

The Jammed BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle)

by H. Foster Mitchem, 397-C

After crossing the Neckar River, in the battle of Heilbronn, we found ourselves without tank support for three days. Each time the engineers put up a pontoon bridge, the German artillery—which occupied the high ground overlooking the city—would knock it out.

Around the fourth day, we found ourselves occupying an apartment house. The room I was in had been a dental office. I was on guard at the window which looked out on a crossroad with an approaching street directly to my front. To my rear was the abandoned dental chair. No office calls today. In the room to my right was our BAR man also on guard at the room's window.

It was late afternoon and the day was coming to a close. Suddenly, an American tank came down the road towards us. Reaching the intersection it made a left turn and pulled up in front of a building a couple of houses to our right. I watched as the tankers got out and made their way into the abandoned building. Obviously, they intended to spend the night there. It beats sleeping in a tank.

Shortly later, I was surprised to see a platoon of soldiers coming down the road as if in close order drill. The clicking sound of their hobnailed boots told me they were German troops. I ran to the next room to alert the BAR man. He told me to get back to my window. The next minute I knew his BAR had jammed and he was desperately working the receiver without success. By now the Germans had disappeared as they hit the dirt behind debris left behind from bombings and artillery fire. We spent the night on a high degree of alert. By morning there was no trace of the enemy as they had made their way through our lines. In hind sight, I thought they were brave to follow the path of an enemy tank, but I felt they were foolish to come down a road in platoon formation.

April 2011 Association Newsletter