

# World War II Memories

by H. Foster Mitchem, 397-C

## Boarding Ship

Oct. 5, 1944 found C company 397th Infantry on the pier awaiting to load onto the SS *George Washington*. Each man had a 70 pound pack with horseshoe roll, rifle, overcoat, ammo belt and steel helmet. Chalk numbers on the helmet indicated where we were to line up. Red Cross workers gave us a send off with doughnuts and coffee. The order to board came down and our company was assigned C deck. We soon heard that our company commander volunteered our company for KP duty. The quarters were crowded; I found myself on a bottom bunk with 3 or 4 fellows above me with a narrow aisle separating me from another tier of GIs on the other side. Boarding was difficult for me, as I had dislocated my knee at Camp Kilmer. On getting aboard a friend, Howard Smith, told me how he felt sorry for me as I limped up the gangway. I didn't know it at the time that I would be put into a hospital at Marseille for a knee operation. On rejoining the outfit, I was shocked to hear that Howard had been killed.

## Shipboard

We had two meals a day. Needless to say many fellows became seasick and were forced to skip some meals. As I recall, we ate at tables standing up. I never missed a meal and can't remember being seasick. Fear of seasickness influenced me to enlist in the Army—even with a brother in the Navy. Eleven ships were in the convoy as well as a destroyer and four destroyer escorts. I was always amazed to awaken with the same formation (the ships being spaced equally distanced as the night before). After twelve days, land was sighted and we saw flying fish and dolphins around the boat. Lights appeared to our right as we hugged the coast of Africa. We reached the port of Marseille the next morning. We now realized we were in a War zone as the port facilities had been destroyed with numerous submerged ships showing only their funnels above water.

## Disembarking

Troops began unloading that afternoon. This was to continue all night into the next day. Landing nets were placed over the side with each soldier climbing down with full combat gear. LCI's (landing craft) carried them to shore, since the transport had anchored some distance away due to the destruction of the port. That night as we lay on our bunks an urgent message came over the loud speaker. "Electrician on watch, throw the main switch, emergency, emergency." The entire ship was plunged into darkness and we could hear ack-ack fire from anti-aircraft guns. "Bedcheck Charlie," a German recon plane was checking out our arrival. I didn't get off until the next day. I managed to climb down the landing net, bum leg and all along with rifle and full gear. I joined the outfit some 12 miles outside of Marseille where they were bivouacked in a muddy pasture. After reporting in, I was sent to the aid station and on to the 43rd general hospital.

## Hospitalization

Reaching the hospital, I was sent to the surgical ward to await an operation on my knee. There was a machine gun sergeant from my division with a broken finger. In the bed next to me was a severely wounded tanker. Both legs were broken and he had a spike cast from the waist down. He told me his tank was hit and a shell whirled around after penetrating the tank. While at the forward aid station they failed to cover him adequately with sheets or blankets and flies had laid their eggs in the crotch area. He suffered terribly from a desire to itch the area and I held a flashlight to aid the ward boy in sweeping up some of the hatching maggots. I'm told that maggots are often an aid in eating up Necrotic tissue, thereby promoting healing. Tankers often got severe burns; in the room next to ours was a tanker with one leg amputated above the knee and one below the knee. His face was severely burned and was covered with a burlap bag with holes punched out for eyes nose and mouth. I often ran for the ward boy as he called out for someone to please help him.

When the time arrived for me to be operated on, two German POWs in German uniforms entered the room with a nurse. They were carrying a stretcher for me to get on. The nurse gave me a pre-operative shot and I was en route to the operating room. The previous patient was being removed from the operating table and I noted he had a pin sticking through his leg in the knee area, and I'm to go next—WOW! On awakening, I noted a bandage that ran from well above the knee to the ankle. I still could not straighten the knee, and this persisted for some time after the operation. After a couple of days I was up on crutches and was able to get to the bathroom down the hall. I was shocked to have a French lady worker enter the room with a cheerful “Bon Jour” and proceed to enter a cubicle. Life in Europe was certainly different. Outside the main building of the hospital were several barracks buildings where the German POWs were housed. Christmas was approaching and the POWs would sing *Silent Night* in German—it was beautiful.

The division had entered into combat in November while I was still in the hospital. Things didn't sound that great when I heard that Colonel Ellis, our regimental commander had been killed. Then we heard of the Battle of the Bulge. Meanwhile, I was on the mend, Catherine Cornell was visiting the troops as a USO performer and was in the recreation building when I arrived on crutches. She got up and kindly offered me her chair.

After the crutches phase, and as ambulatory patients, we were given passes into Marseille and Aix En Provence. On one pass to Aix En Provence, I decided to return to the hospital early. I went to the local police station to pick up the truck that was being used as a bus. I became interested in watching some French Gendarmes question some black marketers; my high school French came in handy in following the proceedings. To my astonishment, a man in civilian clothes seated to my right said, “Don't I know you?” Who in the world did I know in France? It turned out to be my uncle who was in the merchant marine and whose ship was in the harbor where we had arrived. From letters home they had surmised I was in a hospital in Marseille and he was on his way out to visit me. It was a most remarkable stroke of fate. We had a great visit and we weren't meant to meet again until a year after the war, when my service with the Army of Occupation came to an end.

A young Japanese American soldier was assigned to our room. His name was Shigamoda Mimoda and he told me his first name meant little peach. He was a member of the highly decorated Nisei Japanese American regiment. He had a bad wound behind his left ear; each time the doctor came to dress his wound, I would grab my crutches and beat a fast exit down the hall.

I had enlisted at seventeen and had served in the Army Specialized Training Corps (ASTP) at Princeton University. When the program was ended we were assigned to the 100th Infantry Division and now I had my nineteenth birthday while in the hospital. The leg was much better and the surgeon had accomplished what he told me was his task, “to get me back to my outfit as fast as possible.”

### **Return To Unit**

Discharged from the hospital, we were transported by truck to the train station. The car we were assigned to consisted of individual compartments with a door on each side. Wooden seats were facing each other like American cars with leg room between. Above was hammock-like netting for baggage. It wasn't long before I climbed into one baggage rack for a snooze. Another GI grabbed the other rack. We arrived at Dijon, France where the train came to a stop. That night we slept in a cell of a building that had been a Gestapo Prison. Names were scribbled on the walls as well as dates. The next night I found myself in a building around division headquarters. On the wall was a large religious portrait. We were told a GI from the front was on his way back to West Point. We were headed in opposite directions.

The next morning I heard the sound of music, and looking up the street, saw the Division band in rehearsal. I can still see the clarinetist tootling his instrument. On the way to the front, I spoke to the company clerk. He filled me in on some of the things that had occurred during my absence. I was shocked to hear of the casualties, both killed and wounded. I would see new faces as new replacements had come in. Somehow I managed to get a GI haircut. I didn't think I would see a barber for some time and I didn't want to pick up any lice.

I was taken up by jeep to the platoon CP. Harry Weiss was now platoon Sgt. He had been a PFC when I entered the hospital. Later, Harry would receive a battlefield commission as he made a good leader. He introduced me to the new Lieutenant who replaced Lt. Handrihan, who had been wounded. As we made our way up the hill on our way to the foxhole that I had been assigned to, I noticed the heavy machine gun emplacement. Halfway down the hill we came to the foxhole. The date was February, 1945. The defensive position was outside the French town of Urbach, which lay between our position and the Germans. The weather was cold with snow on the ground. The foxhole was well constructed and we could sit up in it. It was covered with logs. There were many foxholes that were never as good.

At night a platoon would take turns occupying Urbach. Our squad leader was Staff Sgt Sherman. Urbach was a beat up and abandoned town. Many houses had no roofs. One night four of us were on the second floor of a building on the edge of town. As was our custom, one member would pull guard duty at the open cement frame of a window as the others slept, two hours on, four off. Since there was only one blanket for the three men sleeping, we coveted the spot in the middle. The Germans were aware that we were occupying the town at night and leaving in early morning around 5AM. As the first man left, and I, having waited an interval, started to step into the street, a German tank threw a couple of 88mm shells into the street. I jumped back into the building. I could hear a cry for a medic some distance away. To top it off, some frightened sheep were running around setting off some of the flares that we had placed in front of our lines to prevent a German surprise attack. It was like the fourth of July without the fun but plenty of excitement. Somehow we made it back to our foxholes.

We were often bothered with bouts of diarrhea, colds, and sometimes an upset stomach. On one occasion, I was on guard duty kneeling at the entrance to a foxhole with two buddies sleeping inside. Suddenly I got a coughing jag and began to throw up. I was being hushed from the fellows inside when a diarrhea attack occurred and I jumped out to run in back of the foxhole. Now the snow began to melt and we had to contend with bailing out foxholes. The steel helmets served nicely. We used them as wash basins and for shaving on occasion when adequate water was available. More often than not we skipped both washing and shaving.

Most GIs carried two hand grenades suspended by the handle in the lapels of their jackets. They were careful to make sure the protective cotter pins were secure to prevent accidental detonation. I was descending an enclosed cement stairwell in Urbach when Sgt. Sherman accidentally dropped a grenade, which came bouncing down the stairs toward towards me. There was no place to go; however, the cotter pin was secure and Sgt. Sherman had a good laugh—some joke.

On the evening of Feb. 23, 1945 our platoon was selected to pull a raid behind the German lines to wipe out two enemy machine gun nests. Someone came up to me after dark and asked if I wanted to take a sub-machine gun. Unfamiliar with it and not being able to examine it in the dark I said I would stick with my M1. We strung out in single file. I was at the rear of the column as the Sgt. thought I wouldn't have as far to make it back to our lines after the raid with my bad leg. The plan was to get behind the hill that had the machine guns set up and form a skirmish line, firing as we came over the hill. We would swing to the left and make our way back on our own. It was dark as we made our way through the center of Urbach. We passed the town fountain, noted some stone religious statues with signal wire strung around them. On the far side of the town we waded across a stream continuing up a hill. Someone signaled to get down and as we squatted in the dark we could hear Germans talking. After a few minutes wait, the skirmish line was complete. We came up over the hill firing and swung to the left. I found myself alone and as I made my way back I came upon Sgt. Sherman with his sub-machine gun pointed at me, fortunately he recognized me and we made it back to our lines together. S/Sgt. Lorin Speaker, a squad leader, in our platoon was given the Silver Star. Two machine guns were destroyed, two of the enemy were killed and two captured. Lorin was returning with a wounded comrade and two prisoners, he was halted by two hostile infantrymen. He killed one and was struck in the shoulder by enemy fire, after which he killed the second.

One day in February, a GI came up to my foxhole and asked for a volunteer to go back to the forward aid station to get his teeth fixed. I never minded going to the dentist, so I volunteered to go. Four of us walked back over the hill noting the machine guns set up behind the riflemen. There was one man from

each platoon. After walking around a tremendous shell crater we reached the aid station. We all speculated whether the crater was from an aerial bomb or perhaps a German railroad gun. The aid station was set up in a French barn. The dentist had an assistant who was supplying foot power for the drill. After filling a couple of my teeth I waited in the loft for the others. In the meantime, we were enjoying a movie that was being shown. Finished, we headed back over the hill to discover there had been a fire-fight with the Germans.

My squad was down to four men. Normally a squad totaled twelve men but they were rarely up to full strength in the front lines, often hovering around seven or eight as some were wounded or killed or even given a pass to Paris or rest camp for a couple of days. One from my squad, Jim Ackers, had been killed. Two had been captured, Bill Stoewer, and Eric Weingarten. S/Sgt Ed Williams had also been killed and his body was somewhere in front of my foxhole. That night four of us crawled out of our foxhole with a stretcher to recover Williams' body. Rigor mortis had set in and it was extremely cold. He was still aiming his carbine, which was in his arms. We removed the carbine, and as silently as possible, placed him on the stretcher. No one knew exactly where the Germans might be after this recent engagement. We carried him back to our lines. He had been shot through the forehead. (I contacted Ed's nephew this year in response to a request for information as to the circumstances of his death).

The next day I was sent, with other riflemen, into Urbach to search for Stoewer and Weingarten. We found their rifles. I recognized Stoewer's, which had his wife's name carved on it. The Germans had smashed the rifles and the stocks were broken. The Seventh Army planned a spring offensive. I was sent into Urbach with other riflemen to protect a squad of combat engineers as they set up booby traps in the town. As I stood looking out the doorway of the building, an engineer had just activated a booby trap, when a rifleman wandered in and inadvertently tripped the wire. He was severely wounded from the explosion. We used an old door as a stretcher to carry him back. I hope he made it.

On March 13th the 44th division relieved us and took over our foxholes. We thought we were going back for a rest. Our battalion was moved to Bining. Here we got the best treat of the war; this consisted of a shower and a complete change of clothing. Nothing could have been better. The quartermaster corps had set up one beautiful portable shower; I've never forgotten it! The remainder of the day and the next was spent cleaning rifles, picking up new bandoliers of ammunition and hand grenades. We also had mail call and were able to write letters home. One annoyance was a strafing by a captured P38, piloted by one angry German. No casualties resulted, although I remember seeing tracers coming from the plane as I looked toward the window from the corner of the room I had taken refuge in.

General Burrell began an attack on March 15th as part of the Seventh Army's spring offensive. Companies A and B led the attack with our company in reserve. When we were ordered up, a stream of bandaged walking wounded passed us on the trail. The attack continued for three days, and the town of Bitche had been liberated. The 100th division has since added the "Sons Of Bitche" to their divisional insignia.

We were now ordered into trucks to be transported to the Rhine. We started traveling through forested and twisting mountain roads. A German convoy had been knocked out and lay beside the road. Dead horses still harnessed to the wagons as well as dead German soldiers were seen. The American Air Force had done its job. High on a mountain, our truck pulled out of the convoy with brake trouble. The platoon piled off the trucks and entered an old Tavern Inn. Blankets were spread in the room that contained a bar. The German owner was happy to dispense drinks. Not being a drinker, I began to talk to the owner who told me he had a cousin living in my state of N.J. Pretty soon some of the fellows wanted to go down into the wine cellar to see if there were any better vintage wines. As they started to open the cellar door some German soldiers who had been hiding there came up with their hands up. They had been bypassed in the rapid break through.

The next day we got on the repaired truck and crossed thru the German Sigfried line thru an area where there was a break in the anti-tank barriers. Here we rejoined the company in St. Petersburg. This was our first town in Germany and the fellows were most happy to be out of foxholes for a while. One of our fellows had acquired a top hat which he sported as he rode on the back of one of the town's cows. He put on a regular rodeo show.

The next day it was back onto trucks to continue onto the Rhine River. S/Sgt Jim Grogan from Tenn. taught us to sing *Farther Along* and *When The Saints Go Marching In*. We even had some good harmonica accompaniment. We got to the Rhine at Mannheim. The buildings of the city, which was on the west bank of the river, were beat up by repeated aerial bombing. We were ordered to dig in again on the grounds of a Farben Chemical Factory. I had my rifle lying at the entrance to my hole when the Germans lobbed in an artillery shell. It struck the rifle and broke the stock. I was issued a new one. This rifle lasted me for the rest of the war.

We crossed the Rhine on a recently constructed pontoon bridge. Heading toward Heilbronn, we passed small towns that surrendered. They would have white sheets hanging from their windows. Often these towns would be undamaged. And then we had to fight through small towns where resistance was high and damage was great. On one occasion, we entered a town that had recently been bombed. Smoke came from small fires, and civilians were digging out relatives from the rubble. One of our men told a civilian that the town had been bombed by American planes that were using French Pilots.

Entering another damaged town, we paused for a ten minute rest break. GIs were sitting at intervals on each side of the street. Some were lighting up cigarettes and others were drinking from their canteens. Suddenly an enemy shell whistled overhead. We all scattered for shelter, into the rubble of bombed-out buildings. Looking up the street, it was like a ghost town as though everyone had vanished.

Another incident occurred when the entire battalion was moving up. Infantrymen were spread out at intervals on each side of the road. Suddenly a machine gun opened up on us. Everyone hit the dirt and all were reluctant to move. Someone on the left side of the road tossed a grenade into a house but all movement forward had ceased. Suddenly I saw a soldier come walking up. It was the battalion commander, Lt. Col. King. He assessed the situation and soon had the battalion moving forward. I thought he had acted very bravely.

Approaching the bank of the Neckar River, we were marching single file on opposite sides of the road. We were keeping safe intervals between each man and came upon a column of American tanks drawn slightly off the road. I waved to a tanker who wanted to know if anybody was from N.J. We continued on to a warehouse beside the river. Here we were told our company would cross the Neckar River that night at dusk, under cover of smoke screen. This would be the initial crossing for the first battalion. (The 1st battalion 397th received a presidential citation for this river crossing and the capture of Heilbronn). If we were successful in clearing a city block and holding it that night they would send over help. The Catholic Chaplain called the whole company out and gave us all the last rites. Shortly before the combat engineers brought up the assault boats that we were to paddle across, one of our men broke down and began crying like a baby. He was a big strapping guy who had recently come up as a replacement as a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifleman). We watched as medics led him to the rear.

The Neckar River is a sizable deep navigable river comparable to the Rhine or our Hudson or Mississippi. This crossing was in April when the snows had thawed and increased the rush of the water. Manning the assault boats the company crossed at 1830 (6:30 in the early evening). Two riflemen in the boats were wounded by rifle fire from snipers. German artillery was hitting the west banks of the river.

Reaching the other side, we huddled down around cement debris from a blown bridge. The company commander, Capt Roe, arrived in the next boat and ordered us to go up the embankment as he was going to make this spot his temporary C.P. (Command Post). As we moved up the hill, we could still see evidence of the smoke screen. We were moving toward a big brewery building firing at some Jerries who had left their holes and were running in retreat. We entered the brewery, and I had a German prisoner by the collar trying to make sure he kept his hands on his head. It was dark and we were standing in a stairwell. I was glad when the platoon CP was set up in the furnace room and I could be relieved of the prisoner. At one point that night, I heard someone say "they're coming in the window and I'll get him with my 45".

While standing at the bottom of the stairwell, the Germans tried to counterattack from the opposite side of the building. They fired a Panzerfaust (German Bazooka) at the building. A GI on guard duty at the head of the staircase, that was full of debris from bomb damage, came rolling down the stairs suffering from concussion. Herbert Coe and I were ordered to go up where he had been, to pull guard duty until

morning. We both fell asleep and were awakened by the sound of hob nailed boots. We got a glimpse of a German soldiers' leg as he disappeared around the corner of the building. It was around 6AM.

The Germans commanded the high ground behind Heilbronn. This enabled them to knock out the pontoon bridges as fast as the Engineers could construct them. Tanks couldn't get over for three days to help us.

One day we were in a damaged apartment building. It was on the corner of a crossroad. I was on guard at the window. In back of me was an abandoned dental chair, it had been a dental office, the BAR man was at the window in the next room. Suddenly an American tank came down the road toward me. It made a left turn and stopped outside another building, two buildings up, on the same side as ours. The tankers got out of the tank and headed inside for the night. A little later coming down toward me came a platoon of marching men. I ran into the next room to alert the BAR man. He too had heard the hobnail boots and told me to get back to my window. As I hurried back, I heard him yell halt and work the receiver of the BAR which had jammed. By now the Jerries had taken cover and we had to remain doubly alert for the rest of the night. They had infiltrated our line and left by morning.

Another GI and I found ourselves in a relatively undamaged building. We were in a large loft. Standing back from the window we could see a German officer lying below us and scanning up the street with binoculars. He had no idea that we were there. We could have hit him with a brick. Wondering if a large force of Germans might be in the next building we decided to not take any action but to lie low.

At one time a few of us were in a building when we spotted a wounded German soldier. He was lying in a crossroads and was struggling to get up. He seemed to be seriously hurt. One of the fellows wanted to take a shot at him with his 45. I talked him out of it as it didn't make sense to me. I was convinced that his fighting days were over and that he could do us no harm.

Sniper fire was rampant in Heilbronn, especially from the church towers. One day I was selected to serve as first scout and was sent to gain access to a relatively undamaged building. As I ran around piles of rubble I had the feeling I was about to be hit on the back of the neck. Arriving at the door, I found I couldn't get in so I smashed the window with the butt of my rifle. An old couple appeared and opened the door for me and I signaled the rest of the squad to come and search out the building. The old lady next appeared with a broom to clear up the debris that I had created; despite the danger of sniper fire.

Searching out one building in Heilbronn, I glanced to my left and about eight to ten feet away was the body of a young German soldier. He was lying on his back with a gray blanket wrapped around a Potato Masher (German hand grenade) under his head. I wasn't sure whether this had served as a rough pillow or if the body had been booby-trapped. Dust had settled on his open eyes. His jacket was open and pulled away from his left shoulder. A bandage was over the left collar bone area covering a severe wound where an effort had been made to stop the loss of blood. Fearing a booby trap I didn't go any nearer.

We continued to push to the outskirts of Heilbronn. We came to a street with a building facing us. Suspicious of movement in the building, we called for the tank destroyer to lob a shell into it. Two squads ran across the street, and onto the back of the building. One squad approached from each side. I was about to enter the back window to follow a buddy who had just entered. On the floor of the cellar was a machine gun pointing in the direction from which we had just come. At that moment a German medic came up from the deeper wine cellar. He had a big white sheet covering his uniform front and back. On the sheet were two large red crosses. He reminded me of the Crusaders I had seen in movies as a kid. Following him, some sixteen or more Jerries (German soldiers) came out with their hands up to surrender. They were relieved of their arms as well as their watches.

Going out of the city, we bypassed some German military barracks. We soon came to a German military hospital with sheets hanging from the windows as a sign of surrender. Some German soldiers were in wheel chairs on the lawn. As we went farther, we arrived at a deep gully with a railroad track at the bottom. The track ran into a tunnel which housed some displaced persons (slave laborers) who lived in idle box cars. Fred Droste, the platoon Sgt., told me and another fellow to cross over the track and dig in at the top of the gully on the other side. He planned to put his CP on one of the flat cars in the tunnel. We didn't feel much like digging in, but were glad we had, as a German tank fired an 88mm shell down the track. A DP (displaced person) had her head blown off and Fred was severely wounded. We watched as

two German medics, in uniform, came from the hospital we had just passed. They placed him on the stretcher and took him to the hospital where he passed away.

We continued to run into fire-fights. Fighting toward one rural town, we advanced down a valley and up a hill toward a large barn. Our mortar men were firing over our heads as we advanced. Someone said they couldn't set up the base plates for the mortars and were using tree stumps for support. My hope was for no short rounds. The tank destroyer threw a shell into the barn and we were soon able to take the barn. Two wounded Germans surrendered. I gave them my cigarettes. While the barn door was open, a sniper round went over our heads. Cows were lined up as if ready for milking, but one was down on her knees with a shrapnel wound.

We were ordered to continue the attack on the rest of the village. My squad, 3rd squad 3rd platoon, would ride the tank destroyer; the 1st and 2nd squads would walk along the drainage ditches along the country road beside the tank. Moving forward the tank began to draw artillery shell-fire. We jumped off and the tank went into reverse. We made it back to the barn where radio contact with headquarters established that the 398th regiment had mistaken us for Germans. Once this was straightened out we were told to load up again. This time I asked Harry Weiss, who was now a Lt., if I could walk beside the tank, as my knee bothered me from jumping off. Walking beside the tank, I heard a rifleman ahead of me yell, "they're behind the wood pile". Before we could react there was a tremendous explosion. The tank had been hit with a German *Panzerfaust* shell (anti-tank shell). Immediately the big gun on the tank fell. We began crawling down the ditch hoping to get back to the barn. I didn't expect to see any tankers but looking behind me was a tanker crawling as fast as he could down the ditch. He didn't have a helmet or side arm on but he was traveling all out. How he got out the escape hatch, I'll never know, but I was glad to see him. We made it back; some of the fellows were suffering from concussion. We all had ringing ears. One of our men in my squad, Herbert Coe, was missing.

The next day we went up the same road, everyone was on foot this time, walking in the drainage ditches on each side of the road. We came to the tank and there was Herb's body lying beside it. We had to continue, so we simply walked around him. My eyes get a little watery as I recall visiting Herb's grave in France, on the Century Division's trip to Europe for the 50 anniversary of WWII. As I passed the front of the tank I glanced back and saw a hole thru the armor near the big gun. I expected to see a much larger hole. Later I heard that two tankers were also killed.

At one time, we had entered a wooded area. Soon after we entered, a machine gun opened fire, and we all hit the ground. I noticed bullets chipping off pieces of bark from the trees to my right. It wasn't too comforting to see that they were hitting the tree only inches above the ground. As I tried to bury my nose deeper into the ground, I heard a noise in the bushes that I thought to be a German grenade that was rattling the leaves as it came towards me. Raising my head slightly, I saw a terrified rabbit running towards me. The rabbit ran right over my rifle, which was lying beside me. My heart remained in overtime for the next few minutes.

We were approaching an orchard outside of a small town. About a platoon of Germans were at the back of the orchard and were retreating between the trees toward a wooded area. They were hesitant to open fire and we were hesitant to do the same, due to our exposed positions. They made it to the woods and got away. I also remember it was now Spring and the orchard was in full bloom.

The company had been moving forward and it began to get dark. We were in a pasture and were told to dig in for the night. After digging a good foxhole my buddy and I wanted to cover it to protect us from air bursts (shells that burst overhead as timed by the fuse setting). Seeing a couple of barn buildings in the distance, we headed for the smaller one. Our plan was to rip off a door for the cover. We were shocked to find the door was made out of steel and hard to move. The small building was a camouflaged pillbox. We got the door from the real barn.

The next day dawned with some enemy 'in-coming mail' (artillery barrage). The two of us were lying in the foxhole eating a cold breakfast K-ration out of an open can. An enemy shell buried its nose in the dirt fifteen or twenty feet in front of our hole. It was close enough to throw dirt onto our food which we brushed off and continued eating. Thank God it was a dud. Come to think of it they had some nerve interrupting our breakfast.

Land Mines were a problem. Rapidly advancing, we came on a mine field of large Teller plexi-glass anti-personnel mines. The Germans didn't have time to bury them but they were spread across a field that we had to cross. Wires ran between the mines and if one was tripped, the mine would explode. There was a trail through the mine field, but you had to be alert to spot the wire that the man in front would point out as he stepped over it. I came to the wire and carefully stepped over it. Turning I signaled to Swanson in back of me. He had thick glasses that gave me some concern as he came up to the wire. We got through thank God.

Moving forward we got pinned down by a German rocket battery. We were too close for them to lower the trajectory and the rockets were screaming over our heads. The screaming of those rocket batteries was frightening!! A piece of hot shrapnel hit me in the left elbow; it felt like I had been hit with a well thrown baseball and the arm ached for a little while. It didn't cause any bleeding or real damage. It was the only time I ever got hit.

I never wished to get hit, but I often thought it would be great to get some illness to get off the line. I saw some fellows go back with yellow jaundice and thought that would be just fine. They didn't appear to be too sick. I got my wish right after the war ended. They flew me to the 36th hospital in Dijon, France. Here I found that some fellows had died from hepatitis. They gave me 6 bottles of plasma. The orthopedic surgeon looked at my knee and said I should never have been on the front lines. I was put on limited assignment working as a dental technician and my time with the division came to an end. But once a Centuryman always a Centuryman and I still try to make the reunions.