

What a Way to Spend Your Birthday

by Ray Howarth, 399-B

20 February 1944: I was in Atlanta, GA, attending Georgia Tech when newspaper articles told of the dissolving of the ASTP.

27 March 1944: I was transferred to Fort Bragg and assigned to Company B, 399th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division.

05 October 1944: Company B boarded the SS *McAndrews* troopship.

20 October 1944: Company B arrived in Marseilles, France.

31 October 1944: Company B relieved Company B, 179th Infantry Regiment in the Vosges.

03 November 1944: Company B took Saint Remy.

12 November 1944: We were on the assault of Raon l' Etape.

16 November 1944: We made the assault on Hill 538.

24 November 1944: We left La Trouche by convoy and headed north into Alsace Lorraine.

28 November 1944: We were in La Robedeau near Senone in Corps reserve.

07 December 1944: Company B was pinned down in an open frozen field, while attacking Lemberg, France early in the morning. It wasn't until dusk that the Company pulled back into the forest. We lost about 26 percent of our company with 11 killed and 34 wounded.

About 16 December 1944: We arrived in the foothills above Bitche and the Maginot Line fortress. We were ordered to take up a defensive position, while most of our support was sent to Belgium to help contain the German offensive in the Battle of the Bulge. For the balance of December, we stayed in our dugouts looking down on Bitche and the Fortress.

31 December 1944: About 11:30 pm, the German operation Nordwind was launched.

01 January 1945: This was my last day with Company B. Captain Prince called the Company and said the CP was under attack and requested help in evacuation. I was told to take my squad to their aid. We were able to hold the Germans off while the headquarters personnel loaded three jeeps and drove south through the forest. We blew some trees down to block the road and began our return to the Company positions, when the forest literally blew apart from the worst artillery barrage I had ever encountered. The Captain had forgotten to tell me that he had called artillery in on his position. One of my men was killed and I was badly wounded and eventually became a POW.

02 January 1945: I was taken to Zweibrucken, Germany (29 kilometers north).

05 January 1945: I was taken to *Kriegslazarett* (War Hospital), Neustadt an der Weinstrasse.

12 January 1945: I was taken, along with 39 other prisoners, to Stalag XIIA prison hospital, Heppenheim, Germany. Only severely wounded prisoners were brought here. Out of 330 American POWs, 185 arrived from Neustadt.

27 March 1945: I was liberated by elements of the 45th Infantry Division. Correspondents with the liberating forces called Heppenheim the "Horror Hospital." Lieutenant Thornton of Company B found me there.

By the way, I spent my 21st birthday in Heppenheim. By that time, I had lost 40 pounds.

March through May 1945: I was in several different Army general hospitals from Paris to Marseilles.

09 June 1945: I left France on the hospital ship *John L. Clem*.

24 June 1945: I arrived at Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island.

June through October 1945: I was in Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco, California, Dibble General Hospital in Menlo Park, California, and Camp Carson Convalescent Hospital in Colorado.

10 November 1945: I received a medical discharge from the US Army with a fifty percent service-connected disability.