

see them again. I want to get back to them with enough of me left to be able to take care of them." He shows me their picture. Little charmers!

I think how lucky I am still to be single; the thought of leaving a family; or worse, coming home crippled, to be a burden - but I say: "I can't do anything about it, you'd better talk to the Lieutenant."

I install the packing around the gun barrel and fill the jacket with antifreeze: "GI" Prestone, in cans painted olive drab. My mind follows the ammo bearer; men have been shot for less! We miss him later that night when we move out to relieve another battalion on the front.

I need not have worried; our understanding Company Commander assigns him to permanent KP for the rest of the war. Our kitchen is seldom out of artillery range, but it is almost never hit and has few - or no casualties. He also serves ... - - and what he did that day was an act of courage and love.

In the middle of the night, carrying our guns and bedrolls to the front, we are almost to our new positions when we pass a dead white horse and trees, splintered by shell fire.

I think of the options, of going home proud of my service; in shame as a deserter; or more likely, disabled or not at all.

The kitchen seems like a good place to be.

## 50. HOT CORNER

Before dawn, in the darkest hour of the night, I stand a lonely vigil while the gunners go behind the lines for breakfast. When my turn comes, I roll out of the dugout on Spitzberg Ridge; scramble back into the woods; wade through the snow, and pass the dead white horse.

The mess jeep is a few hundred yards behind the lines, hidden by the dark trees. The cook dumps oatmeal, powdered eggs and toast into half of a mess kit held in my left hand. The other hand holds a canteen cup full of hot coffee.

The rifle strap tries to slip off my shoulder while I lean against a friendly tree and slowly slide down to sit in the snow. Thank God - and the cooks - for the

heat from the coffee. The rifle leans against the tree - and the coffee cup perches in the snow while I eat and gulp the coffee before it gets cold.

Warmth flows from my middle, out to every limb. The sense of well being defies the sound of random German machine gun bullets, once more whispering harmlessly through the trees overhead.

The jeep also brings cans of "C" rations for lunch; and little wax-filled cardboard boxes called "heat blocks" that we burn to heat the ration cans. The cook presents us with a box marked "Mother Smith's Doughnuts." The fried cakes are still warm. Thank you Smitty, the Cook.

The first light of dawn reveals our machine gun, sitting on top of the dugout; exactly where the previous tenants had their gun sitting before their hasty departure last night. It is pointing in the direction from which we came, and from where I stand in the firing pit, the gun can only be fired into the woods, to our flanks or to the rear. No doubt our predecessors sat the gun there to speed their quick departure; but they failed to tell us where it belonged, or where the Germans might be. In the dark, that remained a mystery.

Now we see that the dugout is nestled between trees at the edge of a field. The edge of the woods is our front line. The field is no man's land. To our left, Item Company riflemen occupy dugouts, concealed in the woods near the field. The nearest one is barely in sight; perhaps 50 yards away; a big gap to think about at night. Worse, once again our right is guarded only by a steep hillside dropping through the woods to a road below.

We move the gun to face the open field. In the distance, two lines of trees mark a snow covered road that passes behind the buildings of the Freudenberg Farm, now occupied by the Germans. Near the farm are mounds in the snow; dugouts like ours, but probably hiding hostile occupants.

The far tree line curves around our right side until it blends with the woods on the steep hill below our right flank. About 50 yards to our right front, a break in the trees slopes down the hill to a pill box almost hidden by the trees. The gray concrete structure is some 12 feet high and wide; part of the Maginot Line. The "firebreak" is a good field of fire for our gun; - or perhaps for a German gun mounted in the pill box.

We dig the gun a little deeper into the ledge at the edge of our dugout and hide the dirt in the snow. No one is in sight. The woods are empty all the way around us. Almost hidden in the trees to our left, we can see only the outline of a mound of snow; the first of the series of dugouts, each occupied by two riflemen.

White parkas with fur liners have finally arrived for everyone, and we place a piece of a white sheet over the gun to blend (we hope) with the snow.

The newly connected field phone brings an unusual order from the rifle company commander; "TEST FIRE ALL GUNS!" We hesitate, reluctant to attract that kind of attention. Each of the riflemen in the holes to our left fires a few rounds. Scattered shots reveal positions much farther to our left. Silence on our right means that once again we are anchoring the right end of the Division's line. It is time for our "test fire."

The ammo belt is already threaded into the receiver. I turn the gun to face the pill box, aim the sights at its menacing black slit, pull back and release the bolt, and pull the trigger. The hammer falls with an empty click. I yank the bolt back, release it again; another empty click.

Two unfired cartridges are ejected from the gun. A little Cosmoline on their shoulders tells the story; the barrel is clean, but the chamber is still lined with Cosmoline, and this is no time to take the gun apart.

A rifle cleaning tool does not budge the frozen Cosmoline in the chamber. I move the ammo belt back into its box, eject the third cartridge, and hold a burning heat block in the open receiver close to the chamber. Black, molten Cosmoline drips into the snow under the gun. I drop the heat block, thread in the ammo belt, pull back the bolt and slam it shut as far as it will go, but it still does not seat.

Again, the heat block flame warms the empty chamber until more Cosmoline melts into the snow. At last, when I force the bolt forward, a round seats in the chamber. A pull on the trigger fires the round, but the cartridge case, caught in the Cosmoline, holds the bolt closed.

The bolt is forced back again, and the cartridge ejects reluctantly. I slam the bolt home, fire a second round; and force the bolt back, again and again, for 5 or 6 more rounds. Then the chamber clears and a single pull on the trigger fires a burst of six rounds, fully automatic. I enjoy a big sigh of relief.

A firing machine gun draws attention. A hunch, perhaps a sixth sense, or

maybe just a little caution, drives me to sit down in the hole. Just as I sit, a burst of machine gun fire riddles the tree behind our hole; in line with where my head had been. The sound is higher pitched than that of our guns; and fast; more like a roar than individual rounds. The famous "burp" gun was pointed at me, but missed by a split second and a few inches. A few minutes later mortar rounds burst in the trees around our dugout while we huddle, almost safely underground in the back of our dugout.

(I was doubly fortunate; a round not properly seated in the chamber can explode in the gunner's face.)

We try not to think about what might have happened if we had been attacked at dawn while our gun was still fouled with Cosmoline. There is only room for one man behind the gun, but he can reach a rifle, a carbine, a pistol, a half dozen grenades, and the gun. But the gun, our primary weapon, was not working until mid morning.

We listen to firing from German rifles, machine guns and mortars. They are hidden in the farm buildings and fields in front of us, in the pillbox to the right front, and in the woods to our right. Once again, to leave the dugout in daylight, one must roll quickly over the back edge, crawl into the woods; and then stay out of sight behind the trees.

The afternoon passes in relative quiet. We watch from behind the gun; no one stands and no one leaves the hole until dark. At intervals, mortar shells land in the trees nearby while the man "on watch" takes cover with the men in the back of the hole. There are a few rifle shots to our left from both sides of the front. A BAR and a burp gun duel for a few seconds in the distance.

Mortar and artillery fire is nearly continuous; a few mortar rounds hit the trees around us, a random type of firing, answered by our own mortars and artillery somewhere, well out of sight behind us. The ratio continues in our favor; one round comes in, ten or twenty go out. Again I think, "If life is this tenuous on our side, what must it be like for them?"

On watch, I am startled by a sound behind me; and whirl with a carbine ready to fire. A lieutenant colonel is standing by the tree behind me and he is looking over my shoulder through a pair of binoculars. The silver leaf painted on his helmet looks like a target.

I caution him about snipers and point out the bullet holes in the tree close to his knee. He moves a little behind the tree but continues to survey the fields, the farm building, the mounds in the snow and the pill box in the fire lane. I turn back

to the gun and continue my own surveys from a much lower position. When I look back again, he is gone.

A few hours later, a weapons carrier pulls a 57 mm antitank gun into a clearing to our right rear. The crew jumps out, unlimbers the gun, and fires a dozen rounds. I cannot see where the shells land. (Are we pretending to have a right flank?) Then the crew hitches the gun back to their truck, loads up and drives away hastily. Seconds later, German artillery and mortar shells fall, searching our woods and the area the gun had just vacated, while we hide in the back of our dugout.

To the front I hear distant tanks moving in the dark. We have no defense against tanks except the artillery, somewhere far behind us. But we see no tanks. Germans have been known to broadcast the sound of tanks through public address systems.

Every night we wait and watch as patrols of riflemen probe enemy positions in front of us. Sporadic flares briefly light the fields and woods. Far behind us, searchlights generate artificial moonlight. Shadows in the snow are "spooky."

While the patrols search, I am grateful to be a machine gunner in a snug dugout. Most patrols consist of a single squad, under-strength at 5 or 6 riflemen. They are "ordered" - (sometimes "requested") - to advance until they reach their objective; or hear enemy sounds, or until the enemy opens fire, or until they bag a prisoner. Only then are they to return. Some patrols go only as far as their courage will allow.

Days are tense. Nights are terrifying. The snow is almost two feet deep, and it is so cold! In the coldest part of the nights, we again hear loud cracking sounds, almost like pistol shots as the sap freezes in the trees. We remain in the dugout, occasionally under fire from the Germans.

One night I am standing my hour on guard, exposed to the weather in the firing pit behind the machine gun. The wind bites through parka and scarf, through the layers of clothes. When relieved, I crawl gratefully back into the dark dugout to sleep; but sleep is fitful - I am so COLD! The end of the hour is SO welcome.

The cold follows me, back in the sleeping bag. Suddenly I am walking into our warm living room at home. Mother is sitting, waiting for me, with a shawl lying across her lap. I fall on my knees and put my head on her lap; I can feel the shawl on my cheek. "It's so cold out there!" She says: "It will be all right soon."

Her hand reaches out and instantly I am back in the dugout.

I pull my jacket over my head to hold the heat from my breath. My teeth stop chattering. As I drift off to sleep, I feel that she sensed that touch from so far away. Years later, my brother tells me. "She did."

Lt. John Langley is wounded in the hand and gaily rides off with his "million dollar wound." He returns to the mortar platoon, three weeks later.

My squad has had no casualties here, but the lines of riflemen are thinning. Our mortar crews send some of their men to fill out the rifle positions.

Pfc.'s Charles Wunderlich and Hartmut "Foos" Arntz are equipped with rifles and sent to a riflemen's dugout, a few hundred yards to the left of our machine gun position. Late in the evening, a sniper's bullet goes through Arntz's helmet, clips a hole in his wool cap, and cuts the hair on the side of his head.

That night at the chow jeep, Arntz shows the damaged helmet to the driver and says; "I'm going to keep this and show it to my grandchildren!"

Next day Arntz and Wunderlich take turns, using Wunderlich's watch to time their hour on guard, occasionally peeking above the edge of their dugout, trying to find the sniper. Wunderlich warns; "Make it quick!" But a shot hits Arntz, killing him instantly. He falls on top of Wunderlich, who finds only a small hole in his friend's cheek. Wunderlich recovers his watch from his friend's hand, and leaves as the troops move out of those positions. He does not return to that dugout. ("Hartmut" is defined as "hart; strong;" and "mut; courage." Arntz's Mother emigrated from Germany in the early '30's. His Father was an SS Captain.)

The mortar platoon suffers additional casualties when a gasoline stove blows up in a house and ignites stored mortar shells. PFC Melieire, Sergeants Zinanchek (?) and Patton are killed, and several men suffer injuries which take them back to the hospital. Sgt. Evan Miller wins the Distinguished Service Cross when he rescues several men from the inferno.

A few days later, a boil develops on my cheek; maybe a whisker, infected from not being washed for a week. A medic tells me, on the field phone, to walk back to the aid station and get it lanced. I roll out of the hole, crawl a few feet and run into the woods to a different world.

There are no German positions in sight; no companions rubbing elbows,

climbing over me in the crowded dugout. The sky is a magnificent blue; the mountains stretch away; the snow contrasts with the dark green pine foliage and black tree trunks. "GOD! You made a beautiful world!"

A medic at the aid station quickly drains and dresses the boil. The pain eases and I head back to the dugout. The beauty of these snow covered mountains is overwhelming. Dazzling whiteness contrasts with thick stands of tall green pines. I can see for miles through gaps in the trees. While I search for enemy positions in the distance, the path narrows under my feet and I am suddenly rolling down the mountain. Caught by a shrub, I sit in the snow, clutch my rifle and watch my helmet roll down the mountainside.

I enjoy the time that it takes to recover the helmet and climb back to the path; a welcome delay, even though the location may be visible to German positions. I tumble back into the dugout just in time for my turn on watch behind the gun.

When our relief arrives, we take care to point out the enemy pillbox and the sinister mounds in the field ahead. And we show the new squad where to set their gun. Then we carry our gear and the guns back to our jeep.

We wonder at our great good luck. For two weeks, we were under fire from snipers, machine guns, and a continuous barrage of mortar and cannon fire. Nearby riflemen were hit, and several were killed, including our own Hartmut Arntz. Yet, our little section of eight men is not touched. Amazing!

A single jeep with a trailer carries nine of us (including the driver) along with two machine guns, ammo, bedrolls and sidearms, through the snow covered woods. In four wheel drive, the jeep plows through the foot deep snow, pushes down brush and small trees, and finally breaks free onto the road back to Siersthal. I am really impressed by this little vehicle.

Another short rest in Siersthal; showers, clean clothes, and time to clean our weapons, indoors.

A gunner in my squad ejects the magazine from his pistol; pulls back the slide and releases it. This should eject any round that might be in the chamber; but then he points the pistol down and blows a hole in the wood floor next to his foot.

Dr. Donald Fernbach writes:

"I had the advantage of being just a shade to the rear as an antitank cannoneer (2nd Bn. HQ Co.). We dug many a defensive position, but never encountered a moving German tank. One of our guys fired his pistol, as yours did, in a tile kitchen - the bullet bounced around a few times, but missed everyone. At Lemberg we test fired our 57 (mm cannon) and heard a click instead of a blast. The firing pin must have been jogged loose. Sickening feeling when we learned we had been sitting on a useless gun, thinking we were ready to protect the free world. To make it worse, the 50 caliber machine gun jammed after three rounds when it was tested. Our platoon had no KIA or WIA; my guardian angel was exceptional."

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We move out to another part of the front where new perils await - but I am happy to be far away from that "hot corner" on Spitzberg Ridge.

## 51. THE PILLBOX

We march on a narrow paved road, to new positions to the northwest. We are short-handed; I trade the rifle for a pistol as I am now both first gunner and squad leader.

Aircraft engines roar and machine guns fire along the road behind us as we flee uphill into the woods. I look back in time to see an American P-47 strafing the empty road. Rumor has it that Germans had captured a few P-47's; - we'd like to think that this is one of them and not one of ours!

We relieve another regiment; our new position is in a Maginot Line pill box with thick concrete walls and a firing slot just right for our gun. From the slot we see the right flank of the Freudenberg Farm. The road from behind the Farm passes through our field of fire and then close to our left.

In earlier positions we were isolated from the other gun of our section. Now



the other gun, manned by Sgt. Beckett and his gunners, is about fifty yards to our left on the other side of the road. .

At dusk, a gunner in Beckett's squad (PFC Lindsey) runs out into the field in front of our guns, fires his pistol repeatedly in the direction of the Farm and yells: "Come out and fight you yellow bastards!" Perhaps he has been drinking.

We live in crowded intimacy; every man is armed with a loaded weapon; a round in the chamber and often the safety is off. We are careful of the weapons and I think we are very polite to each other.

The pill box is dry and protects us from the wind except for cold air coming in through the firing slot. We rig a stove from an oil can and salvage enough stove pipe to run it out through the door in the rear. Dry and almost warm; it is nearly comfortable, compared to the dugouts. Soon the smoky stove coats us with soot.

As dark nears, the field phone alerts us to the passage of rifle patrols. Through the night, flares light the fields and the Farm; artificial moonlight casts a glow to the southwest. The artillery and mortars duel at intervals. We see no one.

On the third day, the rifle platoon leader instructs us, by field phone, to aim our guns at a designated clearing in the field near the Farm where they have seen the Germans muster every night. The patrol has a phone line from an outpost where they can watch the clearing and tell us when to fire.

By chance, I am on watch about midnight when the field phone rings. I pick it up and hear the rifle platoon leader say: "OK, Beckett, open fire!" Beckett's gun begins firing. I wonder when they will order my gun to fire; it is loaded and ready, safety off.

My left index finger rests on the trigger while my right hand clamps the phone to my ear. Beckett's gun suddenly stops firing. The silence is overwhelming. A flare casts a big circle of flickering light on the snow in the middle of the field, but there is no sign of its occupants.

At breakfast, the rifle platoon leader congratulates us on hitting the German formation. "They took some casualties and moved out of there fast." I ask why he did not ask for our gun to fire too. He says: "I thought Beckett was the section leader, and he would order both guns to fire."

Our orders were to fire when told to, and for my gun, the order never came. A few unfired rounds will hardly lengthen the war, but getting that gun into the

right place at the right time involved a terrible cost; all the way from our early training, through the battles of the last three months, to the recent magnificent efforts of the rifle patrols. I wonder, "Who did I spare, so inadvertently, that night? Will he fire at us one day soon?" Fifty years later, I still wonder.

Ralph Reeves writes:

"There was a wooded hill near Glassenberg village, near where Hartmut Arntz was killed. The forward rifle guys were entrenched at the edge of a clearing, maybe 100 yards wide, and then more woods beyond was German territory. In the clearing, which was no man's land, was this stash of German 80 mm mortar ammunition. A detail of us mortar guys went up there and grabbed it. No one shot at us until we had collected every last round. Then long range machine gun fire went rattling through the trees around us, sounding like woodpeckers, but no harm done. I also found a few rounds of French 81 mm shells."

"Our forward observer stationed himself where no harm could be done to himself or anyone else, and we developed a rudimentary range table simply by shooting the 80 mm shells (in our 81 mm mortar)... "

"Mortar Gunnery in combat was quite different from how we were taught. In training, the observer directed so many mils left or right of an aiming stake, and how far ahead or back to shoot the next round. In combat we ignored the stake after the first round and directions were simply 'half turn left,' 'half down,' or 'one turn right, one turn up and fire.' The observer knew from experience how much a turn in any direction meant as to where the shell would hit next."

"The German 80 mm could only shoot 2,600 yards versus our 3,150 yards, so the only thing to do was to shoot a couple of rounds and use that as a reference. It worked fine until we ran out of German ammunition."

"About that time I ran across the chemical company again, and they gave our squad one of their mortars and a bunch of shells, mostly white phosphorous. The story was that they had been issued new mortars with stronger tubes because the first tubes tended to unravel with heavy use and heavy charges. They didn't give us any of their heavy shells that could have killed us, and they advised against long range with heavy charges. Fine, we shot up a storm with what they gave us.

A week or so after that, the jeep driver got rid of the 4.2 mortar, and we began to receive more 81 mm ammunition."

"One of us read about a strike in the States among some workers at ammunition plants. We were very unforgiving of those workers."

"I recall an abandoned area that for many years had been a no man's land between the old Maginot and Siegfried line. Our whole platoon was lazing around in some field enjoying a rare bit of nice weather. Myself and some dude decided to explore and walked off."

"We came upon a barbed wire fence with the warning sign 'MEINEN GEFAHR' or something like that. The keep-out warning was perfectly clear so it was our challenge to enter and look around, figuring 'Phooey - this isn't dangerous if one is careful!' I shortly had a comeuppance; I tripped or kicked a wire, but just lightly, for nothing happened. It sure got our attention. We found the mine; a big old Bouncing Betty, and the pin that triggered the damn thing was just half way through the hole."

"We realized that we came within 1/32nd of an inch of being killed. Did that bother us? No, it was exciting! We dug up the mine (for kicks!) like we needed a souvenir. That wasn't enough; we carried the damn thing out and were walking along the dirt road next to the fence, coming our way, was a group of guys led (I believe) by Major Pinaro. We stopped and so did they, for they saw what we had. So there we were, a standoff about 50 feet apart. The Major commanded: 'Put that thing down and report here at once!' I was carrying, and so gently put it in the middle of the road; and said to my buddy 'Let's get out of here!' And that is exactly what we did. We went into reverse and got the hell out of there. I don't remember running, but we must have. You can bet the Major was pissed. For many years I would recall that little incident, and for some strange reason it would just frighten me something terrible! That tiny fraction of an inch from unintended suicide haunted me like no other danger that I ever experienced."

"We've been packing for a move, it is an enormous nightmare ... no wonder I miss the smug self-sufficiency of going into combat with nothing more than I can carry. I miss the joy of being unencumbered, but worked so hard to collect all that stuff..."

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Al Bowman, the "old" Panama Forces antiaircraft gunner, invites me to accompany him from our pillbox, on a tour of the nearby Maginot fort. (We leave

two men "on watch" by the gun.)

Near the fort, we find a GI helmet; "How good are these things?" A shot from my 45 caliber pistol at the top of the helmet (with just enough angle to avoid a returning ricochet) dents the helmet, but does not penetrate. A second shot penetrates the dent. The smaller diameter, higher powered 30 caliber rifle bullet with its higher muzzle velocity, can penetrate a helmet easily.

We enter the fort and examine a French 75 millimeter cannon mounted in the face. The ground in front of us is saturated with bomb craters. Al is impressed.

"Look at all this ammo, I can fire this thing! Go up in the tower and tell me where to fire."

I climb the steps and find an observation slit high in the wall of the fort. Our pill box, the Farm, the road to Bitche are a panorama from here. Al fires the cannon; the shell bursts in the field by the Farm. We correct the aim, and drop rounds on the farm house and other buildings, but there is no sign of life and no return fire.

Once again we return to Siersthal for a rest and showers.

## 52. THE THAW

The cycle continues; eight to twelve days on the front, then a few days rest. We save sugar from C - rations, and then, when we are back in town, we scrounge a little butter or shortening and a few apples, and Al Bowman bakes an apple pie; almost as good as Mom's!

The villagers offer a little hot boiled milk; we really miss fresh milk, but this is no substitute. YUK!

There is mail, and time to write letters, both in town and in the dugouts. A few candy bars and some tobacco products appear as "PX rations." They are not expensive, but several times when we are in the front lines, Lt. Witt buys PX rations for the entire platoon.

We are back on the same Spitzberg Ridge that we had recaptured early in

January. The Germans are still out there, waiting; occasionally firing a burp gun, a round from a sniper, or a mortar round. Their artillery seldom fires. The front is much quieter now.

We are barely settled into these dugouts again when cold rains sweep the hills and melt the snow. Each dugout become a muddy slippery mess. Melting snow reveals a three month accumulation of debris and feces. Our positions are plainly marked by the trash and threatened by lack of sanitation. We hasten to clean up the areas and restore a little natural camouflage.

On the night of February 12th, our rifle platoons stage two raids. We huddle behind our machine gun, waiting and watching for them; but they return by another route.

We are a little more careless about leaving the dugout. I am outside in broad daylight, when I hear the cough of a German mortar that has previously shelled our position; I dive into the dugout and bowl over a gunner sitting at the entry hole. The shell bursts in the tree overhead, and I apologize for knocking him over. He thanks me for bringing him in, for he had not heard the sound of the mortar.

We continue the almost-comfortable routine of one hour on watch and two off. We have time for rest, for letters and reading, and for thinking.

Keeping my glasses clean has not been the problem that I expected, so long ago at Ft. Meade. No matter how wet and dirty, there is always a dry clean part of my clothing for wiping the lenses. A little dirt on the lenses does not interfere with details seen at a distance as the helmet shields the lenses from sun and rain.

On watch, one scans the far tree lines for any sign of enemy activity. Standing watch on a mild afternoon, I see a field mouse picking his way through the twigs, maybe 10 yards in front of the machine gun. A shot from a carbine cuts the ground away from under him; he does a double roll and races away out of sight.

If the mouse is properly in the carbine sights; and if I fire accurately, will the round be more likely to go over or under the mouse? The sights are on top of the carbine; for the first few feet, the round will be lower than the line of sight to the target. I think about my old boast; "I can hit anything that I can see."

Every night a German plane drones through the sky overhead; "Bed Check

Charlie." Several times we hear a sporadic roar marked by flames in the sky; later we learn it was a V-2 rocket, on the way to our rear echelons. Hope it does not hit our mail, riding the supply lines all the way from some French seaport.

Following the rain, blue skies bring out our P-47's; they patrol our front and bomb targets in the Bitch area. The cycle continues: a few days in reserve, another apple pie whipped together by Al Bowman; another 10 days on the front.

Ralph Reeves writes:

"I was with Lt. Flaum when he opened a package and there is this little book, "You Can Never Go Home Again" by Thomas Wolfe. The Lieutenant is thrilled, and seemed to miss the macabre humor of it. I thought I might die laughing, but contained it until I got some distance from him."

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We move about more freely; shell fire is rare and we see few Germans. We hold "The Winter Line" for 72 days. Unknown to us, the Germans launched "Operation Northwind" at our lines in late December and early January. It was a major effort to break out after the failure of the "Bulge" at Bastogne. Ski troops, crack SS mountain divisions, and Panzers (tanks) bent our defenses, but failed to break through. I saw their white clad attackers; and felt blessed that I had only heard their tanks a few times at night in the distance. Now the opposition is weaker.

On March 14 we are back in Siersthal. This night we sleep uneasily for tomorrow, on the Ides of March, we will attack the positions that had inflicted so many casualties in December and January. The enemy has had time to lay mines and fortify their defenses. A few troops with a little support from artillery and air can hold such positions against heavy odds. Beyond their Maginot forts lies the vaunted Siegfried Line; its seemingly impenetrable "dragon teeth" tank barriers are already visible from some of our observation posts.

Once again, long before dawn, we move out. The Germans are waiting, ready again to trade real estate for our lives.