

How NOT to Get Warm!

by Mel J. Helmich, 925-C

During the latter half of January 1945, "Charlie" Battery was located in Enchenberg, and we were supporting the 399th in the Winter Line. I went with Lt. Martin Hale on F.O.P. many times on le Kirschscheidt and registered the battery guns on the church in Reyersviller.

The trajectory of the guns was so high that the shells coming in sounded like bombs dropping. Even a slight adjustment of the battery would change shell impact several hundreds of yards. Pappy West was in the area and was taking "pot shots" at the enemy across the road between Reyersviller and le Steinkopf.

On a snowy night I was in a foxhole with a Private Zimmerman from Company L, 399th outside of Glassenberg between Steinkopf and Spitsberg, toward Signalberg. We were in the woods, and our hole was a well constructed log-lined German one. We had sleeping notches that were carved out on both sides, and our opening was covered with a shelter-half.

Sometime, in the middle of the night, our C-ration can heaters went out, and Zimmerman went outside and filled a Coleman stove container full of gasoline and brought it back inside the hole. He poured some in one of the ration cans and the still hot pebbles ignited the gasoline. Zimmerman's reflex action threw the flaming gasoline completely around the hole. I awoke in a flaming cauldron and dove for the opening. The shelter half was afire when Zimmerman and I went rolling in the snow.

We then heard a plaintive voice in the night, 'Hey you guys! Put out that light over there. Do you want to draw fire in here?' Needless to say, Zimmerman and I complied. I don't know how many other GIs burned down their foxhole.

March 2006 Association Newsletter