

B Company 397 in Combat
12 November 1944 to 8 May 1945

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DEDICATION

This history is dedicated to the memory of Capt. John Alden Hine, Jr., who commanded Company B throughout its overseas assignment. Capt. Hine survived the war but fell to leukemia on June 28, 1951. He was thirty-three years of age at the time of his death. He had reached the rank of Major and had been assigned to Command and General Staff School. It is clear that the Army had recognized his superior talent as both a combat and staff officer and that he was on his way to General Officer's rank.

It can only be said that, had this happened, it would have been no surprise to the men of Company B. In fact, we would have predicted it from the time we first knew First Lieutenant Hine. He was a quiet man; he led his company with vigor, intelligence, and total respect for all the men who had the privilege of serving with him. He was not a commander; he was a leader.

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Preface

At the 41st reunion of the 100th Infantry Division in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, September 8-11, 1988, I had a long conversation with my good friend and fellow soldier, G. E. (Bud) Millett. We were in the "Company B C.P.," and remarking on the diversity of the combat memories that we had been sharing with the others who were there. The diversity did not come just from exaggeration, although there certainly was that. (Old soldiers never die, they just tell bigger and better war stories). Actually, most of it came from the details - Who was on the right flank? Who had the BAR? Where were we located when Capt. Hine was wounded? When did he return?

Since I've always had a mind for details, I was a little bothered by this, and I shared my concern with Bud. We then agreed that someone should sit down and write it all up with as many details as possible. The someone turned out to be me and what follows is my first attempt. I have leaned heavily on several sources which are as follows:

1) Company in the Attack, Captain John A. Hine, Jr., The Infantry School, 1947-48.

2) The Story of the Century, Stuttgart, Germany, 1945, Michael A. Bass, Editor.

3) Regiment of the Century, Stuttgart, Germany, 1945, Samuel Finkelstein, Editor.

4) Personal papers, Wilfred Howsmon, 1948.

5) Verbal and written communications from numerous men of Company B. (Names included in the text where possible).

Finally, I need to say that I know the only ones who will ever read this are the ones who were there. When I say "were there," I know that doesn't mean "where I was." You all remember that most of the time, we never knew what was happening to anyone other than ourselves and our squads. Sometimes we didn't even know about the rest of our own platoon. It is, therefore, quite presumptuous for any one man to try to describe what happened on any given day. What I have done here, and all that I can do, is to describe it as I saw it and remember it , and hope that you will add to it.

Bragg to Baccarat

On or about March 18, 1944, a sizable group of men joined the 100th Division at Fort Bragg from the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). I was among them. The ASTP ("Take down your service flag, Mother, your son's in the ASTP") was a college training program that was suddenly terminated because the need for infantry troops had become so critical in both Europe and the Pacific. At the time of the termination, I was in Basic Training at Fort Benning, Georgia, 8 weeks into what was to be a 13 week cycle before returning to college. We were out on the firing range and the orders came down for us to return to barracks. The next morning, we were told (in my company) that "If your name starts from A to I, you are assigned to the 100th Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, J through Z, to the 106th Division at Camp Atterbury, Indiana."

This hit me like a ton of bricks, because my hometown was Dayton, Ohio, 115 miles from Atterbury. I really wanted to go there. I asked my first sergeant if I could swap with someone. "Are you kidding, soldier," he answered, "them orders have been cut. Get outta here." I need not remind the reader that the 106th

was the outfit that was nearly wiped out in the Bulge. All I could think at the time was how close Camp Atterbury was to my home.

Our reception at the 100th was, to say the least, cool. We were, after all, green college kids (18-19 years), many of whom had not even completed basic. The guys we were joining had been around the block and, most importantly, "THEY HAD BEEN ON TENNESSEE MANEUVERS." I remember telling my friend, Howard (Squirrel) Jones, that I wouldn't care if I never heard the word TENNESSEE again as long as I lived. There were several of the "old" guys, however, who treated us like people. The two whom I remember most were Cpl. Bud Millett and First Sergeant Jack Albaugh.

Our training began and continued through the summer. During this period, several men were shipped out as replacements in combat divisions, and I remember we had decided that the 100th was never going overseas as a division but was going to be used to fill the "REPO DEPOTS." (Take down your service flag, Mother, your son's in the Century). In September, however, we were, indeed, alerted for overseas movement - as a division.

At this time the spirits of the men in the division were, in my memory, high. I think we were anxious to remove the "Repo Depot" image that we thought we had. We had been trained well and most of us, I think, felt that it was time we got into the war.

This is not to say that we didn't have fear about what lay ahead. No one looks forward to being shot at and maybe killed, but I believe, as a unit, our state of readiness overwhelmed the fear. It is harder for me to say these things in 1989 than it would have been in 1948, because one must remember that we were part of the last American fighting force that fought to win and that knew we had the whole country behind us in full measure. For this reason, I've always felt sorry for the Viet Nam guys and lesser so for the Korean guys. Those were two wars that we didn't really try to win. That's my opinion, but I had no way of thinking in 1944 in any other way than "Let's get on with it, get it over with, and get back home."

On September 25, we entrained for Camp Kilmer, N.J., which we left on October 6 to board the troop ship, U.S.A.T George Washington, in New York. I remember being told that the ship was the largest troop ship a float, whether that was true or not, I don't know. However large it was, it was very uncomfortable. They had us stuffed into that ship like sardines in a can, and the troop quarters were hot and contained a mixture of every body odor known to man. On October 8, my birthday, I was promoted to buck sergeant. My first command detail was, of all things, GARBAGE. I remember Jack Albaugh saying to me, "SERGEANT, have I got a job for you." Anyway, we stood at the mess hall exit, chanting, "Coffee in the sink, garbage in the pail." My "command" started

dropping like flies from seasickness. I finally found myself virtually alone with the garbage, which afterward had to be dumped over the fan tail of the ship.

On October 17, we sighted land and that evening went through Gibraltar. We docked in Marseilles on October 20. In the evening we began our debarkation, only to be interrupted by a German air raid. I did not see or hear any planes, but I heard the anti-aircraft guns firing. I remember thinking that was the first "real" gunfire I had ever heard.

We left the harbor on foot and arrived at our bivouac area during the night. This was the so-called Delta Base Section Staging Area, some 12 miles from Marseilles and near the town of Septemes. What it really was was a large open field, cold and wet. We were so pooped from the full-field hike that we just "laid down and died." We stayed there for 10 miserable days. Some of the guys got into Marseilles a time or two, but I didn't go.

On October 31, we started by truck up the Rhone River valley. In places, the road was strewn with dead men and horses and wrecked vehicles of various sorts. We were told that the air force had caught most of the German nineteenth army in the valley and almost totally wiped them out. Thus we saw our first "real" dead men. After overnight bivouacs at Valence and Dijon, we arrived at St.

Helene, near Baccarat. Someone told us that we were only about six miles from the German lines. After several minor movements at the battalion level, the regiment was located around Baccarat and the date was November 11. We were ready to push off the next morning.

Raon L'Etape

The Situation

Much of what I write about the "situation" was gleaned from Captain Hine's monograph. In truth, the situation was not understood by the troops in the line. We never really knew the big picture and probably wouldn't have understood it if we had known.

In August, 1944, the Seventh Army stormed the Mediterranean beaches of France. This invasion was carried out by the American VI Corps with the 3rd, 36th, and 45th Divisions and the French first army with four divisions. The opposition was the German 19th Army, and they retreated up the Rhone River valley where we had been on our way to the front. Eventually the Germans retreated through the Belfort Gap which was the southern-most escape route between the Vosges Mountains and the Swiss Alps.

At Belfort Gap, the Germans wheeled around and began to prepare a strong defensive line along the entire length of the Vosges (app. 30 miles). They were aware of the fact that no major military force in history had ever penetrated the Vosges Mountains against opposition.

The northern end of the line, called the Low Vosges, ran through mountains averaging 2800 feet in height. The region was densely wooded; both infantry and artillery observation and fields of fire were extremely limited; tank support for both sides was limited to a very few roads. Combat in the Vosges was principally one of short, plugging, unsupported infantry advances.

So this was what we faced on 12 November when we jumped off. We had the town of Raon L'Etape some 7.5 miles away as our objective. This campaign was our first, and I believe probably our worst time, but make no mistake about it, we emerged from it as one helluva rifle company in one helluva division.

12 November 1944

We had relieved units of the 45th Division around Baccarat. At about 0530 we had what was to be our last hot meal for several days. At 0700, we moved out toward our final assembly area. It was cold and wet, and we moved up a muddy road, so muddy that our weapons carriers bogged down. We on foot did not bog down, we just sank in and then pulled up. This road, I recall, was quickly strewn with equipment (gas masks, etc.) which we all decided we didn't need. We cut left from this road and stopped in the assembly area. I remember I was in a rather rocky area. It was here that I heard my first small arms fire. AT 0845 (Hine) our

artillery preparation began and at 0900, A and C companies pushed off through the 3rd Battalion lines. B Company was in reserve behind A Company.

In a few minutes, A Company made contact with the Germans and there was a fierce fire fight and A Company lost 23 men killed and wounded. We were in a ravine and could not see any of this, but A Company did fall back and we were sent into their place. At 1600 we attacked, supposedly in conjunction with C Company, we later learned that C Company had stopped for the night. Thus, we were about 600 yards in front of everybody and we were out of touch with battalion - we had run out of radio wire (Hine).

It was now dark, and we were digging in a perimeter defense. It was beginning to snow. In the thick woods, we couldn't dig because of roots. Sometime in there, 3 Germans wandered in and fired machine pistols. As I recall, Gerry Peitsch ran them off with his BAR. Captain Hine says "an alert BAR man had spotted the Germans, and with a sustained burst of fire killed one and forced the other two to surrender."

Whatever did happen, we were thoroughly miserable. We were cold, wet, hungry, and plenty scared. I remember thinking that, even though I had not fired a shot on this day, we had been baptized. I don't believe anyone slept that night. I don't

believe any of us knew we were completely cut off from our battalion, but I don't think knowing that would have made it any easier, so it's just as well.

13 November 1944

My memory is that at about 0900, a patrol was sent out to our right to make contact with C Company. They ran into a bunch of Jerries and in the fire fight Toby Reich, 3rd Squad, 2nd Platoon was killed. Captain Hine does not describe this as patrol activity but rather a German attack on C Company that stumbled into our perimeter. Whatever it was, we had a pretty good fire fight. I shall never forget the sound of Toby's crying for his mother as he died. Sometime later, probably around noon, we pushed off again. We didn't meet any enemy and at about 1700, we reached a place in the woods next to a wide fire lane, and there we dug in. It was nearly dark and we didn't have a chance to dig in well again because of roots. We caught a tremendous barrage from what Capt. Hine says were our own 4.2" chemical mortars. C Company suffered several casualties but B Company had none (Hine). A later barrage by Jerry mortars was apparently brought on by the sound of our chopping roots and trees. It was in this barrage, I believe, that Malcolm Miller was killed.

We had not received any supplies for two full days. A patrol was organized to go back to battalion and get them. Roger Goos was a member of that group and it took them almost all night to get back with water and K-Rations - but they did it! It was another bad night.

I remember thinking two things that night about our training and preparation for this experience. One was that we had not before dug any foxholes in such thick woods and that we really needed axes in addition to our entrenching tools. (We later acquired them). The other was the tree bursts that occurred overhead and dumped the shrapnel straight down on us. I couldn't remember ever hearing about such a thing. The mortars and artillery shells at Fort Bragg all seemed to explode in open fields. So, the baptism continued.

14 November 1944

The morning was cold and wet, but we did have K-rations. I was sharing a hole with Norman Chapin, and we improved our place considerably, only to move out at about 1300 hours. My most vivid memory of this place was the inverted rifle with helmet by Malcolm Miller's hole. I later got used to this sight, but I'll not forget this first one.

At 1300, we moved out with B Company on the right, A on the left, C in reserve. After about a half-mile (Hine) we went over a hill which led down to a draw with a creek flowing through it. On the other side of the hill we could see zig-zag firing trenches. The word came that we had hit the MLR of the Germans. Capt. Hine describes this draw as a sharp ravine filled with chopped limbs and trees to form a crude abatis, but my memory is that it was more gradual than that. On the other side, there was barbed wire. We were in a line stretching across the hill, pretty well spaced out. We were told that we were going to get artillery and then attack. I remember that no one in my squad had wire cutters which we would need. The artillery came and some of it hit trees behind us (those damned tree bursts), but most of it was effective including blowing the barbed wire. At this point, we got the order to hold our position and open fire with everything we had. It was here that I fired my first shot in the war, and I remember thinking, "I'm firing at a hill, I don't see anybody to shoot at." This didn't really make any difference - it was a great experience to know that I was doing something. I shared this thought with a lot of the guys later, and it turned out many had felt the same way. Suddenly, I wasn't so cold and miserable, I guess the adrenaline was flowing.

Anyway, we really gave it to them. I've often wondered how many rounds we fired in this action - it was a bunch. We then

moved out, crossed the creek, and charged through the barbed wire and up the hill. There were a few dead and wounded Jerries lying around, but we encountered no resistance. Apparently, most of them had retreated through the maze of trenches. I was among the first to cross and start up the hill. We were totally disorganized, and Lt. James was yelling "Hold up, let's get organized." Some of the company was still on the other side. We did hold up and finally restored some order, but I remember thinking, "We are green and this really shows it." We headed up the hill in company front. About the time we reached the top, the Jerries counter-attacked on our right flank. I saw probably 15 to 20 of them and they had burp guns. We slugged it out with them for probably about 15 minutes, during which we were able to set up a couple of light machine guns. I was between the two and those guys really did a job but they drew some mortar fire (tree bursts - we were still in thick woods). One shell hit in a tree right behind me and I heard the shrapnel hitting all over but I lucked out. Finally, the Jerries backed off and we dug in. This was to be a long, tough night. We had probably a dozen Jerry patrols during the night. They seemed to be in a hit and run pattern. They'd come in, the burp guns would go, we'd respond, and then off they'd go. In the morning there were several killed and wounded but I didn't know of any casualties on our side. (We later learned that Capt. Hine's runner, Pease, was killed).

This had been a day when most of us felt we had really done something and despite the weather misery, our morale had gone way up. There's nothing like meeting the enemy on his terms and beating him - especially when you have survived untouched. Except for the time when we came unglued after we attacked, we had really been a sharp combat unit. Proud? You bet.

15 November 1944

We held these positions all day. We improved our holes and cleaned our weapons. It was cold, but dry. We had Jerry patrols off and on all day, but they never really mounted an attack. They seemed content to harass us with the hit and run stuff. We had two killed and four wounded this day (Hine), but they were all from those damned tree bursts. Chapin and I had gotten our hole covered by noon so we stayed safe. I remember some time in the afternoon Capt. Hine came around and talked to each of us and told us we had done well the day before. What a man!

16 November 1944

We were scheduled to jump off at 1100 following an artillery barrage. The barrage, when it came, fell upon us and we got back into our holes. B Company lost one killed and 6 wounded. The barrage was stopped and then re-started, with the same result.

This time we were in our holes, and no one was hit. These events kind of sent the morale back down. There's nothing more devastating than being bombarded by your own stuff.

We finally did move out (this time without artillery support), and, other than taking a few prisoners, ran into no opposition. The prisoners told us the Jerries had withdrawn from Raon L'Etape. We didn't believe them, of course, but at about 1700, we found ourselves on the crest of a high hill overlooking the town. This was the battalion objective and we had it! We dug in. It was about dark, but I remember seeing a few civilians moving around in town and I heard several dogs barking. This night was totally uneventful.

17 November 1944

The sun shone this morning. I mention that because it is the first time we saw the sun after going into the lines. I also heard some roosters crowing in town. We also saw our first planes; they were ours (P-47's), and they were strafing on the other side of Raon L'Etape. We pulled back to a reserve position in the morning; it was along the Baccarat-Raon L'Etape road. We dug in and had our first hot meal in five days. Bud Millett recalls that we had church services in this position and that the chaplain announced that Col. Ellis had been killed. I don't recall this so I must not

have gone to the services. I do recall that I heard about Col. Ellis from one of the cooks in the chow line. This was a good day, I remember sitting in the sun and cleaning my M-1.

18 November 1944

We hiked into Raon L'Etape in the morning and moved into our first billets. We were now in Battalion reserve and were not the first to enter the town (C Company was, I think). Anyway, they had a few snipers to contend with, and, other than worrying about booby traps, we had no problems. Millett's squad was billeted in a restaurant of some sort and they captured two very sleepy Jerries. As we were preparing to settle down for the night, the order came to move out. We got out on the road and I was on the bank of the Meurthe River. Col King, who must have been regimental commander then (after Col. Ellis died), and Capt Hine were also at the river and they had fierce argument going which I overheard. Col. King was insisting that we cross the river that night; Capt. Hine was arguing that we should wait until morning. Capt. Hine finally said, "Colonel, we'll go if you give me a direct order, but I think it's a big mistake." To this day, I can't believe I heard Capt. Hine say that - but the end of it was that we did not cross the river that night but returned to our billets. I would have had no less admiration for Capt. Hine if he had lost the argument, but I

remember thinking that I was very proud (and fortunate) to be one of his men.

So ended the first campaign - at least that's the way I define it - in my memory these five days were the worst we had throughout the war. It was not only the first combat we experienced - it was to me the toughest. We had miserable weather, cold, wet, muddy and it was in a place where we couldn't get supplies. The woods were so dense and dark; the tree bursts and lack of visibility were constant problems. We had experienced a lot of casualties and sickness. Our regimental commander was killed along with some of our buddies that we'd been with since Fort Bragg. I can't make a comparison of the Raon L'Etape action with other first actions experienced by a new, green outfit, but surely the 100th had as severe a baptism as nearly anyone anywhere.

As I have earlier said, out of Raon L'Etape came a fighting, proud unit. One German general wrote that the 100th was a "crack" outfit and called us "shock troops." He may not have known how green we were, but he must have had a good reason for saying these things. I believe he was right, and I think that when you consider the officers we had from Gen. Burress to Capt. Hine, I think I know why.

19 November 1944

We spent the morning in Raon L'Etape and moved out in late afternoon. We were in battalion reserve and we moved into a little town which C Company had already taken. After hearing shouts of "Rear Echelon" from the gallant Charlie warriors, we moved again and dug in the woods above the town. It started to rain about the time we dug in. We were then called back to get hot chow, and several of us fell over a baby cliff getting there. In this maneuver, several of us jammed our rifles straight in to what appeared to be kind of sandy soil. Millett recalls reporting to Capt. Hine that some rifles were jammed. The C.O. replied, "T.S." Later, we all got a chance to practice the "blind-fold drill" when we cleaned our rifles in pitch dark.

20 November 1944

We moved out in the morning along a back-top road and secured a little town within a mile of our starting point. We then moved on into the town of Moyennoutier, where we really got a French welcome. Collie, Moran, and Murn led the column. The mayor of this place greeted us. He was a little guy with a bottle of wine in one hand and his "badge of office" in the other. He spoke good

English and claimed he had lived in Toledo, Ohio. He was a character, to say the least. We moved on through the town up the wide-open valley, but we were soon pinned down by sniper fire on that road. We finally pulled back to a road junction and spent the night in what must have been some kind of textile mill. I remember large spools of thread sitting around. I have no idea where the other platoons were that night. The building stuck out like a sore thumb and we were afraid we'd draw artillery, but there was none.

21 November 1944

We moved out in the morning along the same road. We came up to Senones, and some Recon outfit was held up there by a mined road block. Capt. Hine very calmly went up and removed the mines for them. He received the Silver Star for this. Later, we caught a terrific mortar barrage in this town. After it let up, we circled up the hill to the left and were pinned down by Jerries in a graveyard. We cleared the place and started digging in. Orders then came for us to move into LaPetite Raon, secure it, and stay the night. This we did happily. In LaPetite Raon, we found the townspeople removing a German roadblock, and we marvelled at the size of the logs some of those women were throwing around. We spent a comfortable night.

22 November 1944

Our first replacements came to us that morning. I don't recall how many there were, but, according to Gerald James (who kept a list), the first six replacements for 2nd Platoon were Weitmeyer, Gibbons, Contraras, Potter, Robinette, and LaCroix. Whether all six joined at this point, I really don't remember. Sgt. Albaugh came in and told us to relax and clean up because we'd have our Thanksgiving dinner here. In the afternoon, we moved out, and we hiked, a long way in the rain, to LePuid, where we finally got the turkey at about 2300. Several of us, including me, were sick, I guess from the rich food. I was up all night.

23 November 1944

We moved out in the early morning and hiked a long way to Champanay. On the way, we captured two Jerries who nonchalantly strolled out of the woods while we were taking a break. Along the road, there were a number of dead Jerries and numerous vehicles. They appeared to have been hit by .50 calibre bullets - we speculated that they might have been strafed by our fighters, but we had not seen or heard anything of that sort since Raon L'Etape. Whoever did it, they did a real job. After arriving in Champanay,

I went out with a recon patrol to a high hill nearby. On that hill, we found what must have been a German bivouac that had been vacated not too long before. There was a rocket launcher (Nebelwerfer?) with several rockets lying around. Since this stuff was left behind, we figured that Jerries must have left in a hurry. We saw no troops at all. On the way back I wandered into a swollen creek and nearly drowned. Lt. James later reported to Capt. Hine that the swimming team had seen no enemy. Very funny. Somebody had found some eggs somewhere and we fried them. This was a quiet night.

24 November 1944

Remained in Champanay the whole day. We got paid. All of a sudden, our pockets were stuffed full of Army script. I lost most of mine in a black jack game that night. Scherrer was a big winner.

25 November 1944

Same position. We were getting a good rest. This concludes the "post-Raon L'Etape" phase. It had been a lot easier than the preceding phase because we did not have anything like the intensity of action, the weather generally was better, we were able to stay

indoors frequently, and much of what we did was in open country rather than the woods.

Our morale was high. Since 12 November we had participated in the first recorded military penetration of the Vosges Mountains, you had to feel proud about that!

MOUÏTERHOUSE

The Situation

For us, the Vosges campaign was now over. We had driven the Jerries back, and they had now settled into a defensive line that mostly was associated with the Maginot Line. This was a line of pillboxes and fortresses that the French had hoped would stop the German invasion in 1940. That didn't happen, of course, mainly because the Germans out-flanked it to the north. The Maginot remained intact but in German hands. It presented us with a tough nut to crack.

The principal objective for the 100th was the citadel of Bitche (Beesh), and it proved to be well named (as we pronounced it). We were moved about 40 miles to the north of Raon L'Etape and we prepared the new assault with the division CP in Sarrebourg.

The 398th and 399th were later assigned the attack and capture of Bitche, the 397th the zone north and east of the town (left). We didn't know at this time that we would remain in the sector until March, that Bitche would not fall until then. Nor did we know that the Germans would hit the "Bulge" and cause us to stretch]

our lines paper thin and basically maintain a defensive position all winter.

MOUTERHOUSE

26 November 1944

We moved on foot back toward Raon L'Etape. I don't know where they came from, but truck convoys passed through us continually; we seemed to be the only outfit in the 100th Division that was walking, at least so it seemed. We got back to Senones and found the rear echelon firmly entrenched. We stopped and ate there, and I remember Hirschorn, the mail clerk, broke his glasses and cut his eye, he was yelling something about a Purple Heart. We mounted trucks and moved back to Raon L'Etape, where we spent a good night in what must have been a warehouse or something.

27 November 1944

In the morning we were told we were "changing sectors." This turned out to be a move by truck about 40 miles north east to the town of Neuwiller where we relieved parts of the 44th Division in a big schoolhouse. It was next to a large and very ornate Catholic

church, and some of us went to mass there the next day. Several of the guys left food at the altar.

28 November 1944

Remained in Neuwiller - quiet.

29 November 1944

We moved on foot to a hill overlooking the town of Ingwiler. We relieved a company from the 45th Division, and we went right into their holes. The place was very much like the Vosges at Raon L'Etape, wooded and dark. There was a paved highway down on our left. Apparently, the 45th had some action here, because there were three dead Jerries lying about 20 yards to our front. Spent the night in these positions.

30 November 1944

We remained in these positions. This was my mother's birthday and I wrote her a V-mail.

1 December 1944

We moved out and spent the whole day climbing hills and digging in. At about dark, I had to lead a patrol back down in the valley to bring back rations. We marked the trail with toilet paper going down, it was so damned dark! We would have come right back except that we were shelled at the ration point and had to sit tight for about an hour. We had a devil of a time finding the trail back up and somebody in the fourth platoon popped away at us with a light machine gun. A pleasant time was had by all.

2 December 1944

We retraced our steps of the day before and re-occupied our original position. We never knew what was going on here. At some time in the day, Sgt. Blum of the 1st Platoon took out a combat patrol which got into a fierce fire fight with some Jerries out front. From the sound of it, I was glad I wasn't along.

3 December 1944

We moved forward again to the positions we had dug 1 December. Capt. Hine came up to our platoon and I said, "Hine, this ain't funny." He replied, "Howsmon, I ain't laughing."

4 December 1944

We attacked in the morning (forward this time) and we caught a lot of mortar fire and 88's all day long. We finally got into holes which had been occupied by C Company the night before. I guess we were in battalion reserve, but I never really knew. Anyway, C Company must have had a rough time in this place because there were several dead bodies, G.I. and Jerry, lying around. I never did get used to this.

5 December 1944

Moved out in the morning and ran into our first anti-personnel mines. Tex Roberts of the 1st Platoon (?) was killed by one and we heard it was the "Bouncing Betty" type. We had our own tanks on the left flank (we were kind of out of the woods by now). They kept firing at something all day long but we never knew what. We

crossed the road at a fork and started to dig in but then moved into Wimmenau, where we spent a comfortable night.

6 December 1944

We moved into Melch on foot. In the afternoon, I became deathly sick. I never knew what it was, but I felt I was about to die; vomiting, the G.I.'s, you name it, I had it. A jeep from battalion came up with mail, I believe, and Lt. James sent me back with them. The next 7 days I missed, but I will try to write about them from what I've read in the Regiment and Division books and from what I heard happened.

7 December 1944

We moved on foot to Hill 285 which was northwest of Mouterhouse and dug in there. It was cold and it was snowing. The second battalion entered the town from the other side and we had it surrounded, so that we were in the back door. We got into a fire fight with some Jerries leaving town and we also caught some mortar fire. We had several casualties. It was a miserable night.

8 December 1944

Our battalion moved to the northeast to secure a cross-road, and B Company was caught on a hill near the cross-road by artillery and mortars but we got to the road. We had heavy casualties many of whom could not be evacuated until dark. Night evacuations were difficult even in favorable times, but in this one, we found the road to the battalion aid station to be mined. All casualties were evacuated by midnight.

9 December 1944

The third battalion had cleared Mouterhouse on 8 December, and we moved into the town. We were under constant artillery and mortar fire. Many of our motor pools and kitchens were in town, and they were catching the heat along with the rest of us. Bud Millett recalls that there was a chapel service held on this day.

10 December 1944

We moved out in the morning. We were on the right flank of the whole division and the 398th on the left, and we were moving toward Bitche in the Maginot Line. We were encountering little

resistance and it was relatively good day. Dug in and spent the night in the woods, not close to any town that we knew of.

11 December 1944

Remained stationery.

12 December 1944

We moved on and got into a brisk fire fight during the day. We had a good night in new positions, again not close to anything.

13 December 1944

We learned that our objective was Camp de Bitche. We moved out and had no trouble, but A Company had a nasty fire fight on the next hill. The Division book says they succeeded in driving back an enemy force twice their size. Millett recalls hearing bagpipe sounds at some point (?).

14 December 1944

I rejoined the company, and took a terrible razzing because I had clean clothes. Bill English was telling me about how rough it been while I was gone, and I remember asking him how it had

compared with TENNESSEE MANEUVERS. He told me I was a smart ass, but we had a good laugh. It was a quiet day.

15 December 1944

We remained stationery, but we had some mortars in the afternoon. It was nothing special because we had good holes.

16 December 1944

We moved out and it didn't take long to get into trouble. We were moving up a hill and were pinned down by a Jerry group, probably a Company with plenty of automatic weapons. I myself counted 5 light machine guns. With the good help of our 60 mm and 81 mm mortars, we finally ran them off, but we were run off ourselves, once. We dug in on top at dark and we were overlooking Camp de Bitche.

17 December 1944

We remained stationery but we were bothered all day by mortar fire and patrol action. It reminded me of a couple of the days above Raon L'Etape. The Jerries just kind of harassed us, but it never became serious.

18 December 1944

We remained stationery and had a chance to clean weapons. My M-1 developed a malfunction and Lt. James sent me back to the Company CP to see if I could replace it. There I talked with Sgt. Blum (now 1st Sgt. because Jack Albaugh had been hit on 8 December). He gave me his M-1 and said he was carrying a carbine now. I remember thinking that I sure wouldn't replace my M-1 with a carbine, I never thought those little things had any power, but I didn't say that to Blum. I hated to part with my M-1 because it had been issued to me the day after I joined the 100th in March. Blum told me the M-1 was a Christmas present.

19 December 1944

We were relieved by the third battalion and put in regimental reserve some 500 yards back. We took over positions that they had occupied. They were really good holes and we got the better of the bargain. A and C Company got back to Mouterhouse for showers, but we just weren't lucky. "I really didn't need a shower," I said, "since I've only been back 5 days."

20 December 1944

We remained in that position. We had hot chow and mail call, but it was cold! This was the last day of what I call the Mouterhouse campaign. I think we all knew that something else was coming because we heard that day about the "Bulge" to our north. Some of us speculated that we might even be sent north to that sector, we were cocky enough by now to think that we could take care of it single-handedly. That didn't come about. I think the memory of Mouterhouse I have (remember I was not there for the tough stuff) is that we had fought a tougher enemy under better weather conditions, generally, and that we had knocked his socks off.

BITCHE

21 December 1944

We moved on foot back to Mouterhouse and mounted trucks to Holbach. We heard that we were not changing sectors but that, because of the Bulge, the 7th Army was stretching its line to cover most of the line of Patton's 3rd Army. The 3rd was cutting to the north to help stop the Bulge. From Holbach we marched to a place called Urbach where we relieved elements of the 44th Division. With this move, the 397th became the left flank of the division. Actually we were outside Urbach on a hill. We didn't know it then, but we were destined to remain in this vicinity until March. These first positions around Urbach were good ones and we got hot chow, but it had really gotten cold and we had a fair amount of snow on the ground.

22 December 1944

Remained stationery.

23 December 1944

Remained stationery.

24 December 1944

At about 1800, we moved out and hiked toward Bettwiler. This was a lateral move rather than a forward one. We were "adjusting the lines." This Christmas eve was a bright one, clear and cold. Two things occurred on this hike. One was that somewhere we passed somebody's field kitchen (in a house) that had caught fire and we heard a couple of guys had died in the fire. The place was still smoking. I never heard whose kitchen it was. The other was that Malcolm Gannaway, in my squad, apparently had developed pneumonia. He was coughing his guts up and finally just caved in. We radioed for a jeep to come up and pick him up, and "Doc" Brown, our medic, and I stayed with him until the jeep arrived (about 30 minutes). The jeep driver then offered to take Doc and me up to catch up with the company, which we did. I never found out who that guy was (he was not one of ours) but I'll thank him now if he reads this. We spent the night comfortably in a school house in Bettwiler.

25 December 1944

Merry Christmas! We moved on foot from Bettwiler to Rimling out to a bare hill to the left and started to dig in. The ground was frozen and we had a devil of a time. About 1500, we moved into a school house in Rimling and had Christmas dinner. I remember we had beer. We were issued our snow parkas, reversible, white and tan. Then back to Bettwiler, still "adjusting lines." All the way, we passed through our 3rd battalion who told some wild tales about a big attack. We had heard shooting on our left during the afternoon, but we had no action. Strange. We passed through Bettwiler and halted at a place called Milingerhof Farm on the Bettwiler-Urbach road. Apparently we had made a big circle because we were now on the other side of Urbach. We relieved a TD outfit (these were the first black guys I had seen), and we moved into their holes. So ended Christmas.

26 December 1944

No action. We spent the day fixing up our holes. It was very cold, probably about 10° - 15°. Milingerhof Farm had several buildings and the CP's were located in them. The rifle platoons were in holes stretched (probably 25 yards apart) along a hill and

across the Bettwiler-Urbach Road. My squad was all on the other side of the road and I could see no one on our right. It snowed during the night.

27 December 1944

No action. In the morning, Bill English came down and told me that Capt. Hine had ordered a wire-pull flare be installed at my hole. Apparently, some action was expected. English and I installed the flare after it arrived from the rear.

28 December 1944

Lt. James took a small patrol out in the draw directly in front of our holes, but found no one. He told me that there was definitely something coming, and that the Jerries had hit Rimling (we had heard a lot of shooting on our left) and that must have been the attack on the 3rd Battalion. Actually, it had been going on since 26 December, off and on.

29 December 1944

B Company, 398th, moved in on our right flank but their nearest hole must have been 75-100 yards away. I went over to make contact and was shot at by one of their other platoons. This is

in broad daylight and open field. I finally made it over and talked to the platoon leader who told me there was no way they could close up because they couldn't dig. This I believed, but we sure had a big gap. He also said that they were patrolling Urbach twice a day and they had some action there. I had heard nothing in that direction, so this I didn't believe. I bade him farewell and went "home."

30 December 1944

No action.

31 December 1944

No action - had some beer on New Year's Eve. The Division book reports that the 398th had taken 15 PW's in Urbach; they seemed to have left our right flank during the night of the 30th. At least, they were no longer there.

1 January 1945

At about 0200 (Lt. James and I do not agree on this time, he thinks it was about 0030) an estimated 40 Jerries came up the road out of Urbach. They were making an awful racket and we heard them before we saw them. All nine of my squad were ready, and since it

didn't take the form of an attack, I waited a while to pull the flare. Though they were not in lines on the road, more in an attack front across the draw, they really didn't seem to know we were there, until I pulled the flare. When I did, the place was as bright as the sun, and we let go on them. I had planted our BAR in the left hole by the road and I realized it didn't have as good a field of fire as Collie, Scherrer, and I had in the middle hole. (I can't for the life of me recall who the BAR man was, it could have been Koeppen). I went to the BAR and took it back to the right of my hole. We were all firing away and with the BAR in that location, I was able to sweep their whole line. At some point, one of our heavy machine guns on the left cut loose and we had those guys in the neatest cross fire I had ever seen. They tried to fire back but they were completely at our mercy - "like fish in a barrel." Several of them broke and ran. I got on the phone and talked to Lt. James and asked for artillery (I had seen no tanks, but I thought they might be coming). We got 105's, I believe, and I passed firing orders through Lt. James. When the artillery came in, the Jerries just quit, and started to surrender. We let up, called off the artillery, and the machine gun stopped also. Lt. James and English arrived and took several of my guys (Chavez was one) down the road into the draw. There were nineteen dead, and we took 11 prisoners, most of whom were wounded. We had no casualties. We later learned that this thing was, in fact, a part of wide-spread assault on our division, which turned out to be

stuck way out front of the 7th Army line. All I can say is that the outfit that hit(?) us sure didn't act like assault troops. They apparently didn't know we were there and they didn't do any assaulting after they found us. We had them over a barrel from the first minute and it was no contest. Nevertheless, we were pumped higher than a kite. This was the sum total of the action we saw around Rimling, and it was nothing compared to what the 3rd battalion had in Rimling, itself.

2 January - 11 January 1945

This was a quiet period. Aside from mortar fire which blew out our phone lines to the CP's almost daily, we had no action. Of all the places where we were, this is the one I remember most vividly and even warmly. Even though it was cold, we had good holes, hot chow, and the memory of 1 January, when we had really torn them up. During this period, we re-installed the flare but never used it. The only other thing was that somewhere in here several of us realized that we had head lice. Now that was fun!

12 January 1945

We said goodbye to Milingerhof late on this day after relief from E Company, 398th. I remember the company exactly because I had a friend, Bill Kidd, from Benning who was in Co.E. I learned

this day that he had been killed in the Vosges. We went on foot back to a little town the name of which I never knew. It was about two miles from Achen.

13 January 1945

We occupied positions just outside Achen. Some of our guys were actually in pill boxes of the Maginot Line (not me) and most of us were pretty comfortable.

14 - 18 January 1945

A very quiet period in which we were aware of some Jerry patrol activity way out front but no action. We were able to send a few men into Achen to sleep each night. A shower unit came up and we all got cleaned up.

19 January 1945

Moved out of Achen late afternoon. There are two photographs of us in the Division book passing a cemetery on this march. It was cold and miserable. We had no idea where we were headed and we stopped intermittently. It took a long time (0300, 20 January) to arrive at guess where - Urbach! We relieved some of the 63rd

Division in their holes south of the town. We just couldn't get away from that place.

20 January 1945

When daylight came, the 2nd Platoon found itself in a draw which after the weather warmed we affectionately called "Shit Creek." We were maintaining three "outpost" holes on the exposed hill overlooking the town. This first day, we made the mistake of changing our outpost personnel in daylight and also bringing hot chow right up to the front. Both times we drew mortar fire. The 2nd Platoon had two wounded (seriously), Potter and Robinette, but the 4th had Hennigar killed. Butts from the 4th was wounded here, also, I believe. There were others, but I don't remember who they were. We stayed undercover from then on, and we changed the outpost just twice a day, right after dark and just before dawn.

21 January - 26 February 1945

Stayed in this position. We established an outpost right in Urbach. We had a couple of squads there 24 hours a day in the basement of the church. At night we had 3-4 listening posts wired into the church at various places. Although I don't remember seeing any, we had every reason to believe that the Jerries were in town, too. We heard them several times. It was an eerie time.

We did a lot of recon patrolling in this period out in front of Urbach, but Jerry was hard to find. Also we stretched barbed wire across our front. This had to be done at night, of course. I recall that Bud Millett, Tom Murn, Norman Chapin, and I were all on barbed wire detail one night during a snow storm. This was a really happy party! Also the ground thawed in this period and we had some rain. Our holes filled with water and a little stream literally flowed down that draw. The water was none too clean and the name "Shit Creek" seemed especially appropriate.

26 February 1945

We moved out of S.C. into reserve positions about 500 yards back. The holes were in good shape, and it was a pleasant change.

27 February - 13 March 1945

Remained stationery. We still maintained the accursed Urbach outpost and a few recon patrols, but other than those, it was quiet. On 3 March, Capt. Hine was wounded by mortars, I believe, and left the company. Jerry didn't know what a blow he had struck to B Company that day.

13 March 1945

We were relieved by the 44th Division and moved by truck to Bining where we spent the night. We got there at about chow time, and two Jerry-operated P-47's strafed the area when we were going to eat. We stayed in some barracks for the night.

14 March 1945

Moved by truck to Hottwiler, about a mile south-west of Urbach!! We sensed that something big was happening when we found the whole regiment there. The spring push started the next morning.

15 March 1945

We attacked at 0500. The 397th was on the left of the division and the other two regiments, we heard, were making a direct assault on Bitche (which we never saw). Our sector was open, rolling hills. We passed through and around some really king-sized mine fields. It was fairly quiet until we entered the first wooded ground, and we immediately began to catch hell from rocket fire. (Screamin' Meemies). We dug in and prepared to stay

the rest of the day and night. We then learned that the battalion objective, Schorbach had been taken by someone(?) and we moved out in the afternoon. It was a nice, sunny, warm day and somewhere along the line we picked up some tank support. We moved through some rather rough wooded ground. We came to a black top road, where we were held up by a sniper on the opposite hill. He had wounded at least one guy from the first platoon and then killed the medic who went out to assist. We finally got WP shells zeroed in and literally set the whole hill afire. Then we moved up the road which had a junction with a road coming out the "back door" of Bitche. At least there was a sign that pointed to our right which said "BITCHE - 10 km."

There was a house across the road, pretty well beaten up, and Lt. James sent my squad across to clear it. Like every good squad leader, I went first. About half-way across the road something literally spun me around and knocked me down. It was a sniper bullet, but I could find or feel no wound. The company behind me swept the area beyond the house with small-arms fire and my squad got across safely into the house. Lt. James later said that the small arms barrage had been fired in the right direction but no sniper was ever seen. We got inside and a tank 88 hit the upstairs, we were in the cellar and we were sweating pretty hard. A couple more tank shells hit and then our artillery got him, I think. We had three men down, Rouse, hit in the leg, and Peitsch

and Scherrer, concussion. (The Regimental book lists these three as being wounded on 16 March - but it's wrong).

There was nothing for us to do but to sit tight under cover until dark. While we were doing that, two Jerries came out of a woods up the road and surrendered. I didn't invite them in but waved them across the road. I was interested to see whether the sniper would get them, but nothing happened. It never occurred to me - they might have been the snipers.

At dark, others came across and assisted with our evacuation. This one was to me worse than 1 January, at least I was a helluva lot more scared.

16 March 1945

In the morning, the second battalion moved through us and mopped up the hills where the snipers had been the day before. We remained stationery.

17 March 1945

The tanks were with us and we attacked again. We had very little trouble and most of us ended up riding the tanks. We spent the night in Walschbronn.

18 March 1945

Stayed in Walschbronn and ran a few patrols.

19 March 1945

We patrolled Kroppen, our first town inside Germany. We came back to Walschbronn where we dug in just inside the border. Right behind our position was a wrecked P-47, it had a red tail just like the ones that had supported us at Rimling. On this day I had severe foot trouble. I took off my shoes and socks, and both feet were raw and bloody. In the process of worrying over this, I got my foot powder out of my pack. Lo and behold, the can had a bullet hole through it. So my knock down on 15 March was explained. I knew I hadn't just fallen, the force of the bullet through my pack had literally flattened me. This is a true story, guys, honest. Made me think.

I was telling Lt. James this story and he saw my feet. He said, "Willie, after the day you had on the 15th, and with those feet, I think you need a break." I didn't argue - I hopped a jeep and went back to the kitchen, where all I did for 5 days was soak my feet and drink beer. Sgt. Powell, the mess sergeant, told me

right out that he didn't want me to do anything. My previous memory of Powell was as a K.P. and I told him "Powell, that's a switch." All the guys in the kitchen really were good to me.

20 March 1945

I was absent, but I understand the company was relieved by the 71st Division and went back into Walschbronn.

21 March 1989

Remained in Walschbronn. Apparently the front was moving fast and we were in reserve.

22 March 1945

Moved by truck to Petersburg. Somewhere in here, I was told, a wine cellar was liberated by B Company and a deal was struck with the tankers that the wine would be split with them if they would carry it on the tanks. The deal was consummated.

23 March 1945

Moved by truck to Ludwigshafen where we dug in on the Rhine River (I was still absent). Terrific artillery all night.

24 March 1945

I rejoined the company, fit as a fiddle. We moved to Eppstein where we occupied comfortable billets. We heard that Patton has crossed the Rhine at Remagen and that he was bound for Munich. It was also said that we might be done. That wasn't to be, however.

25-30 March 1945

Remained in Eppstein.

HEILBRONN

The Situation

Bitche had fallen on 16 March and we were off and running toward the Rhine River, which we crossed at Mannheim. The enemy was on the run and we were smelling victory. The weather was good, we took one town after another and we were moving quickly - frequently on tanks or trucks.

Then we hit Heilbronn which Jerry had decided to hold at all cost. Heilbronn was our last major battle, and it was a dilly!

31 March 1945

Rode tanks across the pontoon bridge to Mannheim. We had no action and we were billeted in a little town near Schwetzingen. I don't recall the name.

1 April 1945

Moved out through woods and captured the town of Walldorf around which was emplaced a battery of wicked looking 88's. They had been abandoned, however, and there was no resistance.

2 April 1945

We moved out of Walldorf and went up a long, low valley, taking one small town on the way. We left the road and went across a ridge into another town. There was no resistance in the town, but the surrounding woods was full of snipers. We cleared them and moved ahead. It was dark by this time, and as we passed a large house on the left, we heard a lot of voices inside. We were immediately alert, of course, but the people turned out to be Russian Displaced Persons (DP's). They were afraid we would kill them, and several of them were down on their knees pleading with us. Now that was a funny feeling. We moved on into the next town which A Company had taken that afternoon. They apparently had some trouble, though, because there was a wrecked Sherman tank and a couple of dead tankers. We stayed the night here.

3 April 1945

With A Company, we cleared the rest of the town then moved on. We took a few small towns, but it was mostly just a hike. About dark, we were picked up by trucks and moved to a little town where we spent the night.

4 April 1945

We moved out on tanks and went without incident to Frankenbach, where we began to pick up some Jerry artillery. A jeep from some unknown outfit was hit right by us, and the driver was killed. None of our tanks were hit. Just behind us our Corps artillery was digging in, and with all those Jerry shells falling, it was a really strange situation. Things quieted down soon, though, and we took billets in Frankenbach for the night.

5 April 1945

In the morning, the second platoon was called out and moved by truck into Heilbronn to help mop up the east bank of the Neckar River. We finished the job and went back to Frankenbach, only to find the company ready to move to Heilbronn. Such bitching, you

never heard. I remember telling Ray Salsman, 3rd Platoon, that we had made the place safe for the 3rd to go in. Ray just grinned and said, "It's about time you guys did something." We went back and stayed in the buildings along the river.

6 April 1945

The Jerries had blown all the bridges, and we crossed the Neckar River in assault boats at 0430. It was clear that we were in for some hot times. Jerry had all kinds of artillery and tanks, and we learned that the SS had decided to make a stand at Heilbronn. When we got across, we went into a large factory building where A Company was located. AT 0900, we moved out and it was door-to-door, room-by-room. There were Jerries everywhere, sniping at us. We cleared out a bunch of buildings, one of which was a machine shop in which we captured several prisoners. In the basement was an air raid shelter full of terrified civilians. There was also the body of an SS captain laid in state, such as it was. We moved out again up the main drag left of the Knorr Works and searched out a row of apartment type dwellings. About this time, the Jerries counterattacked and there were at least three tanks (Tiger) that I saw. We withdrew, except for B.R. Smith. B.R. stayed put with his machine gun and literally stopped the counterattack in its tracks. How he avoided catching an 88 shell from the tanks, I'll never know, but he sure did a job - we heard

that he had knocked off about 15 Jerries, and, of course, he was severely wounded himself. He got the Silver Star for this. We pulled back to a row of houses facing the Knorr Works, and held them off from there. I never saw the tanks again until the next day. It was somewhere in this location that Lt. Kirkland was killed.

7 April 1945

Since Capt. Hine was still gone, and Lt. James had just returned from somewhere, Lt. Boswell from A Company took over B Company. At about 0830, we caught another counterattack. There were a large group (company?) of infantrymen, three tanks, and a flak wagon who came around the Knorr Works right at us. We were in deep trouble. The tanks headed toward the river, however. It was clear that the move was intended to cut us off. The attempt failed, however, because the sweet sounds of our artillery started and the tanks ran. It was beautiful. We got most of the infantry ourselves, and the artillery chased off the tanks. A big sigh of relief could be heard. We moved out again in the afternoon and went back to the line we'd lost the day before. The 2nd Platoon was set up in what must have been the Nazi headquarters because the place was full of party uniforms, swastika flags, buttons, and pictures of Hitler. One room had a desk as big as a pool table, I swear. Several of us slept on the damned thing.

8 April 1945

We stayed put all day. There was a lot of action on both sides of us, but other than a few snipers in the building across the street, we had none. We later learned that the days before we had really stuck ourselves out on a limb. We were apparently ahead of anyone else.

9 April 1945

We moved across the street and cleared the buildings. It was a textile works. The 2nd Platoon occupied the whole building and that night we had a mobile guard patrol. We had more guard posts to cover than we had men, so we had to move around.

10 April 1945

No change in position. Our tanks had crossed the river now and there were several in the boulevard to our left.

11 April 1945

We cleared a large number of apartment dwellings. Things had quieted down and we had almost no action. We took several wounded prisoners.

12 April 1945

We completed mopping up our part of the city. We were in the high rent district now and our billets were very comfortable. Capt. Hine returned to the company that evening and came around to say hello to everybody. I remember he said "It looks like you men got along all right without me." We replied, "No way." He told us President Roosevelt had died several days before.

13 April 1945

We moved out of the city in the morning and went to Weinsberg, but we had no action. We spent a good night.

14 April 1945

In the morning, we sent several recon patrols out but found nothing. In the afternoon, we moved to Oberheinreit. We had a fire fight all afternoon outside town. We moved in about dark and found Co.E, 397th, there. They had been shot up pretty badly that afternoon, and they only had one company officer, and he was wounded. I believe the battalion commander attached them to us under Capt. Hine. The two companies together probably had enough men to make one company.

15 April 1945

We moved out, without Co. E, and pushed into the woods. The 781st Tank Battalion was back with us and they still had the wine. We took three Jerries by surprise in the woods and captured them. We dug in overlooking open ground across which we could see several Jerry positions. We fired on them and drew some mortar fire in return. Spent the night.

16 April 1945

In the morning, the Jerries were gone and we moved out on a long road march to Lowenstein. We had no trouble there, but somebody did, because there were several burning buildings. Lowenstein sat on top of a hill in what I later learned was vineyard country. I remember looking down a valley, it was beautiful, and saying "With a beautiful country like this, why do these bastards want more?" We moved on through and were pinned down by snipers. We cleaned them out the woods and took several prisoners, then moved into a small town where we stayed the night.

17 April 1945

Moved out in the morning on tanks. We ran into several roadblocks that we had to clear then came into a long narrow valley. There were snipers on both sides, and we had to take to the woods. The tanks hit both sides and we got some WP's from artillery. The snipers left. We mounted the tanks again and went on to Wustensot where we stayed the night.

18 April 1945

Moved out on foot and took several towns. In the last one, where we stayed, the people seemed very surprised to see us and I can hear the women squealing yet as we entered. I don't know the name of the place, but there was a creek that ran right through it. The 2nd platoon was billeted on one side, and company CP was on the other. Maybe that description will help somebody remember the name.

19 April 1945

On foot all day, one little berg after another, absolutely no resistance. We were really moving now. Sgt. Jenkins joined the platoon on this day.

20 April 1945

We hiked to a main road where we were picked up by trucks. We dismounted at about noon and captured several small towns without resistance until about dark. We were moving up a hill with the 3rd platoon in the point, when snipers got at least two (wounded) in the front of the column. We searched out the woods

and went into a little town at dark. At 2300, we moved out again and hiked all night.

21 April 1945

We moved into Schorndorf at about 0430 without action. We stayed the morning there, then mounted tanks to Winterbach. We had hopes of staying the night there but we moved on foot up a muddy road to Hohengren, where we passed through A Company. We entered a woods, and proceeded to get into a really hot fire fight. We dug in and prepared to stay. There were Jerries everywhere and it was necessary to have only one guy dig while the other popped away. It was a crazy situation, made more crazy by the fact that at 2300, we got orders to pull back to the town of Baltmannsweiler, near Hohengren, where we stayed the night!

22 April 1945

Moved out at 0300 and entered the same woods we had occupied the night before. The Jerries seemed to have left. About 0900 a German convoy (no tanks) headed right up the road to our left. There were sedans, motorcycles, and flak wagons, and they came right into us. We stayed in the woods and popped away, but they kept coming. It was here that James Smith (Smitty) of the 1st platoon was killed. He was our last casualty. We finally got this

thing stopped and we took a bunch of prisoners. It turned out they were part of Hitler's "People's Army" (Volksturm?) and they were mostly old men and young boys. I remember their leader told us they were only trying to give themselves up. One of Smitty's buddies almost shot him for that. After all this, we hiked, with no more problems, into Plochingen, where we spent the night.

23-26 April 1945

We remained in Plochingen and patrolled the banks of the Neckar River. During this period, we learned that the front had literally passed us by and that we were completely out of contact with the enemy, at least in any organized form. This came as good news, of course, but we didn't quite believe it. I think we were really expecting to be told to "Move out!" at any minute. Our patrols were picking up no action for us. Plochingen became a fine place to be. We were done.

It was in Plochingen that we had a lot of fun with the "Weasel" that Lt. James had commandeered on 22 April. The Weasel was a German half-track vehicle with a single front wheel (like a tricycle) and it was steered by handlebars, (like a bicycle). It was a powerful vehicle and the Germans used it for transporting ammunition, supplies, etc. in rough terrain. It was superior to our Jeep.

27 April 1945

We moved into Stuttgart which had been our division objective after Heilbronn. The French First Army had gotten there first, however. Here we were billeted in a mansion, I mean mansion. These were fancy surroundings for guys who had been in fox holes, basements, barns, you name it, for 162 days.

28 April 1945

Two things happened on this day. The first was that about noon, the whole company (battalion?) was ordered out in the street and formed up. The battalion commander (Major Thorp?), a chaplain, and a civilian woman then "inspected" the troops. We couldn't figure what in hell was going on; it turned out the woman had been assaulted by an "Amerikanisch Soldaten," and the formation was like a police line-up. Whether they found the guy, I don't know.

The other was that at about 1400, I was called to the Company CP. When I got there, 1st Sgt. Blum was there. He said, "Willie, is that my rifle you're carrying?" I replied, "Yes, it's the one you gave me up above Mouterhouse." He said, "Gave you, hell, that was a loan. If you'll give it back, I'll give you a five-day pass

to Brussels." You had to know Blum to appreciate the story. I kept the rifle.

29 April 1945

I got clean (brand new) clothes and took off on a quartermaster convoy for Brussels. On the way, we stopped in Bastogne - that was interesting.

29 April - 4 May 1945

I was toughing it out in Brussels. B Company spent the time in Gingen and moved to Sussen, where they were when I returned.

5-7 May 1945

We stayed in Sussen without incident. We heard there were a few Jerry stragglers around, but to my knowledge, none of us ever saw one. The only entry of note here is that on 5 May we stood the first reveille and retreat since the states. Capt. Hine told us it was time to make soldiers of us. It was actually kind of fun. The cease fire order came at 1200 on 7 May but we didn't celebrate until 8 May.

8 May 1945

Sgt. Blum determined that the 781st Tank Battalion was about 15 miles from us and that they still had our wine. A patrol was sent by truck and they came back with almost all of it. That evening after retreat was wild, and we saw something I didn't think we'd ever see. About dark, we were sitting around drinking the wine when the order came to fall out. We reeled into the company street and there was our company commander, dressed in a helmet, shorts, and combat boots with a sabre strapped on his waist. He was carrying a bottle of wine and just a little drunk. He said, "I want to tell you men what a helluva job you've done. Dismissed." That was it. We broke into cheers and tears, I believe, at least I did. The war was over, we had made it, and the best officer in the whole army had congratulated us - in his underwear. That was a moment I will remember and cherish forever.