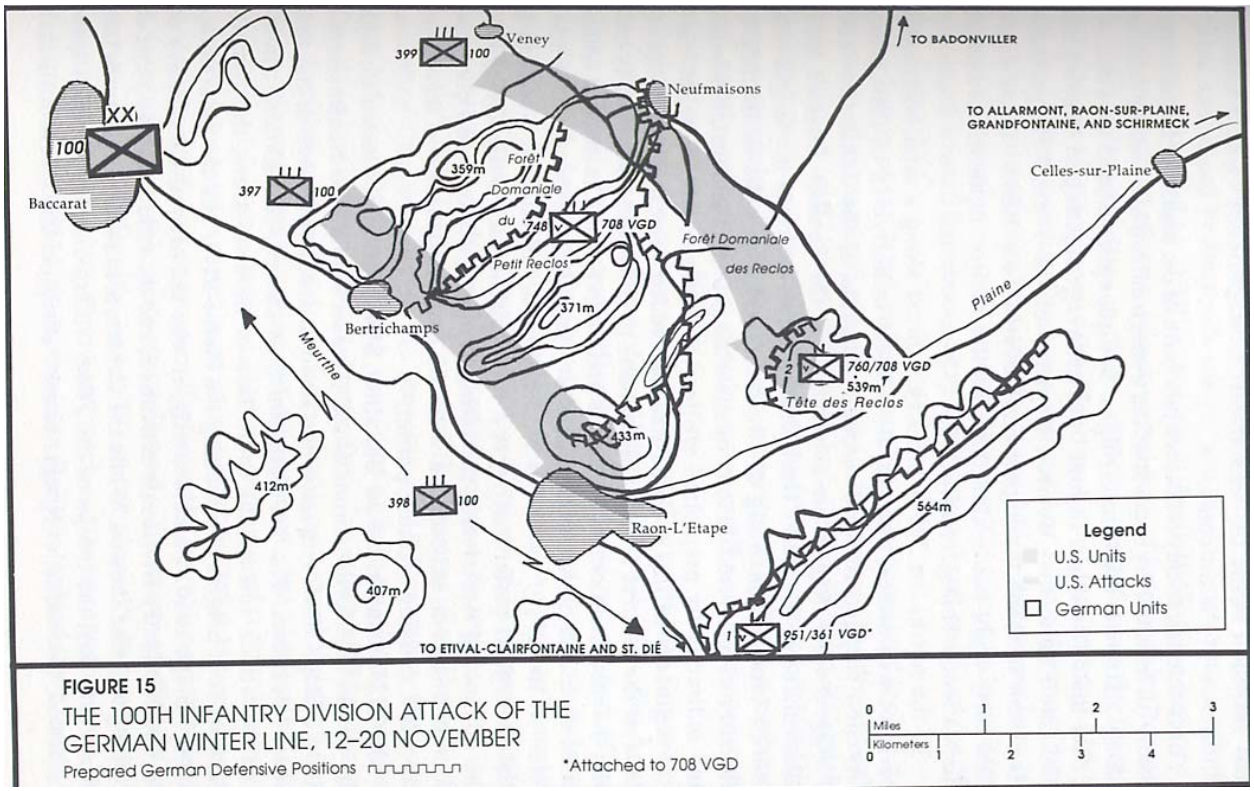


FIGURE 14

SITUATION, 12 NOVEMBER 1944

Note: German prepared fortifications only shown in Vosges and approaches to Saverne Gap.

This map shows our position the day before our baptism of fire at "Purple Heart Lane." We had just relieved elements of the 45th Division. Note the little box with "100" next it. If any of us had seen this map then it would have meant about as much as a map of the bottom of the sea. We never had any idea of exactly where we were.



This map shows in closer detail where we were going that mid-November of 1945, and what we faced in getting there. This time our little box is marked “399” and “100.”

XII. WINTER CAMPAIGN (1)

Thus we embarked on a way of life involving almost unrelieved misery and discomfort that was to last, with only occasional short respites, for the next two months. We were during this time moving through country that was mostly mountainous and heavily wooded. Towns named St. Remy, Baccarat, Raön L’Étape, Wackenbach, Moyenmoutier, Sarrebourg, La Petit Pierre, Lemberg, Hottviller, Sierstal, Lambach, and many others were familiar places for a few days and then soon forgotten as we

constantly moved on. It rained a great deal, and then it started to snow a lot. In that latitude and time of year the days were short, wet, and cold, and the nights were long, wet, and cold. We had for protection from the elements only what we could carry with us: a shelter half, a blanket, and maybe a raincoat. We were also loaded down with entrenching tools, grenades, a weapon, ammunition, and a handful of personal items. Each day we would be issued food, dehydrated K Rations, more often canned C Rations, which could be heated if one could build a fire, and, less frequently, a hot meal from the mess tent at Company headquarters. We went many weeks at a time without being under a roof and without a change of clothing or a bath.

We had been issued what were called shoepacs—boots with rubber feet and leather tops. These were a mixed blessing. They kept the outside wet out but also kept the inside wet in, thus promoting trench foot and other unpleasantness. My mother periodically sent me two pairs of heavy hand–knit wool socks. I would wear one pair for a day with the other wrapped around my waist under my clothes to dry, then alternate, and discard both pairs when new ones came. This was an unmitigated blessing.

From Armistice Day to Thanksgiving we ate K Rations every day. Then on Thanksgiving Day, through someone's well-meant but misguided inspiration, we got a hot meal: turkey, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, all of it. We were under roofs in the tiny village of La Petite Raön that night, for the first time in two and a half weeks, but it didn't do us much good. Almost all of us were deathly ill during the night, and up getting rid of that rich food from one end or the other, or both. Digestive systems on an exclusive diet of dehydrated food for so long couldn't adjust so abruptly.

It was nearby, not much later, that we actually "liberated" a settlement, deep in the forest, called Les Quelles. That is, my squad were the first (I was sixth, "by actual count," according to one of my letters) Allied troops to appear after the Germans left, only hours before we got there. It was like the liberation of Paris in microcosm. We had people cheering and crying on the roadside as we passed through (we always passed through the good places, we never seemed able to stay anywhere even remotely resembling pleasant), women trying to kiss whoever they could, and everyone offering gifts. Somehow I acquired a miniature pair of wooden shoes, doll sized. I managed to carry these in the breast pockets of my field jacket from then on, and actually got them home. My daughter has them to this day.

One of my sketches of the early 1950s was about this incident and got into the *Newsletter* as this:

LIBERATION

[*This episode took place somewhere between La Petite Raon and Les Querelles—and you need a pretty detailed map to find either of them. The time is late November 1944.*]

It was a tiny, remote village nestled in the forest of the Vosges Mountains. At this phase in our tortuously slow but steady pursuit of the Germans over endless steep hills and bottomless valleys, through a light but incessant rain, my squad was ordered away from the main body of the battalion to circle around through a tiny village that showed on the map, to make sure that it was cleared of the enemy. The Krauts in our sector were on the run at that time anyhow, so our

pursuit was none too thorough, but this was just the sort of spot where a few might hole up in the hope that we'd overlook them.

There were eight of us, and we turned at the next fork in the road with some little trepidation. We'd just been through our initial "baptism of fire," the company had been rather badly cut up, and most of us were pretty tired of war already, what with this incident and the endless rain of Alsatian November with no shelter but a blanket and a raincoat a large part of the time.

We'd progressed only a few hundred yards when the replacement who was acting as scout let out a yell and came running back. We stopped dead, and I started dully eyeing the roaring torrents along side of the road that passed for ditches, for a soft spot to fall into in case that should become necessary. It turned out though that the replacement's cause for alarm was only two Germans, both very dead, that had gotten into the way of an artillery burst, apparently several days past. Loud and vociferous was the indignation directed at the poor rookie.

Then the tension mounted in earnest, we were approaching the village; as we entered, conversation ceased, we drew further apart, and rifles were lowered. Was this a dead town? No, it didn't seem likely, the buildings were unscarred, farm tools lay about the barnyards, and a bedraggled chicken was forlornly scratching about a wagon. Where then were all the people? The open door of a shed gently closed. Three of us lowered our rifles at it, but nothing more happened. Had it been the wind?

As we neared the center of the village a middle-aged woman opened a window and inquired in faltering English whether we were Germans or Americans. "*Nous sommes americains!*" I shouted, perhaps a little rashly.

At that, the whole family appeared at the door, still fairly doubtful. We soon dispelled their fears, however, and in a few seconds the street was crowded with crying women and cheering men and children. Never before or since have I seen so much unadulterated happiness. The Germans had left two or three days before and these people had been left in a state of suspense, wondering what was to come next.

An old grandmother ran along side of us for a few yards, trying to find someone to kiss, and numerous bottles of schnapps were held out to us. Our squad leader decided, however, that we were in a terrific hurry just then and that we had to leave, post haste. As we trotted out, I looked back and unashamedly wiped away a few tears.

As the Winter neared, the weather and our living conditions worsened. It seemed to rain or snow almost every day. We spent most of our daylight hours on the move somewhere, sometimes in trucks, but mostly on foot. Every once in a while we'd spend a night, or sometimes only a few hours, in homes of villagers or farmers. That was when we would, very occasionally, get showers or clean clothes. The rest of the time we lived and slept in the dirt, often mud. And it was at about this time that the diarrhea started, and, as we gradually began to realize, the infectious hepatitis.

Let me try to give a picture of how we lived during those days of November and December 1944. On a given day, after a march of 15 to 20 kilometers we would arrive

at a position—maybe the edge of a woods or just over the leading edge of the crest of a hill—and be assigned spots to dig in. Typically, two of us would did a hole together, line it with our shelter halves or raincoats, cover it with boughs or logs and earth, and at night take one or two hour turns sleeping in it while the other stood guard. Sometimes we would be in such a spot for a week or more, other times we'd be ordered to move on before we'd even finished digging or—worse—just after finishing. From these positions we'd go out on periodic small group patrols, and of course we were on guard against similar enemy patrols. Naturally, we had no real protection from the weather. If our kitchen was set up near enough in the rear we would get a hot meal once a day. For the rest of the time it was mostly C Rations, K Rations having apparently been belatedly recognized by our leaders for what they were, emergency food.

If we were in reserve on this static front situation, we'd spend our day, or hour, or week in a house in some tiny farm village, often with stables on the ground level of the house, and always with a huge mound of manure in the town square, awaiting Spring use for fertilizer. We seemed to be out far more often than in, however, and our lives reverted to the most primitive sorts of conditions that were then imaginable in what I thought was the modern, civilized world. And we were never out of danger. Even on a "static" front people were constantly being killed or wounded in the frequent clashes between small groups or larger.

Occasionally something would happen to mitigate all this misery just a little bit. Once it was something our Captain did. It had been an awful day. We hadn't seen any fighting, though it was all around us, but we had been all day slogging through mud and wet. It had rained all day long, and it was December, and cold. Eventually we arrived at some nameless spot in the woods and were told that this was it, where we were to spend the night. It was black dark at 4:00 p.m. and we had nothing to do but dig our foxholes and try to figure how to keep from getting any wetter for the night. The Company Jeep might or might not show up with hot food, no one ever seemed to know until it arrived, which it often didn't.

A runner from Battalion or somewhere was on hand to tell the Captain that a farmhouse for him to set up his command post in had been located nearby. That it would be warm and dry everyone knew. The Captain was still a little new with us and we naturally accepted the idea that he and a few others would be spending the night in relative comfort, in compensation for the demands of command. Then we began to understand that we had a real leader. He turned down the farmhouse, saying that if everyone couldn't be under cover no one would be, and spent the night out in the rain and the mud like the rest of us. Unimportant–seeming gestures like that, made with sincerity, can have enormous significance, given the time and the place.

Here is another kind of story, one I've never mentioned until now, which illustrates what the stress of the kind of life we were experiencing can do to people. It's December I think—I really have little chronological sense of these events now—and 2nd Battalion is ordered to attack once again, perhaps for the first time after Purple Heart Lane. Our Company objective is a German position at the top of a small but very steep, quite heavily wooded hill, a nasty spot that could prove very bloody for our force. However, we had tanks. Our idea was that we would advance behind the tanks, using them for small arms cover. However, it was a peculiarity of our tankers, we knew from

previous experience, that they expected us to advance in front of them and to cover them from anti-tank fire. We were a while that morning sorting that out, but our way finally prevailed. Two of the three tanks were quickly rendered useless, however: one had engine problems, another got stuck and threw a track, and the crew of the third would not advance alone. So we had to.

The way up the hill when we got there was so steep and narrow that we had to struggle up single-file, a very perilous maneuver. However, word soon came back from those in the lead that the enemy position, though nearly impregnable, with this hill on one side and a mine field in a pasture on the other, was very lightly held and the Germans didn't have the heart to fight for it. They had surrendered! But just before I reached the position there was a burst of gunfire. B.A.R. fire, it turned out, and when I got there a German soldier lay face down in the dirt in a flowing pool of brilliant red blood. After surrendering, he had not been able to resist taunting our men, in fluent English. The war was over for him, he had said, and no doubt he'd be sent to the States as a pampered prisoner of war, while we had to stay there in the wet and filth and probably die. This snapped something in the mind of one of my fellow B.A.R. men who was standing a few feet away. He just raised his weapon and pulled the trigger. About half the 20-round clip must have hit home and death was surely instantaneous. I was horrified and revulsed, but our friend showed no sign of remorse, or that he necessarily considered himself finished shooting, so no one said anything.

This was, in a sense, cold-blooded murder, though probably mitigated by something like temporary insanity, and certainly, given the circumstances, provoked . Memories of this episode returned to me at the time, many years later, when the details of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam were being revealed. Undoubtedly there was a difference between the two happenings, and indeed between them and the Malmédy massacre of American troops by their German captors that was to take place only a few weeks later, and not many miles from where we stood then. But the differences were of degree, not kind, and all these episodes simply underline the dehumanizing horror of war.

XIII. ALSACE

The attitude of most of the local populace toward us, in the limited time we had to observe it, often seemed ambivalent. This was France, and our orders were to treat the people as friends—allies. Complete respect was to be shown to personal property, and when we occupied homes it was, technically at least, as guests. The occupants stayed in their homes and made do as best they could. We were never long in any one place. However, this was also Alsace. From 1872 to 1918 it had been a part of Germany, and it had again been occupied by Germans since 1940. Many people spoke German as well as French, and local patios seemed to be a mixture of both languages. It was by no means to be taken for granted that all of the people were totally committed to the Allied

cause, and indeed we were sometimes greeted with coolness and viewed, perhaps, with more fear than joy. Most likely, though, I usually thought this was just a perfectly natural and understandable reaction to having an army, friendly or not, visited on the community.

An occurrence illustrates something of this atmosphere. The village, maybe it was Lemberg—we seemed to be in and out of there a lot for a while—was somewhat larger than the tiny mountain hamlets we'd gotten used to; it would qualify as a small town. We'd moved in at mid–morning and were deployed to houses on the central streets. It looked like a comfortable spot for a well–earned respite. Our squad was assigned to a home occupied by a gruff and taciturn elderly man and two women, possibly his wife and a sister. None of them spoke any English. We entered the house through a small back yard in which a prominent feature was three cages holding large rabbits. The house was clean and warm, the furniture soft and comfortable, and, since we'd been told to hold off settling in pending further orders, I suppose most of us sank into a semi-doze, which is what we usually did whenever we waited for something to happen. We were a little apprehensive about these people, for they had not really acted very friendly, so we did not arrange ourselves for sound sleep—which we easily could have, any kind of sleep being in permanent short supply.

Suddenly, after some time had passed, there was a stir at the door to the kitchen and the two women appeared with a huge pot of some sort of meaty stew, indicating that it was for us. We ate it gratefully, finding "home cooking" a welcome change from Army chow. A few minutes after we had finished off this bonanza, orders came to move out. Naturally, we weren't going to stay there very long. Too nice. Probably slated for Regimental headquarters. As we left, out the back way again, the first thing we saw was three fresh, dripping skins nailed to a barn door, and three empty rabbit cages. Our stew! Some of us may have felt a little queasy, but it had been delicious, and surely it showed that we were more welcome than official caution would have it. The rabbits were doubtless to be an important part of those people's Winter diet, and the gift of them represented real gratitude for our presence. At least, so it seemed to me.

Here is another anecdote, culled—as was the above—from the sketches I wrote in the early 1950s. This one got into the *Newsletter* once when I was getting short of material:

ENEMY?

[The *locale of this story was a small village called Plaine de Walsch a couple of weeks later—December 1944.*]

The division was in Corps reserve for a few days in the early part of December, resting up—as we learned later—for a drive on the Maginot Line fortress of Bitche, which was to be our next objective. [*As we know now, this drive was later postponed until March, because of the German counter–attack in the Bulge, to the north of us*.]

We'd been continually oriented during the past week or so that now we were getting into a part of Alsace where the people were predominantly German sympathizers. We were to be billeted in houses for a while, and in accordance with the Army policy in France, the owners would stay in the houses too—which they didn't in Germany later—but we were to watch our step now.

This was the flat Alsatian plain country and the village our Company was assigned to, a few kilometers south of Sarrebourg, was like all the rest: small and dirty. The squad stopped outside the house assigned to us while the squad leader informed the owner that we were to be his guests for a few days. Our sergeant came back looking a little crestfallen and told us that the burgher hadn't been told of any such arrangement. He was extremely busy right then anyway, but he would condescend to speak with an officer. Apparently the other squads were having similar trouble, so while we waited in the drizzle our platoon leader was found and the initial difficulty settled.

Our landlord decided we could have his guestroom and the hayloft, but only on the condition that there be no smoking in the hay, and that we would take good care of his furniture. He was a typically German appearing character of about 60, large, stolid, and stocky. His wife, the only other occupant of the house, was a meek little woman who spoke when she was spoken to. What was keeping him so busy was soon revealed by our prying eyes to be a small still in a shed in the back yard where he was making schnapps, the German national drink, the distillation of which was the occupation of about 80% of the farmers of Germany and eastern France in the Fall. The other 20% and the city dwellers helped them drink it the rest of the year.

The people spoke a strange, singsong patois neither German nor French, which contains elements not much related to either tongue, I'm convinced. [*This seems a gratuitous description of a language I knew, and know, nothing about*.] However, the old man also spoke French, which a number of us were slightly conversant in.

We hadn't been in the house long when he came storming up the stairs, red in the face and muttering to himself, to the guest room, where those of us lucky enough to be there were bickering over who was to get the bed the first night. As it was the first bed we'd seen since we left the boat in Marseilles six long weeks before, it was quite an important question.

Since I was the only one of the five of us who could understand any French it was suggested I deal with our host. It turned out he had been mortally insulted. Some of the other boys in the platoon had gotten wind of his still and had the effrontery to want to buy some of his schnapps! Some of his very best schnapps, mind you, that he very seldom sold at all and then only for the equivalent of about $40 a liter—which was probably a lie, even the Germans couldn't like the miserable stuff that much.

Anyway, my intervention in this problem so mollified the old gentleman that he informed me he would let two or three of us at a time come down to the kitchen and wash and heat our rations in the evening, if we so desired. Later he sent his wife up to us with a bowl of nuts and several varieties of fine apples, which were a great treat to our K– and C–Ration famished stomachs.

A day or so later when three of us were taking our, by then, regular sojourn by the kitchen stove, he brought out his greatest treat and the solace of his old age, so he claimed: steaming cups of herb tea, each laced with a good healthy slug of fresh green schnapps. If ever more nauseating potion was devised by man, I hope I never see it, much less drink it. We forced it down for

fear we might hurt his feelings otherwise, and after a trip to the latrine, we felt fairly normal again. Firm relations were cemented, however, and most of us rested serenely, unhaunted by fear of fanatical Nazis knifing us in our sleep.

Indeed, we developed such solid relations that when mine host caught me raiding his apple bins deep in the basement a few minutes before we left, early in the morning a few days later, he let me escape with the rather ridiculous explanation that I was just looking for him to thank him for his kindness and to say good-bye.

XIV. WINTER CAMPAIGN (2)

Some time during the middle of December all of us who were still privates got the news that we were promoted to private first class. Then, a few days later, we were all awarded the Combat Infantry Badge, new at that time. We scoffed at these things and

would rather have been sent home, we said. But still, they did something for morale by showing us that, though abused God knew, we were not completely ignored or forgotten.

Now another change of scene. It is New Year's Eve, and hard, cold Winter. Although from our lowly perspective we imperfectly understand what is happening, we are on a line that is stretched very thin, with no reserves and very minimal artillery support. Many units from our sector had been sent north to aid in repulsing the German attack in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. The night is dark, very cold, with a light snow cover over everything, and quiet. Quiet in war isn't real silence, you never cease hearing the crump of artillery near or distant, and small arms fire never really seems to stop either, but sometimes there's relative quiet. Suddenly there is an enormous crash of noise as our artillery shells go screaming over our heads, salvo after salvo. Next we hear the sounds of a firefight: mortars, machine guns, rifles. The Battalion on our right is under heavy attack! The Germans are acting crazy; they must be drunk or drugged. They're running straight at our neighbors' positions, screaming and firing as they come. Some of our people on our periphery are getting it too. Enemy losses are heavy, the attack fades away. They regroup and come on again, for more heavy losses. We listen in awe and apprehension. Then, suddenly as it started the crazy assault stops, just as the main body of our force is tensed and ready to join the fray. No one knows what it was all about. It is not until much later that I learn it was part of the beginning of German Operation *Nordwind,* a desperate attempt at an attack—that eventually proved abortive—to emulate Von Runstedt in the north. What's left of the night is quiet again where we are, but we have lost some more friends, including four of our men who were captured when their outpost was overrun by the attackers.

Another night, just before or just after the New Year attack, I don't recall precisely; conditions are very similar, at any rate. Suddenly an ungodly noise comes from the enemy side. To me it sounds like the whine and grind of my Model A Ford starting motor incredibly, unbelievably, amplified. Quickly enough we learn what it is: rockets, the first we'd ever heard of, being fired from the bed of a horse–drawn wagon. Fortunately for us, though they are being launched very close by, the target, whatever it is, is far to the rear. We can't even hear the explosions. Some days later, though, we become the targets for these insidious devices, and we take a few casualties. They are unnerving, because the explosions just happen, without forewarning. Mortars you can often hear being shot off, artillery shells make noise coming in, but with rockets, nothing—just sudden noise, concussion, and destruction. When our turn comes we are not far from the *Nordwind* attack area, but we are near a large deserted farm through which the Maginot Line runs, not very far from the border of Germany now, of course. The farm buildings are cold and empty, but we try to occupy them anyway—until we come under rocket fire and realize that we are being observed. This was the only time we received rockets, for which I was grateful. Probably at that point the Germans just didn't have enough of them available to be effective.

Those farm buildings were obviously unusable, so we tried positions around the outsides of the Maginot Line pillboxes. These offered some protection, but we had to dig in. We did not use the extensive facilities of the Line with its pillboxes and underground living areas, storage spaces, and connecting tunnels, primarily I suppose because there was no electricity. Ventilation depended upon electric power, and therefore the complex

was unusable, which was doubtless one reason why the Germans were no longer there. We did explore a little bit, but found little of interest. The Germans seemed to have used many of the floor areas as toilets before leaving. Eventually we relocated our positions away from these prime targets and dug ourselves in under some tall trees and bushes near the edge of a large open area nearby. On the other side, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, was the enemy. There we stayed for several weeks, long enough to get our holes substantially roofed with heavy logs. We called this area the “splinter factory” because of the frequency of mortar shell bursts in the trees, resulting in showers of splinters.

Here we got very familiar with mortars, since their use was the primary way we and the Germans reminded each other that we were still there. A mortar projectile is dropped, bottom down, in a tube. At the bottom of the tube is a metal protuberance that detonates a shotgun shell in the bottom of the projectile. The gunpowder in the shell provides the propulsive force, and the little bomb arches out of the tube to its target area. When you are in or near the target area, and the mortar is close enough, you can hear the shotgun shell go off. So, after the first few rounds—if you’re not hit, of course—you know how much time you have to get down. Since mortar shells explode more or less up and out, getting down is likely to be good enough, unless the hit is very close. This works until the mortar tubes are moved and re-aimed; then the timing process starts all over again—if you’re still lucky.

I was outside my hole one day attending to my diarrhea when I heard the telltale “plock” of the shotgun shell. I grabbed a nearby empty C Ration can and ducked into my hole to finish in the can what I’d started in the makeshift latrine we were using. The projectile came in on schedule, and when I looked out a moment later I saw my cold–stiffened rubberized raincoat, which I’d left behind lying on the ground, shredded with jagged shrapnel holes.

On another occasion, down the line a few holes from mine, a foxhole sustained a direct hit by a mortar round. The heavy log and dirt roof disappeared entirely, but the two occupants were unmarked. One of them, though deafened and in shock, seemed likely to recover when they carried him away—and indeed he did. The other man was dead. His death was a shock. We’d gotten used to mortar shells; at this place they hadn’t done much noticeable damage until then. All you had to do was to stay reasonably near your hole to be safe. But these guys were *in* their hole, and that was cause for a little added apprehension.

It was here that the time came that a large filling fell out of one of my teeth, resulting in a king–sized toothache. After a day or so of rather excruciating pain, I mentioned it to my sergeant, who ordered me back to Regimental headquarters, where there was a dentist. At first I was reluctant to go, since, looking around, I realized that our squad strength, normally 12, was down to four, and in the whole platoon there were barely enough of us left to make up a normal squad. However, the pain was almost unbearable, so back I had to go, There I paid my only visit to an Army dentist, and lost the only tooth I’ve ever had pulled. I was back on the line the next day, full of horror stories from the rear echelon troops about rocket and artillery shelling, which really didn’t impress me too much after a quiet night on a cot in a building, warm and dry for the first time in several weeks.

We moved on again eventually, of course, in rather deep snow for a change, and our new positions, on the crest of a lightly wooded hill overlooking a broad valley with the Germans on the other side, seemed exposed to us at first. However, we soon found that we were pretty much out of small arms and mortar fire range of one another, so it wasn't so bad. The enemy opposite us had artillery, but they were probably low on ammunition, since they only fired if we moved around in the daylight. I don't recall it harming any of us.

Without much concern for chronology, here are two more stories from my 1950s jottings that once got into the *Newsletter*:

HOTWEILER/HOTTVILLER

It was shortly after Christmas 1944, and our Battalion was moving up to the line from a reserve position we had been occupying for a few days. It was a still, bitter cold, cloudless Alsatian winter night. We had been trucked the first few miles, and now, out of the safety zone for trucks, we were making the rest of the way on foot, heavily loaded with equipment, panting, sweating, and occasionally cursing quietly. The night was illuminated by a pale half moon and the usual sporadic flashes of artillery fire some off in the distance. Except for the faint sound of explosions, occasional *sotto voce* orders from the non-coms and officers, and the sounds of our motion and continual gentle undertones of our swearing, the night was as still as death.

This was, and had been for countless years, a perennial battle zone, this borderland that was sometimes France, sometimes Germany. So there were no barking dogs or lowing cows to disturb the awful stillness. Often we caught ourselves holding our breaths, straining to hear just one natural sound, but we never did.

We had covered perhaps five miles of silent desolation in this manner when suddenly there loomed up in front of us a double row of the familiar French heavy stone houses. I felt a moment of relief. Perhaps we were not the only living beings in the world after all; here was unmistakably human habitation.

Then I was abruptly struck by a deep sense of shock and a more complete sense of desolation than before. The houses, the village was deserted, had obviously been for many years. Only the mere shells of the buildings were left. The roofs, windows, doors, everything but the stone walls had long ago been burned or rotted away. A light dusting of snow lay over everything. The cold, pale light of the moon reflected from the snow and through those empty roofs and staring window holes.

It was with a distinct sigh of relief that we passed from this human desolation on to what now seemed the more natural quiet of the poor ravaged countryside.

THE HOLE TROUBLE

[*My notes say this adventure occurred in January 1945, on either Spitzberg Hill or Signalberg Hill, still in Alsace, of course*.]

During January and February of 1945 our Battalion was part of the Seventh Army defensive line on northeastern France. While von Runstedt staged his counter–offensive further to the north we had advanced almost unopposed though rather conservatively and slowly, since most of our armor and heavy artillery had been sent up to help soften the Bulge.

On New Year's Eve, however, we had met and repulsed a rather vicious, but short–lived enemy counter–attack. [*This was Operation* Nordwind*, and it is obvious that I didn't know much about it when I wrote this. In fact, the average G.I. didn't know much about anything that was going on out of range of his own vision.*] Winter set in earnest then, so we shortened our lines and dug in to sweat it out until Spring.

The Jerries apparently did the same thing. The country being hilly and fairly wooded, was easy to defend but not suited for attacking through the snow. The Battalion was set up with two of the rifle Companies constantly on the line and the other in reserve in a nearby town four or five kilometers back. We were to shift each week so that each Company would be in one position one week, the other position the next, and in reserve the third, running patrols to see what the Krauts were doing. The first time we tried it there must have been some slip–up, for we stayed in position 22 days, sustaining two blizzards and a thaw and running our own patrols; then only three days rest.

Our hole was about seven feet square and perhaps three and a half feet deep. It was covered with a roof of logs, shelter halves, and dirt. Here three of us made our temporary home. We were situated in the middle of a line of similar holes along the top of a thinly wooded ridge. We had a clear sweep of the hill before us and way down on the other side of the valley we could make out the Kraut dugouts, about a mile away. A German machine gun spat at us occasionally, but it was so far away that one of our men it finally hit had the bullet stopped by the thickness of his overcoat. Mortar fire came in regularly, and we sent it out just as regularly, without much damage on either side, if our boys didn't have the range any better than the Jerries.

The theory was that one man was supposed to stand guard in a hole for an hour while the others slept, and to switch around during the night. On the night in question the severe cold and heavy snows of the past few weeks were over. It was stickily warm, and raining, the snow fast disappearing. Our hole got more and more uncomfortable as the day wore on. Leaks had appeared in the heretofore frozen roof, and C–Ration cans wired to the logs served but poorly to stem the tide. Then large chunks of the fast–melting earth began to fall out of the walls sporadically. Along about dark, however, with the aid of a lot of harsh talk, and not–too–clever engineering we had things in a state where we felt pretty well assured of passing a damp but fairly comfortable night.

At about 1:00 a.m. I was dozing fitfully—such conditions are never conducive to sound sleep—when suddenly I was awakened by a sound belt on the head. I was trying to figure whether we'd been hit, and if so whether or not I was wounded, when suddenly the whole roof of the foxhole, at least my side of it, suddenly settled on me, accompanied by a dull roar. Then I realized what had

happened. The melting and leaking of the day had reached their natural climax, and we had no more hole.

After mutual solicitations and inquiries disclosed that none of the three of us had been hurt, I realized that I was completely buried and unable to move. I requested to be gotten out of this, and damned fast, please. It was at this unfortunate point that the humor of the situation became manifest to my buddies, they not being buried of course. Between my loudly voiced imprecations and their laughter and indignation at being sworn at, it was a good 20 minutes before I was extricated, much ruffled but unharmed. Relations between three of us were somewhat cool for the next few hours.

XV. A REPLACEMENT

Something happened here that I wrote another short sketch about in the 1950s. This one is adapted a little for readability:

He came to us one morning on the chow Jeep. We'd been in this position for several days now, so the Jeep managed to get to us regularly at least once a day, often twice, with hot food, mail, ammunition, and—very rarely—replacements. Our Division had been on the line in and near France's Vosges Mountains since early November, 1944. At first we had moved fairly rapidly through woods and tiny villages, having frequent small but brisk firefights with slowly retreating German troops. Now it was February, and we had established a front around the first of the year near the Maginot Line that had remained static for several weeks. We exchanged desultory mortar fire with the enemy, and each side probed the other's defenses from time to time with small patrols. Snow lay deep on the ground, and it was cold.

We'd had moderately heavy casualties in our early days of combat, and casualties continued, even at a reduced rate, in our more stable position. Illness had taken its toll as well: trench foot, hepatitis, influenza, had all claimed their victims and, since replacements had been infrequently sent to us, we were down to perhaps one-

third of our authorized strength. So any replacement was welcome, but this one, we quickly learned, was special; beyond physical reinforcement, he brought entertainment, which was in very short supply. We knew he was going to be special the first time we saw him. He was an enormous man, well over six feet tall, large in every way, but with bone and muscle, not fat. He had no fat. But he almost fell as he got out of the Jeep under the weight of an enormous backpack, stuffed to the bursting point with equipment.

We all had these packs, and we had all been issued what was supposed to go in them; blankets, shelter halves, extra clothing, spare boots, mess kits, emergency rations, entrenching tools, the list went on—and the weight increased accordingly. Long ago most of us had stripped ourselves to the real bare essentials: enough clothing to keep warm—most of which we wore all the time, day and night—our weapons and ammunition, hand grenades, and not much else. If our bedrolls didn't catch up with us at night, along with food in some guise, we did without. Foxhole buddies carried real shovels—entrenching tools were useless—but only one for every two people at the most.

It became quite obvious at once that our out–sized replacement was proud of his pack and what was in it, and felt it a privilege to be able to carry it. It quickly became obvious too that he was an example of what we would have called in those days a "rube" or "hillbilly," two sobriquets that don't have much meaning any more. He claimed he was part Indian. But even though unworldly, he had been, apparently, not without ability to function well in his own milieu. He told us he was a ranch owner in Montana—in Idaho—and in Washington. He was unclear about the details, but assured us he did own ranches. He was semi–literate at best, and he said he was having big trouble with his wife. She was trying to sell all the ranches, and then divorce him. At least, that was what he thought; he had considerable difficulty interpreting her letters.

All that notwithstanding, however, his characteristic that made the biggest impression on us was his gung–ho attitude to what we were doing there. He took it all very, very seriously. Well, we all did that, I guess, but the way most of us dealt with it was far different from his. He seemed to have the attitude that it all depended on him. The eagerness to have his pack contents complete, as officially designated, was symptomatic of that, but even more so was his activity when he was actually on the line, in his foxhole. There he seemed to feel that everything depended on his alertness, all of the time, to the possibility of enemy appearing, like Indians, having stealthily and invisibly crept up on us. We'd been there a while, and though we knew there were Germans within artillery range, at least, there had been no evidence of their ever having come any closer. We told him this, but it made no impression.

This extreme caution and alertness manifested itself in several ways. The most significant, I think, turned out to be his behavior at night. Our rule at night was that in each foxhole one occupant should be awake at all times. This was accomplished, of course, by the two "foxhole buddies" taking turns, usually hourly, one awake and the other asleep. On a quiet front like this we sometimes cheated a little bit by combining the force of two holes so that we could each have as much as three hours of unbroken sleep while still having one of us awake. Never our Montana replacement, though. He barely trusted the one man with him, and could never have composed himself for as much as three hours of sleep. He had trouble enough with one hour. As often as not, he

would neglect to awaken his buddy until he had assured himself that some imagined irregularity was not a potential disaster. And every so often we'd be rudely awakened by a burst of fire from his B.A.R. or a grenade hurled at some insignificant noise, probably imagined most of the time. We managed to get used to that after a while, but it was upsetting at first.

One day it snowed most of the day, and by nightfall there was a fresh coating of white over everything. Then, in the early dark a full moon rose over a landscape of brilliant white and jet–black shadows. We learned in the morning something that really surprised no one, I suppose, though it did seem most bizarre. Our replacement had sat in his hole the whole night through staring at the shadow of a small tree he was convinced was a man. He never saw it move, but he couldn't believe it might not, so he sat there for perhaps 10 hours, staring and waiting. In the morning, with some skepticism, we learned that he was actually suffering from snow blindness! Snow blindness at night? It could actually happen, we were assured, though it certainly was rare.

He was led back to our Division rest camp for treatment. After a few days there, and possibly consultation with a psychiatrist, it was decided that he should stay there permanently, as part of the rest camp staff. Envy was the reaction of most of us when we heard this, but hardly anyone did not feel that he had certainly earned the rest. He slept far less than half as much as the rest of us, and when we moved around he carried far more than four times the load we did. So much for that, we thought.

But no, not so. Scarcely a week passed before he came walking up the path to Company headquarters one day. He looked terrible, he'd lost weight, and he almost staggered under the weight of his pack. He was a country boy, he said, and couldn't stand living in the "city" where the rest camp was—a hamlet whose population certainly didn't exceed 5,000—so he'd gone "over the hill" to get back to us. He'd tucked a couple of bottles of cognac for the platoon in that great pack, so we weren't totally unable to welcome him back. Over the course of a little time most of the contents of the pack got distributed to others or discarded, and it wasn't long until his pack was much like everyone else's. His dramatic sense of alertness and constant apprehension was dulled too, and eventually he settled into a state of neurosis no worse than most of the rest of us, most of the time.

XVI. A FRIEND

Patrol action from this place was frequent: at least we went out on a lot of patrols, we assumed the Germans did too, though we never made any actual contact here. But *shu minen* (shoe mines) were a source of constant concern as we moved about, for we

were in territory recently vacated by the enemy, and they used a lot of them. These were small explosive devices buried just under the surface of the ground and detonated by pressure on a metal plate that was easily concealed. The weight of a man's body was enough for detonation.

One day after an unusually quiet week a squad from our First Platoon moved through our area on a rare daylight patrol. We laughed and joked with them as they passed through our positions, and then thought little more about them. We heard a series of small, far–off explosions some time later, but they seemed hardly noticeable at that time and place—until a runner came hurrying back out of the woods the patrol had entered, that is. They had encountered shoe mines, there were casualties, and help was needed carrying them in. This was one of the rare times that I moved in the open on the front line without fear, as we rushed to help.

I only remember two of the injured, and now I don't recall if there were more than two. I found myself on the corner of a makeshift litter helping to carry a man to whom I had become very close over the few months we had known each other. His right foot at my corner of the litter was completely blown away. He was conscious and kept repeating over and over, "I fucked up, I fucked up." I tried to assure him that he had not, but I doubt that he heard me, or that he really knew what had happened to him. I hope not. He died a few minutes later at Company headquarters, waiting for an ambulance. The other wounded man, the sergeant leading the patrol, had the exact same injury. He was sitting up on his litter, apparently perfectly aware of what had happened, and very actively directing the withdrawal and the handling of the litters. He was a truly remarkable person. No doubt he was in shock, but that didn't interfere with his sense of duty and leadership. He survived.

The man who died was my friend. Combat soldiers are physically and emotionally close to one another, to an extent. They need and rely upon one another, and they share much—mostly trauma, fear, and misery, but good times too. But in no way, any more than in any other situation are they all real friends. That man was my friend. I don't recall when we first met, but we were close companions by the time we reached France. It was he who went with me on the expedition to Aix that we both enjoyed so much. He was a little older than I, I think, and intelligent, articulate, gentle, and very courageous. He suffered from osteomyelitis, he told me, and the cold, dampness and physical strains of our life were often torture to him. He was in the infantry through some administrative foul-up; he was supposed to be on limited duty. I think I was the only person to whom he confided this; I hope I was able a little to help him bear it. He refused to complain officially, and doggedly stuck it out with the rest of us, not wanting to let anyone down or to be thought not doing his share. Certainly he deserved better than a useless death on an idiot patrol that in the end served no purpose. I missed him then and I still miss him when I think of those days.

XVI. A PURPLE HEART

Now we return to Bud Stimes, writing letters home from the hospital:

LIFE IN THE U.S. ARMY 23RD GENERAL HOSPITAL

"… My official diagnosis was SFW, penetrating left thigh, incurred in action 13 November 1944 in France. SFW means shell fragment wound. I know the fragment hit the bone. The surgeons removed the fragment from a second incision which left me with two deep scars. After surgery in the 27th Evacuation tent hospital I was carried to the 23rd U.S. Army General Hospital at Vittel. The hospital had just been established in Le Grand Hotel which was a deluxe resort hotel with a casino and mineral water baths. 6th Army Group headquarters were based in another hotel. I was assigned to a fifth floor room facing west. My bed was next to the window. The six other patients in this room became my squad for several weeks. I was able to resume my letter writing with stationery and pencils furnished by the American Red Cross. My hospital bed in this surgical ward was my duty station until December 22, 1944 when I was transferred to a medical ward in the same hospital. These excerpts from my letters back home to northern Illinois detail my hospital duty."

Nov. 21, 1944. "They gave me a Purple Heart… The Red Cross has sent it home so you will receive a fine medal… I am in a swell hospital now… I will be as good as new in a little while and be back on the old job… You made me laugh when you said how glad you were that I was safe in England. Everyone in the company got letters to the same effect… I am in a swell hospital that used to be a hotel, but I don't know where we are… I can get around a little… Our food is

OK and I have no complaints whatsoever about this bed. It has been over a week now and for 5 days I was taking penicillin shots every 3 hours. A needle has become so commonplace that I think nothing of one. My equipment has been strewn all over… I was lucky and just got a nice little piece of shrapnel in the leg… I might catch up on my writing here, but it tires me just to write this… (In June 1995 I remember how the ward nurse, Miss Virginia, said you are costing the taxpayers $50.00 each time she stuck the needle in my buttocks. Penicillin was scarce and French Morocco wounded soldiers in the next room were treated with sulfa drugs.)"

Nov. 24, 1944. "We had a delicious (Thanksgiving) turkey dinner with all the fixings here in the hospital… I hope the ones up front who deserve it can have what we did. I am willing to bet that they enjoyed K–rations and rain… [*Bet lost, but maybe we'd have been just as well off without the rich food in K–Ration attuned stomachs*.] We have Italian ex–POWs in here as handymen and they can't do enough for us. In the kitchen they have French women so we are exposed to a variety of languages… Our chow is excellent… All of it was good even if the spuds were dehydrated, the peas canned, and the cranberry sauce without the berries. We had pie and pineapple salad so you can see that they really treated us swell. I am mending fast, but they still have to sew me up. We are back on the old routine now and they had some of us boys making bandages, I do a lot of reading, some letter writing, and we do a lot of talking. Most of our talk is about home and food. (This hotel bedroom had seven hospital beds with six wounded infantrymen from the 100th, 36th, and 79th Divisions and a 45th Division tanker with appendicitis.) We are in a French hotel and it is some experience to discover these strange plumbing and electrical fixtures. I can get about and I am planning to walk downstairs in the near future and get a haircut. My locks are so long the boys in the room are beginning to call me Abe Lincoln. I am also called Slim… None of our mail has reached us… We have butter here, but we have a craving for ice cream, and I sure would love some milk. [*Ice cream! I can't recall having any whole milk from the time I left the troopship in Marseilles until I got on another troopship to come home almost a year and a half later. I wonder why. We never had much fresh food of any description: powdered eggs and potatoes, canned goods, and if fresh meat I don't recall it.*] Yesterday afternoon we even had cake so we are being pampered… They serve a lot of fruit for dessert when it is possible. I have lived on crackers and cold meat so I guess I have some good food coming to me… I want to write everyone back home, but we have a limited supply of energy, but mostly the shortage of stationery. I was lucky to be able to buy some airmail stamps."

Nov. 27, 1944 " … I was feeling quite spry a few days ago, but since then I have been sewed up. It keeps me in bed and consequently I am flat on my back… Those three meals a day brighten the monotony… I have read several books… Letter writing is quite fatiguing. Whenever I get some mail I will hit the ceiling three times at least… I had no idea yesterday was Sunday. We get chicken in the middle of the week and for Sunday dinner we get hash. I eat any and everything with no complaints… I hope my previous letters arrive before you get the War Dept. telegram. You'll probably be worried if the telegram comes

first… We read the “Stars and Stripes” and now I see we are going in high gear… I have a wonderful view of some level farmlands from my window… Yesterday a French soldier was in to visit us and he spoke good English. Some of these boys really have it in for the Krauts and you can’t blame them… Keep things going on the farm until I come marching home… (The War Dept. telegram to Mrs. Doris Stimes, R2, Capron, Ill. was dated 12-7-44 and said, ‘Regret to inform you your son was seriously wounded in action in France thirteen November.’ A new army postal office of 640 was given in the telegram.)”

Nov. 29, 1944. “ … Last night they brought me over 10 letters and I was the envy of the room… I hope my boxes reach me because we can enjoy them now … that stack of letters last night helped me more than penicillin shots… I am sewed together and it keeps me down these 5 days. I can attend to nature’s call… I have been eating any and everything and maybe I will gain some weight… They are opening a patient’s PX and we are looking forward to it… What I need and want now is a haircut. Today we received a partial payment so we can do a few cash transactions… Yesterday we all made surgical dressings size 4 x 4… This invasion currency may interest you so I am sending some. I have passed by enough war souvenirs to fill a box car, but all I have now is the clothes on my back. Somewhere in France I have a duffel bag, pack, rifle, and tent, but the Lord only knows where. That’s why it doesn’t pay to have too many valuable personal articles…”

Dec. 2, 1944. “I am out of stationery again so I will have to use this V–mail… In a few days my stitches come out so it will be a break in the monotony. We are getting a chance to get PX supplies… what do you think of a PX without a comb for sale? … If you so desire I could eat some peanuts and maybe you could send me some. Each day we look for our Xmas boxes…”

Dec. 4, 1944. “… My purpose in life now is to take it easy for a while and get well. It is sort of difficult to do after such a rough and hectic life I had been living … now I can get around a bit. There are 7 of us in a room with a connecting bathroom. However, I still spend most of my life in bed… The day I can walk around will be a gala event. There are some pine trees outside my window that remind me of home. I have heard from home with the mailing date the 16 of Nov. So you can see we have good mail service…”

Dec. 6, 1944. “Happy day! They pulled my stitches out last night and I can move under my own locomotion now… I am weak as hell from being in bed so long. Every time they work on me I have seen what it is all about so I am learning. It still isn’t a pleasant sight to behold and it will be some time before it is healed. The other day I was a little worried when I had a touch of the scours. Recovery was rapid after we took the medicine. It is made from licorice, chalk, goat dirt, and a base made out of furniture polish… All I can do now is get well and add some meat to my bones… Things are green out in the fields, but I can’t tell about the weather… I can see a steeple chase track out our window. I know the name of this place, but I don’t know where the location is… Things must be looking like winter back home by now. I have been in snow over here so I haven’t forgot what it looks like.”

Dec. 7, 1944. " … The other night we showed some snaps to our Italian (ex–POW and ward boy) friend and he thought our house was a palace. In a way he is right and you are the one who cleans it! They have these Italians doing handy jobs around here and we like this fellow (Guisenne from Milan) in particular. It is fun to see and hear them cuss Mussolini and Hitler. I walk around a little now and now I am in a chair. My travels will be limited because I know when I am not perfectly well…"

Dec. 8, 1944. " … Two of your Christmas parcels arrived… The hard candy came in good condition and I pass it around to the boys after each meal… There must have been a mixup in Doug's and my box. I got a box from the Hub (Chicago men's store) with a toilet articles kit and a card addressed to Doug from Mom and Dad. The box was crushed like a tank run over it. The boys in here needed the articles so much that I kept it… I can walk a short ways. The view looks beautiful out my window and it makes one yearn to get out and enjoy it… Your razor found me and it is an amazing little device. It gives a good shave and fits right in the watch pocket. Of course now we don't wear pants. Our uniform is 2 pieces pajamas with robes and shoes if we move about… In our room now we have a Frenchman just a little older than me. I wish I knew how much longer the Germans can hold out…"

Dec. 10, 1944. " … There are church services in the near vicinity, but it is too far for me to travel… Today we have baked ham for dinner … They feed fairly good meals except breakfast. Every day we can plan on bread, coffee, mush, and powdered eggs. The other meals make up for it… We are all looking for our Xmas boxes for that little something extra…"

Dec. 12, 1944. " … Today is PX day… They sell us 4 candy bars a week… This morning I had a pleasing experience of soaking my feet. We have a big pan and warm water so what more could I ask. My feet looked almost like a pair of shoes. We have a nice bathroom and once in a while we get warm water so we really have it fairly nice. Dinner is done and the trays have been carried back. We had spam, beans, kraut, bread, pudding and coffee. It sure is an improvement over K–rations… I have been sleeping well which is more than some guys can. Last night the doctor looked me over and put some silver nitrate on my wounds. I can't determine whether it tickled or burned me the most. I will have some scars, but no complications developed so I have nothing to worry about. It can always be worse so I am grateful for my position in life right now… I would appreciate some homemade jam or jelly. The only preserve we get here is orange marmalade…"

Dec. 16, 1944. " … This morning the whole hospital was treated to fresh eggs. I had two soft boiled eggs and enjoyed them without the benefit of pepper and salt. You can remember when I had to be coaxed to eat eggs back home. Yesterday we also had beefsteak, but it sure was tough. I like the food here and it is improving every day… (About this time I was issued a pair of combat boots size 12 D as I was anxious to walk around in shoes. My size was 11 1/2 AAA and I slopped around in these oversized boots well after the end of the war in Europe.)

Dec 18, 1944. "… I am wearing the identification bracelet and it sure is classy. My only complaint is that my wrist is so thin that it keeps sliding about. My watch is the same way and it used to fit tight so I guess I have lost a few pounds… I can walk around now after a fashion and I feel a little like a baby. Today I saw my first movie since the states: Wallace Beery in "Barbary Coast Gent." Best of all was when I found my sergeant in another ward. We were both injured the same day and just a few rooms from each other yet so far away when we couldn't get to see each other…"

"In late June of 1995 I remember vividly three other incidents in this hospital room in Le Grand Hotel, Vittel, France. 6th Army Group commander Lt. Gen. Jacob Devers was scheduled to visit our ward to present Purple Heart medals to wounded soldiers without them and inspect conditions. A soldier in the closest bed to the door and with a scrotum wound and the other six of us were instructed by the head ward nurse to lie at attention when the general entered the room. Not all of us could follow that order.

"When I first left the room in my hospital pajamas to visit the Morocco soldiers in the next room, I noticed they wore their daggers and belts over their pajamas. In sign language I asked one to show me his beautiful dagger. He smiled brightly and nicked his finger to show me his dagger with his blood on it. Their daggers were drawn only when blood is shed. Obviously I was considered a friend and an ally.

"The winter war and the German Ardennes offensive created a high rate of infantry casualties. Medical officers were pressured to return infantrymen to combat units as soon as possible. I remember two men discharged from our room with instructions to stop at their battalion aid stations to have their stitches removed.

"My stay in the medical ward after December 22 and then to a rehabilitation ward until March 4, 1945 in this hospital is a separate story."

FROM A SURGICAL TO A MEDICAL WARD IN THE U.S. ARMY 23RD GENERAL HOSPITAL

"My next assignment was in a medical ward in the long garret of the annex that formerly housed hotel employees. Both wards were located in Le Grande Hotel in the same city as the 6th Army Group headquarters. Thousands of Allied wounded and sick were treated in this deluxe hotel and spa. Few of us soldiers could have afforded the peacetime room charges."

Dec. 22, 1944. "… Today I have been transferred from a surgical ward to a medical ward. I am still in the same hotel only in a different wing. We walk downstairs to a messhall and more or less take care of ourselves. In the other room we got to be a close group of friends, but now we are split up… It amazes me to see how quickly the Christmas boxes are coming through at one time… All the rooms are decorated in the customary Yuletide fashion. There are several Christmas trees in the hall with red flannel and white cotton for trimmings. The windows are also decorated and the inside of the rooms are strung with decorations. We even got mistletoes hanging from the light fixtures…"

Christmas Day 1944 "… I have had a pleasant holiday… Last night the Red Cross opened their new rooms and we had all the hot cocoa and cake we could eat. After that we sang carols in the mess hall for over an hour. We even had our stockings filled. The Red Cross gave each of us a GI sock filled with apples, candy, and cigarettes. Everyone is busy trying to match some other guy for a sock mate. Today's dinner was superb and was all the newspapers say it was. We had roast turkey, spuds, dressing, cranberries, fruit cocktail, and pie plus the fixings. For supper we had some good old dependable spam and macaroni salad… One day I helped sort mail in the APO here and it sure is some job… I got your Nov. 27, Nov. 23, and Nov. 17 letters in that order so it shows how topsy turvy the whole situation is. It is a good idea to enclose the stationery like you have been doing. Once I leave here it is impossible to carry a box of stationery, while a stamped envelope is O.K. It is impossible to carry paper long before it gets wet in your pockets. I met two more fellows from my company and one was the bearer of good news… Steve is up in the hot sector (1st Army) and I hope we will stop the Jerry counterattack… When addressing my envelopes, please write small because chances are several addresses will be stamped on before it reaches me. I am slacking up on reading so much and now I am back to the good old rummy and casino games that we used to play at home. I have even learned the fine old game of solitaire. Today has been far from an unhappy one… Every GI thinks of home today more than ever…" [*Ha! I'm not even sure Bud's buddies who were still on the line were aware when Christmas was that year. One day was much like the rest.*]

Dec. 27, 1944. "Today is the first day I have worn a suit of clothes. I have been transferred to a convalescent ward and we wear clothes instead of pajamas… I am feeling well now, but it still bothers me to walk. We have movies now so it is something to look forward to… the biggest pastime is batting the breeze and beating our gums."

Dec. 28, 1944. "I read where Margaret Ballinger's brother was killed in the Pacific. There is going to be more before this is over. The (Boone County) Courier papers are from the weeks of Nov. 2 and Nov. 9. Old news is still good reading for me. Every week there is some guy wounded, killed or missing in action. In the room I used to stay in is where I spend my time. I am in a place that is quite dull and boring. My old room has my friend Sam Pablano… There are also three wounded Frenchmen in my room and we like them O.K. I have a lot of fun giving them my cigarette rations and food from my packages. Tonight they gave me some French bread and cheese. You can't beat French bread anywhere and the cheese was the best I ever tasted. These French soldiers are about the world's best and they have an awful time trying to keep them in bed. They all want to go and get some more "Boche"… Every other day I have my dressings changed with sulfa powder for a disinfectant. I wear clothes now and walk around so I am in fairly good shape…"

Dec. 30, 1944. "Your Christmas box arrived and you sure hit the spot with that cheese and crackers and can of fudge. I gave most of the soap to my favorite nurse… You need not worry about me getting sick because there isn't much left after a box is passed around… I saw Katherine Cornell and Brian

Aherne in the “Barretts of Wimpole Street.“ There is a swell theater here and I was right in the bald headed row. It was an excellent show and no movie can ever compare to these actors in the flesh. I met another good friend – my former sergeant (Carmelo S. Paratore). He was hit with me (on Nov. 13) and I didn’t see him since. Right now he is awaiting evacuation to England…”

Jan. 1, 1945. “… Lorraine wrote that you received the (War Dept.) telegram before my letter. I wanted the letter to arrive first and save you a lot of worry. By now you ought to have my Purple Heart. Maridell said that Scotty (future brother-in-law) was burned by a Jap bullet. You see some close shaves around here and some that aren’t so lucky. Living through a battle is being in the right place at the right time. I was in the wrong place… I never felt much pain… According to my records my wound was moderately severe… my old sergeant still has his arm. These doctors around here can do wonders especially when I see what they had to work with… The kid from Sharon (Delos Lowell) got it the same day as I and he was close by me also… I have some swell buddies in the infantry and after all everybody else in the war supports you with rifles and bayonets…”

Jan. 10, 1945. “… We have snow here now, but the weather isn’t too severe. The language problem is getting more complicated every day. We have a Porto Rician (sic) soldier here who speaks Spanish. He has several friends who visit him and they carry on in Spanish. We already have French and Italian workers here plus German prisoners. (51 years later I still remember our success in getting Giuseppe from Milano, a former P.O.W. ward boy friend who spoke some Spanish, to instruct the Puerto Rican soldier to furnish a stool sample from his bedpan so the ward nurse could check his appendectomy recovery. It took an Italian speaking GI to fully communicate with Giuseppe.)… About once a week we have fried eggs and bacon for breakfast. I have to sweat out the other six meals of powdered eggs to catch the real treat… So far no fruitcake, but I am still hoping…”

Jan. 14, 1945. “… As you guessed we left New York (most of this page was cut out by the censor where I wrote details of our ocean voyage to France)… We were part of the sanitation crew. Life on a troopship is crowded, we had a “restricted” deck to clean so we had lots of room to ourselves… Today we had a good GI variety show. There are two theaters operating here and I take it all in… They also made the casino here into a big rec hall…”

Jan. 19, 1945. “… Aunt Alice said you got the telegram on the 8 of Dec.… Right now I am receiving Sept. newspapers and letters… The Russian offensive has everyone thinking here and I bet A.O. (my father) is busy with his maps & book… The paper situation over here isn’t too good so I sort of have to ration my letters… I’ll sign off and get at my solitaire game…”

Jan. 26, 1945. “… Several new divisions have arrived here in France and I suppose all the extra mail clogs up the system… The professional photographer is a GI who charges 100 francs for 5 pictures and does a good job… Sammy and I like the Red Skelton in “DuBarry Was a Lady” and we saw it three times… The Russians are really going full speed and everyone hopes they don’t stop… All the fellows around here listen to every news broadcast possible and sweat out the

"Stars & Stripes." We don't get much domestic news but plenty of war news. The Yanks are really going places on Luzon. Living in a world of soldiers gets quite boring. I shouldn't complain because I know lots more boys are worse off than me.

Feb. 1, 1945. "… All my former room mates have left this hospital. In the army you always meet new fellows and sooner or later they get shipped somewhere. I am enclosing a picture I had taken of myself. (The photograph shows me in a new field jacket with no insignia and an OD shirt and tie delivered to 25 in Section A.)… As yet I still haven't received a fruit cake and I know that I have them coming from 3 different sources."

Feb. 2, 1945. "My pen is dry again so here I am back using my old pencil… These French chickens are so scrawny they hardly flavor the stew… I have found a late copy of the Readers' Digest and I read every word. A late magazine is anything under 3 months old. We get a few Life magazines and the Satevepost. Everyone is counting the miles of the Russian offensive. All the snow here is turning to mush and mud… When we landed all we got was mud & rain and it was weeks before I ever saw the sun… I am getting to be a whiz at solitaire."

"Fifty one years later I still remember walking through the large, unheated trenchfoot ward on the first floor on the way to the 5th floor ward to the ground level messhall. We held our noses and passed through as quickly as possible to avoid the smell of swollen feet uncovered with blankets. The orthopedic ward in the grand ballroom contained many severely injured soldiers. We usually passed through the yellow jaundice ward and the patients always offered us some of their hard candy from the well-filled dishes at their bedsides. French, Italian, and German workers did all the KP and cleaning chores. We ambulatory patients were somewhat like guests in a grand hotel. Permanently disabled soldiers and those with need for more extensive surgery had been evacuated to English and stateside hospitals.

"My next letters are from the large rehabilitation ward behind the hospital. Our days as patients and hotel guests would be over and we would be preparing for our return to duty as active soldiers. Only we wouldn't be furnished with any weapons."

THE REHABILITATION WARD AT THE U.S. ARMY 23RD GENERAL HOSPITAL

"A major purpose of this hospital was to return soldiers to their active duty units in the U.S. 7th and French 1st Armies. Mine was as a rifleman in the 2nd platoon of Company G, 399th Infantry Regiment of the 100th Division on the U.S. 7th Army front. This rehabilitation ward were army tents mounted inside the boarded up, columned arcade leading from the rear of Le Grande Hotel to the ornate spring building."

February 5, 1945. "… While cleaning out my wallet I found something that might be of more interest to you than the trash box. One is a meal ticket used on the ship (George Washington) and the other is an old PX ticket from the hospital here. The whole town here is full of internment camps. The town is just a little

larger than Harvard (3,000 population) and has 25 hotels. Right now I am living in what used to be a bath house and looks like Union depot (in Chicago). We are heated by Jerry furnaces which goes to show the fortunes of war…"

February 10, 1945. "What do you think of this classy stationery? Anyhow I paid a classy price for it. The genuine French article… It is better than using airmail paper… Yesterday we had an all French variety show and all the performers were civilians. The juggler is the world's best… The best of all were the girl vocalists. A tremendous improvement over some GI with a mop wig and a brassiere. They sang in French and a few songs in English. I get quite a kick out of them speaking English. All our slang phrases don't quite fit in with the English they were taught. They sure received a tremendous ovation from the soldier audience… I guess you realize that I am on my second year in this army… How is the draft affecting Boone Co.? There are some local dogs around here that capture my fancy, but they can't hold a candle to Wimpy."

February 16, 1945. "I am listening to the radio here in the Red Cross center… Bob Hope was on a few minutes ago and he sure is tops with me. Right now I am listening to a fast folk dance by the AAF orchestra… Most of the time it is the BBC and the English comedians sure can't compare to Hope & Co. The radio is of German manufacture and isn't too good but it is better than nothing… You would be surprised at how large some of these French farmers' horses are. Some of the wagons look strange, but they have good horses…"

February 19, 1945. "… You had better start using my old address now. I will be going back there anyhow in a few weeks. Today I started on this reconditioning program. It lasts two weeks and then if I am ready I go back to duty. We have calisthenics, lectures, hikes, and games. Nothing difficult about it and it passes the time as well as builds one up… Tomorrow makes three months in this hospital. It is too bad that Newell lost his heifer at Christmastime. Think of some of the farmers over here who lose everything. What few chickens they have left the soldiers eat and the same for the rabbits. We are all waiting for spring… There are some pretty views here and this used to be quite a showplace… I have to fall out in a few minutes…"

February 22, 1945. "… I see where you are writing to the old address (Co, G, 399th Infantry, APO 447) and according to my calculations it took two weeks. That is speedy service compared to some of this 10 weeks delivery (through the European central delivery service)… Some of these letters I get are ancient and yellowed with age, but I read them over & over again. Life is a series of aches and pains for me now. This reconditioning program is stiffening me up but eventually I will loosen up. We have calisthenics, games, and hikes and we are all getting used to them. Yesterday we had a softball game and did I ever goof off. A flight of bombers was passing over and as I was watching them the batter knocked one right at me. I wasn't the only one sleeping as the whole gang was except the pitcher & batter. (I saw two old movies) Both were full of heel–clicking Nazi spies. I notice that there is only one blot. Perhaps this is a better pen than I think it is."

February 28, 1945. "… You and Aunt Mae both enclosed the same clippings out of the (Harvard) Herald. I was at the induction center (Fort

Sheridan) with Dooley (Harvard barber) or else it was his partner, Sharp. I don't know them, only their names. Our regiment relieved his outfit last fall and that sure was a good description of those woods… Today I saw the doctor and I will be discharged to duty on Sunday… I have no serious after effects. Just 2 scars, one is 2 inches and the other about 3 (back of upper left leg). I'll never get rid of them, but I am proud of them in a way. These past few days I have been playing softball and taking hikes. We are having nice weather and it makes me wish I was doing farmwork… The war news is encouraging today, but there is always that Jerry counter–attack coming… I helped a friend eat a fruitcake. He is 26 years old and has four boys and a pretty wife. We must be hard up when we have to take men with that much responsibility. This morning we had hardboiled eggs and it is the 5th time for me in the ETO. (A strange comment from a writer who hasn't eaten a hard boiled egg in 51 years.) So far I haven't had any milk except the canned milk… Also send me little boxes with a pair or two of socks in them. Just any old socks as long as they are clean. These things are expendable so send along my old work and dress socks. Time to close as I am washing out a pair now."

March 2, 1945 V–Mail. "… I am leaving here the day after tomorrow… From here I go to a replacement depot where I am sent from there to my unit. This reconditioning program has me in a fair physical condition. Today I played some strenuous volleyball games and yesterday we had a hike of 9 kilometers. The physical training we have every morning helps also. March is here and the beginning of spring I hope. Anyhow I saw an old timer digging his garden. I sure hope we have an early, dry spring so the tanks can roll…"

March 2, 1945. "… I saw something the other day that all the farmers would be interested in. A 1–2–1 formation of four horses pulling an empty wagon. They don't have reins to guide them but shout commands. You hardly ever see a team, but usually one ahead of the others. The horses look as good as any horses back home… Over here we have these pocket editions books and I have read dozens of them."

March 5, 1945. "Well I have finally been discharged from the 23rd General Hospital. I am at the 2nd Replacement Depot now awaiting shipment back to my unit. They reequip us here and issue rifles. While walking down the street I met three fellows from Co. G. One fellow has been to England and back. I can never understand why I didn't get sent there. A general hospital is just supposed to keep them a month. I got your letter of Feb. 15 and the bad news about Del Lowell (paraplegic)… Last night I went to the movies here and saw "Christmas Holiday" with Deanna Durbin & Gene Kelly. The place here is a soap factory or something and I am in a warehouse. We have blankets aplenty and army cots. Things can't compare with the hospital, but the next change from here will be for the worst. I really got to like it at the hospital and met a lot of fellows… I told the company mail orderly to hold my mail so I will get them when I go back…"

"Fifty one years later three other incidents are remembered that weren't specifically mentioned in my letters. On a sunny, warm February say I was sitting outside the Casino with fellow patient Sam Pablano and remember counting the B–17s flying toward Germany and losing count at 300. Some six months later I

learned that Pforzheim, our later station in southwestern Germany, was almost completely destroyed in this heavy bombing attack. [*I wonder about this. The calendar time seems about right, but I recall hearing that the attack came at just before dawn, and that it was carried out by the British RAF. If that's true, Bud could not have been right.*] Sam was with me on a shopping trip to downtown Vittel. We had been in the hospital long enough to receive soldiers' pay in occupation francs. The lavender colored stationery I began using February 10 dates this excursion. I purchased a small folding pair of scissors that is one of the few souvenirs I carried home from wartime Europe. The Italian former prisoners of war, who served as wardboys, invited us to their messhall in the village for a spaghetti dinner. Their cooks drew army rations, but cooked them Italian style and sang Italian songs while dining. The hospitality offered by Giuseppe, Pietro and others from Milano to an Illinois farm boy and a New Mexico Zuni is still remembered."

FROM HOSPITAL PATIENT TO RIFLEMAN DUTY

"My hospitalization stay for my left leg deep wound was almost four months. The Army promised to return patients to their original units where their comrades were. The 2nd Replacement Depot was located in Épinal."

March 6, 1945. "… I left the hospital two days ago and now I am at a reinforcement depot. In a day or two I will be sent back to my unit. We have been issued new equipment and also they give us rifles. Yesterday we fired them on a range to set the sights. Replacements fresh from the states come through here and are assigned to divisions. I am staying in a warehouse and the whole setup is a (soap) factory. We have cots and straw mattresses so we aren't so bad off. At night we can go to the movies here in a theater… The Red Cross operates a snack bar with coffee and rolls for sale. This place may seem quite crude to fellows from the states, but it sure beats living in a fox hole…"

March 6, 1945. "… Back in the hospital spring was in the air, but here it looks and feels like winter with all this sleet and mud… The war news is encouraging and I hope it ends soon. All the armies north of us have pushed off and now I suppose it will be our (U.S. 7th Army) turn next…"

March 10, 1945. "… I hope my letters arrive in the order they were written. One has to read between the lines and do a lot of guessing if the preceding ones haven't arrived. I bet pa really deciphers every syllable and according to your letters he does a lot of wild guessing. The past few letters from you have had postcards in them. I've given several away to friends, mailed several, and I still have a few left. Tomorrow makes a week that I have been here at the reinforcement depot. Most fellows stay only two or three days but another 100th man and myself are here after a week. I met a fellow from my company and he left and he didn't come in until after me. I don't run the army and I don't pretend to understand everything. They have showers here and I use them. In my first room back at the hospital there was a tub only I never got to use it. There was showers though and I really love to shower… Since I have been in the army I have never bathed in a tub. I don't know whether I'm bragging or complaining… (movies are) the only recreation here and the joint is packed for every show…I

read in the paper that they don't guarantee to send airmail by plane any more. When I write you I will mix them up with V–Mail…"

March 12, 1945. "Here goes for a few lines providing this candle holds out. The lights are on the fritz that isn't too unusual here. I have made another jump (to Sarrebourg) nearer my outfit. Before I left the last place I met another boy from Co. G. There was six of us there, but we never all got together… They have the movie set up in a cavalry stable. Wherever the GI's go they try and get movies to them and they sure mean a lot to us… Today we hiked to the range and fired our rifles again. I have another rifle now so I didn't waste my time. The pussy willows are budding and I guess that is a sure sign of spring… I'll never forget those forests last fall. It never did get totally light and the nights were almost 16 hours long. Anyhow I passed through the town (Baccarat) where I was hit (Nov. 13, 1944) on the way to here. Tomorrow makes four months since I left the old gang. My candle is almost kaput and the lights are still on the fritz…"

"51 years later I remember this. I rejoined Company G comrades March 16 in the late forenoon of a warm spring day. The company jeep brought me up the road and dropped me off at the "Splinter Factory" on Reyersville Ridge. The Wehrmacht was driven away and our casualties had been evacuated. My close comrades had survived the difficult winter campaign outside the fortress city of Bitche. They were in an at ease formation and happy to see me again. I took my place in the 1st squad of the 2nd platoon and we moved out with slung arms into the city of Bitche. That night we slept in a French, then a German, barracks. The Maginot Line was ours and I had served one day and the last day in the Bitche campaign. The Siegfried Line awaited us a few kilometers northward. When my wife and I visited Bitche on the 1978 100th Division reunion tour, we were hailed as liberators and heroes by the mayor and civic officials. As I drank the choice champagne, nibbled the lady fingers, and ate the gourmet dinner, I thought deeply of the G Company guys who really got the job done. The trees were in full foliage as our tour bus passed the Splinter Factory."

XVIII. BREAKOUT AND MOVEMENT

On March 15, 1945 suddenly movement became the order of the day, fast, confusing, but always forward. We were quite obviously on our way to end the war, as deep inside Germany as we had to go to do it. Near us was the small city of Bitche, a formidable fortress in the Maginot Line that the Germans had not moved out of. We had talked with trepidation all Winter of our probable eventual attack on it, knowing that its reduction could be a difficult, bloody task. When it came, though, our push was so massive and rapid Bitche was almost literally overrun; resistance was token at most. And so it was to continue in the next few weeks. The German defense of their Western Front was reduced to pockets, although, as we were to learn, some of those pockets had enemy in them fiercely determined to defend what they had left.

There was so much rapid movement and milling around in the next few weeks that I have retained only flashes of memory, often with no clear sense of chronology. Many replacements had come in, so that we were more nearly up to full strength than we had been since landing in Marseilles what seemed like a very long time ago. We moved on foot, riding on the outside of tanks, and in trucks, but we moved, and seldom stayed anywhere for more than a few hours to snatch a little sleep. The first sharp interval of memory that I retain from this time came during the first days of the push. I remember feeling that it was a poor way to celebrate my 20th birthday, the 21st of March.

It was perhaps an appropriate welcome to Germany, however. I'm not sure I realized it then, but we were over the border for the first time, in hilly, rural country, near a place called Dietrichingen. Incongruously, a memory that survives is that we'd just traded in our shoe pacs for a new kind of leather combat boots with the smooth side in and leather leggings sewn to the tops of them. We were pleased with the change–over; it seemed a harbinger of Spring. (Anything to do with the care and comfort of feet is of prime interest to infantrymen.) I was enjoying my boots, when quite unexpectedly I found myself momentarily isolated from the Squad, in a large, flat open area like a shallow bowl, surrounded by low wooded hills. And I was under mortar fire. At first, I had no idea from what direction the fire was coming, or even if I was the primary target. Several bursts following the first confirmed that I was, though, and I could see that it was coming from a concealed position in some underbrush atop one of the little hills. Apparently the soil was too thin for real foxholes, for nearby were several small rings of large boulders that had obviously been used as makeshift holes. I flattened myself inside one of the rings, and so began an ordeal I don't think I'll ever forget.

It seemed possible that I was relatively safe, barring a direct hit inside my stone ring, but it was also obvious that I was under direct and precise observation by people who wanted very badly to kill me, and who had the means to do so. All they needed was time. I have no idea how much time elapsed. It seemed like days, but must have been only a few minutes. I hugged the ground and clearly heard the little “plock” sounds as the shells were fired, and each explosion seemed closer than the last. The feeling of helpless vulnerability rendered me almost paralyzed with fear. But I was not harmed, and soon enough, though I don’t really recall how soon, I guess now that someone else noticed the mortar position and cleared it out. For a second time, then, I owed my life to someone—only that time, in all the confusion of movement and battle, I had no idea who it was. Or maybe the Germans just decided to stop wasting time and ammunition on such an insignificant target.

It was at about this time when I became fast friends with one of the replacements who had a remarkable military history. He was assigned to our Platoon as a medic, and he had been a medic, in and out of combat, in Africa and Europe for over three years. He had participated, as a combat medic, in the First Division landings in North Africa and Sicily. Just before he came to us he had been assigned to an Army hospital in Marseilles. When he learned that his twin brother was the company commander if one of the companies in our regiment, he requested a transfer, for yet another combat assignment, to the 100th Division so he could be near his brother. He was sent to our Company because it was against Army policy to have brothers in the same line unit. We hit it off immediately and were more or less constant companions during the very few weeks we were together.

Thinking back now, it seems almost incredible that the events I’m recalling here all took place in almost exactly four weeks—from about March 15, to April 12, 1945. So much activity was crammed into that time, and so many vivid—disconnected for the most part—flashes of memory remain with me that it seems as though many months must have passed. It was only four weeks, though.

I recall very clearly our first stop after we got into Germany to stay, though I don’t recall the actual border crossing. We were billeted, very temporarily it turned out, in a house in a village just inside the border. As they had not been in France, the occupants of the houses had been turned out, to stay away until we finished our use of their homes. All except one young girl who had stayed behind. She was about 16 years old, plump, very blonde, and very pretty. She spoke to us in German, and it was some minutes before we could find anyone who understood what she was trying to say to us. She had been told that we would be raping her and she wanted us to know that she was ready and wouldn’t resist, hoping we wouldn’t hurt her too much. To our credit, we instinctively, I think (and hope), sent her away unharmed—*before* word came down that we were not to stay there after all and would move on.

Now began what could fairly be described as an orgy, however. We were moving fast through fairly thickly populated country and meeting no resistance. Somehow we got the idea, which no one attempted to disabuse us of at first, that as conquerors we had the right to take whatever pleased us—that we could carry. We called it by its right name—“looting”—and we went at it with a will. Much of what we found to loot turned out

to be brandy. There seemed to be a great deal of it about, apparently there were a number of small distilleries in the region, and many of us soon got quite drunk. After a day or so we were ordered to stop drinking it—I still recall the rueful regret of pouring a bottle or two down a street sewer drain—but a prodigious amount was consumed, and it's a wonder to me now to realize that no ill effects I ever saw or heard of resulted from this over–indulgence.

There is, however, one near miss that I am aware of. My good pal the medic and I each came into possession of a liter bottle of B & B liqueur, from the cellar of a residence said to be the property of a *Wehrmacht* officer who had been in France. Being "cultured" and "understanding" such things, we assured one another that this class of booze had to be sipped and savored for full appreciation. We then proceeded to sip and savor, each his own bottle, until —I guess—the B & B was gone. The memory of the next few hours has always been fuzzy to me, and many of them are total blanks. The next clear memory I have is waking up, or at least returning to more or less normal consciousness, the following day, in another town to which the unit had moved, dragging us with them. We were about to start fighting a duel. He had a little .25 caliber nickel-plated automatic pistol, for which he probably had no ammunition, and I had a pair of scissors. We weren't angry with one another; apparently the duel just seemed like the thing to do at that point. It didn't come off, but I still have the scissors, beside me on the desk as I write this.

Once again, Bud Smith was able to report on our action—rather than his own inaction—to his family at home:

> March 19, 1945. "… When I first got back it took me 2 1/2 hours to read my accumulated mail… While back at the hospital I kept up fairly well on my correspondence, but out here I probably will have to slack up. We are having some nice spring days and I hope we don't get too much rain. There are several new people here but most of them I already know. All the boys I knew well are still around… All the mail that comes through the directory bureau is reaching me in large quantities now. It took me almost two weeks to get here after I left the hospital. While at division headquarters the dentist filled four teeth. He used one of those hand or foot powered drills and I think he did a good job. They had a theater in that town and I saw "Devotion"… it is the story of the Brontë sisters with Ida Lupino and Olivia DeHaviland. I think my show going days are over for a while. I even bought a dish of French ice cream and it sure tasted good for a change. The people over here are just as healthy looking as back home. You remember how the magazines depicted them a few years ago? However, some of their buildings are damaged and they sometimes lose their livestock by shell fire… I have put on some weight only I know I am not fat…"
>
> March 21, 1945. "…Today is the beginning of spring and the weather is sure cooperating today… The grass is green now and the pussy willows are budding … the past few days have been nice. Well mother I can beat most of our families travelling record. I have been in three countries now and they all look about the same… It is too bad that the mail doesn't arrive in the proper sequence. You had better send a little stationery now whenever you write. Disregard that request I made to send my old work sox. They have a fairly

efficient system of supplying us now with clean clothes. Today we got clean drawers, sox, and uniforms. We sleep warm in our bedding rolls and the chow isn't too bad. Nothing like home but better than last fall. Lately we have been sleeping in buildings only they aren't too impressive looking. Just a shell but better than nothing. Over here the house and barn are one and the same building with a manure pile in front… I am still receiving Christmas cards and get well cards… Be sure and send me the stationery…"

"The next letter is datelined Germany and forms a new chapter in this series."

"Fifty one years later I remember my most arduous fatigue detail in the U.S. Army. While at the Sarrebourg replacement depot in a French army barracks I was assigned to the taking the tents out of the basement storeroom detail. The huge squad tents were frozen lumps of canvas and the stairway was very narrow. Four soldiers to a tent got each tent to the courtyard with very great effort. It was like moving huge blocks of ice without icepicks."

As this letter transcription process went on, Bud gradually added more and more latter–day comments to his actual letter excerpts, until his narrative became a dominant feature of these writings. Possibly this is because there was suddenly much less time for writing letters. We were on the move, and fast, and for several weeks we seldom spent more than one night in the same place.

THROUGH THE SIEGFRIED LINE TO THE RHINE RIVER

"After four months of hospitalization and rehabilitation I rejoined Co. G March 17, 1945 and bunked with them in a barracks building in the fortress city of Bitche on the Maginot Line. The *Story of the Century* … says, 'The 398th and 399th Inf. went into assembly areas around Bousseviller. Briedenbach, and other towns to the north of Bitche … from 18 to 22 March.' The *399th In Action* book … says, 'The White (2nd) Battalion moved into a sandwich of the 397th Infantry and the 3rd CMH Division who were busy bursting a hole in the Siegfried. Easy, Fox and George waited for a counterattack and sweated under terrific direct fire from the underground fortresses. The rest of the 399th moved back into reserve wooded areas and spent the days shooting deer, pulling lanyards on nearby artillery, and training in smashing Siegfrieds … a mere three miles to the front.' On the nights of March 18, March 19, and March 20 we slept in sheltered valleys. Each morning we found large pieces of shrapnel nearby. The explanation at the time was that our artillery was firing short rounds because of damp powder. Now I think it might have been 1st and 3rd battalion infantrymen pulling unfamiliar artillery lanyards. We had no casualties other than some loss of confidence in our artillery support. The large piece of shrapnel found between sleeping Clarence Manganaro's outstretched legs caused some comments about his future fatherhood.

"My March 21 letter home commented on the beginning of spring weather and the greening grass and the budding pussy willows. The ground was firm and

dry and our armored support vehicles and artillery pieces were able to move freely. The company was near full strength with new replacements and discharged hospital patients. Our cooks were serving hot meals two or three times a day brought forward in insulated containers [*mermite cans, they were called*]. The spring war was a vast improvement over the fall fighting in the snowy and muddy Vosges forests. So far it was more like a Boy Scout campout than World War II. My biggest scare at this time was on a very dark night time move forward when we passed 4.2 mortars of a chemical warfare unit. They were just off the road when our platoon felt the blasts from four large mortar rounds. It has been said that the infantry advances rapidly so as to keep out of the way of our artillery.

"My March 21 letter to my mother was the seventh written on that day while I was sitting in a rocking chair in the German village just south of the Siegfried Line. I never learned the name of the village situated in a valley, but I remember many details. Our 2nd platoon stayed inside of the two story building closest to the Siegfried Line and built against a steep hillside on the back side. A large, flat field across the road was a possible artillery firing position. I remember sitting in my rocking chair in an upstairs bedroom and watching German 88 mm. Shells fall methodically and sporadically on an empty field. I did lots of letter writing on my guard shift. We knew that the 3rd Infantry Division was successfully knocking out the Siegfried pillboxes with bazooka rockets aimed at the rear facing doors. The Siegfried pillboxes were not as thick and deep as the Maginot Line Forts, but the German mobile artillery was still active. An open country crossroads about a half mile northwest of my rocking chair guard post was zeroed in on a ten minute or so firing plan. I observed dozens of 3rd Division vehicles wait at a distance for their turn to proceed after the shell had landed. None of the 88 mm. rounds that day scored a hit. Our building housed the burgomaster's office and I remember military government or CIC officers searching quickly through the village's records. Enterprising soldiers from another platoon [*3rd, I'm sure I recall—though it was a bigger car, maybe a Daimler*] found a Volkswagen automobile hidden under a hay pile and got it to run with a little white gasoline borrowed from our cooks' stove fuel supply. The automobile was of pre–Beetle design. Others found bicycles and motorbikes to ride in this one street village.

"A day or two before this village we were in a reserve position in another border town village where the company was issued clean underwear and wool uniforms. I remember the clay tiles falling in a clatter when the ball was thrown on the barn roof for my one man game of catch. Was my arm that strong or had artillery fire weakened the roof? The German red tile roofs were not like the wood shingled roofs in northern Illinois.

"On March 22 the race to the Rhine River at Ludwigshafen–Mannheim began led by the 1st battalion of the 399th. The 2nd battalion was second in line. Our squad rode on a Sherman tank in a mechanized array through the hole in the Siegfried Line made by the 3rd Division. We had struggled one hill or ridge at a time and suddenly we went through 92 miles of Germany in two days on dry roads. Our regimental history said our front was '60 miles long and one Sherman

wide' and that the Blue (3rd) Battalion liberated a liquor warehouse in urban Neustadt and 'shared it reluctantly with the rest of the 7th Army.' This was on the second day of our drive and several of my platoon comrades imbibed deeply and were unable to safely ride on the outside of a Sherman tank. Our officers ordered them to walk to our next objective while sobering up. I was one of the few teetotalers and was invited by the tankers to ride inside of their Sherman turret. Many soldiers learned about French cognac that day and I learned how confining a tank was. The view of the German countryside was better on the outside.

"Our motorized 399th Infantry regiment led the U.S. 7th Army and met the men of the 94th Division of the U.S. 3rd Army outside of Ludwigshafen. Two armies had joined and the Saar pincer had closed west of the Rhine Bridges. German Soldiers by the thousands marched in long columns four abreast to surrender and throw their weapons on huge piles in a village square with only two or three American soldiers present. The 399th reached the Rhine on March 24th. I remember that it was a wide river and a swift flowing river with armed Germans on the east bank. I finally realized that rivers could flow northward. All the rivers in northern Illinois flowed southward and westward and I knew that water couldn't flow uphill. We slept on the roadside close to our Sherman tanks on the two nights of our drive to the Rhine. The weather was delightful and no shots were fired at us. We saw lots of white flags flying as we passed through each town.

"On Sunday March 25, 1945 we were billeted in a complete, two story house near the west bank city of Speyer between Mannheim and Karlsruhe. Between patrols I wrote letters back home. We were billeted in the village of Mutterstadt."

March 25, 1945 Germany "…We have had a beautiful spring over here and we deserve it after that miserable fall we had. The grain has sprouted and some of the early spring flowers and fruit trees are in blossom… Anyhow I am back in the farming element. The river valley here is full of prosperous farming villages. I was led to believe that the Germans were being starved, but they all seem to have robust appearances… The people don't seem to resent us, but we can't trust any of them. I have yet to find one that claims to be a Nazi. All the soldiers say they are Poles, Russians, Austrians, etc. We live in houses now and move the people to the other part of town. Most of the villages are untouched by war compared to some in Alsace. All the GI's are going crazy riding Jerry motorbikes, bicycles, and autos. These people have as good or better living than most of our people. I don't understand why they always want to expand and start wars. Right now we have a phonograph only nobody understands what the singing is all about. The tunes are pretty nifty. I always sort of like the German music and the brass bands… Don't worry, I had what is known in the trade as a 'million dollar wound'…"

In the midst of all Bud's letter writing, looking at my letters saved by my father, I find for this time period one lone V–Mail:

March 30 (V–Mail, from Germany). "Just a line to let you know I'm around and able to sit up and take nourishment still. These are exciting times and big doings

over here, and I guess I'm right in the thick of it. I don't see how it can take too long now, but there's no telling. Another box of candy arrived the other day and was much appreciated by all. Unfortunately, in the general melee of the past couple of weeks I managed to lose the books you sent without so much as opening some of them. Maybe you could send some more, send 'em one or two at a time, though, and maybe then I'll be able to carry them. The weather has turned on us a little lately, cooler & a little rain, but not 1–2–3 with last fall & winter."

Back to Bud:

March 31, 1945. "… We have been taking it easy the past few days and live almost like we did back at garrison. The past few days we have had movies. Last night it was 'The Thin Man Goes Home' and the night before was 2 reels of 'Strike Up the Band' before the projector went on the blink. Yesterday we had Bobby Breen and some musicians in the rain. Tomorrow I am one of the lucky ones who goes to see Marlene Dietrich. [*I do NOT recall any movies, but I do remember hearing about the USO shows. Only some could go, and I was certainly not in their number.*] We pull road guard once in a while and house guard. A few days we had a training schedule complete with hikes. You should of heard us complain about that! I suppose we will be on the move again soon and anyone's guess is good. We read in the papers how they celebrated a false armistice back home. I'm afraid there is a lot of fighting to be done as yet. Patton is going so fast that even our headquarters can't keep track of him…"

April 3, 1945 Germany. "… There is no need of you worrying in case I haven't been writing. I have a case of good old fashioned spring fever Then again we have done a little moving… This rat race is exciting in a way. Every night a different house. Last night I slept under these old fashioned feather beds and they sure are warm… (We) are having an early spring … and once in a while we get a cool, rainy day. Since hitting this country I have spent only 2 nights outside and the rest under shelter. It hasn't been all gravy and some of the days have been tough ones. Our company hasn't had a casualty so far in Germany. I hope the record stays that way. This country is full of displaced slave workers, old people, and kids. Nothing doing here only these people are great church people and have some splendid cathedrals. I wish they would practice their religion and not going around stomping down the neighboring countries. Some of their cities are really blasted and it should keep them busy rebuilding for a few years at least. Most of the rural villages haven't been hit bad, but all have a few scars… I didn't see Marlene Dietrich…"

"I still remember being road guard near Speyer where we followed our orders and held up an artillery battalion headed for the Rhine pontoon bridge with our BAR and rifles. Squad mates convinced me to allow the Lt. Colonel's convoy through after we told him what the current password was. Part of our patrol duty was riding on light tanks southward to a large villa near the Rhine River occupied by another platoon sized unit. Nothing happened on several day and night patrols. On our last patrol we decided to hunt the small deer in the state forest

halfway to the villa with the tank's .30 caliber machine gun and our BAR and rifles. This commotion alerted the German self propelled 88 mm. gunners across the river to a suitable target. The Stuart light tank was very maneuverable in making a change of direction. We retreated safely with no game. The searchlights reflecting from the low clouds to light the Rhine River and forestall any enemy crossings will always be remembered.

"Fifty one years later I still remember our 7 kilometer walk westward in the rain to see Marlene Dietrich entertain the troops in her GI long johns. Dick La Fleur was on that hike. Who was the other one? It rained lightly all the way. When we arrived we found Bobby Breen, the boy soprano, singing while standing on a jeep. Marlene didn't come out in such weather and there were many disappointed soldiers. We were carrying live ammunition, but didn't use any.

"I wasn't aware of the cathedral in Speyer during our late March 1945 stay. Late in 1947 I learned in my Medieval history course that the Diet of Speyer in 1529 was the first recorded use of the word Protestant. I let the Beloit College professor and Congregational preacher know that I was a Methodist soldier that helped liberate Speyer two years earlier. I pulled an A in that course. The regiment left Speyer on March 31st and crossed the pontoon bridge at Mannheim. I rode on the back of a kitchen truck across the Rhine and began another chapter in my Company G days."

We saw Bud and Melpomene at the 100th Division Association reunion in Charlotte NC in September 1997, in apparent good health. Two short months later, just before Thanksgiving, Bud suffered an aneurysm in his brain and quite suddenly died. There were more letters to be transcribed, and he had fully intended to do it for us. I have asked Mel if there was any way she could do the job. She has never said no, but so far she hasn't gotten to it.

Eventually we reached the Rhine, which we crossed—in trucks over a temporary bridge—at Ludwigshafen to Mannheim. Here, in fair–sized cities, we saw for the first time what real devastation looked like. We were still moving fast, so the impressions were only fleeting, but they were of total destruction. It was about then that I began to formulate a resolve never to complicate my life by attachments to material things, especially non-movable ones. Without attachments, I thought I should be free from the anguish of losses if they came. It's a resolve I have not kept, but I'm still not sure it wasn't wise. The physical ruins I was to live in and near for the next year made a deep and lasting impression on me that time has to this day failed to eradicate completely.

XIX. HEPATITIS

We were following the fleeing German army at a rapid pace. Mostly they were fleeing, that is. Every so often some of them would stop behind a hill or on the edge of a village in a defensive position and attempt some sort of a stand. Short, intense little battles would ensue that had no effect on the actual outcome of the war, but which were destructive and vicious. We were lucky for a while, and missed these resistance pockets.

Combat material from the *Newsletter* is sparse from here on, but we do have one short piece submitted by William Matthews. He called it:

AN EVENING IN APRIL

> "Late in the afternoon we heard the bad news. 'Roll up and be ready to go at seven,' said the platoon runner as he went back to the Command Post. In dismay, I looked at the neatly arranged blankets and mattresses on the cellar floor, all made up and ready to crawl into.
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> "At seven it began to sprinkle as we left our bedrolls and formed in the usual attack formation. Shortly after we moved off. Our objective was the lower section of Heilbronn, Germany. The double files of men, one of each side of the street, moved away silently through the yellowish twilight.
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> "Easy Company was leading, and naturally they drew the first fire. German '88s' were zeroed in on a roadblock, and they shelled it frequently. We stopped, wondering what all was going to happen next. Anticipating the possibility that we might be shelled, and to be on the safe side, the doors of several nearby houses were forced open, and we were all ready to dive for the *unterkeller* if it became necessary.
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> "As we waited anxiously for the next move, three of our tanks sped down the road, returning several minutes later. Then came the news we longed to hear; we were to go back to our houses and wait for daylight. That night I slept as comfortably as anyone could ever wish to sleep, even if I did have to stand guard for an hour in the middle of the night."

The city of Heilbronn was a stop for us where we spent a little time, and here I had what eventually turned out to be, on balance, a stroke of good fortune. It started when I got a three–day R & R pass that sent me quite suddenly and totally unexpectedly to a rest center in Nancy, the capital of Lorraine, back in France. I got back to the center by truck, and by the time we arrived it was late, so I just went to bed in a sort of barracks which I don't remember much about. What I do remember is waking up the next morning feeling terribly, terribly ill. I have never been so sick before or since, and it kept getting worse. Somehow I managed to locate and drag myself to a large U.S. Army hospital that was near the rest center. I recall that somewhere on the way I glimpsed a copy of the *Stars and Stripes* armed forces newspaper with the headline announcing that President Roosevelt had died, so that pinpoints the date, April 13. There's no other way I could remember it.

I was admitted into the hospital and immediately bedded in an isolation room. Here I had raging fever alternating with terrible chills, delirium, semi-comatose periods (all this I was told later) and a series of doctors trying to find out if I had ever been anywhere that I could have contracted malaria. I had not, but a day or so later, still deathly ill and very weak, I began to turn yellow and was promptly diagnosed as another infectious hepatitis victim. The hospital was full of them, and I was moved into a large ward with some of my fellow–sufferers. This ward became my home for the next two months. At that time the treatment for hepatitis was bed rest and a low–fat diet, and that's what I got. Before I got out of there I also got something called atypical pneumonia and a strep throat infection. Everything got cured eventually, and I've never had any after–effects, except nobody has ever let me be a blood donor.

Shortly after I left for my supposed R & R, "G" Company hit one of those pockets of resistance—hard. Action, I was later told, was heavy for a while, and the Third Platoon had most of it. It resulted in two Distinguished Service Crosses (one posthumous), and two Silver Stars. There were also three more friends killed in action and a number wounded whom I never saw again. But that turned out to be, to all intents and purposes, the end of it.

V-E Day came May 7 and, still weak but ambulatory by that time, I watched the celebration in the streets of Nancy late into the night, from a hospital window. Thus ended five and a half months, for me, of more or less continuous combat life—November 1, 1944 to April 13, 1945—which still seems in memory a much, much longer period of time.

My attitude toward this dramatic happening for which we had waited and struggled so long seems somewhat ambivalent now, as evidenced in these lines from a letter to my father dated May 8:

> *"Well, here it is at last! The war is exactly half over, maybe not in time, at least I hope the Japs don't last another 5 years. It's just like the 4th of July here, flags, fireworks, and all. All Nancy was out singing in the streets last night, and they had some sort of demonstration in the center of town. Here I sit in the hospital, watching it all out the window. I feel sort of left out, but it all seems sort of anti-climactical now anyhow. It seems hard to realize, though, that the nearest fighting is now over 14,000 miles away, by boat."*

The bad part of the war was actually over for me, though I didn't know it right away, of course. The big question then was the continuing war in the Pacific and the probability that we might yet have to participate in it. Would we go as a Division or as individual replacement troops? If and when we went, would it be direct or would we get home for a time first? There was even speculation about becoming part of a "permanent" army of occupation in Europe. Of course, by August it was all academic. As time passed, and I realized there would be no more fighting, I gradually became so obsessed with the desire to go home that the interesting times to come often seemed only obstacles to that end.

I continued my convalescence, eventually getting well enough to go out and explore Nancy a little bit, sit in the park, and go to the service club and the movies. In

the early days of my hospitalization, I learned much later, since it wasn't known exactly where I was, some of my mail was returned as undeliverable. This must have been a source of considerable distress for everyone at home, but they never said much about it to me. Eventually, of course, I was well enough to write them, and my mail did get forwarded as well.

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XX. THE BEGINNING OF THE END

It is impossible to complete this story using original sources that we have used in the *Newsletter*; there are no more. It was not long after the last transcribed Stimes letter that we have was written that I left the Company on my three–day R & R pass to the Nancy rest camp that ended up with my hospitalization for hepatitis. Thus I have no personal memories of what happened to the Company during the very eventful final weeks of combat—and of course Bud never got the opportunity to give us his impressions of that time. I have been able to unearth only one other on–the–spot recollection of what happened—and that never got in the *Newsletter*.

In 1995 I was able to meet with Hugh Gillin—once a sergeant in our third platoon—to discuss his proposed biography, that I would write using oral history tapes which he would provide. Hugh had made a quite dramatic mid–life career change to become a successful Hollywood actor, and I thought his story was worth telling. For a number of reasons the project didn't come to fruition, but I was able to get from the tapes, among other things, verbatim accounts of his experiences in the Company G action at Talheim up to the time he was wounded, plus some of his experiences after being wounded: in hospitals in Germany, England, and back home. Some of this material has been used in the *Newsletter*, most has not, and some of that is what follows:

> "April the 12th Roosevelt died, when we were in Heilbronn, Germany on the Neckar River. We were on the safe side. I would guess the west bank, kind of reserve. Somebody got the town cleaned up and then we went across, on a pontoon bridge as I recall. Got into town and most of the fighting was done, moved through the town. We were advancing and we were heading toward the town of Talheim. (I know this now, didn't know it then, it's about 10 or 15 miles outa Heilbronn goin' southeast. I got some old maps.) We started to move in there. As we're advancing you could see the town up ahead of us maybe a

quarter of a mile, a little village, like. And there was a crossroads, and moving across the field, walking toward this town, we stopped.

"My squad leader had been hit earlier. They sent him back to the hospital and he got patched up, and he's back with the squad. We dropped in a shell hole—kind of a depression thing there—together. We were getting ready to move on this town, and I said, 'Hey, Sarge,' I said something about, 'Welcome back. Glad you're back, you're the squad leader now.' 'Yeah, well I don't know.' He was kind of bewildered. All I'm thinking about is he gets to lead the squad into town. I don't have to lead them in; he can do it. He looked at me and he said, 'Uh,' with a kind of vacant look on his face, 'I can't do it, I just can't do it.' I didn't smart him or wiseacre him; I knew what he meant. As I recall, he was married and had a couple of little kids, and he'd been hit once and now he's back. And I'm saying, 'Glad you're back, and now you can lead the squad into town. Maybe you'll get hit again.' I didn't say that, but he's kind of shrinking inside, like; he said, 'I just can't do it.' And, as I recall, I said, 'I understand.' Ha, ha, that was the end of my dream. So I got up and we just kept moving into town.

"We got near the town and they started shelling us. Siemasko was the lieutenant then, and he told me, 'Gillin, you take your squad up front on the left,' and I forget who he said go up on the right. 'And, Kelly,' (that was Vincent Kelly), 'you bring up your squad in the rear.' I thought, boy, lucky Kelly, he's back in the rear. Now 'in the rear' is like, what, 50 yards back? But anyway, he was the reserve squad. I'm on the left going into town; Goosey Steines is my scout. I said, 'Goosey, you're a scout, you get up in front.' 'I don't wanna get up in front.' Well, I said, 'Hell, you're a scout, they're payin' you to be a scout, you get up. God, Goosey, up front's only 20 feet in front of me. We gotta do this the way it's supposed to be done.' He said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' He didn't like that.

"As we're moving in, they start shelling us with mortars. But they're going over and hitting behind us. There's the crossroads right behind us that they had zeroed in on. I remember going by the little crossroads, it was like a couple of dirt paths, and I went by that and right away. I know that's a good zero point for artillery and stuff, so I'm hopping on ahead of that thing. They started throwing mortars on it, and I hit the ditch, and guys were in the ditch. We had a couple of tanks with us, but hell, they were following us by about several hundred yards. They put the damned infantry up front to clear the town. They didn't want the damned tanks getting blown up by *Panzerfausts,* those rocket things, out of some basement, so they put the infantry up there in front.

"Anyway, the artillery comes in and somebody says, 'Let's get out of here. Pull back.' The Krauts are kinda yippin' and yellin' up in the town. They're acting like they're going to run out of town at us. Kind of scared everybody. So we pulled back. This was three or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We pulled back, past the crossroads, and we dug in. Couldn't get the tanks to come up with us. Finally they did, came up behind us by 30 or 40 yards. Sat there. Made you feel good, at least there was a tank there. That's when somebody said, 'Kelly got it. Kelly got it at the crossroads.' In that same action that guy from Arkansas got the Distinguished Service Cross, or some damned thing*. [Lonnie Jackson. Kelly was also awarded the DSC there.*]

"The next morning we moved into the town. In the meantime the Krauts had pulled out and into the hills behind it. I found a butcher shop there and somebody who could speak a little French and I could speak a little French, and first thing I asked him if he knew where any Germans were, and he said he did. He said, 'Follow me,' more or less. Delbert Steines, Goosey, my scout, and I and this Frenchman started over there into another part of town we hadn't taken yet. He pointed to a cellar there and I kicked the door open and said, '*Rausmit*, come on out of there.' Hell, a bunch of civilians, about 10 or 15 of them, came out of there, brushing by me.

"I'm standing there with my gun on them, Goosey behind me. I looked to my left all of a sudden as a Kraut walks around the corner down there and throws his hands up. So I grab him and put him up against the wall, and I'm frisking him. Got his hands up on the wall. I pull his shirtsleeve down and he's got a wristwatch on. Hot damn! I take that wristwatch off and put it in my pocket. Go through his pack; he's got a bunch of crap in there. So I said, 'We'll take him back to the command post, and then we'll go get some more.' So I took him back to the command post. We had to walk over a little wooden plank they'd put across a little stream there. They'd blown the bridge out and they put a plank in there so the Krauts could get out. I was over there where I had no damned business being.

"Anyway, this guy, on his uniform he had an artillery thing on there. I said, 'Artillery?' and he kinda nodded his head and, boy, I hit him right smack in the nose hard as I could. He just looked at me. Blood's coming out of his nose. I figured my reasoning was that he killed Kelly. The artillery or the mortars killed Kelly. So I was mad, and I hit him. You know, I whanged into him one way and I hit him again the other way. And he just stood there and looked at me. He wasn't looking mean, he wasn't looking daggers. He was looking at me like, 'What'd you do that for?' You know, 'I don't understand.' And I didn't either for a moment. Somebody said, 'Aw, leave him alone.' So we shoved him in the command post, and I said, 'Let's go get some more.'

"So we started out again, from the middle of that little town, to get some more prisoners. Seemed like a good idea. That's when I got hit. I'm walking along, and I was in the middle. Steines was on one side of me and the other scout on the other, and zzzzip! boy, it hit me. Took me right out of the middle. Didn't hit either one of them. Spun me around; I went down, I knew I was hit. I picked my rifle up. I was hit through the left arm and the left leg, and I got into a little house about ten feet away. The houses were right on the street. I sat down in there. I knew I was hit and I was kind of glad I was. I knew I was hit in the leg because I fell down. I pulled my pants up out of my boot and looked. There was a hole drilled right through my calf muscle. Didn't hit the bone. The blood's kind of running down my leg, and I remembered that you're supposed to take your first aid pack off and dress yourself up. So I did. I noticed I wasn't using my left hand very much. So I shoved my left sleeve up, and there was a hole through my left wrist.

"The funny part of this story is that the summer before I went in the Army, the summer of '43, I worked in the coal mines while I was going to college. I

made enough money I bought a Longines wristwatch, paid about 200 bucks for it. I was really proud of that watch, and I guess I had it for about a year or so. Now, you remember, I just took that watch off that Kraut about ten minutes before I got hit. Put it in my pocket. Some damned old Mickey Mouse thing, wasn't worth a damn. I'm sitting on the floor of that house and I looked down and, by God, my watch is gone. I thought, son of a bitch.

"About that time Sergeant Walters, who was across the street, said, 'Are you all right?' And I said, 'Yeah, you better stay there, don't be comin' in here.' In the meantime there's mortar rounds coming into town. The second story of this little house I'm in took a hit. I figured this damned house is going to be gone pretty soon. Here I sit. I'm wounded; I'm going to get the hell outta here. I'm going home if I can just get out of this house. Now they got small arms fire going up and down the street. Walters says, 'I'm coming over.' I said, 'Stay there.' I could see him, because I'm just lying there in the doorway. He comes across and he grabs his thigh about halfway across. Damned if he didn't get one right through his thigh. He came in and sat down. It was almost like a comedy. I said, 'Look out there and see if you can see a watch.' He looked and said, 'I don't see a watch, I see a strap.' That was the end of my Longines watch. I think it was like God said, 'Hey, you don't need two watches. You gonna steal that guy's watch?' 'Yeah.' 'You don't need two watches, so you gonna give yours up.'

"So we sat there for about ten minutes figuring out what the hell to do. We knew we were in trouble and we had to get out of there. I could see a muzzle of a tank up the road there, about a block up the street, and we kept yelling up there for that tank to come down. Hell, he wouldn't come down. Anyway, somebody got him to come down. He got in the street between us and the other side of the house. The street curved going up out of there, so if we could get out of our house to the other side of the street, we could follow that curve and we could get out. So finally, maybe 15 or 30 minutes later, he lumbered that tank down in there. Walters went first and I went last, and, boy, I tell you, I'm starting to get a little weak, I'm losing blood. I thought, oh boy, there's a gap between me and back of that tank of maybe four feet, and I thought that if I can just get across that sumbitch without getting hit I got her made. So I just bellied up, made a jump and a hop, and I got to it and I didn't get hit.

"I went ten or twenty yards up the side, hugging that wall and trying to get up that damned road out of the way there. Somebody came down and picked me up and took us in a house, laid me on a couch. Lady's living room and I'm bleeding all over the damned thing. Old Kraut lady, she brought me a pillow and put it under my head. Never will forget that. I carried that pillow all the way back to the hospital. Somebody moved out next to me one time and stole the son of a bitch.

"So they got me out of there. Loaded me on a Jeep with a couple of Kraut prisoners, wounded prisoners. We all went back and hit the hospital, and that night I was operated on in a tent. They cleaned up my wounds, and I lay there in that EVAC hospital, 174th I think it was, for two or three days. They put me on a C47 or C46 and flew me into England to a general hospital. A week later they closed my wounds, and they had me non–ambulatory, a litter patient. I got so I

could hobble around pretty good after three or four weeks. They'd call my name and I'd hobble up and I'd lie down on my litter. A guys says, 'You can walk.' And I said, 'Yeah, but that says litter patient on there.' So I said, 'You can carry me, Fred.' So I'd lie down and they'd pick me up and carry me where I was going to go next.

"From there I went on a train up to Glasgow, Scotland. From Glasgow they put us on an airplane and flew us back to an Air Corps base in Long Island, and on to Leonard General Hospital in Topeka, Kansas, where I recuperated. Then I finally went to Colorado Springs Convalescent Hospital, and got discharged that Fall of '45.

"I got a letter from Bill Remoir, 'Wild Bill.' He was from Washington, and he was a BAR man. In the letter he said, 'I got the son of a bitch that got you, and his buddy too.' There was a Kraut sniper in a church steeple, and he got me from behind, with a burp gun. He laid a stream out of there and took me out of the middle. Luckily. I mean if he'd a moved his line of sight over 3 or 4 inches it would have gone right up my back. But it didn't, it was to my left side, and it went through the back of my leg and the back of my left wrist, and blew my watch off. That's what got me, according to Remoir. And apparently the Kraut that did it paid a price for it, because Remoir says, 'I got the son of a bitch that shot you, and his buddy too.' I always felt a little bit sad about that. It might have been all right to get the guy that got me, but he didn't necessarily have to get his buddy too. But anyway, that's a long time ago.

"I got hit on April 14th, about 9 o'clock in the morning. I think it was a Saturday morning. Evacuation out of there was good. I got to the EVAC hospital; there were American nurses there. They had on uniforms and they had on lipstick. They cut my clothes off of me and they said, 'Sergeant, you're going to be OK, we'll take care of you.' And I said, 'Yeah, I know that.' I had some morphine, I guess. I wasn't hurting. I don't recall any pain. I remember the shock of getting hit, but I don't remember pain connected with it. Cut my clothes off me, and later on wheeled me in and put me on like a marble–topped table in a tent with a lantern hanging up there. A young doctor was there, he was a little bit blood–spattered. I won't make it too gory, but I could see some blood spots on him, and he had captain's bars. He said, 'Hi, I'm goin' to fix you up in a minute. I'm going to give you an injection here. Start counting and see how far you can get.' I got to about four and was gone. I remember him kind of smiling. He cleaned out my wounds. My left arm was fractured. There was no nerve injury in there, which was another miracle. The doctor would come through the hospital, 'Wiggle your fingers.' And I could wiggle 'em. Missed the bone, the tibia bone, in the leg, and just went through the muscle. If he'd been over there another inch it would have resectioned that tibia down there, taken a couple a inches out of that, and I'd have been walking with a thick shoe on one side, and nerve injury on the other. Missed both of those. Million-dollar wound: clean, clear, and clean through.

The *Newsletter* did use some of the next part of Hugh's oral history concerning his time in the hospital in England after he was wounded, where he was being treated and waiting to be shipped home:

> "One day—I was still bedridden with a cast on my left arm and dressings on my leg—the T–5 came in and said, 'We're going to have an inspection tomorrow morning, and when the inspecting officer comes in and I yell ATTENTION! I want all you guys to stand at attention.' This one guy says, 'Well, I got a leg off, and it's going to be a little hard to do.' And I say, 'I don't get up either.' He said, 'Then you lie at attention.' There's a little humor in that one.
>
> "So he came in the next day, and this guy says 'TENSHUN!' The guys that could got up. I think the guy with the leg off kinda hung—wobbled—on the end of the bed. I lay real stiff in the bed, like I was at attention. This guy hadn't gone halfway around that damned ward when the giggles started breaking out. The god–darned place started laughing. He got furious and stomped out. Served him right!"

XXI. OCCUPATION

It has been my regret that I was never able to get anyone's first–hand impression of what it was like to be on the front line on V–E Day. I have described my own observations from the window of the hospital in Nancy, but I have nothing else. I suspect this may be because nothing dramatic happened. It wasn't as though the

Company was in the midst of a pitched battle and was suddenly able to lay down their arms and embrace the opposing Germans. That would have been remembered, and told over and over again. I assume that what happened instead is that the Company was either on the way somewhere or stopped in some village for a while, and that the end of the war had no immediate dramatic effect at all on anyone—until later, perhaps.

At the end of 65 days I was finally discharged from the hospital as cured and returned to good old "G" Company, by then in residence in a school building in Kirchheim, a small town halfway between Heilbronn and Stuttgart in Germany. Here *Combat Company*, a little paper–bound book that was the first eye–witness history of our "G" Company's role in World War II was published. In response to a 1997 request, when we began to reprint the text of the book, now–Dr. William S. Joyner, the book's Assistant Editor, offered the following to the *"G" Company Newsletter*:

> "V-E Day found Company G in the small Wurttemberg spa village of Bad Boll, the site of a German religious retreat center. We held our celebratory formation and parade there. Soon thereafter, we were moved farther east into the area between Stuttgart and Ulm and eventually settled into occupation duty at Kirchheim-unter-Teck, a town so–named because of Teck Castle located on a hill–top nearby.
>
> "It was while we were at Kirchheim and after we had had some time to reflect on our experiences in the E.T.O. that *Combat Company* came into being. It was, of course, a collaborative effort. One representative from each platoon was selected to write an account from the perspective of his platoon's experience. These accounts were then synthesized, co-ordinated, and melded into a single narrative by the editors.
>
> "Anthony Altieri of the 2nd Platoon became Editor-in-Chief, and I agreed to be Assistant Editor, representing Company Headquarters. Contributing Editors from the other platoons were Chester Racke, 1st Platoon; Ron Fett, 3rd Platoon; and Frank Branco, Weapons Platoon. David Moss from Company Headquarters was named as Business Manager. Howard Hall, also from Company Headquarters, whose artistic ability had become well–known among us, was asked to do the illustrations. He came up with those unforgettable chapter headings and the pictorial map which became the 'centerfold,' depicting our pilgrimage from Rambervillers to Stuttgart.
>
> "At length, the story with which you are familiar and the one that will be re-told to refresh your memories soon in the *Newsletter* came together. The art work was completed, the photos gathered, and those rather formal platoon formation photos were taken. The book was dedicated to Captain Hayes, who had led us with so much courage and inspiration. His picture and a dedicatory tribute were placed preceding the first chapter of the text.
>
> "The next stop was production. Fortunately, we were able to locate right there in 'downtown' Kirchheim a small printing establishment, the Printeroffice Weixler. This printer was willing to take on the job in spite of language problems. He had a set of Roman type-face that we Americans were accustomed to read and had an adequate supply of paper and other materials to complete the work.

"I recall my dealings with the printer to have been quite business–like as we sought to work out a satisfactory line of communication, what with my college freshman German and his limited English. Several proof–reading and correcting sessions then followed, all of which were not enough to prevent several 'typos' from appearing in the finished product.

"In any event, at length the press began to roll and out came our 'little blue book,' *Combat Company*, just in time to distribute before we packed up to move on to Pforzheim near the Black Forest."

One of the contributing editors, Frank Branco of the Weapons Platoon, offered us this brief reminiscence:

"As I recall it was done in a rather serious manner with Tony Altieri and Bill Joyner doing the actual writing and those of us who were contributing editors providing the information based on our experiences with our respective platoons. If memory serves me right each platoon had its own representative. I represented the weapons platoon.

"I cannot speak for the other contributing editors but I assume that I was chosen to be a part of the writing, not because of my literary talents, but because I served with the platoon from the day we left N.Y. until V.E. Day without a break. I was one of the few lucky ones who was neither wounded or fell sick to hepatitis or some other illness.

"As I look back I feel we did a creditable job on the book and I am quite proud that I was able to make a small contribution."

Combat Company thus became the first—and until now the only—eye–witness history of "G" Company, 399th Infantry Regiment, in World War II. It is a most valuable document, and it must also be quite nearly unique. I have never heard of any other formal battle history, written almost on the spot by the participants, of an infantry company. However, to quote from the last page of *Combat Company*:

"In finale [*sic*], let it be said that this is not the complete story of Company G. This is the story of their combat experiences in the ETO. Interesting chapters have preceded this story, and undoubtedly others lie ahead to be written in the future."

True enough, except that there wasn't much future for the Company, nor for the whole 100th Division for that matter, after the Japanese capitulation later in the Summer that was written. Some of the other stories that can be told are unique; others give a different perspective to stories already related. We have been fortunate enough to have been able to collect, and give you, some more of these stories.

The 100th Division was to remain intact for a few more months as part of the early Army of Occupation, and shortly after I returned, the 399th Regiment removed to the Caserne Buchenberg (renamed Fort Breckenridge), a former *Wehrmacht* post near the city of Pforzheim. We were in real army barracks again, our bunks wooden boxlike double-deckers with straw in large burlap sacks for mattresses—at least until we found

them infested with fleas and had to burn them. Subsequently we slept on the hard boards with perhaps a folded blanket for a mattress, a memory that remains vivid.

Pforzheim itself is worth some comment here. It was a city of perhaps 50,000 or so, in a river valley surrounded by forested hills. It had been before the war a jewelry manufacturing center, and its factories had been converted to the production of precision parts for bombsights. At air raid alerts it had been become the custom of the populace to leave the city and seek shelter in the nearby hills, something they were quite used to because of the strategic importance of the products of their factories.

On the night of February 23, 1945 the air raid alarm had gone off and people had evacuated the city. American high altitude precision bombers had come and gone, and near dawn the all–clear sounded. Everyone returned to their homes and beds, to prepare for a new day with as much sleep as they could salvage. At just about dawn, as I recall what we were told, a massive attack force of British bombers appeared over the hilltops at very low altitude. Again and again they saturated the city with bombs, until the devastation was nearly complete. The records showed that 28,000 died, but I don't know if anyone ever knew how accurate that number was; I do know that a great many of them were still there under the rubble in June, when we arrived. The whole center of the city was a pile of destroyed buildings, and the odor of death in the warm summer sunshine is a memory that will always be with me. In spite of all that, the people left on the fringes of the town seemed friendly enough. We were no longer looting, and we were getting our laundry done in exchange for bringing the soap and leaving it. And I began to learn some of the pidgin German I was to pick up over time.

William Matthews helped out the *Newsletter* again with a vivid reminiscence:

PFORZHEIM – CITY OF THE DEAD

"One day as I was on my way to Dillstein. I stopped halfway down the side of the valley to take a good, thoughtful, look at Pforzheim. There spread before me in the beautiful wooded valley was the shattered remains of one of Europe's most famous and charming cities. Was it really possible, I thought, that this ruin, this graveyard of more than 28,000 men, women, and children, had been produced in only 27 short minutes? But there it was.

"Rising above the jumble of fire–gutted buildings stood the old church—a deep reddish–black stone building with its tower and cross still high over the city. The windows were gaping holes and the blackened arched rafters were like the ribs of an old sailing vessel, lying inverted and decaying on the beach.

"The River Enz passed along by the church and on down the valley. In its shallow, clear water I knew there were hundreds of long, hexagonal incendiary bombs. Spanning this river in the center of town was the plain wooden bridge the engineers had constructed to replace the destroyed one.

"On the far side of the valley floor were the rail yards. Long rows of four–wheeled freight cars stood on the sidings and on the main lines. Nothing remained of some of the cars but piles of fire–blacked metal frames. An overhead roadway bridge crossed over part of the rail yards, with some of its black girders twisted and bent at crazy angles.

"Below and in front of me was a large four–story hospital. Still visible on the few remaining tiles of the roof was a large painted red cross against a white background.

"The streets were lined with stone ruins, the rubble having been cleared to the curbs and piled high along every sidewalk. Here and there on top of the rubble piles was a small cross and sometimes a few flowers. Frequently the whole face or side of a building had been sheared away as cleanly as if a gigantic knife had been used.

"As I started on my way again to Dillstein, I knew I would long remember Pforzheim, city of the dead."

We were not far from Stuttgart, where we were able to spend many off-duty hours. Bomb damage in some sections of the city was relatively light—the opera house was undamaged, for example—so there were some things left to do there, as there were not in Pforzheim. Usually we hitch–hiked on military vehicles on the *autobahn* or caught rides with our own people. I recall seeing there a USO show with Jack Benny, Ingrid Bergman, and Larry Adler the harmonica virtuoso. There had been one time during the fighting when we heard there was a USO show near our position, but no one I knew got near it. We were impressed by Miss Bergman, who sat for hours at a card table in the opera house lobby and chatted with anyone who wanted to wait in line for her—and there were many.

At some point during this time I had a bizarre encounter with a strange and intriguing girl who took up a lot of my attention for a while. She spoke very passable English, and, I think, excellent German, though she assured me she was Yugoslavian. She was probably in her early 20s, short, rather thickset, but bright, vivacious, and attractive. Her story was that she had spent a good part of the war as the servant and virtual prisoner of a German army unit in Yugoslavia. She had been badly treated, forced to do menial work, regularly raped, and severely beaten. She claimed to have whipping scars on her back, but she would never let me see them. I spent many off hours with her, and of course I had the usual expectations of a 20-year old male regarding sexual exploits. However, though I'm sure there was some kissing and necking, she never let me touch her in any serious way, blaming her sensitivity on her brutalization at the hands of the Germans. I even remember spending the night once, in a farmhouse near Stuttgart where she was living, in not only a separate bed but a separate room.

Yet I was intrigued, She fascinated me for a while, and, though her stories may not have been true, I still rather believe they were. She claimed her mother had been born in the U.S.A., in Bristol. Tennessee, so that she was half American. She wanted to get to the U.S. somehow, and thought she had some right to because of her mother. For reasons unclear to me now—since I can't imagine what good we thought it would do—I wrote to the city clerk of Bristol asking if there was any record of her mother's birth. No reply ever came.

Next I suggested that we get married so she could go to the States as my war bride, which would, I guess, have made her a citizen eventually if not automatically. Then we could get divorced if we didn't want to stay together, and she would have

gained her end. The only surviving memory I have of that hare–brained scheme is that it didn't happen. Whether I scared myself or just gradually lost interest, I don't recollect, but I stopped going to see her eventually, and I never knew what became of her.

So the summer passed. We kept busy with desultory training, making a presence for the Germans, and—most of us—just marking time, wondering what was to come next. At one point I had a minor disciplinary encounter with MPs in Stuttgart (it was a uniform violation that I got a little verbal about). Our wonderful, patient Captain, rather than court martial me as had been suggested, elected to send me away on detached service, to the mail room at Division headquarters in Göppingen, about 50 miles east of Pforzheim. Here I spent lonely hours sorting undeliverable mail for return to the States, and rather solitary off–hours as well. I was there when the news of the Japanese surrender came early in August, which meant mostly to me that now I would surely be going home, and out of the Army—soon I hoped.

After my return to the Company, in September I had another stroke of luck. Furloughs were rare, and to the most desirable places—Switzerland and the French Riviera—almost non-existent. However, my name came up somehow and I ended up with a week vacation on the Promenade in Nice. I remember a long train ride to the Riviera, with an overnight stay in a hotel in Lyons, and then a solitary week in the luxury Hotel Ruhl right on the beach front in the center of Nice. It was solitary partly by choice, partly by circumstance. I was with no one I knew, and I had a single room. Most of the time it was impossible to be alone in the Army, and I didn't mind a little more of it. Every morning I went to a bathhouse on the pebbled beach in front of the hotel, rented a towel and a bathing suit, and spent the time until lunch swimming, sunbathing, and ogling bare–breasted women. Afternoons and evenings I explored the city, mostly bistros, I guess, but some legitimate sightseeing too. One day I took a bus tour along the coast as far as the Italian border, and fell in love with that part of the *Cote d'Azure*, where the beginnings of the Alps rise right out of the sea in startling scenic loveliness. It was a wonderful week for me, over too soon.

XXII. SOME REFLECTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

A brief digression seems in order here. Considering what we now know—and think, and fear—about the atomic age, it is somewhat amazing to me to realize that I can't recall attaching any particular significance to the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki—beyond the far from insignificant relationship the bombings seemed to have with the end of the war, that is. I was profoundly grateful for that, so much so that I suppose I was blinded to anything else at the time.

What I do recall from that time is my fear and distress at the talk that seemed to start up almost immediately, perhaps more at home than in Europe, that it would be good for us to continue moving while we had manpower and momentum, and push back the Russians. It was beyond my comprehension then—and it is still—why anyone would want to start up all that horror and destruction again once it was stopped. I remember deep–seated gut fear and apprehension that it might actually happen. I can't believe that the people talking that way then had any conception of just how massive the Russian war machine was, and how much more they'd had to do with destroying the German resistance than we had. Of course I was not taking the bomb into consideration, because I had no clear conception of what it was. However, I wonder how many other people were either, back in those confused days. All I remember thinking then was that the war was over, that I was extremely gratified to have survived in one piece, and that I wanted it to stay over.

Bud Stimes directed our attention to a book that gave us some interesting information that we quoted in a *Newsletter* article:

CASUALTIES

We have at hand some information on World War II casualties in infantry and armored divisions excerpted by Bud Stimes from a book entitled *Closing With the Enemy – How G.I.'s Fought the War in Europe, 1944–1945,* by Michael D. Doubler. We quote from the book:

"… By May of 1945 American forces in the ETO included forty-six infantry and seven armored divisions. Between D–Day and V–E Day stretched

337 days, during which many divisions endured near continuous commitment to battle. Half the infantry divisions spent over 150 days in combat, and 40 percent spent 200 days or more. Two divisions saw more than 300 days of action. The 2nd Division marched across Omaha Beach on 8 June and went on to spend an incredible 303 days in battle. The 90th Division saw its first fight in Normandy and in a stormy combat career managed to accumulate 308 days of combat, the highest of any division in the ETO. The armored divisions also had to endure long periods under fire. Of the fifteen armored divisions in the ETO, four saw more than 200 days of battle."

A chart accompanying the text contains some interesting comparisons. The 100th Division, for instance, with 163 days in combat suffered 4,770 battle casualties and 7,425 non–battle. The Battle casualties are in the average range for the number of combat days. However, the non–battle figure is very high, and it raises our total casualty turnover to 86.7%, which is also high. The interesting part of this is that, while our non–battle rate was over 60% of our total, only 12 other divisions had non–battle casualty totals higher than their battle casualties. Six of these divisions: 3rd, 36th, 44th, 45th, 70th, and 103rd were in the Seventh Army. In only one of these, the 45th, was the non–battle rate substantially higher than that for battle; in that case, also about 60% of the total. What conclusion can be drawn from this? Spending the winter in the Vosges Mountains was very unhealthy, even when we were not being shot at! Fellow yellow jaundice (Type A hepatitis it's called these days) victims take heart; we were not alone! My favorite division to have been in was the 13th: no combat, no casualties of any kind. My least favorite is a tie between the 4th: 229 days of combat, 35,545 casualties, 252.3%; and the ill–fated 106th: 63 days of combat, 10,671 casualties, 75.7%. The 4th had 118 casualties per day of combat, the 106th a staggering 169! (We may recall that the 106th, completely green, took the main initial thrust of the Battle of the Bulge for their baptism of fire.) By contrast, the 100th's daily average was 53.

As I look back over what I have written, and think about some other things I have read, it seems to me that something more ought to be said here about training. In his wonderfully readable book *Citizen Soldiers*, Stephen E. Ambrose has a chapter titled "Replacements and Reinforcements" that is in essence an indictment of the training duration and methods for soldiers sent to the ETO in 1944 and 1945. He states unequivocally that in this aspect of fighting the war the US Army failed completely. He offers many examples to support his contention, and I suppose many of them are true, even perhaps most of them. However, I cannot help feeling that the experience of the 100th Division—and I can only assume of many men trained in the Division before we went overseas *en masse*—must at least be a partial exception to his contention, if not an outright refutation. How could anyone read Bud Stimes' letters from Fort Bragg and think we were not well and thoroughly trained? Just reading about some of that today brings on thoughts of exhaustion.

We did not appear on the front lines as untrained, unmotivated, and hopelessly confused victims, which is the picture Ambrose presents. On the contrary, we were a

cohesive, and in the final analysis, really superbly trained military unit. And it showed. Though we were not suddenly exposed to horrific, disastrous situations, as were the Divisions who landed in Normandy at D–Day whose initial combat experience it was, or, later, the 106th Division, one of whose early assignments was to attempt to repulse the initial German attack in the Battle of the Bulge, we were given a wartime combat assignment, and one which we carried out well. I cannot speak personally to the experiences of our replacements, but I do remember that we were always glad to have them—they were always desperately needed—that they were useful (two of Company G's were awarded the DSC, as noted above) even if not always highly skilled in the beginning, and that many of them became, and remain, firm friends.

As a matter of fact, this treatise has, I think, in some respects turned out to be a tribute to the training that we of the 100th Division at least—and I cannot believe our experience was unique—received before we were thrust into the maelstrom of war. I never intended it that way when I started to write, because the memory of being humiliated and debased by much of the training is still quite vivid, and I had a strong resentment of all that, vestiges of which I still cannot help feeling. But that was an unavoidable—for me, at least—part of being young. Mature reflection tells another story. Almost every humiliation, and certainly all physical exertions, no matter how onerous, turned out in the event to be useful, and in combat "useful" could mean survival.

Indeed, Keith E. Bonn, in *his* excellent book *When the Odds Were Even,* subtitled "The Vosges Mountains Campaign, October 1944–January 1945," has this to say about the training of units in the Seventh Army:

> "The training afforded the units that fought in the Vosges Mountains varied widely in quantity and quality, and had a major impact on the outcome of the campaign. In the latter stages of World War II, both sides were forced to commit as replacements soldiers whose initial training and military experience suited them primarily for other roles. The American system was far superior in retraining such personnel and welding them into effective fighting forces, however."

As a matter of fact, Ambrose, in making his generalizations, seems to dismiss the Seventh Army almost completely. Though his book purports to be the story of the American effort in Western Europe in the last months of the war, it is really mostly about the First and Third Armies. The Seventh Army and its role are largely ignored. It is certainly true that the exploits of the First and Third Armies were more dramatic (often more *dramatized*)—and sometimes bloodier—than those of the Seventh, but we were there, it was wartime combat, and what we did and how we did it was significant. Bonn's viewpoint—and conclusion, regarding training at least—is different, and I believe more accurate.

One more reflection seems pertinent here. In his highly detailed and eminently readable book, *One Day In A Very Long War*, the British military historian John Ellis points out that on the "Day" he writes about, October 25, 1944, American military presence in the ETO totaled 2,204,000 men. (We were sitting in a mud hole near Marseilles on that date.) By the end of that October battle casualties had added up to 190,000, of whom 56,260 had been killed. However, the huge majority of the casualties had been inflicted on the 250 infantry battalions present at the time, in which there were

only 214,000 men. Not only do we see, then, that there were in Europe no less than nine support troops for each of us front-line infantrymen, but Ellis goes on to point out that even taking into account the influx of replacements, infantry casualties were at the rate of 56 percent, including 17 percent killed in action. I remember feeling, when I was an infantryman, that there was no possibility for me to be anything else. There was a sort of fatalism about it, I suppose. Now I wonder what force lined up ten men, in effect, and appointed only one of them to serve in the infantry—forever. Even with wounded men, as we have seen, unless they were permanently incapacitated the pressure was on to get them right back where they came from as soon as possible. Why couldn't we have at least taken turns—with so many to take turns with?

It might have worked too. Here's one last Company G story that somehow seems related to this thesis. Once, in the early weeks of 1945, a replacement was assigned to us who identified himself as Lonnie Jackson, a "red clay hillbilly from Arkansas." Shortly after he joined our platoon he informed us that, until very recently, he had been assigned to the Quartermaster Corps in England. He had been caught and convicted of dealing in the black market with Government supplies. He informed us with no little glee that for punishment he had been offered a choice of a prison term or transfer to the infantry. He had, of course, chosen the latter. "I know why I'm here," he told a group of us one day, "I'm a convicted criminal being punished. Why are *you* here?" This was a question we had difficulty answering, and took scant pleasure pondering, but he was so good-natured about it that no one took offense. And it turned out that he was in the right place, apparently. He really seemed almost to enjoy the life, and some few weeks later, in our last real combat action, near Talheim, he managed to earn the Distinguished Service Cross.

Well, so ends the saga of G Company, a tale twice told that probably will not be told again. It's a tiny part of a huge panorama, the history of World War II, but I believe, a not insignificant part. No story from a time of such overwhelming events is without meaning, nor, I think, not worth telling. I can only hope that this one has been told well enough here to have made it worth following from its start to its finish. My own "Good War" chronicle still had some months to go to reach its end.

XXIII. BERLIN AND THE MPS

The 100th Division's days were numbered. It eventually went home in December, and was officially deactivated in January 1946, but without many of us who didn't have enough service points for discharge. On October 12, 1945 I found myself, along with a few other 100th Division veterans, on the way to Hofgeismar, near Kassel, a day's journey north on the *autobahn*. We had been transferred to the 78th Infantry Division, whose immediate destiny lay in Berlin, where it was to relieve the 82nd Airborne division—which had in its turn relieved the 2nd Armored Division, the first American unit in Berlin.

The 78th Division's Military Police Platoon was being beefed up into a Company for the Berlin assignment, and I found myself one of the recruits for this duty. The qualifications seemed to be: combat infantry experience, over six feet tall, and few enough service points to ensure some months of availability. At least those were the qualifications all the newcomers shared. I qualified on all counts, and so was off on about six months of the most bizarre and fascinating life I'd had in the Army—and, to be truthful, before or since.

Our first duty as new MPs was some rather cursory orientation and training at 78th Division headquarters. Shortly, however, we were sent as advance party, a month ahead of the rest of the Division, to be attached to the 82nd Airborne Division for further training and to learn our way around the city. We were issued .45 caliber automatic pistols, ever infamous for their short range and inaccuracy at any range. We also got night sticks, arm bands, and gaudily marked helmet liners along with our training.

Berlin in the Autumn of 1945 was kind of a wild place, and there were lots of tensions in the air. The U.S., British, and French occupation zones of the city were parts of an island in a sea of Russians, dramatically isolated from the rest of their respective military occupation forces. Although we had permanent passes, in four languages, to go anywhere in the city officially, in point of fact we didn't. Visits to the French and British Sectors were rare, and to the Russian non-existent. In fact, in those early days stories of G.I.s who had ventured into the Russian Sector, only to disappear and never be heard from again, were persistent. There were always feelings in that atmosphere of fascination, apprehension, stress. You felt you were somewhere centrally significant, and that you could never knew what would happen next.

There seemed to be a general, if unspoken, consensus that Berlin had been the life center of the evil that had brought us all so far from home and caused us and the world so much misery. After all, one could easily go and look at the ruins over the

bunker where Hitler himself probably lay dead. So there was the feeling among the occupying troops—particularly the Russians and Americans—that anything went that one could get away with. *Amis*, as American occupation troops were called by Berliners, were also know as “Russians with pressed pants”—just as wild, but neater looking. There was a tale in circulation that some of the 2nd Armored Division troops had sold a Sherman tank to some Russian adventurers in the early occupation days not so long past.

Another thing about Berlin was that, even though bombing damage was widespread, it is a large, cosmopolitan city where a lot of things could go on without attracting immediate, widespread public notice. And even though there were terrible shortages of things like soap, food, tobacco, fuel, and even drinking water, there were a lot of things available that most of us hadn’t seen for a long time—if ever, for some. Things like nightclubs, a large population imbalance in favor of young, mostly attractive, women, down to little things like barbers and tailors—and relatively affluent people who were quite ready to sell fine cameras and jewelry for what seemed to us like nearly nothing.

Cigarettes were the major medium of exchange. The city was flooded with occupation currency artificially pegged at ten marks to the dollar. Through an apparent oversight—which was rectified soon after we got there—this inflated paper could be sent home at that par value. To show what this meant, we were allowed to buy a carton of cigarettes a week at the PX for 50¢ a carton. Then these could be sold on the black market for ten marks—one dollar—each *cigarette*, thus turning 50¢ into $200 in the twinkling of an eye. You could buy a Leica or Contax camera, or a diamond ring, for three or four cartons of cigarettes. You could also turn your 50¢ investment into $200 cash, real money, and send it home—until the rules were changed and we were no longer allowed to send home any more money than the net amount of our pay each month. The going rate was one mark per cigarette in the rest of American–occupied Germany, but Berlin was special, and wide open in many other ways too, I was to see much of that changed in the next five months.

The 82nd Division MPs were quite professional, real veterans at their job, and they needed to be. The airborne troops had a reputation to maintain of being rough and tough—like the Marines—and they were hard to handle off duty. It was not true that the great majority of them were bona–fide combat veterans. Paratroopers’ casualty lists were appallingly long, and the few true veterans left were happy to be left alone in peace—which was true of most combat survivors—but the replacements felt constrained at any opportunity to demonstrate how macho they could be. Thus the month of orientation we spent on patrols with the 82nd was eventful.

As I've indicated, it was a time of nervousness. One Saturday afternoon we got word that a riot was in progress at the 1936 Olympic Stadium, in the British Sector. There was a football game going on between the 82nd and another Division—most of the best professional and college athletes were in the Services in those days, so these were good games, well attended—and trouble had broken out in the stands with some Russian spectators. We piled into our trucks and rushed off, heavily armed and outfitted, to find—nothing. There was a large crowd, including many Russian soldiers, but for the most part everyone seemed good-natured, if a little boisterous. Someone

had apparently witnessed a minor argument and, assuming the worst, had pushed the panic button. We stayed until the game was over anyway, and I got to meet my first Russians. They didn't seem very friendly, but they were certainly not antagonistic either.

XIV. MP ROUTINE

Eventually the rest of the 78th Division moved in, the 82nd moved out, and we settled in to a routine that was to last for most of us until our service–point level was enough to get us home. The MP Company lived in a small garden apartment complex of row houses on a quiet, tree–lined street in a pleasant, mostly undamaged section of the city. Across the street was a parking lot that had become our motor pool. I was designated a Jeep driver and was assigned my own Jeep, for which I became responsible. We patrolled in these, in two–man teams, every other day from about 4:00 p.m. to 12:45 a.m. Thus we had 40 idle hours for every eight that we worked, or so it seemed much of the time. We had to service and maintain our vehicles, keep our living quarters clean, and perform other small military chores, but our off–patrol duties were not onerous. On patrol, we rode the streets looking for traffic violations, made the rounds of drinking spots to put in our appearance, and did what sometimes seemed to be our most important duty, enforcing the midnight curfew imposed on all 78th Division troops. This we did mostly by being a presence, though often we'd give an errant potential violator a ride to his billet. We surely were not strained by over–work, and we began to make varied use of our off hours. Because of our Jeeps (which we could use as we wanted, not just on duty) and the nature of our work, we had total mobility and got to know our part of the city very well. This gave us full access to the three most popular

activities: womanizing, drinking, and the black market—and whatever else might take our fancy.

Some of us drank very heavily, so heavily in fact that it is still somewhat of a wonder to me that I didn't do any permanent damage to myself—which apparently is so. We came upon a Berliner who claimed to have two barrels of good cognac in his possession, which some of us bought from him at the rate of two bottles each every other day, delivered like milk. Fortunately for us it was good cognac and not denatured alcohol or something worse, for there was never any left over when the next delivery came.

Our own enlisted men's club was in a little bar in a shopping area around the corner from where we lived. There we spent many of our off evenings drinking peppermint schnapps, which I never worked up much real enthusiasm for. Occasionally we would be entertained in the club by a small orchestra that had purportedly accompanied Max Schmelling on vaudeville tours after his retirement from the boxing ring. There was a movie theater in the neighborhood too, where we often saw American films with German sub–titles.

Women we found to be plentiful and very accommodating. There weren't very many young German men left around in any case, but, to offer besides ourselves, we had food— especially chocolate—soap, cigarettes, and other luxuries in ample supply which were totally unavailable elsewhere in Berlin. We found the girls oddly loyal and compliant. Picked by a soldier as a companion, and there never seemed to be any compunction about which individual selected her, the girl would make herself completely and exclusively available to him until he either was transferred out or told her he was no longer interested in her, whereupon she would take up with the next man who asked her to. I never heard of any permanent liaisons, but there were far too many of these girls around for them all to have been prostitutes. However, venereal disease was almost epidemic, and a real problem, although I escaped contamination that way myself. In the small, rather private quarters that we inhabited those who wished to were able to entertain women overnight in their own beds for most of the duration of my stay in Berlin. I recall being amused by a notice on the bulletin board when we first moved in with the 82nd Division, to the effect that all women had to be out of the buildings by 0800 hours. The notice was not removed for some time after we moved in, if ever.

The black market was another aspect of our excessive leisure time. Most of us were heavy smokers and constrained by our addictions to consume all of our weekly ration of cigarettes. However, sometimes a few could be saved out, it might be possible to purchase rations from non–smokers who didn't have our black market contacts, or cigarettes could be mailed from home. It is hard for me to realize now, when cigarettes and smoking mean nothing more to me than an occasional minor annoyance, that they were then not only a medium of exchange, but also the most important and precious medium there was. Black market dealing was, of course, illegal. However, at our level of military police work we were never called upon to attempt any sort of control. In fact, just the opposite; since our work afforded us so much mobility we were able to engage in sub–legal trade with more ease and success than most of our compatriots. Most of us were not committed criminals, however, and our operations were limited to turning the odd two or three cartons of cigarettes into a Leica or perhaps some family jewelry of questionable value.

XXV. TWO ADVENTURES

In the course of our duties we did sometimes get involved in activities outside the scope of the mildly nefarious. Two adventures remain in my memory as episodes of more than passing interest. From this vantage point they can be seen to have turned out more comical than anything else, but both had the potential of being much more serious. Both incidents involved Russians, and both occurred because the Russians had an official right-of-way through our Sector on the *Hauptstrasse*, the main thoroughfare which linked the center of the city and the Russian Sector boundary at the *Brandenburger Tor* with the western extremity of our jurisdiction in Potsdam. The rule as I recollect it was that, in general, they were to proceed on their route without deviating or stopping while in our Sector. I'll describe the first incident by means of another of my 1950s sketches, since the flavor would be hard to recapture as well any other way:

Russian Speeders

I was driving the Sergeant on a routine MP patrol up and down Berlin's Hauptstrasse. It was Dec. '45 and moderately cold. It had been a quiet, boring night, but we were tired notwithstanding and ready for quitting time at 12:45, a half hour or so away. We'd just picked up two G.I.s and were giving them a lift home so that they wouldn't miss curfew, which was our occasional custom, when a closed–in Jeep bearing Russian markings passed us doing about 50 m.p.h., in a 20 m.p.h. zone. Hauptstrasse is a 4–lane road split down the middle by two trolley tracks with a low wire fence between them. I took off up the middle of the trolley lane to avoid the heavy traffic that was on the road at that time of night. The fence was broken down where I started, but became whole again further up the street. I broke off a dozen or so of the wire pickets before I realized I'd have to get off. I'd gained my advantage, however, and we were right on the tail of the Russian vehicle. In a couple of blocks we passed it and cut them off. We were just getting out of our Jeep and preparing to go through the bilingual farce we engaged in usually with Russian speeders (they invariably said they thought we'd stopped them to be friendly, or told us they were special envoys of Marshall Zhukov and so shouldn't be stopped at all), when they surprised us by backing up and taking off again. They had a good start this time and made a couple of turns to try and shake us off. However, my Jeep was faster, so I caught them again in a couple of miles. We were doing about 60 by then, and apparently there was no passing them again. Even if there had been, what would be the use, we reasoned. So the Sergeant pulled out his .45 and let go with a couple of shots, both of which hit in the road a few yards behind the speeding Russian vehicle. At this they simply increased their speed. I increased mine accordingly and pulled up a little closer. The third shot hit the rear corner of the lead Jeep, and though it bounced off harmlessly, it brought them to a very sudden stop. We stopped a few yards behind them and got out, both with our pistols ready, and rather

annoyed. Seven very drunk Russian men and one equally drunk girl got out of that little Jeep, and came running toward us wildly gesticulating and shouting, “Tovarish, comrade, Moscow, Truman, Stalin,” they yelled, and indicated in pantomime that it was a very bad thing to shoot at allies, and for us to unload our pistols and put them away. We tried to explain that we were police and that they were committing all sorts of crimes, but, apparently, to no avail. As we were miles away from the nearest police station and help, we decided to let the moral victory of having stopped them satisfy us, and after watching them drive off, very, very slowly this time, we took our G.I. hitch-hikers back, both of them looking rather pale, and went home to bed.

The second adventure that sticks in my memory also involves Russians on their right-of-way. It was Christmas Eve, a hard time to be on shift anyway, and I was particularly anxious to get off promptly at its end. I had just met up with a high school classmate, the only person I ever saw in the Army who I’d known before—and he was, and is, a particularly close friend— and we had arranged to lift a few glasses of cheer in honor of Christmas and the long arm of coincidence that had brought us together in this unlikely place.

I was driving, as usual, and I don’t recall who my partner was this night. On one of our stops by our office we were directed to check out a call from the sergeant who was manager of a nearby 78th Division officer’s club, on the *Hauptstrasse*. He was known as a rabid Commie hater, and this night he had decided to be very suspicious of, and hostile to, two Russians in civilian clothes, who, for some reason best known to themselves, had stopped in for a drink. His worst suspicions were justified, the manager was convinced, when, upon examining the Russians’ car in the parking lot, he discovered that the back seat was full of tires. Nothing would satisfy him short of our arresting them on a charge of black marketeering. I pleaded with him to change his mind, since I noted that he was far from sober, but he was adamant. So we had to make the arrests, impounding the car in our motor pool, and escorting the driver and his well–dressed and fluent English–speaking passenger downtown to the Military Government police station from which American, English, French, and Russian MPs patrolled together. We had no authority to prefer charges against the Russians, but had to turn them over to their own police.

We explained the so-called charges, through the Military Government interpreter, to two very hard and forbidding looking Russian MPs who were festooned with their standard sub-machine guns, whereupon they demanded identification from our prisoners. Immediately upon seeing the ID of our affable soft–spoken suspect and his driver, the policemen suddenly looked more forbidding than ever and trained their guns on us! Hasty consultation with the interpreter revealed that our prisoner was a major in the KGB and that, as such, his person was sacrosanct, at least as far as our fellow minions of the law were concerned. We were at a potentially very serious seeming impasse.

It was notable that throughout the whole episode never once did the major speak to us on any subject that was substantive: who he was, the charges, or his opinion of them. At this point, though, he did have a consultation with the Russian MPs, thus solving the problem and ending the incident peaceably. A quick deal was struck. *We* would be allowed to go without further involvement in return for seeing that no charges

were pressed, escorting our erstwhile prisoners back to their car at the motor pool, and seeing them safely on their way again. And that's what happened.

I presume the accusations of the drunken, paranoid club manager were simply ignored; probably the chance of his even remembering many of the evening's events was remote. I do know that we rapidly returned our charges to their car. I had been quite vocal all evening about my distaste for, and lack of belief in, what we were being called upon to do. I was convinced that we were just helping to indulge the fantasies of a nasty, drunken bigot, and I was not hesitant to express my opinion. Perhaps this had helped to ease potential tension; I don't know. Besides, they probably were dealing in tires on the black market; nearly everyone was dealing in something.

On the way back to the motor pool I was still muttering and sputtering to myself when the major put a soft hand on my arm. Wasn't this a night that signified peace and joy to us, he asked, and should I let myself get so upset over a triviality at such a time? I had almost forgotten, it was still Christmas Eve—or rather it wasn't any more, since it was long after midnight. A little abashed, I relaxed a bit and we finally parted, friends for the moment at least. The Russians drove off, I never heard any more about the incident, and I finally got to my high school friend's billet at about three o'clock Christmas morning, to tell him a tale I'm not sure he's ever believed.

XXVI. THE END

So ends my personal saga of World War II, much less eventful than some and yet more so than many. I haven't told it all, of course. For one thing, I don't really remember it all; for another, a lot of things I do remember are dull and repetitive, which is integrally characteristic of Army life as I knew it. However, I have tried to preserve some of my more vivid memories by writing them down, and having been enabled to combine them with the "G" Company Newsletter accounts has proven to be singularly advantageous as well.

I finished out my time in Berlin relatively uneventfully and was eventually shipped home—from Bremerhaven on the *SS Antioch Victory*—when people with 45 service points were finally eligible to go. It was on April 26, 1946 that I at last became a civilian again, ready to pick up the threads of "real life" and see if I could make something of it. Both the times and I were profoundly changed by that war, but only gradually did realization of the number and extent of the changes come.

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.

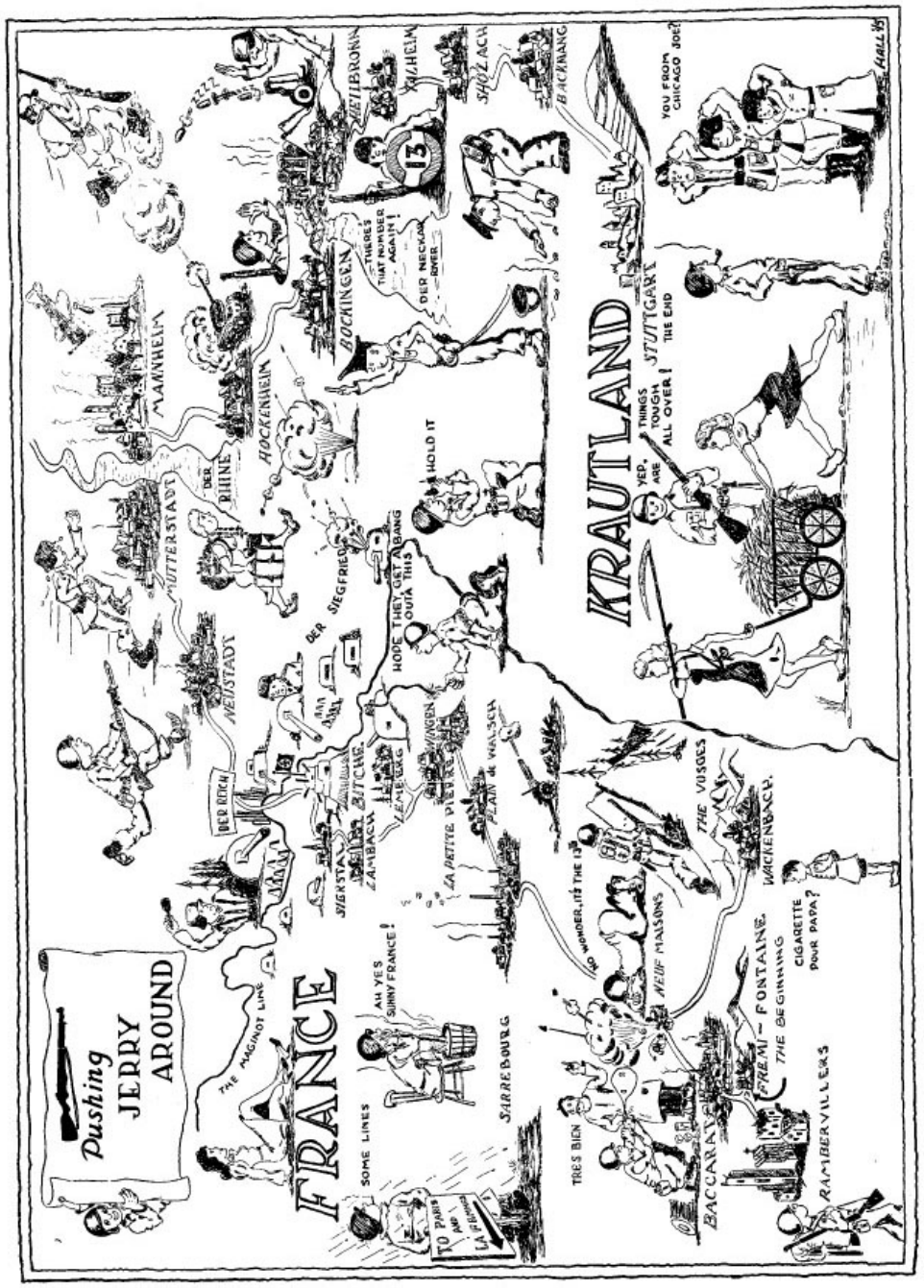
Those were some of the most poignant few hours I've ever experienced, but there is more. I felt then, and still do, the closest imaginable affinity to the men we saw at that reunion. Somehow the closeness, the intensity, of experiences we shared 40–plus years ago had survived intact, and this with literally 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

here they are anyway, more or less in order of their appearance: Dr. William S. Joyner, Frank Branco, the late Alfred C. “Bud” Stimes, the late John Heron, Richard La Fleur, the late William “Buckeye” Smith, the late Jack Porter, William Matthews, V----n C----r, Jack Pointer, Bernard Jerding, Daniel Capozzi, and Hugh Gillin. Though I have edited most of the contributions—some more, some less—in no case have I added anything to the material we were given; there is some elimination of repetitions and some reordering of items. In all cases the intent was not to change anything, but rather to increase readability.



This fanciful cartoon map, drawn with great imagination and humor by Howard Hall, was the “centerfold” in the original *Combat Company*. It depicts the course of ”G” Company during their combat days.

APPENDIX

Much has been said here about the original *Combat Company*, and it seems that this account would be deficient were it not included. Reading it now, one is struck by how unemotional, perhaps even clinical, the little book sounds when compared to the first hand accounts and memories that make up the rest of the retelling of the story we have presented. It is invaluable for its delineation of events and chronology, but certainly not for feelings. Reading about what it was like to be there and reading this account are so different from one another—though they refer to the same chain of events—that one can only wonder how people who were there could write so dispassionately about something that was so emotionally involving. It was quite an accomplishment.

For some reason that I don't recall, I did not re-read *Combat Company* when I first wrote *My Good War*. Therefore, one of the striking things that can be noted is that though the same story is being told by both the editors and me, some of the details are different. Some of the differences have to do with chronology. In more than one instance my memory of an event was clear, but my recollection of just when and where it took place was not. And there is a great deal of action in *Combat Company* that I don't seem to have been aware of at all. There are three reasons for this: first, I may have known about it but just decided to leave it out of my account, which was never intended to be a detailed day-by-day record; second, I may have just forgotten it; third, and most likely in many cases, even though the account was of my own platoon, I really was not aware of it. It is the nature of infantry combat that the individual soldier almost never has any idea of what's going on beyond his own range of vision. This may be hard to swallow for one who has not been there, but I can assure you that it is true. The editors of the book had several advantages. The first of these was that they were all eye witnesses, one each from each platoon, who had seen it all, and they were writing of events that had occurred only short months—at the end only weeks—before they wrote. If one hadn't seen or heard of an event, one or more of the others probably had. Also, they no doubt had access to the company morning reports. These were daily written accounts of the previous day's activities that the company commander was required to submit to headquarters, and would have been invaluable to on-the-spot (so to speak) historians, as they were often amazingly detailed.

The original *Combat Company* was "Printed by printeroffice Weixler Kirchheim unter Teck, Germany," to quote from the title page. There also is the message: "This publication has been passed by the censor for mailing home." It is a small paperback book, 5"x6-1/2"; the cover is infantry blue. There are only 58 pages, 12 of them are blank, for one reason or another. Platoon group pictures and rosters take up another 10 pages. Each chapter is headed by a wonderful cartoon drawn by Pfc. Howard A. Hall, who also contributed a cartoon at the end and a fold-out map showing in a highly stylized way the areas we fought through. Although cartoons are so well done that they seem professional, Hall—though he had a career as a high school art teacher—maintains that he never drew a cartoon before the book and has never drawn one since.

We reprinted the book as a continuing project in several issues of the *"G" Company Newsletter*, and here it is again, for perhaps the last time.

COMBAT COMPANY

DEDICATION

To Capt. Millard B. Hayes, who was to everyone a trusted friend as well as a fearless leader, this book is dedicated. He designed task for no one that he himself would not do, his order was “Come” rather than “Go,” and his personal courage was a constant inspiration to all who served under him.

BATTLE BOUND

As the U.S.S. George Washington backed away from its moorings on New York’s 43rd Street Pier, stopped momentarily, nosed around, and headed out on the Hudson current through the narrows into the grey, fog-bound Atlantic, each of the 193 men of Company G, 399 Infantry, packed below deck in this, the Army’s largest troop transport, was aware that he had begun a new and adventurous chapter in his life. It was the beginning of a journey into fear, hardship, courage, and the score of other little things coincident with combat as only the front-line infantryman knows. However, thoughts were elsewhere just then, of home, of family, the old car, the corner drugstore, and all the other familiar things synonymous with the America they were leaving. To those few who slipped up on deck, against orders, the Statue of Liberty, fading away into grey dimness, symbolized this separation, but those below felt the reaction just as keenly.

It took little time for the men to settle down to the daily routine aboard ship. Their resentment for having drawn the police and sanitation details while at sea was short-lived, because it helped break the monotony, meant three meals instead of the usual two, and gave them access to all parts of the ship.

The veteran Merchant marine crew on board agreed that the weather was unusually bad, and the crossing was a rough one. Quite a few made impromptu visits to the rail, but just as many found a love for the sea and decided then and there that they had missed their calling when they joined the Army. Gunnery practice was always interesting to watch, and it was reassuring to know that there was ample protection in case of an attack. There were boxing matches, movies, card games, and books aboard ship, but the days became very monotonous. It was a relief to them all to finally see the coast of North Africa, opposite Gibraltar, appear on the horizon and steadily become clearer on the afternoon of October 19. This was their first sight of land since they had sailed on October 6.

Even before sailing, there had been many rumors circulating as to the destination of the convoy. The one that seemed the strongest was that it was headed for Marseilles, therefore, as it passed through the Straits of Gibraltar this rumor was all but confirmed. Just a day later the convoy rounded the Cape de la Garde and entered the harbor of France’s finest Mediterranean port. This was the first convoy to land there since the Sixth Army Group’s invasion of southern France in August.

Viewed from a distance Marseilles was breathtakingly beautiful, much prettier than they later found it to be when seen from a closer range. The first actual contact with war and the enemy came that night while the ship was being unloaded. Instead of the usual “Chief Electrician, report to the Bridge,” the

loudspeaker system blared out the order to black-out the ship, it was an air raid. Those on deck were surprised to see the speed with which the harbor was blacked out and covered with smoke. Everyone was more cautious than scared, for this was their first real air raid. Later it was learned that a German reconnaissance plane had been responsible for the alarm, and that no damage had been done.

On October 21 the company climbed down the cargo nets, packed into LSVP's and started ashore. As they chugged through the maze of sunken ships and went around the long breakwater, they were amazed to see such complete destruction there in the harbor. They realized how glad they were that the French and Americans were there to greet them rather than the Germans. Here they got their first look at the Jerries—long lines of P.W.'s working on the docks.

Marching through the winding streets that afternoon on the way to the staging area, they had their first acquaintance with European culture and climate. It was a new experience to see people dressed differently, speaking an unfamiliar language, and riding bicycles instead of automobiles. The heavy downpour of rain that greeted them and the quagmire of mud it stirred up seemed to stay with them until the rain turned to snow a month later.

They remained in the staging area only long enough to unpack and assemble their equipment. However, they were not too rushed and almost everyone got to visit Marseilles. Everybody saw the city through different eyes, but almost all were impressed by the same thing: the cosmopolitan effect due to the influence of the French Colonials who crowded the city, the Senegalese, Moroccans, Arabs, etc., the filthiness, which may or may not have been due to wartime conditions, the forwardness and apparent shamelessness of the women, and the system of barter which was carried on.

On October 29, after a week of preparation in a mud hole near St. Antoine, the staging area, they rolled in a motor convoy, along with the rest of the 399th Combat Team, up the Rhone River valley towards northeastern France. The rapidity with which events were moving did not impress them so forcefully at the time because they did not as yet fully realize what lay ahead. Few, if any, dreamed that they would be in combat within three days. The first day they rode as far as Valence, where they stopped to spend the night. It was there that they first encountered the cheering crowds of Frenchmen that were to become familiar later on. During the afternoon their convoy had stopped momentarily at a railroad crossing to let a hospital train pass by, and they were then reminded that there was a war up ahead, and not so very far away. The second night was spent in Dijon after a day's ride along with highways cluttered with burned out Jerry vehicles, which the American Air Corps had caught and destroyed. They were impressed by the natural scenic beauty of the countryside and were surprised to find most of the rural population centered in countless villages along the way rather than in outlying farms as in the United States.

On the third afternoon they arrived at Fremi-Fontaine, a small town within artillery range of the front, and unloaded in a bivouac area outside of it for the final preparation before going "on line." There was a great deal of confusion and scurrying around as they made up packs and bedrolls to carry with them and

crammed the rest of their belongings in a duffel bag, which was to be stored in the rear. Officers and non-coms found it necessary to take on new duties, very different from those they had been used to in garrison life. After seeing their first dead Germans at Fremi-Fontaine, they began to wonder if they really belonged in this strange, new environment. No one could deny that the game was for keeps now, and that Company G would soon take its place "*Up Front*."

BAPTISM OF FIRE

On Nov. 1, just twenty-six short days after leaving New York, CT 9, the first organization of the 100th Division to be committed, was ordered to relieve the weary, battle-wise 179th Regt. Of the 45th, "Thunderbird" Division, veterans of Anzio and the invasion of Southern France, which was located then in a mountainous, heavily wooded sector of the front near St. Remy, France. The transition from the training areas of Fort Bragg, N.C., to the front line in France had been so rapid that it was hard for the men of the company to realize that they were not just starting out on another problem, with blank ammunition and simulated enemy, to be called off in time to get back to camp for chow. The 2nd Bn. was the reserve battalion when the relief was effected, so they had opportunity to acclimate themselves to battle conditions more gradually than the other two battalions did. During the company's first week in combat, they occupied a series of reserve positions and got their first taste of artillery. At first they could not distinguish between Jerry's guns and their own and they jumped every time a gun went off, but they soon got so they could tell whether the shells were going out or coming in. The old training period habit of scratching the outline of a foxhole on the surface of the ground was soon forgotten. "Digging in" was SOP after the first barrage. On Nov. 8, the company was ordered into the line and as they met the straggling group of unshaven, dreary-eyed, bone-weary veterans that Bill Mauldin has made famous, coming down the muddy trail, they got their first good glimpse at the Combat Infantryman and wondered how long it would be before they looked that way. The 2nd Platoon went on outpost line, in pitch blackness over a trail that was knee deep in mud, and those who carried ammunition and laid a communication line up the mountain will never forget the exasperation and confusion of that first night. On the next night, during the first snowstorm of the winter, the company pulled back to an assembly area from which they moved by foot and truck to a new sector near Baccarat on Armistice Day. This had been more or less the prelude, a time of orientation to battle condition, while waiting for the remainder of the 100th Division to make the long trip up through France and to come on line. Now the curtain was about to rise on the real show.

On Sunday morning, Nov. 12, amidst another snowstorm, Company G jumped off in the attack, a part of the division's drive against the Meurthe River Line, which the Germans hoped to establish and hold for the winter. Loaded down as they were with equipment and ammunition, it was difficult climbing those hills, and the sniper fire they encountered soon after the jump-off didn't help matters any, but it wasn't heavy enough to stop them. Early in the afternoon they received quite a few artillery shells and suffered their first casualty, due to

shrapnel, but they moved ahead and stopped only after a heavy darkness had set in.

The token resistance they received that day did [not] prepare them for the 13th, the most dismal day of their campaign in the ETO. If there were any among them superstitious, their worst fears were realized that unlucky day. Resuming the attack through the heavy snow Monday morning, they had not gone far before scouts of the 1st Platoon took three prisoners, their first. Sending them to the rear, the company continued towards the crossroad on the Baccarat-Neufmaisons road that was their initial objective. Approaching the crossroad, the scouts of the leading 1st and 3rd Platoons halted the company in the edge of the woods and cutting their way through a barbed wire entanglement, went forward to reconnoiter a lone house beyond the crossroad. Three Germans were observed leaving the house and entering the thick woods to the right rear of the building. Word was passed back that the house was cleared, and the company moved out into the clearing to organize the position. When two or three artillery shells landed near the crossroad, they still did not realize the gravity of their situation, but when a murderous volley of automatic and small arms fire opened up from an unexpected quarter on their left flank, and the Kraut mortarmen, using the crossroad as a wonderful reference point started dropping shells right on top of them in a seemingly endless barrage, they realized that they had been neatly "mousetrapped."

Within an hour, they managed to pull back into the woods, re-organize, and evacuate most of their casualties. Among them had been three platoon leaders, and the company commander, Capt. Melvin D. Clark. Four scouts of the first platoon were captured when the Jerries re-entered the house, and five men were killed outright. Later that afternoon and night, desultory artillery fire on their positions accounted for several other casualties, among them the acting Company Commander. Next morning, the company pulled back two or three hundred yards to get out of the way of a barrage fired by Corps Artillery, who were trying to neutralize the enemy position. A patrol went back up to their forward positions to determine the results of the artillery and to observe for mortar fire, but after receiving enemy mortar fire, they returned. Meanwhile, the company had prepared positions for the night. Capt. Millard B. Hayes, formerly Regimental Special Service Officer, took command at this disheartening time, when morale was at an extremely low ebb and most of the men were suffering from exposure in the snow of the previous two nights. Quickly grasping the situation, by efficient and intelligent measures, he began to instill a re-determination and aggressive spirit in the men that increased perceptibly day by day thereafter. On Nov. 16, they moved forward by their former positions at "Purple Heart Lane," for so it had been named, and occupied positions overlooking Neufmaisons, which the Germans had evacuated, with the mission of protecting the division's left flank while storming Raon L'Etape. While there, four patrols were sent out to whom credit goes for killing several Germans.

On Thanksgiving Day the cooks, who had been in a rear area since Nov. 1, prepared a wonderful dinner that tasted marvelous even though their stomachs, after two weeks of emergency rations, were unable to take it and

almost everyone got diarrhea. The company moved that day to take part in the new drive that was forming on Strasbourg. Everyone was glad to get away from this sector with its unpleasant memories. A veteran outfit would have made out better, but every company must have its baptism of fire—"Purple Heart Lane" was Company G's. However, they really had something to be thankful for on Thanksgiving. Moving to La Petite Raon that afternoon, they were billeted temporarily in French homes for the first time. Most of the people were poor, but they put forth their best effort to be hospitable, and at least the men were able to get dry for once and get a short night's sleep.

Leaving early the next morning, they traveled on trucks to an assembly area from which they jumped off in attack on Wackenbach, in the heart of Alsace. They climbed a couple of rugged mountains that day but didn't run into opposition until they got to the outskirts of Les Querelles, where the only passage was a narrow defile cut by a mountain stream. There they ran into considerable small arms fire, and, as darkness was falling fast, they were ordered to dig in for the night. Few of them will forget that miserable night in a steady downpour of rain, huddled under inadequate ponchos that just strained the water as it poured down. Next morning, they resumed the attack, took Les Querelles, and started over the mountains to Wackenbach, which they reached just in time to attack simultaneously with a task force from the 14th Armored Division. Here they stayed in houses again and were able to dry off once more. They did not know it then but the French 2nd Armored Division had entered nearby Strasbourg and had liberated, among others, the four men from the company take prisoner on the 13th, who later rejoined the outfit.

On Nov. 26, the company transferred from the 6th Corps to the 15th Corps, and they traveled on trucks to a battalion assembly area at Moyenmoutier. While there, they billeted in a woolen factory, which they entirely filled with smoke from their "small, controlled" fires, but the warmth felt so good they didn't mind the smoke. They received a big supply of Christmas packages, which were coming in an ever increasing stream. On Nov. 28, they moved through Sarrebourg to Plaine de Walsch, where they got to catch their first real breath and to relax for the first time since entering combat. The kitchen moved up with them there, and they had good hot chow three times a day for a change. They were paid for the first time in Liberation Francs and a few got their first shower since the salty ones aboard the George Washington. Here they began to notice German influence on local customs and habits as well as French, because this part of the country has in its history at times been part of Germany. The subsequent moves through Vexervillers, La Petite Pierre, Puberg, Wingen, and Goetzenbruck were, in the main, merely following up operations behind the Germans retreating up the Ingwiller Pass to the Maginot Line.

On Dec. 8, in the early morning dawn, the company jumped off from Goetzenbruck in an attack on well-entrenched positions on the high ground outside Lemberg, where the Germans had elected to make a stand. They met enemy sniper fire before they crossed the line of departure and soon came under artillery fire as well. But, knowing a few tricks now, they pressed the attack rather than stop and made good progress until they ran into a force of Germans well

dug in on high ground, with several machine guns strategically placed and other automatic weapons. Electing to by-pass this strong point, they advanced in a flanking movement until they received direct fire from two flak wagons on the high ground across the Lemberg-Bitche railroad. Unable to continue the attack at night, they organized the position. The next morning was spent in working their way to a position from which they could launch an attack on their objective outside Lemberg. Preceding the attack was a Corps Artillery preparation, which consisted of white phosphorous and high explosive shells and which lasted for twenty-five minutes. This barrage, one of the heaviest they ever witnessed, paved the way for them, but there was still the job of climbing two precipitous hills and neutralizing the enemy positions. By nightfall, they had overrun strong bunker positions, captured a force of about 20 Germans, including the crews of two flak-wagons which they had found blazing, and had captured and organized a position cutting off the German retreat route from Lemberg itself along the Bitche highway. On Dec. 14, when they reverted into reserve and moved back to Goetzenbruck, morale was high—they had really won that fight. The company moved back to Lemberg on Dec. 11, still in reserve, as the division prepared to launch an all out attack on the fortress city of Bitche, the city on which the whole Maginot Line hinged. German troops there were determined that the city they were unable to capture from the French until after the armistice, the city that had never been taken by assault in any war, should not be wrested from them. The men of the Century Division were more determined to prove that they were just the guys who could do it. Doughboys maneuvered into position, artillerymen began a ceaseless preliminary pounding to soften things up; the men of the 3rd Bn., 398th Regt. stormed and captured Forts Schiesseck and Otterbiel, powerful Maginot Line positions west of the city, winning themselves the coveted Presidential Citation, “Powderhorn” men of the 399th Regt. Prepared to storm the city and its invulnerable Citadel.

HOLDING THE LINE

At this almost climactical point, the unexpected took place —breakthrough in Belgium! This bold move on the part of Von Rundstedt made its effects felt along the entire front. In order to relieve units of the Third Army for a counter thrust, it was necessary for the 6th Army Group to extend its front to include about half of the entire Allied battle line. This change in strategy necessitated, of course, the discontinuance of the division’s drive on Bitche and the establishment of a defense system running generally north and south of the Maginot Line.

Action during the next three months consisted mainly of artillery and mortar duels, with each side trying to dislodge its opponent and cause as many casualties as possible. Old man winter proved to be a more formidable foe than the Germans, there was almost continual snow, rain, and bitter cold, which made life in the foxholes miserable. The number of men lost because of sickness, especially yellow jaundice, was very high. Another aspect which characterized this period was the constant patrolling, which was carried on day and night. G Company men had their share of these patrols, and many of them proved themselves to be outstanding patrol leaders.

When G Company went back on line, December 22, its men were dispersed to cover almost a battalion front. Christmas found them dug in on high ground between Lemberg and Bitche, overlooking the highway. It wasn't the way they were accustomed to celebrating the holiday, but they made the best of it and enjoyed their packages from home. After spending several days in Enchenberg, they moved to Hotviller, a "ghost town." The CP was established in a small pillbox on the high ground outside of town, the 2nd Platoon was in Simserhof Fort, the 1st and 3rd Platoons were dug in on outpost line, and the mortars were set up on the edge of town. This was to be the scene of one of their most bitter fights.

On the night of December 31 increased activity was reported by all the outposts along the front, and early in the morning of January 1 they were hit by the full force of the Germans' New Year's offensive against the Seventh Army. First to feel the German attack was an outpost of the 1st Platoon which was well out in front of the rest of the company—all four occupants were captured as the position was overrun. By this time the other outposts, together with the rest of the 1st Platoon near Simserhof Farm were pouring a deadly crossfire into the German ranks. One of the squad leaders in command of an outpost devised a new infantry tactic on the spot—"skip bombing" with rifle grenades. This new method was used successfully to destroy two enemy machine gun crews. Driven by the intensity of this fire to the shelter of a nearby woods, the German force, now gathered in a relatively small area, was especially vulnerable to mortar and artillery fire. The H Company 81's set up in Hottviller and the guns of Battery B of the 925 FA Bn. furnished this supporting fire. Few of the Germans in those woods escaped. When a patrol from the 1st Platoon went out, twenty dazed survivors were taken captive.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Platoon had had a fight on its hands. Another German force had attacked on the left flank, attempting to get into the draw that the 3rd Platoon was protecting. Most of the enemy was pinned down by rifle fire, but some succeeded in getting into the draw. The 60mm mortar section, which as yet had seen practically no action because of the heavily wooded area they had operated in previously, was called into action. The mortarmen proved to be one of the most efficient teams in the company and by accurate fire destroyed part of this enemy force and chased the rest out of the draw into an unoccupied pillbox to the platoon's front. During the afternoon, when it was seen that mortar and artillery fire was having little effect on the pillbox, two patrols were sent out from the 3rd Platoon to neutralize it. As the only approach lay over open terrain, neither patrol was able to reach the fortification, so after firing several well-placed bazooka rounds at the firing apertures, they pulled back under cover of a smoke screen. Later that evening the Krauts decided it was "too hot" there in the pillbox, and withdrew over the hill toward Bitche.

The company's faith in its ability to carry out any assigned mission under favorable or unfavorable conditions, which had faded at Neufmaisons, been recovered at Wackenbach, increased at Lemberg, came to full flower at Hottviller that day. During an all-day battle in which they had effectively employed every weapon at their disposal, they had thrown back and largely destroyed an enemy

force numerically superior and found themselves to be the only company in the regiment to stand its ground during the counter-attack.

Three days later they were relieved and moved to Holbach, where they stayed in reserve for several days. The 3rd Platoon which had been in the French Garrison, temporarily attached to E Company, rejoined them there a day later. On the night of January 8, the 3rd Platoon under the leadership of Lt. Alphonse "Smokey" Siemasko, former platoon sergeant, left on a combat mission to the town of Schorbach. Unable to reach the town because of strong German defenses, the platoon returned after having a stiff fire fight. The next night two patrols from the 1st Platoon raided German positions near Sussell's Farm.

The kitchen and supply installations, which had remained in Goetzenbruck, were threatened from the flank and rear on January 1, as the Germans succeeded in recapturing Wingen. Moving to Bining, they were strafed by German aircraft, but luckily no damage was done. The company moved up to the French Garrison which, as the name implies, was formerly a garrison for soldiers of the nearby Maginot Line. The rifle platoons took up positions outside of the garrison with the 1st Platoon and a squad from the 2nd Platoon at "Little Anzio." This position was so named because it was only a few hundred yards from the Germans in the Freudenberg Farm pillboxes and received a barrage from the Germans at the slightest indication of any activity. It was almost impossible to enter or leave the area except under the cover of darkness. Freudenberg Farm was a system of pillboxes, which had been camouflaged as a cluster of farm buildings. Another place which acquired a name was "Shrapnel Bend," a curve in the road directly under observation from Freudenberg. Almost every evening the chow jeep had to run a gauntlet of mortar shells when it approached this curve. After a week here they moved back to Lambach in reserve for several days. The rest they had in Lambach or Sierstal every few weeks was certainly appreciated during the cold winter. They didn't have all the conveniences of home, but at least they were able to get under a roof and keep themselves dry.

From January 22 to February 6 they were in defensive positions near Signalberg and Spitzberg Hills, and occupied the biggest sector they had ever been assigned. The company was split up into two sections in these positions. Here, as in all the other defensive positions, communications took on a new importance. Instead of the two telephones allotted a rifle company, they were using eighteen phones with miles of wire lines. While in these positions each of the three rifle platoons sent out patrols which determined exact enemy positions, captured prisoners, and reflected credit to the courage and ability of those participating. They were happy to leave this sector, because there had been a big thaw and most of the snow which had covered the ground for so long melted away and caused many of their foxholes to cave in.

After six days reserve in Lambach, they went back up to the positions near the French Garrison which they had occupied before. This time the 2nd Platoon held down "Little Anzio" and patrolled the approach to Sussell's Farm. While here, the communications section constructed a switchboard from parts salvaged down in an "underground city" of the Maginot Line, which several of the men had

explored. The entrance was through an elevator shaft and the underground fortifications were complete with railroad, kitchens, Diesel power plants, and machine shops.

On February 23, the Company moved out along the firebreak between "Little Anzio" and the Reyersviller-Sierstal highway. The 2nd Platoon, located down in the "Splinter Factory," got a good look at Reyersviller. When the company moved back to Sierstal on Feb. 27, the 3rd Platoon went out on another raiding party, this time attacking the first house of Reyersviller, which the Germans were using for a CP. After a stiff fight, the platoon returned without any casualties. While the company stayed in Sierstal, a house full of ammunition caught fire during the night. Men from the 1st Platoon were instrumental in saving much of the ammunition as well as the occupants of the house. For this action three of them were awarded the Soldier's Medal.

On March 6, G Company moved into positions opposite the infamous Steinkopf Hill, which proved to be their last defensive action in France. While there, 1st Platoon sent a daylight patrol to Steinkopf. The patrol had almost reached the crest of the hill when the leader stepped on a shu mine, which blew off his foot. Trying to reach the wounded man, the assistant patrol leader also set off a mine, as did another member of the patrol. When the company was relieved by the 71st Division and moved back to Sierstal on March 14, the rumor was that the division was going back to a rest area, but later that afternoon they learned that they had been relieved for an entirely different reason.

RACING THRU THE REICH

On March 15, the 7th Army took up the offensive again, which was not to stop short of complete victory. As a part of the drive, the 100th Division was to pass through the 71st Division and launch its attack on Bitche, which had been postponed for three months. In this, the division's most brilliantly executed maneuver of the war, Company G was ordered to attack and capture formidable Signalberg, Little Steinkopf, and Steinkopf Hills, which protected the southern approaches to the city. After E and F Companies had teamed up to take Spitzberg Hill during a morning of bitter fighting, G Company went into action and jumped off without benefit of artillery that afternoon in their attack on Signalberg. Working their way up the most precipitous part of the hill to avoid the minefields that covered almost every approach, they reached and engaged the Germans entrenched on top. Those who resisted were promptly destroyed, and twenty-five prisoners were taken here and on Steinkopf, which was also quickly cleared. Within 36 hours of the jump-off, the division had captured Bitche and nearby Camp de Bitche for the first time in history, recaptured the Schiesseck and Otterbiel Forts and were racing towards the German border. As little resistance was encountered, the next three day's action consisted mainly of moving up behind the retreating enemy. Just after midnight on March 20, the company moved to the left flank of the division at Dietrchingen, Germany, to fill a gap between the 100th and the flank of the famed 3rd Division, which was hammering at the Siegfried Line, and awaited an expected counter-attack. None materialized, however, although they took a terrific pounding from artillery and

direct fire from the Siegfried pillboxes. Next day, they pulled back into France to an assembly area, relieved again by the 71st Division. This was their first look at Germany, but one had only to cross the border to notice the difference. The towns seemed to be generally cleaner, the homes better constructed and containing more conveniences, and the farms better-tended and more business-like than in France.

By March 22, the 3rd Division had battered a hole in the Siegfried, and the 100th, completely motorized, was ready to carry the ball on off-tackle play through the hole. Loading on tanks, T.D.'s, and half-tracks, they re-entered Germany, passed through the Siegfried east of Zweibrucken and began a dash through the Saarland. Taking a look at the Siegfried while passing through, it looked plenty rough and they were glad that they had not had to buck it. It was not uncommon to see groups of disconcerted Germans wandering aimlessly around, looking for someone to give themselves up to. And the roads were lined with refugees and D.P.'s eternally heading west. They were impressed by the peacefulness and lack of destruction in the little towns of the Saarland as they roared by, and they wished that the German civilians had been made to feel some of the horrors of war. But it seemed that no object of direct military value had been overlooked by the Air Corps in their preliminary bombings and strafing. Long lines of rolling stock lay twisted and burned out along highways and railroads, the larger towns had been thoroughly plastered. Passing quickly through Sweix, Kaiserslautern, and Neustadt, they reached the Rhine Valley the next day. They attacked Shifferstadt and Waldsee on foot, but met no opposition as they marched to the banks of the Rhine. Finding all bridges across the Rhine blown, they moved to Waldsee and later to Mutterstadt, while the engineers worked to bridge the river. Hundreds of Germans that had failed to get across the river were rounded up.

During the long winter months they had often thought of "Crossing the Rhine," and almost everyone had pictured fanatic German resistance at the great natural barrier. But on the last day of March, when they crossed in motor convoy over a hastily constructed pontoon bridge, they were quite unopposed. With the Rhine behind them now, they began to knife into the heart of the Reich. Easter morning found them attacking Hockenheim, where they met only token resistance. After a quick succession of moves through Swaigern, Sluctern, and Grossgartach, it looked as though the Germans were really on the run. But when advance elements of the division approached Heilbronn, a large supply and communications center astride the Neckar River, it became apparent that the Krauts meant to fight for the city with all the resources and ferocity at their command. Reinforcements were observed streaming into the city, and fleeing D.P.'s reported that Nazi troops there were SS men of the highest fighting caliber. The company went into Bockingen, the southwestern section of Heilbronn, and engaged the Germans across the river in sniper and mortar duels, as the battle raged throughout the city.

FINISHING THE JOB

After outposting the river bank at Bockingen for several days, they were still waiting for engineers to complete a bridge over the Neckar. Even under a

heavy pall of smoke, the pontoons laid down on the water were blown up by the German artillery as fast as they were laid down. Finally, it was decided to cross on assault boats. Therefore, on the morning of April 12, following the 1st Bn., they paddled across the canal-like river amidst a heavy smoke screen. Most of the day, the Germans poured an abundance of artillery and rocket fire in trying to destroy their bridgehead. By nightfall, the 1st Bn. had cleared most of the houses and the 2nd Bn. set out down the bank of the river with the mission of securing the city. That night, E Company and F Company took Sontheim. The next day G Company moved through to Horkheim and jumped off in attack on Talheim. First indication of what lay ahead that afternoon was picked up from a Polish refugee as they moved through Horkheim. According to him, there were pillboxes ahead, something neither they nor the S-2 had anticipated.

They moved down the road with the 1st Platoon on the right, 3rd Platoon on the left, 2nd Platoon in reserve, plus a platoon of tanks from the 781st Tank Bn. Before they had moved very far, heavy small and automatic arms fire came from across the table-like valley. Quickly deploying, both platoons advanced in rushes, covered by overhead fire from the tanks. Soon they were able to spot two pillboxes, the last two remaining of the Siegfried Line, and supporting bunker positions. Calling for fire from the tanks' 76mm guns to keep the pillboxes buttoned up, men from both platoons were able to move up within distance to first grenade the boxes and then finish the job with Tommy-guns and M1's. For this action, three men of the company were recommended for the DSC. At this time, the 3rd Platoon on the left began to receive fire from an orchard on the high ground across a deep cut to their flank. The 2nd Platoon was ordered around to give them assistance but were unable to move to a position from which they could neutralize this resistance.

Having been supplied with ammunition, the company moved out again to attack the town itself, which lay just ahead. As they approached, the Germans resorted to a stratagem. Lining up on the road to the edge of town as if to surrender, the Germans sought to draw them in as far as possible. Seeing this, the company commander halted the company and sent an interpreter forward to shout at the Krauts. At the first "Kommen sie hier," the Krauts bolted to the houses on either side of the road and opened up with small arms and panzerfausts, To avoid the confusion of a house-to-house battle at night, the company pulled back slightly and dug in at the outskirts of town. Few slept that night, as they expected a counter-attack, but none came.

Next morning, they resumed the attack into town and met only sniper fire as they cleaned out the houses. Several Germans were observed retreating over the hills behind the town, and the mortar section did not take long in pouring a deadly barrage at them in addition to artillery and heavy machine gun fire. No sooner had the Germans evacuated the town than they began a heavy mortar barrage which kept up the better part of the day and night. In the afternoon, the 1st Platoon went out to outpost the highway to Lauffen am Neckar but were unable to withstand the barrage long enough to dig in without prohibitive casualties, so they withdrew back to the town. Next day, the 3rd Platoon sent out a patrol on T.D.'s to contact the Germans and found that they had moved to

Schozach. The 2nd Platoon then sent out men with the Regimental I and R Platoon to contact the enemy on the Lauffen am Neckar road. In the evening, the whole company moved out and dug in on the high ground outside of Schozach in preparation for an attack the next day.

The attack on Schozach got under way about noon of April 16. The machine guns were set up on the ridge looking down into the town, and the mortars were just behind. The 2nd Platoon was to make a wide encircling movement on the tanks from the left rear, cutting off any route of escape from the town. The 1st and 3rd Platoons were to assault the town frontally. As they jumped off, the 1st and 2nd Platoons got into town without much difficulty, but the 3rd and Weapons Platoons caught a murderous mortar barrage from the German guns set up on the high ground beyond the town. They had to pull back until darkness, at which time they joined the group in town. All night the artillery and mortar fire rained down on the town, and they expected the Krauts to launch a counter-attack, but again none came. During the next day, the artillery continued at intervals, and in the afternoon, they were ordered to withdraw as the regiment changed its direction of attack. After dark, they withdrew from the town, a platoon at a time, and moved to Unter Gruppenbach, where they spent the night.

The next two days found them moving to Unter Henriet and Prevorst, where they were when the final breakthrough came. A task force of the 10th Armored Division and the 398th Regiment had achieved a breakthrough near Backnang, and the 2nd Bn. was again assembled and loaded on tanks and T.D.'s for a race southward to exploit the breakthrough into the Nazis' publicized Southern Redoubt. The first afternoon found them roaring through Backnang to Waldrens. Next day, they moved to Waiblingen, and then to Stetten in the drive to cut off the major city of Stuttgart, which the French 1st Army was attacking frontally.

On April 22, they cleaned off a series of ridges between Stetten and the Neckar River, capturing several Germans trying to escape from Stuttgart, and in the evening entered Ober-Turkheim. This was the last action for Company G against the Germans in the ETO.

THE STAFF

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Kirchheim-unter-Teck, Germany
June 22, 1945

Henry T. "Tom" Bourne, Jr. was born in Bronxville, New York on March 21, 1925. In 1942, a recent graduate of Woodstock, Vermont High School, he found himself a freshman at Yale. In the Spring of 1943 he enlisted in the Army of the United States, and after the school year was over he was sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama for 13 weeks of basic training. Assignment to the A.S.T.P. at The Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina followed. When the A.S.T.P. was disbanded in early 1944 he was sent to the 100th Infantry Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he was eventually assigned to the Third Squad of the Third Platoon, Company G, 399th Infantry Regiment as the B.A.R. man. Tom served with Company G from March 1944 to October 1945 continuously except for a two–month hospital stay in France being treated for hepatitis. From October 1945 to March 1946 he was assigned to the MP Platoon of the 78th Infantry Division in Berlin, Germany. He became a PFC in France and was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge, the Bronze Star, and all the usual service medals of the time.

After the war Tom returned to Yale, and was awarded a B.A. degree in 1949. He then embarked on a career as an architectural hardware consultant, eventually ending up as a hardware and architectural specifications writer for the Office of General Services of the State of New York, from which he retired in 1987.

In 1952 Tom married Janet Goldsmith, and they have been together ever since, having produced two children, Gaylord and Brett, along the way and having been somewhat instrumental in the production of two granddaughters.

Retirement years have found Tom and Janet back in Woodstock, after many years in Texas, New Jersey, and various parts of New York. One of Tom's avocations has been the publication on a regular basis of the *"G" Company Newsletter* for veterans of the wartime Company. Tom has also had an abiding interest in secondary education and because of that, has served several terms on the School Boards of the public schools in Kinderhook, New York, and, now, in Woodstock.