REMEMBRANCE:
ONE MAN'S LIFE

A WORK IN PROGRESS

BY

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REMEMBRANCE VI

IT BEGINS

I got my orders to report to Camp Attebury, Indiana. Reporting date was the fourteenth of February of 1944. The fourteenth fell on a Monday. The weather had been rather cold, so the day I left home it was a chilly, smoggy Louisville day. The sun was trying to shine, but not quite succeeding. There were patches of mostly melted snow remaining from the piles where the sidewalks had last been shoveled.

It was mid afternoon when I left home. I did not have to take anything with me except the clothes I wore and a small shaving kit. I was leaving on Sunday afternoon, to be sure that I could get to the Reception Center during the morning of Monday, the fourteenth.

I have had, and still may have stashed away somewhere a picture of me that was taken before I got into the car to be taken to the depot. I am standing beside the car wearing my good overcoat, my tweed-like suit and carrying the small shaving case and a package of "Pocketbooks (TM)". I must have had a dozen or so, which Martha had gathered together for me. She must have heard that there could be a lot of wasted time in the Army process. Another thing I had which did not show was an extra twenty dollars which someone in the family slipped me to take care of unexpected expenses.

I had not had a paying job for almost six months. Fortunately, I had accumulated a few hundred dollars before I went into ASTRP. (A few means three, doesn't it?) I still had a few dollars available, but I did have to close my account for lack of having anything in it to continue to pay bank charges. I had got through the two quarters of college without a payday, but I had almost come to an end of my money. Back to the trip!

I don't remember a rail line running from Louisville to Indianapolis, so I conclude that I must have gone by bus. No big deal, just 110 miles or so. On the bus were several other young men going the same place for the same purpose. There were a few whom I had met at UK, and several whom I did not know. I had no firm plan of action for what to do when I got to Indianapolis. The question must have come up among the young men during the trip. One suggestion, which sounded good to me, was to get a bed at the YMCA for Sunday night and then take the local transportation out to the Camp on Monday morning. This made sense, as the probability of there being any organization in place to accept us at eight o'clock on Sunday evening was not great.

That was the plan we followed. There were probably 10 of us in the group. We got cots at YMCA for the night; for fifty cents we got a cot with clean sheets in a dormitory and a shower. We took the local bus to the Camp in the morning. We were moved into the reception area immediately. We were given the cursory physical - we had had the complete before we were entered into the ASTRP some months before. We were

moved to the uniform issue, given a duffel bag and run through the line. I came out pretty well! The last item was a box to send our civilian clothes home. (They didn't offer to pay the postage, however.) We were not to be allowed to wear them, as we were now in the Army - during wartime. It took a day or so to get the civvies in the mail – because of limited time and limited availability to the post office.

We didn't have an awful lot to do except to serve on work details. During the week or ten day I spent there I spent perhaps two and a half goofing off and waiting, during that time. I read all the Zane Gray western novels in the day room library. The rest of the days were spent mostly on work details. I spent one day on "fuel detail". That consisted of about four men with shovels and a big truck of coal. As the quarters were single storied buildings about 20 feet by 60 feet heated by two small pot-bellied stoves in the center isle, each of the tar papered shacks had a big coal bin at one end. Our job was to do the work of a dump truck and move the coal from the truck to the bins of the shacks.

I spent one day as a stock clerk. The detail sergeant was looking for anyone who had worked at A&P, as they understood the idea of restocking bins. We worked in a warehouse about 100 feet by 200 feet and in bins up to 15 feet high. Items were opened and stacked in bulk. Blankets, canteens, covers, cups, mess kits, everything that was issued to the new soldier. I worked hard.

I spent two days on K.P. The KP detail started just a little past bedtime. The ranges on which the meals were prepared were coal fired, thus they had to be emptied, scraped polished and new fires started before the cooks got in to start the breakfast. One day I spent about three hours scrubbing a kitchen floor made of very rough concrete. When I finished one could have eaten from it, if any thing remained to be found above the pits in the surface. Another day I was assigned to the food preparation group. For half a day I peeled potatoes & carrots, cleaned and chopped celery and prepared chopped onions. In the afternoon I was charged with preparing oyster stew. The recipe was interesting, I thought. It called for white bread, measured by the loaf and crumbled, shucked oysters, by the gallon, canned tomatoes, by the #10 can, evaporated milk, by 12 0z. Can, salt and pepper by the handfuls. The ingredients were layered in baking pans that held about 10 gallons each (about a 10" side height.} The recipe was not one I had known before, but I knew it would be good - as I liked oysters. At suppertime it was ready, and it was good, but almost no one even tried it. When being told it was oyster stew very few men would take it on their plates. This, I surmised, was the result of most all of these men being Middle Americans. Most had not been 50 miles from their homes before in their lives. It hurt me to see gallons and gallons of delicious expensive oyster stew put in the garbage cans to be carried to the pig farm the next day.

Something happened one day, which gave me a new insight into the character of unknown men. There were a few men in my barracks whom I knew, only a few. Most of the men there were from ASTRP, whom I considered to generally honorable young men. There were a number who were straight off the streets and fields of Indiana and Kentucky. I basically knew that not all of them would be strictly honest. I had twenty dollars more than I felt safe carrying in my pocket - I did have several dollars left from my working time checking account. In trying to play it safe, I decided that I should leave

the $20 hidden in my gear. I, therefore, found that I could place the bill in my safety razor box, under the lining where it did not show. It should not have attracted any attention as every man there had one almost just like it. I felt sort of like "The Purloined Letter". It was where no one should look for it. Someone did and I never saw it again.

One evening a few of us went into Indianapolis where, at the Service Club, there was a dance with a singing contest as a special feature for the evening. One of the men in my barracks I had been with before. I knew him to have a beautiful baritone voice and to have had some experience in singing with a dance band. We talked him in to participating. He chose as his song Cole Porter's "Night and Day." He sang and he won. He has the smooth tones of a crooner but the power of an opera singer. I think he could have sung anything. I had known him slightly. I would like to have kept in touch with him to see what he did with that voice, but we did not go the same direction in our next assignments.

One morning we were scheduled to take the AGCT (Army General Classification Test). This was to be the most important test one could take. Upon result of this test could depend the rest of your life - if any? This was the Army equivalent of the Intelligence Test. The score relationship was that it ran about five points above the Stanford-Binet. The morning we were scheduled for the test was one of those days when nothing goes right. By the time we got to the test site many of us were off our stride for test taking. We took it - for good or bad. It was a couple of days before we learned the results.

We were standing in line to get our test results. As we were handed the slip with our critical numbers I overheard a couple of young men behind me talking about the scores. "What score did you get?" "I got a 76, not bad, huh?" "I don't know; I got an 84."

My score was one point below the critical cut off. I had 129. The critical score was 130. Those who got 130 were listed as Class I. They were eligible for any assignment dependent upon native intelligence. Class II was restricted somewhat - not much - but there were some thing's which we were not qualified for. I knew that on a better day I would have scored at least five points higher, but then, so would everyone else.

We were not given the option of taking the test again, not for several years, and then I did only a couple of points better. After the few days we spent in the Reception Center we finally got our orders. Several of us were assigned to Ft. Benning, Ga. for Basic Training in the Infantry. We were divided into travel groups and trucked to the Railroad Station. The trip to Ft. Benning was an overnight trip. It also involved a change of trains in Cincinnati, lunch in the station there and getting on the proper connecting train. For some reason I was selected to be the travel group leader.

I was given all the lunch vouchers, instructions and documentation for the group for the connecting train, and the orders for reporting the group in to the proper command at Ft. Benning.

We had no trouble in Cincinnati. The station was one of the most modern in the U.S. I had visited it with Mother, Dad and Joseph a few years earlier. It was strictly in the

modern style of construction. After the railroads lost their favor in this country and the L&N closed out its operation in Louisville and Cincinnati, the city of Cincinnati adopted the old Union Station for use as a museum. I thought that was a neat idea, as the station, itself, was worthy of placement in a museum setting.

We got on the correct train and joined hundreds of other soldiers heading for the south. We were placed aboard Army sleeping cars. These were the same size as the standard railroad car, except they were somewhat higher. The seats made up into cots, with fold-down canvas cots above, to make six cots, three high, in the space of the two usual back-to-back seats. That would work pretty well, except that it left no place for the full Duffel Bag and all the extras, which had to be carried by each soldier. That evening there was a crush of men trying to get to the rest room. Many had to shave in the evening and all needed some clean up. I chose not to shave at night (my beard, even then, would not hold for the day if I shaved at night), but I did have to get out my toilet kit to get my soap for a clean up. While I was cleaning up someone bumped my duffel bag and knocked out the tube of shaving cream that Dad had presented to me before I left home. It was the largest tube of shaving cream I have ever seen. It must have been most of a pound. Of course, someone stepped on it. Shaving cream was spread all around my rack of bunks. I cleaned it up before I climbed into the middle bunk.

I slept uneasily for that night, too excited in anticipating what was before us.

The next day was bright and sunny. We arrived at Ft. Benning by the middle of the afternoon. The rail point was in an area of snow-white sand, which reflected the sun in waves of heat. Representatives of the trainee reception unit met us at the train. We were divided into new groups before we got on trucks to be transported to our new homes. The 80-degree plus temperature soon had us dripping in our winter uniforms.

This time a couple of hundred of us were taken to the Harmony Church area. This was an area of fairly new two storied wooden barracks of the W.W.II design. If anything they were a bit larger than the standard unit, or perhaps the difference was that the normal cadre rooms at the ends of the barracks weren't there. There was an open floor for the full size of the barracks, less the latrine space.

We were assigned to double bunks, alphabetically within the company, thus, all the men whose name began with "S" were in the third platoon. The routine, which we started immediately, was no surprise. Getting up before daylight to have reveille (nose count), fifteen minutes to shave, dress and make your bunk, standing in line for a surprise breakfast before a five or six hour morning training session were not unexpected - or really different.

The surprise of this phase of training was that we did have some time off after the evening meal. For the first time we had a short period, a couple of hours on most evenings, during which we could go to the service club or even to the Post Exchange. Until this time we still had not had a payday and time was still crammed, so there was no chance to get out of the immediate housing area. Actually, there was no inter- area transportation system to which we had access. At this time we were not thought to be at the level to benefit from any training they could schedule outside in the dark.

Here, too, we continued to have work details. I remember one afternoon I was called to join a group to sweep out a training building. The building was about the size of a large airplane hanger. A dozen of us with wide (40 inch) brushes could not sweep the width. The day was hot with enough breezes to keep the light sand moving across the floor from one open door to the other.

One day I was put on KP at the officer's mess. At first I was a little put out at having to scrub floors and scrape ranges for the benefit of those whom I could not join to enjoy the product. By the end of the day, though, I wasn't too upset. The officers who came in were on the run. They were obviously not really enjoying the results of my labor. They had heavy duties and responsibilities, too.

Then, too, we had the usual range of extra housekeeping duties, such as latrine duty - to clean up the common bath rooms for the platoon, KP (I've used this term as though everyone knows that it means Kitchen Police - literally, keeping the kitchen clean). More than once I shoveled and raked the sand back on to the company street to fill the ruts that were washed by the downpour of spring rains. Before we left the area, after less than two months, the concrete curbs and gutters for the company streets had been almost completely eroded by the sand being washed by the heavy rains.

There were a couple of pleasant weekends, too. I remember one Sunday afternoon when several of us walked up to a shady open patch of pine trees where we lay down and took a long nap. One Sunday, too, a few of us just went for a hike through the area. None of us had any idea where we were in relation to anything. We were just in a newly constructed area in west-central Georgia.

One evening after the evening meal two or three of the men invited me to go with them to the Service Club. As I had nothing planned I joined them. As we went into the club, I was approached by one of the young ladies who acted as volunteer hostess at the club. She asked me to join a group in participating in an academic Quiz contest. The teams were formed save for one member. I was given no dignified way to refuse, so I consented.

The two groups were well matched, and surprisingly bright. There were very, very few questions that went unanswered by one team or the other. The event went on for quite some time. The event generated a great deal of interest for the men at the club that evening. The audience was pretty large and entranced by the show. After about one and a half hours the team I was on was declared the winner. Each member of the winning team was awarded a carton of cigarettes. Some of my smoking friends appreciated the effort.

One of the devices to make sure that everyone received the maximum amount of training was the evening repeat of all instruction. Anyone who missed an hour of training was required to repeat the whole half-day block in which the missed period fell. This created a weird situation for me one day. The morning training included several hours of Chemical Warfare training, including the use of "Sniff Kits". The sniff kit included bottles of diluted war gasses. Theoretically, they were just strong enough to transmit the characteristic odor. Obviously, if the bottle was fresh the contents could be fairly substantial. The gasses known at that time were, Mustard, Nitrogen Mustard, Adamsite,

Phosgene and Lewisite. Most of them were irritants, designed to cause swelling and congestion in the respiratory passages. Mustard and Nitrogen Mustard would also blister skin, but even they were most effective when inhaled and the blisters were inside the respiratory tract.

When I got up that morning I recognized that I was at the point of coming down with the Migraine type headache that I had suffered the preceding fall at UK. After the morning of sniffing the gasses the headache was in full bloom. I was at the point of incoherence. I felt I had to go on sick call at the 1 PM opportunity. I saw the doctor. He, basically, didn't believe I had a headache. After I told him what the diagnosis and treatment of the specialist had been I was told not to tell him my diagnosis - and, "a dilute silver nitrate wouldn't have that effect anyway." As he had no better idea, he used a different oxidizer, that bright purple variety of dye, potassium permanganate, which was used for treating athletes' foot. I returned to the company within about one hour. That evening I had to repeat the whole half- day's training, including all the sniff kits, again. I could hardly be poured into bed by the time that night was over. Within a couple of days I got over the headache.

I do not remember the training to have been particularly severe. The physical training was much less demanding than it had been at UK. But, then, I have never had physical training, before or after, as hard as that at UK in those two quarters. The weapons training consisted mostly in instruction within large groups of men, in assembly and disassembly of the normal infantry weapons. I don't remember any instruction in or any firing of the weapons. I don't even remember seeing a weapons range. We did have some forced marches and some night marches, but nothing remarkable.

About the middle of March when the weather was cool and rainy a sudden outbreak of Influenza overtook the area. I came down with a terrible cold one weekend. Suddenly I was very ill, with nausea, high fever, aches - all the symptoms. I tried to tell the platoon cadre man that I needed to go on sick call, but he sent me directly to the isolation barracks. Someone gathered my stuff together in my duffel and brought it over, too.

We were allowed a different schedule. We were awakened at the usual time. We were brought hot water in a basin, so that we could wash and shave. Half hour or so later we were brought breakfast in bed. Twice more during the day we were brought light meals. The rest of the time I slept. That was the first time I remember ever sleeping more than 20 hours every day. I don't remember ever seeing a doctor, but the ward man did check temperatures etc. occasionally.

I remained in the isolation barracks for a week or more, until I began feeling a little bit more human. I was sleeping only about 16 hours a day and my fever had gone down some when we were told to get dressed and go back to our normal barracks. When we got there our gear was inspected, we were given copies of orders and lined up to move to the entraining point. We had been at Ft. Benning about six weeks. Many of us were being shipped to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina.

This time it was a coach trip. We arrived at Bragg and were assigned among the units of the 100th Inf. Division, the "Century Division". Apparently the Army had cleaned out all the ASTP as well as the ASTRP units. The division was crawling with extra intelligent but half-educated young men. I was assigned to Company D, 397th Infantry Regiment. This company was the Heavy Weapons Company of the First Battalion.

The company had three platoons. The first two platoons were machine gun platoons. Each platoon had two sections of two squads each of 30 caliber water-cooled, heavy Browning machine guns. A lieutenant supported by a small command group commanded the platoons.

The third platoon consisted of three sections of two squads each. Each squad operated one 81mm Mortar. The mortar breaks down into three parts, each weighing from 37 to 42 pounds. The gun crew is three men. The other men in the squad were the jeep driver and three ammunition bearers. A platoon fire direction team directed the platoon. A lieutenant, supported by a section sergeant, commanded each section. A lieutenant supported by a control group including transportation, ammunition and communications personnel and a platoon sergeant commanded the platoon. This made this platoon one of the, if not the, largest in the infantry battalion, more than 50 men. There were as many officers in the third platoon as in the reminder of the company.

The old members of the company were a remarkable group. None of us young fellows had ever come across the mixed group we found

. Among the almost typical members were several Tennessee "Hillbillies"; a full-blooded Indian from Oklahoma, about forty years old, fat and quiet; a fireman from San Diego, California, Italian heritage and proud of his physical strength; a dairy farmer from Orangeburg, South Carolina; an older soldier who had served as an anti-aircraft artillery gunner on a merchant marine ship. A mob muscle man from New York City, he, too, of Italian extraction, very physical and released from prison to the Infantry. (It was generally known that he had been a mobster, but also generally known that anyone who tried to steal from any of his barracks mates would be seriously hurt); an old fellow who had survived as an elevator operator in the Empire State Building, (He was cooperative, but definitely not too bright. He never learned how to tell if his carbine was on "safe" without pulling the trigger, and he never got better than a 50% correct average); a collection of small town "dandies" who felt they were the answer to a maiden's prayer; several sub normal types of big city street loungers; several NCOs of solid mid America, self- sufficient, hard working type; and a few Pennsylvania coal miners, one with yellow eyes and a temperament like a rattlesnake, who happened to be the platoon sergeant.

The old timers were the ones who had been through the mill. They had been with the unit since it had been called to active duty a couple of years before. They are the ones who had gone through the major field maneuvers in Louisiana and Tennessee. Tennessee had been the most recent and the criterion as to whether one was a real soldier or just a pretty boy. From the stories we heard we young members did believe that they had justification for feeling that they were more experienced and probably better soldiers than we.

Our first training with the Division was "Advanced Individual Training". We were supposed to be learning to do those things that were supposed to have been taught in our six weeks at Ft. Benning - whatever that may have been. The Non-Coms, non commissioned officers, conducted most of the instruction. Most of them were serious and intent on getting us trained, but several of them just didn't know the subjects they were trying to teach. I often found myself catching an instructing NCO during a break, to advise him that he had put out incorrect instruction. Some of them appreciated the information and would make the proper corrections. Some of them were not too happy to have the bright college kid advise them on military subjects. In doing this I never mentioned an error that was not important and never in front of other soldiers. The simple fact was that I knew the Army manuals for the infantry better than most of the NCOs.

Now we did get to learn to fire our weapons, and to carry them and carry them and carry them. We put a lot of miles on our brogans. We started small unit tactical problems, acting as plain infantry riflemen. We learned how to set up a bivouac security guard, how to handle the problems of water purification, how to take care of ourselves, and our equipment, in the field; how to line-up at chow, properly; how to properly clean our mess gear. We found we had a great deal to learn in how to take care of ourselves. Funny, but years later I realized how few soldiers, including officers, learned those basics until they had serious situations develop to teach them.

When we joined the Division in early April I had a heavy cough, particularly in the mornings. I had a great deal of trouble in getting rid of the congestion, and until I did, in breathing. In the latter part of April I, once again, went on sick call. I was a bit worried about the cough and the black phlegm I was finally getting up. The doctor listened to my chest and announced that I was just recovering from a heavy bout of Bronchitis, but to continue to do whatever I was doing and I would get over it eventually. "And, if you don't, come back and see me again."

By this time I was a regular at the Sunday morning Protestant services at the Regimental Chapel. One Sunday in May my church-going friends and I were just going into the Chapel when I heard one of the Chaplains' Assistants call "Where is the escort from Company D?" Putting things together, noticing that there were a number of motherly ladies standing around the door, I remembered that it was Mother's Day. I didn't know anything about it, but I concluded that there was a mother for each company in the regiment, and obviously there was no escort for our designated lady.

I stepped up to the Assistant and told him I was not appointed, but I was here and available. He told me quickly that I was to accompany the Company Mother during the Services and then escort her to the D Company Mess Hall for lunch. I was happy to attend the service with the lady. She seemed to be very sweet and touched at being allowed to stand in for all the mothers of the company.

After the Service I walked with her directly to the Mess Hall. I had no idea if she was even expected. She was. The arrangements had apparently been made with everyone who should have known being advised, with the possible exception of the man who was designated to escort her. We were met by the Company Commander, Capt. Sam Dunlap.

Capt. Dunlap and the Platoon Leaders were all there with the officers' table decorated with sheets for cloths and flowers for a centerpiece. I saw that the captain recognized that I was not the designated escort. He adapted. I was to have lunch at the Officers table with the Mother. The lunch went well, everything almost as planned. I never learned who had goofed in not showing up at the church in time, but I lost nothing by volunteering.

Later I got a nice "Thank You" card from the lady, together with an invitation to join with the other men who had been escorts in the regiment at her home for a Bar-B-Cue and Swimming party. The Chaplain's office arranged transportation for the seventeen or so young men. We were surprised when we arrived at her home. She lived a bit out of town in a rather large "Mansion". Her "pool" was a bit smaller than Olympic size. With all the "Mothers" and their daughters there were probably fifty people at the party. It was a lovely gesture on her part. I enjoyed the association, and I think everyone else did too.

Shortly after that I decided - or maybe I was asked to - try out for the Chapel Chorus. It was an excellent musical organization of almost fifty voices. The Chaplain's Assistant who was the director was a very talented musician. He knew his music and how to get the best out of a group of young male voices. I was accepted immediately when he heard my voice. Thereafter, I sang with the chorus regularly, including the Wednesday (?) evening radio program they did at the Fayetteville radio station.

Here again fate intervened. I suppose it was the second week I was with them at the station when, just before the mike was opened for the program to begin, they realized that the man who regularly did the announcing for them was not there. I was handed the script and the engineer signaled us that the mike was now "open". I was suddenly doing my first live radio show. Everyone involved was elated. They acted as they had just won the lottery. Even the station manager and staff people came in to see whom they had as announcer. To me it was just doing what came naturally. The people who had been in the business a while thought it something special so I enjoyed it.

We sang at many special events and programs through the area. We were guests at large church meetings, and at camp meetings. We were often included in special parties and other recognition.

During the summer the 397th Chorus was the centerpiece of a re-written plot to the music of "The Pirates of Penzance", a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta with which I was quite familiar. We spent the evenings of most of a week in learning our music, lyrics, and lines. The program was given several times at the Division amphitheater behind the Division Service Club. That was a portion of the post I was seldom in. I had no regular business near Division Headquarters.

About the middle of June - I am not really sure of the date but it must have been about then - a jeep came to our training area, out in the "boonies" of the post. He had a message to pick me up for return to the company area immediately. I went with no idea what was going on. When I went into the Orderly Room the first sergeant told me they

had a message from the Red Cross, through military command directing that I be given Emergency Leave and put on my way home immediately. I was given 7 days leave and transportation into Fayetteville to the train station. The company had checked the schedule to see that I could make the best transportation. I changed clothes, put an extra set in my duffel bag and the company driver took me to town. The company commander even asked if I needed any money for my trip - He was thinking in terms of interim pay, I guess.

I got my rail ticket and left Fayetteville about four o'clock. I was scheduled to get to Petersburg, Va. about 11 PM. There I was to change trains to get on the train about 2:30 AM to continue on to Louisville. As the clock approached 2:30, and there was no announcement of expected time of arrival put on the bulletin board, I began to get a bit anxious. As the hour passed, I woke the desk clerk and asked what he had on the train I was waiting for. He looked startled and told me that that train departed from the other station - on the other side of town. That was quite a surprise.

He did tell me, though, the time for the next train going my way. It was twelve hours after the one I should have been on. I had the rest of the night and all day to spend in Petersburg. I waited there at the railroad station until the sky started showing a little light, then I started walking toward downtown Petersburg. By taking it slow and easy I was in the town square park by about 6:30. I had only nine more hours to kill. After an hour or so I had breakfast at a cafe on the square. Then I noticed that there were historical markers around the park in the square, so I started looking for the history trail. Late in the morning I was pretty tired and sleepy, so I chose a nice clean spot in the park and, using my duffel bag as a pillow, took a nap for about an hour. I woke up much refreshed.

I got to the second station and met this train in time. The coach was crowded, but there was one seat, next to a very nice looking young lady about Martha's age. We fell into conversation and talked all the way to her destination, Bluefield, West Virginia. I enjoyed her company and the diversion she provided from the worry I had.

I got to Louisville some time after I was expected, but I got there. I must have slept pretty well the first night away. The next day I visited Mother in the hospital. She had had another operation and the Doctor was not happy. Mother had a secondary ulcer on her leg. There was a sheet-covered frame over her legs with a strong light bulb over her legs, for heat, she said.

Mother was in good spirits. She was alert, interested and talkative. We had a good visit until it was suggested that it was time for me to leave. Mother asked me before I left what I planned to do that evening. I told her I would be back there at the evening visiting hours.

She absolutely forbade it. She said there was only one thing I was to do that evening and she wanted my promise to do it. She said I was to call Ruth Akers and take her out dancing. I promised to try.

As soon as I got home I called Ruth. She was home and seemed to be pleased to hear from me. I asked if she would like to go dancing that evening. She seemed very

pleased. I picked her up at the agreed time and took her to town where we went to the "Pendenis Club", which was the only club I knew where one could go dancing any night in the week. I was driving Martha and Bill's 1942 "Studebaker Commander."

Of course the Pendenis served liquor, but neither of us was old enough to drink - and I didn't anyway. That was not a problem. We drank cokes and danced to a live orchestra until near midnight. We were both pretty tired by that time, so I took her home and I headed straight for my bed.

The next thing I heard was early the next morning when I heard Aunt B talking on the phone saying, "She passed away about three this morning." I was shocked. Mother had been so "with it" when I talked to her in the afternoon!

The next day was spent at the funeral home; a home on Broadway, which I never knew existed before. Whoever selected the wear for Mother to be buried in did, I think, a good job. As Mother had been able to wear street clothes only rarely for several years, they selected a beautiful gown and robe that were among her favorites.

I spent the day at the home to greet visitors. The only visitors I knew, other than family, were, of all the possible surprises, Abbie Abramson, my roommate in the second semester in ASTRP, and his parents, whom I had met only once before. Abbie happened to be home on a short leave from his engineering assignment in the southwest. I was touched that he and his parents had taken the time to visit, for they had never met Mother.

The funeral was held in Russellville. First the service in the Presbyterian Church, and then to the Maple Grove cemetery and the Talley plot with her mother and father. The next few years would almost fill the plot. There is now being only one slot remaining. Several of the sisters are not buried there, but are with their husbands in their family plots.

Joseph, I recall, had also got an emergency leave from his base in Texas. His leave ended the day of the funeral, so he went through the Red Cross to get an extension. His extension was approved for an additional week. My leave ended about the day after the funeral, so I had time to get back without extending the emergency leave. There was nothing that I could do at home at that time, anyway.

When I started to put down some of the family history a few years ago the best date of mothers death that I could come up with was June 4, 1944. No one seemed to have any better information. I now realize that date could not possibly have been correct. The very simple reason is that I remember hearing the announcement and the minute-by-minute update announcements about the "D" Day invasion of Europe. That was on June 6. That would have to have been the date of the funeral and I was not in two places at once.

I called Martha to have her check her memory for a better date. She went to the old family bible and pulled out the date which she had entered unnumbered years ago. Carrie Talley Shelton born March 17,1898 died June 19, 1944. That was a full two weeks from my earlier computation, but it does tie into the other things a bit better.

I really do not remember having any association of Mother's death with the Invasion of Normandy. The company had been out training hard all morning. It was hot and sunny at Fort Bragg. The 397th was the first, northernmost, unit as you came to the Division Area from the main post. The first battalion was the first unit in the regimental area. The company streets were unpaved and, as was the rest of the area, were comprised of moderate to deep sand interspersed with bare clay. The company street was just the sand between our barracks and the barracks of "C" Company. There was a paved street at each end of the company. At one end was the street in front of the kitchens, at the working end of the building, where all the food went in and the garbage came out. At the other end was the road behind the supply/ orderly room. This, too, was on the working side of the buildings.

We usually had a few minutes in which we could relax between the time we finished lunch and the formation for the afternoon training. While we were sitting around resting, there was a small radio on in the barracks; we heard the announcements of the first landings on the beaches of Normandy. We listened to every notice until we had to fall-in again.

The upstairs of the third platoon barracks reminds me of a couple of actions. One time I was sitting on my footlocker doing a detail strip and cleaning of a carbine. In trying to put the extractor spring back in place - it fit very tightly between a cam on the bolt face and the extractor - the spring got away from me. With the heavy tension on it, it shot pretty far when it jumped. It shot from the middle of the barracks right out the open fire door at the end of the building. This meant that the spring had jumped into an area covered with approximately one foot of loose sand.

I went down to look for that spring, which was about one quarter inch long and doubled. I had almost no hope of finding the spring in all that sand. I looked very carefully for about 15 minutes - and found the spring. I had already played the consequences of not finding it. Too horrible to imagine.

Reminds me, too, of the combat proficiency tests we were taking about that time. The problems were rather intense. It was no playing matter. The functional rating of the unit readiness depended on the actions of all. During one test, which went on for several days, the ammunition bearers of the machine gun platoons got pretty tired, too. Finally, one man who had had all this play war he wanted just walked up to the gun and dropped the ammo boxes to the crew. He was supposed to remain unseen by the "enemy" and the scorers. The machine gun had not been seen until that time.

The next afternoon, when the company got back to the company area, Capt. Dunlap spent the afternoon walking back and forth from one end of the company street to the other - with two ammunition bearers flat on their stomach before him. It was raining cats and dogs.

As an ammunition bearer in the mortar platoon, the basic side arm was prescribed to be the M-1 Carbine. I fired the familiarization course with it. The side arm for the mortar gunner was the .45 cal semi-automatic pistol. We also did familiarization firing

with it. I liked it. My firing of it was not scored for record, but my percentage of target hits was much higher than most.

The training progressed to Advanced Unit Training, in which we would go out for tactical problems lasting several days. Everyone was playing the role they would have to live or die in a few months. It was during one of these problems that I ran into a peculiar problem. We had been on the go for about two days. After we had established our unit defensive position for the night we dug our individual protective positions. My partner and I dug in behind a large fallen pine tree. It was in a position that we got more protection with less work. After a few hours we had to move again and do it all over again. About the time we had to move I felt something moving on both my feet. There was no time to stop and take off my boots, or any way to check them in the dark. When it was getting light and we were in our new positions, I finally got to inspect my feet. I had fourteen wood ticks burrowing in on one foot, almost as many on the other. From then on I tried to avoid having to stay around fallen wood.

About the last of August we had one of our final big exercise tests. We were now believed to be combat ready. We started the exercise about mid morning with a long forced march. We were issued one canteen (1 quart) of water for the day. We had been required to put a number of salt tablets in the canteen for our protection. About 1:30 as we were marching quickly down the dirt road on the outer edges of the ranges, the old soldiers started passing out. These weren't the young kids. These were the hardened soldiers who never quit. I don't think anyone ever suspected they were faking it.

They weren't. I don't know what the heat index was for that day but it was extremely high. Just fortunately we didn't have anyone die. We were prohibited from getting adequate water to replace the perspiration in the soaking heat.

That evening, about 10 PM, when we got our evening meal, we were told to refill our canteen and to drink plenty of water, but to make sure we took enough salt to hold the water in our bodies. That salty water certainly was good. We may have been set back a week or so by that evidence of un-readiness, but we all learned something helpful for the future.

We did a lot of running around in the woods, day and night. I remember one night while we were marching I saw evidence of advanced sleepwalking. A few men in the column had passed the point of exhaustion and we were continuing. They were walking in the column while fully asleep. The body kept functioning, while the mind slept. We later learned that this was not all that unusual, but it was new to us.

One of the primary exercises on a day-to-day basis was gun drill. I learned that it was the Army that had pioneered the science of work simplification. Specific skills were analyzed to reduce every motion to its most effective base. Each man in the gun team had a set of prescribed actions to take. The team was responsible for the team function. We practiced by the hour. To mount the gun, ready to fire on a target with the gun aligned on a stake at a given azimuth and the sight and gun set to a given setting in minimum time was the objective. One minute was our objective. That was a good time for the team effort. We bettered that time fairly soon. We actually got the time down in the range of

about 45 seconds - regularly. That is starting with the team in line 15 yards from the point where the gun is to be mounted. All the combinations of men were tried for the best combinations. The best in the platoon was with Ted Kassel as #1 gunner and me as #2.

I was serious about my desire to improve. One thing, which seemed necessary to a dedicated seeker for efficiency was a good watch with a sweep second hand. I saved my money like a pauper. By the middle of August I was able to buy a watch. I never got to a main PX where one probably could have found a good watch at a good price. I bought a watch in downtown Fayetteville on one of the evening trips with the choir. It was a 17 Jewell Swiss movement with sweep second hand. It was beautiful. I paid $51 for it. That was one dollar more than my month's total pay. It was all I had put together in six months. It was beautiful. It enabled me not only to time our improvement in our tactical function, but also to confidently respond to any question of, "What time is it?"

It was very rare that we got to actually fire live mortar ammunition. Normally, the exercises were run without firing. On the rare instances when we were allowed to fire the mortars, we fired practice rounds. The practice rounds were powered with a shell which looked like a 12 gauge shot gun shell. The practice round was solid, rather than filled with high explosive. The firing data was different from the real thing so we could practice with the inert ammo on short ranges, up to about 200 yards, instead of long ranges of 3500 yards.

One afternoon, when we were firing practice rounds with no officers around, one of the gunners decided to see what would happen if he pointed his mortar straight up and fired the inert round. (Actually, it was impossible to set the sight for 90 degrees of elevation, but you could fudge on the level of the bubble.) He let one fly straight up. Fortunately, there was a bit of wind, and fortunate that the practice rounds went slow enough to follow with your eye. It fell about four feet from the mortar. Wow! What if?

Eventually each of us gunners was given a chance to call the shots using live ammunition: to identify the target, fire the registration round and move the burst point to the target. On my first attempt I got on target well under the allotted number of rounds. I was a good gunner and, it seemed, also a good observer. Perhaps the latter because I understood the gun and the theory of fire direction. The skill was to put me in good stead many times in two wars.

Another interesting weekend occurred that summer. As there was a lot of ammunition flying around the post and, as there were a whole lot of pinewoods, there was a great danger of forest fire. Each day one company was assigned as the designated fire-fighting unit. One weekend D Company was restricted to barracks - not required when the company was training, as the training units were normally available under supervision. We were called out about mid-morning to contain a small outbreak of brush fire. It didn't take long to bring that one under control. By about two in the afternoon we were called out again. This time it was a “biggie”. We were taken to a large and growing wall of fire. We were armed with flappers, rubber paddles about the size of snow shovels, backpack water tanks with pressure pumps, rakes, shovels, wet burlap and fatigues. We fought this one all night long. We could not get enough water to be effective in dousing

the patches of fire after we got them beat down to size. The most important tools were the rakes, shovels and flappers. We got it down about 10 the next morning.

Before we got back to the company we were called out again. Before we got to the new site we were released. The new unit had taken over. I have felt great admiration for the forest fire fighters since that time.

In the meantime we were keeping fairly well up on the conduct of the war. We were not particularly anxious to get into the fray, but we were well motivated to be ready when we were called.

During that summer I became active in another undertaking. I started taking German classes at the education center on the main post. Lessons were given a couple of nights each week. I missed a lot of lessons because of the training schedule, but I also got to attend quite a few. I had an extra helper. I had a friend who I remembered as being in the company who was also an ex-ASTRP student. His name was Bill Buursma. His parents were Dutch and he spoke Dutch at home, although you would never know it from his English. He spoke German as fluently as he did Dutch or English. He attended the classes with me, and on the long walk from the main post and classroom he would explain the lessons and the fine points, which may not have been covered adequately. This, too, came into good use later. Bill was from Holland, Michigan, and was in Bn. Hqs. Co. and later to Service Company, I think, before we left Ft. Bragg. I often wondered what happened to him, as I never heard from him again. (He and his wife visited me in 2003).

Our training schedule was quite full. We were doing more and more multi-day exercises. We were definitely getting within the range of being considered a combat ready unit.

Not long after the ASTP men had joined the Division a number of the old hands of the unit were shipped out as cadre, that is, to be the NCO core for other units being formed. About mid summer we got a large group of new men sent to the Division. These men were, as we, the ASTP, had been, excess to the needs of their old units. They were men who had been assigned to the US Army Air Corps. They were men from flight training, and from technical and specialist schools. They were a bit older, generally, than the ASTP-ASTRP, and they came ready made with ranks. None of the ASTP had rank, as it was a requirement of the program that those who had stripes had to give them up to get into the program. They were not any smarter than the ASTP group, but they were not any less smart as a group, either.

Thus, by September we were near 30% young extra-intelligent men. They were a perfect combination for good infantrymen. (Contrary to the common opinion that sees infantrymen only as dumb cannon fodder.)

One thing that helped our Air Corps retreads feel at home was that the main runway at Pope Field, the Army Airfield supporting Ft. Bragg, was less than a mile from our company. We were near the top of a small hill directly in line with the runway. The

Air Corps at that time was training troop glider pilots. The troop gliders were, generally, of two types. There was a boxy plywood model, which carried about 18 infantrymen. The larger size was a round model that carried more than thirty men.

The smaller variety was the usual one seen at Bragg. They were being pulled off the runway at all hours of the day. The C-47 aircraft that had earlier been known as the Douglas DC-3 towed them. The C-47 could pull two of them at a time. It was quite a sight to see them take off in series, assembling in groups of 50 or more before coming back and cutting the gliders free for off-runway landings before the tow planes came back for landing.

The C-47s without gliders were almost constantly coming off the runways. It was an interesting way to spend an hour if you liked to watch airplanes.

Another way to spend an hour on a weekend (the weekend began after lunch on Saturday for everyone who wasn't busy training) was an hour or so of swimming. There were no swimming pools available to us in the Division area, but there was an impoundment at the north corner of the Battalion area, known as McFadden's Pond. It was the size of a good size farm pond and was probably 8 feet deep in the middle. There was a dam at one end to provide for the water retention.

The place had been planned as a swimming area, so there was a changing room and a picnic cover. There was a nice sand beach area - the whole area was sand, but it was nice to have some water with it. There was a pontoon float near the middle, which gave something to swim to and a place to rest before you swam back.

There were also small fish in the pond (probably cotton mouth water moccasins too, considering that we were in North Carolina). I enjoyed the occasions that I got to go for a swim, although I was always startled when the small fish tried to take the brown mole off my side. The mole must have looked much like a small beetle, for almost every time I got in the water, a fish tried to eat it.

The only things between the battalion and the lake were the headquarters buildings for the Battalion and the Regiment. Most of us had little traffic in either of those. The only occasion I had for coming anywhere near them were the times they were within the guard post I was assigned when I was on Regimental Guard duty.

I hated to be assigned to guard duty, but according to roster the company got it about every two and one half weeks. When the company got it, it took about half the company strength to meet the requirement. The system of guard was fairly formal. The same general guard orders were used in all Army guard activities. The eleven general orders applied to any guard duty, anywhere. After that came special orders which applied to specific areas of specific posts.

The guard shifts were two hours walking post and four hours resting for the next shift. During the rest period you were part of the guard force, available to be dispatched to any point that needed a reinforcement of troops under command. I never learned to go to sleep in the four-hour break. I ended up spending a 24-hour shift with no rest. I was always beat at the end - although I continued to serve in some capacity of unit guard until

I was promoted to Captain, then I became eligible for Post Duty Officer. Then there was no prescribed off hours. You just spent all the non-duty hours at the headquarters, getting some rest if you could.

The first time I pulled guard duty in the Battalion I was assigned to the post including the Battalion and the Regimental Headquarters. One of the special orders was to allow no one to approach the vicinity of the Headquarters without proper identification.

That duty fell on a weekend. About 8:30 PM, as I was near the Regimental Hqs., I saw someone approach the main door of the building - my post included an area about 200 yards by 100 yards. I intercepted the person and called for him to halt. He did. I asked that he identify himself. He stated that he was the Regimental Commander, giving his name. I recognized the name but I had never seen the man before. I requested that he slowly reach into his pocket for his identification card, drop it on the ground and back up.

By this time the Colonel was giving me a grand old cussing, but I insisted. He did as I directed. I got the card and saw, after taking it to the end of the building where there was some light, that it was, indeed, the Regimental Commander. He was not a happy officer. He promised that the guard commander would "hear about this."

I expected to get chewed out at the end of the 24-hour tour, but I never heard a word about it. There was little he could have said, however, for I followed the identification procedure and the special orders were quite specific in calling for identification in other than normal office hours.

Another guard duty I got to engage in was prisoner guard. Generally, prisoners who were not considered dangerous to themselves or others were put out to work. The work details required guard supervisors. For this duty the guard was assigned live ammunition; for normal day-to-day post security ammunition was not issued. The day I got the duty I was assigned four men to do area clean up. We had a section of road from the Main Post to the Regimental area, including the whole park at McFadden's Pond. I had no difficulty with the prisoners. As a matter of fact, I found them to be rather interesting. They seemed to have active imaginations, but were generally a bit slanted in their view of what society owed to them.

When we finished the normal training day and had supper, many of the older men, particularly the NCOs, who had a little more disposable income, would head for the PX at the end of the street (the first building in the Battalion line) for a mug or two of 3.2 % beer. (This was considered inoffensive as being almost non-alcoholic - when compared to the normal 6 to 12%.) I was young and did not drink beer, but I loved ice cream. Ice cream was available at the PX, too, but only in pint cartons. There was no choice of flavors. Generally there was only vanilla - rarely chocolate or strawberry could be had, neither with the real flavor. The price was 15 cents a pint. That was less expensive than the flavors at our favorite Dairy Bar on west Market Street - but it wasn't nearly as good either, but, in the days before air conditioning, it was a pleasant cooler-desert.

One thing I was generally impressed with about our young college able soldiers was their attention to duty. There was almost no tendency to goof off. I think most of us felt that what we had to learn was vitally important. But every now and then a period was a waste of time. Then goofing off was not specifically frowned on by the men.

For some reason I was appointed as the company Chemical/Biological Warfare NCO. I wasn't an NCO, but we didn't have a NCO who knew anything about Chemical / Biological.

During the readiness testing the testers wanted to meet with the Company C/B NCOs. I took the group to the appointed place at the appointed time. Our schedule was open ended. No one in the company had any idea how long we were to be questioned. Neither did we. The testers asked us three or four simple questions, the answers to which I knew thoroughly. We were released in less than five minutes.

The other men thought that it would be a crime to pass up this opportunity. I agreed. There were men in small instructional groups all around the Regimental Parade Ground, so I took the group to a shady spot, put them in an instructional attitude and gave them a break. It was understood that if an officer or NCO came by I would continue my lecture, as though we had just been having a break after a hard morning of heavy learning. No one came by. No one cared whether we were goofing off or not. We stayed there for two hours, until we got tired of doing nothing. We got up, marched back to the company and reported to the First Sergeant and returned to the company for the last class of the morning. Nobody ever asked. *

Another pastime we enjoyed was a chance to go to a movie in the evening. We didn't get to participate in this too often, but we did see some fine movies. Hollywood was doing a great job in making movies to keep up the morale of the country - and of the soldiers. I remember one of the movies I saw was "Two Girls and a Sailor"; I remember the two girls, June Allyson (but can't at the moment call the name of the other). Van Johnson played the sailor. I enjoyed the musicals of the time.

Another movie series I saw then was the "Why We Fight" series of training films. It was very impressive. It convinced us that the Nazis were a pretty bad lot. We never doubted that what we had to do was something that had to be done.

Among the pleasant moments of that summer was the day in early summer when we were taking a long march in the back reaches of the post. Most of the roads were of compacted sand and clay. They held their shape, but were soft to the feet. As the sun got pretty high and very hot we entered a road that was arched over by the spreading branches of Mimosa trees. The trees were in full bloom. The smell was of fine perfume. I had seen a Mimosa tree only once before in my memory. That had been the previous summer in our home neighborhood. Someone had set out one in his front yard. It had been about five feet high and had about 20 powder puff blossoms on it. I was very impressed with this unexpected combination of shade, coolness, and arching trees covered with fragrant blossoms.

As I mentioned, I spent many hours that summer at the regimental chapel, at choir practice, services or at special activities. I got to know the two Chaplains fairly well. The senior of the two, a Captain, was a "hard shell" Baptist. The Lieutenant (Chaplin Bonner Teeter) was a Methodist. The Baptist was the one who normally held the Communion Services. He used purple grape juice.

One day the lieutenant held the communion service. I choked on the sip of juice. It was a reinforced wine - of the Muscatel variety. It took me completely by surprise. After that I smelled before tasting.

I found the Chaplains amusing, each in his own way. The Baptist was a Captain. He liked the respect and courtesy he got, but he hated to return salutes. I saw him return salutes with the left hand as often as with the right. The Methodist was not so tight. I remember riding with him one time in Europe in his jeep. As we passed some pretty girls I heard a whistle. I looked around to see who was whistling. It was the Chaplain. Nothing but appreciation was intended, but it surely surprised me.

During the final rush period of September 1944, as we were being readied as fast as possible, the unit made an attempt to let everyone get a three day pass, figuring that most of the men could get home for a short visit and back in three days.

I was notified that I could have a pass if I wished. I pointed out that I doubted if I could get home and back in the time. The Sergeant told me that it might be possible to catch an Air Corps flight going near where I was going. He called Pope Field Operations and asked. Sure enough, they did have a plane going to Bowman Field one day and returning two days later. I was booked both ways.

On the day of departure the company jeep took me to the operations office and I completed the administrative forms. I was then taken to the flight line where the aircrew instructed me in how to hook up a parachute and how to exit the plane and activate the chute if it was required. There were three or four passengers on board the C-47. There were not as many parachutes as there were people. No one pressed the issue.

I flew to Louisville in just a few hours. This was the second time I had ever flown. The first had been at Bowman field seven or eight years earlier. The only seats in the C-47 were the canvas patches laced to the metal frames down the sides of the cargo compartment. The seats were designed for people wearing parachutes. We weren't. Who cared?

I caught the Louisville city bus in front of the Bowman Field Administrative building and rode as close as I could get to the address Dad had written to me. When I called, he came and picked me up.

I was surprised to find that he was living in an empty storefront between Jefferson and Broadway on 26th street. He had most of the furniture from our house on 24th street, but no house. He had his bedroom set up in the back of the store space and the rest of the furniture lined up along the walls or serving as a screen between his bedroom and the front window. He seemed genuinely glad to see me and took two days off so that he could spend as much time as possible with me. I spent the nights at Aunt Lillie and Uncle

Guy's. Two days were all I needed. I felt very sorry for Dad. He had no reason for going on. He had no center to his daily activities. The third day he took me back to Bowman field where I met the returning plane.

I had now met the requirements for family contact prior to being sent overseas.

About the end of September we started the equipment checks. We had one layout inspection after another. Any of our blankets, pup tents, canteen covers, canvas webbing and any thing else that was showing any wear were replaced. The company equipment was replaced and counted. Even the unit weapons were issued new. All the mortars and machine guns had to be broken out of "Cosmoline", the tar-like preservative they came from the factory in. It was like cleaning off hard tar. Packing everything for shipment by water to an unknown destination followed this.

I remember that a detail was required to dig a large pit outside the supply room. It was about 8'X8' by 6' deep. You could have buried a 3/4-ton truck in it. Every supply room down the street had a hole just like it. They were for burying all the equipment and gear which had been found excess in the company and which could not be turned in without significant administrative difficulty, such as investigations to find how it happened to turn up as excess. There were even weapons, such as Bazookas, buried in those pits. Obviously, we were almost on our way.

As we got into October we were moved to Camp Kilmer, N.J. It was a very uncomfortable train ride, with too many men and too much equipment in each coach. We already had been issued new helmets and had numbers chalked on the front, so that we could be lined up in the proper order at the proper times.

When we got to Camp Kilmer that first evening, we had no good idea what had to be done or how long would be allotted to do it. We did have a good idea, though, that it was going to be a trying, boring exercise for however long it was. We were assigned to barracks - at least we had cots with clean sheets to put on them. In the time we spent there - I don't remember how long it was - probably in the order of 7 - 10 days, we did all those administrative things which had not been completed before. Insurance checks, to make sure the beneficiaries were correctly identified, next of kin designations - things of that sort.

There were also 12-hour passes available for some for visits to New York City. I managed to get one - from 12 Noon to 12 Midnight. It was crowded trains ride each way. I don't know how long it took, but it seemed awfully long. We went in through Grand Central Station. We visited the Empire State Building and walked all over Manhattan. I even visited Rockefeller Center and the NBC building. I saw a TV program being televised and was photographed in the background crowd. It was being broadcast, but I doubt that the signal was going very far. There weren't many TV receiving sets in the population in 1944.

We visited an automat, a cafeteria where each item was behind a coin operated door. We had only a snack. I do not now remember specifically what we did for the eight or so hours we were there, as I have been through there briefly a couple more times on

the way to Europe and back. I did see enough to recognize the background of many scenes of the movie staring Frank Sinatra and Jules Munchin that introduced the song "New York, New York." That was not the title of the movie. Three sailors spend a pass in NYC. Was it "On The Town"?

We soon moved to embarkation. I remember being lined up on a ferry from the N.J. shore. We were packed like sardines on every square foot of deck - open or automobile. There didn't seem to be room for one more duffel bag. We crossed the river to a pier and were led onto our transport.

The ship in which our Regimental Combat Team was to travel was the Army's "George Washington." The ship had been a luxury liner owned and operated by Germany before WW I. It was transferred to the U.S. and converted into a troop transport sometime in WW I. It was the largest of the US Army troopships. (The Army Transportation Corps ran the troop movements.) The RCT had about 6-7000 men. There was also all the equipment required by the major combat capable unit.

We left the New York harbor in the afternoon, I suspect so as to be in darkness when we got into the distance which enemy naval and submarine units might feel safe in observing. We were moving with a protective convoy, a grouping of something near fifty ships, troopships, cargo ships, and a navel escort of destroyers and perhaps other craft. I saw destroyers, but I never saw anything heavier such as Cruisers, if, indeed, any was in our escort.

Going aboard the "George Washington" was not difficult. We were lined and lead through the large doors in four columns. D Company was to be billeted on the main deck. That meant that we did have a direct access from our deck to the open deck. We did not have to go up or down endless ladders to get to a deck (if, for example, the ship were sinking.) The space we were to occupy had at one time been rather large. Now, however, there was no space. Endless rows of steel poles had been fastened from the deck to the overhead. There were four cots mounted on each pair of uprights. Each cot consisted of a steel frame with a hinge on one side and a chain suspending the outer edge from the pole. From the frame was laced a panel of canvas. The cots could be lifted, when unoccupied, and fastened to the pole to give some room to pass between the rows - and to clean the deck between and under the cots.

A major problem with the whole thing was that there was no space provided for the equipment each man had to carry with him. This included the duffel bag, his individual weapon, web gear and helmet. All this took a great deal of space - more than the man.

Details were assigned. I drew KP. I spent the entire trip working in the kitchen at least eight hours a day, more usually 10 to 12 hrs. There were only two meals a day, but by feeding nearly 7000 men twice, a great deal of time was taken. There were no seats. The tables were chest high with edges all around to keep the mess gear from sliding off in rough weather. The line was continuous into the mess hall, through the food line, to the tables, out through the wash lines for individual mess gear and out of the "galley".

I was fortunate in my assignment. About three men were assigned to make and serve coffee. We made it in huge stainless steel pots that were steam heated. There were about four of them. We kept drawing off steel pitchers of hot coffee and pouring it for the troops as they went by. This went on hour after hour. By the end of the working day we were pretty well worn out. *

We rarely got outside during the daylight. Only occasionally was there an emergency drill, which required everyone to repair to his quarters with life jacket and to stand by for nose count. Occasionally there would be a few minutes between the end of the morning meal and the start of the evening meal to steal a few minutes on deck.

Many men spent most of their time on deck, either day or night. The mess shift got to see the ocean almost only at night.

We spent many nighttime hours watching the flashes of phosphorescence move down the side of the ship. The convoy was moving under strict blackout conditions. No smoking was allowed on deck, no uncovered port was allowed. Any showing of light was a serious breech of light discipline and was a punishable offense.

From our ship we could see that at night the convoy closed the distances between the ships. You could see the silhouette of the ships all around; there were fifty or so ships in our convoy. During the daylight hours the convoy was spread so that you could not see more than about four ships at one time, probably due to the distance that the torpedoes from a single attack submarine could reach. The rumor of submarines was continuous. As far as I heard, no one ever saw one, but the rumors were riot.

When we had been out for several days, zigzagging an odd pattern across the Atlantic, there began a steady strong, and increasing wind. The clouds were low and fast.

Soon we were in the hurricane of the century. We had at least 75 mile per hour winds and the waves were unbelievable. They were fifty and more feet from trough to crest. The waves were higher than the depth of the ship from main deck to keel. We found that no matter which way the waves hit us we could see the curve of the bottom of the ship well above the height of the water at some point.

One night as I finished my shift making coffee I was making my way back to my assigned bunk area. The storm was continuing in its fury. I was passing through the area that had been the grand salon when the ship had been a liner. The old grand staircase still curved broadly down from the promenade deck above to the salon deck below. This stairway was on my best inside way from the two points of my trip.

The ship had been rolling, lurching, and bouncing like a cork. As I started up the stairway, it lay down before me. Instead of climbing the stairs, I was walking on a level path made of the forward edges of the steps. My stomach, which had been unsettled for a couple of days because of the motion, suddenly rebelled. As the ship came back upright I got out the light lock onto the semi-closed lee side deck and tossed my cookies to the fish.

The next day the scuttlebutt got around that the ship had rolled to within one half degree of exceeding its balance. A slightest bit more and the ship would have turned over like a turtle. I don't remember what our angle had been precisely, but it was in the neighborhood of 47 to 50 degrees.

Other stories made their way around the ship, most seemed to come from knowledgeable sources. For example we were for a couple of nights prohibited from going on deck at all, because of the occasional blue water inundations of even the upper decks. Units were assigned to pull guard duty, just as ours was assigned to KP. The story was that the guard posts on the deck continued to be manned. The story, too, was that on the evening of the worst of the storm, several men were posted and a few were lost in the wash of water. It was easy to believe, whether it was true or not. Also, the story got around that one evening as the storm was working up to fury, that the George Washington had come within about six feet of ramming the smaller ship ahead. I mentioned that the formation was closed at night, as there was – I presume - no radar and no light communications. In order to maintain position, there had to be visual contact under black out - not even marker lights. I'm sure that if that incident was really true, the Captain must surely have concluded that use of a marker light would have occasioned less danger than the possibility of a ramming, and could submarines or even surface ships launch torpedo or gun attacks in that weather?

As the weather improved, everything returned to normal. As we approached the North African Coast the sky became unbelievable. The stars were brighter than anywhere in my memory. Any formation of stars that you wished was there for the picking, if only you extended your arm. I have never, before or since, seen stars as close, as large and as brilliant.*

Nearer to the "Pillars of Hercules", Gibraltar, the weather turned terrible, again. It was perhaps a touch of good fortune. The visibility was near zero and the seas were running higher than I thought could be generated within the Mediterranean Sea. For about two days the high seas maintained. The narrows of the channel were behind us. We were secure on our way to Marseilles, although we had no hint of where we were headed. It was late afternoon when we approached the harbor. We were tugged in after sundown. Before we arrived the harbor was blacked out and the antiaircraft guns and lights went into action. We saw no planes and heard no bombs, but, otherwise, the attack looked real.

When the attack was over we were pulled in to the harbor and started the disembarkation. We left the ship as we had entered it, in column out the cargo-loading door, down the ramp onto the dock. There was no loitering. Units were moved out immediately as they formed. It was about 11 PM, as we got under way. We were told that we were in Marseilles. We moved quickly and quietly out of town. We marched for several hours, until we got well into the suburbs. It felt peculiar to be walking through the neighborhoods of the city in the small hours of the morning. There was enough light to see what the buildings looked like. We could read the signs for the shops "Boulangerie", something like that. We thought it was a bakery. The streets were narrow. The weird thing was the complete absence of civilian activity. It was as if we were walking through a complete people vacuum. We were picked up by convoys of trucks and moved out into the countryside to a location unknown to us.

We were unloaded along a narrow road in what seemed to have been a large pasture. We were roughly lined up and told to pitch tents for the night. We complied. The next morning we were lined up properly and adjusted every tent peg to line up with every other peg in the line of hundreds of tents along the road.

That same afternoon a requirement came for a work detail. I was selected for the assignment. We were trucked back into town and back to the same wharf, where we were to provide muscle for unloading the cargo of the ships in the harbor. We moved, uncrated, loaded cargo onto trucks and otherwise worked unrelentingly until after midnight when we got a short break for a meal.

We had already been introduced to the marvelous world of "K" Rations. We had one for a midnight snack. The light for the labor that night was a couple of fires built on the concrete surface of the wharf and sustained by some of the packing materials we took off the cargo. We worked until about 3-4 AM, when we were again taken back to our bivouac area for 3-hours sleep.

We, once again, unpacked weapons. The crew weapons which we had taken out of cosmoline in September, were now unpacked and we cleaned heavy grease off every surface. Individual weapons were cleaned, cleaned and cleaned again.

About our third night there the rains came. We had several thousand men on a flat pasture with essentially no drainage. We ditched our tents (two man pup-tents) before the rains began, but still ended up in the middle of the night deepening the ditches and trying to find something to do with the inches of water covering the entire pasture.

One of the minor culture shocks came the first morning we were there. Upon awakening we all needed to head for the latrine. They were already prepared. They were eight-hole latrine boxes with trough urinals - set up right along the road that the local population traveled. I never expected to have to greet passers-by of both sexes while seated on the latrine or even worse while standing at the open urinal. We did. There was no change in this aspect until we left the area. In the five or six days we were in the area we were given one opportunity to go into town. The closest town was AIX. I had heard of it but really knew nothing of it. *

I got on the truck with a couple of people from the platoon and got off in the middle of town. What was there to do? We knew that the French were in a war. They had no assets to entertain visiting soldiers. We felt it would be unseemly to order food at a restaurant, as we probably had more food than they did. We were too young to drink. It was the middle of the afternoon, so there were no shows to see. So we walked around town and looked. After a few hours we met the trucks and went back to our pasture.

We heard later that some of the men who went in did indeed find something to do. But they had mostly done it before, too. And, it didn't deplete the civilian resources, either.

After about a week, we started our journey to the front. We had no idea where the front was, but privates in the infantry aren't supposed to know where they are or where they're going. We headed north, in the general direction of Dijon. We traveled for about

two days before we bivouacked in the city park at Lyon. We really had not much idea where we were, but we did hear a lot of bombing and a lot of anti-aircraft fire. We were not supposed to have heard it or to know who was doing what - I guess, for no one ever enlightened us.

During our few days of riding on uncovered trucks before we got accustomed to "K" rations, we felt many hunger pangs. There were no stands selling candy bars in this part of the country. At one time during a "Pee" break one of the men from a farm went over to the edge of a field, rummaged in the edge of a pile of dirt and came back to the truck with what appeared to be a very large turnip. It looked delicious. At a later stop, several of us each got one. I happened to like raw turnips. I found no significant difference between a turnip and a rutabaga. My hunger was temporarily assuaged.

We saw a lot of damage during our journey. We saw entire convoys of German units, which had been decimated by air attacks. In some places the roadsides on both sides were piled with German debris. Many vehicles of many types, some tanks, many trucks, anti-aircraft carriers, artillery, some jeep-like vehicles, many, many horse drawn wagons, hundreds of horses and many, many soldiers. No one had had time until then to get to the victims to do more than to push them off the roads. It seemed that there could be no more war - the losses on one side were already too severe to be withstood.

At one point on our progress north and then east we saw a road sign that proclaimed, "Paris 50 Km". Of course we turned immediately lest we see something the world wished to see. That view was not yet approved for combat forces.

As we turned east toward the Vosges Mountains, the roads became narrower, steeper and more crowded. I remember the day that a tanker truck was coming up the hill as we were going down. We met on a curve. There was a crash as the two outside rearview mirrors struck. We were that close, and both trucks were as close to the edge as they could get without going either into the ditch or over the cliff.

At some point we were unloaded in the early evening semi-darkness and assigned to bivouac areas in a light forest of large deciduous trees. It was full dark before we were settled. "C" rations, the largest of the individual rations, pup tents, set up randomly - no longer aligned pegs - and bivouac guard shifts established in the site. My pup-tent mate, Bob O'Dell, and I were fixed for the midnight to two AM post. Our pup tent just happened to be closest to the Platoon Sergeant, he with the yellow eyes and snake like temperament. We were in our tents within a couple of hours after dark. We were advised that we were in reserve behind the 45th(?) Inf. Division and that there were expected to be German combat patrols in the area this evening.

During the next couple of hours I heard the platoon sergeant cussing. He needed to go to the latrine to urinate, but that would involve putting on his boots, finding his way to the latrine in the dark and then finding his way back to his tent. Instead he found he had an empty "C" ration can. He resorted to peeing in the can, dumping it out the end of the tent and filling it again. I heard it dumped 10(?) times. We were now in the combat zone. Anything could happen. We were now following the tactical references.

BIVOUAC

Shortly before Bob and I were to start our guard tour in this, our first Combat Area situation, one of the men we were to relieve came over to our tent to awaken us. We recognized that we were awake and stated that we would be at the post very quickly.

I started putting on my boots, the only thing, other than my field jacket and helmet that I had removed for the night. Bob could not lace his boots in the dark. He had to have a light. He lighted the candle that we had devised - a can of dubbing, a sealant for boot leather, with a wick. By that time I was outside the tent. It, the tent, looked like a Jack O' Lantern. It was a sun-bright lantern in the dark woods. I moved back in, quickly, to advise him to cover the light.

While we were both in the tent, lighted like a lantern, we heard it.

It was a scream; prolonged and deathly. We could hear the knife turning in the kidney of a dying soldier. I slapped a hand over the candle and we were in blackness, listening to the lingering sobs of the dying soldier. He was within 30 yards of our tent. Bob finished lacing his boots in the dark. *

We heard nothing more.

We got ourselves together and made our way to our post, just through to the next clearing. We relieved the two men on guard and assumed our period of responsibility. They had seen nothing, although they had heard the scream.

The moon was above the clouds, giving a visibility to shapes and shadows for perhaps 15 yards. The woods were open, of large single trees. Shadows were the predominant feature. Bob and I looked around, aware that the enemy combat patrol was within our area. We decided that our best coverage was achieved backed up to trees facing each other. Neither of us had to have an open back. Thus, we started our first period of combat security.

Time stood still. The shadows beyond Bob's shoulder moved slowly to the left, then to the right. I had never concentrated harder, trying to separate reality from imagination. The clouds moved slowly, further confusing the real from the unreal. Concentration was focused.

I became aware that I was slipping down the trunk of the tree against which I was leaning. I refocused. Discriminate between the real shadow and the imagined movement!

I concentrated on the weeds and shadows among the trees in the clearing - nothing could be seen in the deeper woods. Time stopped. The moon drifted ever so slowly, shadows emphasizing the light play. I felt myself again slipping down the tree trunk. I realized that I was fainting from extreme concentration. I had to relax, to take things as they came. I could not protect my fellow soldiers if I was to be the first to pass out.

Once again I watched the clearing and the wood line with my peripheral vision (much clearer in clouded moonlight than direct focus.) A few minutes later I felt myself, for the third time, slipping down the tree trunk. THIS WAS IT! I had a serious cerebral conversation with myself.

I was anxious. I couldn't see anything. My comrades were depending on me. I was causing myself to pass-out simply by concentrating on the things that I could not see. I HAD to realign my priorities to provide for physical action as a result of physical threat. I could not tie myself up with unseen phantoms.

Breathing deeply and evenly, although with forced control, I regained composure and control of my faculties. Referring to my watch, which had a luminous dial, I finally determined that it was time to wake our relief. Bob knew where they were and woke them.

I had made a major discovery in the understanding of the psyche of a soldier. Darkness and the unknown can be a life-threatening foe with no assistance from a physical enemy. *

We retired to our tent for two hours sleep, secure in the trust of another pair of scared young men who were learning to stay alive.

Morning came too quickly. We were up and on our way shortly after dawn.

We found that many people had heard the result of the enemy combat patrol in our bivouac area. The best story we got was that a member of "B" company had had a dream in which he had been bayoneted in the back. He had lived through the attack, which we had heard, but only barely did he survive.

We were on our way for another day across the rear of the lines. This time, again, behind the lines of the 45th(?), "The Rainbow" Division (?). Now we were no longer in tactical bivouac. We were in unit support. That is in direct reserve for the smaller unit.

We got to our position long after dark, in a driving downpour. We really didn't know where we were or what we were supposed to be doing. We tried to get some dispersal while maintaining squad and section integrity. We did not know what was expected of us. We tried to pitch tents on the hillside we were on, but it wouldn't quite work. We ended up putting a shelter half on the ground to lie on and putting the other over us to deflect the rain.

That was the best answer for us, as Lt. Earl Turner, the section Lt. had no tent-mate and needed somewhere to sleep. The three of us went between the shelter halves. Lt. Turner was a very small man, who looked completely overwhelmed by the size of the gear he had to wear. Helmet, carbine, field glasses, boots, all looked huge on him. You had to feel about him as you would a cute puppy. He was as nice and considerate as he could be in getting his job done.

During the night my new guard partner was a big, gentle young man named Ballard, a blond, freckled, “everybody's friend” sort of fellow. He had had a great deal of

trouble in our early days in the unit in getting shoes large enough. The result was that they had issued him a double issue of size 13 boots. He had to carry the extra pairs everywhere, for fear of not being able to get replacements.

With the rain driving against everything, it was impossible to hear whether the Germans were around us. I was standing with my back to the pine tree near my tent (?). After about 30 minutes of relaxed attention, learned in my previous experience at bivouac security, I heard a footstep immediately in front of me - six inches in front of me. I felt ahead of me with my hands, one hand on my carbine safety, and found no one there. I learned another thing, - one had to use his ears to compensate for the lack of sight, and one had to use the mind to supplement both.

I could have sworn that I had heard a footfall, of a man who had slipped in the mud and stomped the ground with the other foot in an attempt to regain balance. The other explanation was that a branch had blown from the pine tree against which I was standing and had fallen directly in front of me. I accepted the only logical explanation. Examination of the site in the morning disclosed that there was a pine branch, perhaps 2 1/2 inches in diameter immediately in front of where I had stood. This reinforced my lesson learned that you had to trust your mental analysis of the situation.

We spent another day or so in this location, even getting holes dug in which to sleep. As we were still behind the lines we dug trenches for protection from shrapnel, but mounted our pup tents over the holes to keep the rain out. We dug the holes large enough to accommodate at least two.

Of course, the first thing done that morning was to check on the guns we had mounted in the dark the night before. We had to clean and dry the Mortar, as well as to check that the azimuth and stakes were correct according to the instructions of the night before.

The days were not much better than the nights. The clouds were hanging half way down the hillsides. Everything was dripping. Much of our energy was spent in trying to keep reasonably dry and passably clean - without committing to an area. We had no tactical mission as yet, just a clean-up if required. We hoped there would be no requirement.

Here we were hearing friendly artillery go overhead. We heard some incoming, but nothing frightening. We were curious, however, as to why some of the friendly fire didn't make it all the way to the Germans. Occasionally a round would explode over us, or only a bit ahead of us, while still in trajectory and nowhere near the ground. A timed fire round should not be set that far off.

For no special reason I just pulled out my scrapbook from W.W.II. It was reasonably close at hand. I had hoped that the large-scale maps that I had marked during my stay in Germany after the war had been annotated to show the date of each point that I had checked as having spent a night. No dates were shown, but in the notes for one of the strategic summary maps from the Division Historical section, there is the comment that the Division had debarked on 20 October. That put our placement in the strategic reserve

behind the 45th about the 1st of November. Thus, I suppose, that the night I got my first real fright was our first official day of combat.

We continued from day to day with minor changes of location in support of one unit or another. My birthday on the 10th of November went unnoticed, even by me - except for a completely unrelated side issue. Since the year I was nine in Louisville, as a result of a birthday dinner of sauerkraut and wieners, which I told Mother I liked, I had the same thing each birthday. After the war I could remember no variation of that pattern of November the 10 and Sauerkraut and Wieners, so I suspect that they found me again, though, at this remote point in time not only can I not remember what I had for dinner, I can no longer remember where we were. (My guess at this distance is that we had a cold combat ration, as I do not remember seeing any of the mess personnel during this period.)

I do remember, however, a scene of the late afternoon of my birthday. We had moved again that day. There was a light snow on the ground and on the trees of the woods where we were to spend the night. It was time to get tactical and dig protective positions for the night. The platoon sergeant designated squad areas, got into the platoon leader's jeep and took off. No one knew where.

On the evening of the 12th we were told that the following morning we were to jump off in the attack. We were prepared with holes for the night. Until this time we had heard only general area bombing, artillery and mortar fire. Nothing had been directed specifically at our unit, although several times the barrages were close enough for us to hear the rounds approach and to begin learning to judge what was coming our direction and what was not.

We were up early on the morning of the 13th. Again we had had a light snowfall during the night. Not enough to completely cover the ground, but just enough to keep everything soaked with water.

As the rifle companies crossed the line of departure we were in firing positions designated by the platoon, in support of the planned movement. The first squad was assigned a position at the forward edge of light pinewoods. We had to cut out several pine saplings to get an unobstructed line of fire for the sector we were to cover. We got to register on a base point, so at least the observers would know where to start adjusting our fire, if it was to be needed.

We knew we had passed through BACCARAT and we were told that our Battalion objective was a small farm town of Bertrichamps. In mid-morning, after having fired only one or two desultory missions, we were told to pick up to move. This involved only picking up the gun, stakes, ammunition and moving. We moved left and forward, down a rather steep hill in very heavy, fully grown woods.

Here we observed for the first time the effect of artillery on heavy woods. The tops and most branches of the trees were shattered. As we were passing through the woods we got to see the effect even more closely. What we learned was that an artillery shell, which usually hits the ground and throws most of its shrapnel up and forward would explode 30 to 50 feet in the air and throw all its hardware downward and forward.

The area of danger to troops was much larger in the woods. Lesson: try to avoid heavy woods in the establishment of a defense. They are basically an unsafe place to be when artillery is falling. Second, you cannot fire mortars from heavy woods without hard work in clearing a sector of overhead clearance. (See section on attack of 15 March, 1945 as example.)

We set up our mortars at the forward edge of the woods. We were a couple of hundred yards from and parallel to the road that ran into the town. The rifle companies had crossed the road and were now on the top of the ridge on the other side.

There were a few random missions called for and fired through the afternoon, but nothing that had the feel of real importance. Late that afternoon the rifle companies were three hundred yards or so beyond the road, so we were moved across the road and up the side of the ridge. Our platoon set up in an apple orchard belonging to a farmer who had a house along the road. We spent the night in the house. The guns of all six squads were set up along the same line. All the squads were under roof, in three contiguous farmhouses, for the first time since we arrived in France, more than three weeks before.

The next day we were prepared to do damage. Throughout the morning nothing much was required of us. We cleaned our mortars, re-setting everything for maximum accuracy. We had communications established, sound power phones from the platoon and the Fire Direction Center (FDC), and to the houses in which we were resting. We were providing security all the time both to the gun positions and to the troop area. In the late morning, while I was at the gun position with one other man, I got a call on the sound power phone that there was an emergency target. I was the only one available for several guns. I took the basic data to be set on the gun. By the time the remainder of the gun teams could sprint the 40 or so yards up the hill I had the gun set and the ammo ready to fire. No time was lost. I was one of the fastest gunners around; the only one faster was Ted, my squad leader.

The target, according to the observer, was a group of infantry counterattacking one of the companies. We fired several volleys at the position called. We probably fired search and traverse missions, which is the way to cover the maximum area with the minimum number of shells in the minimum time. The report was that the volleys fired by my gun stopped the attack. The rifle company had only minor damage. The company was reported to be very appreciative of our support, however.

That afternoon the Lt. of the second section passed the word that the first section (I was a member of the first section) was invited to partake of a pot of Lieutenant- made vegetable soup. He had used his time in the farmer's house to cook the largest pot he could find of homemade vegetable soup. The fog was low and cold. The soup was hot and tasted of home. It was good.

In the middle of the next morning we moved forward - to the positions, which the rifle companies had occupied the night before, perhaps three hundred yards from where we had been.

There was a very minor road running across our new front, that is, across the direction we were moving and firing. We had our guns in place and were ready to respond to any need. We expected to move at any moment. The daylight faded and we still were expecting to move any moment.

We never did hear anything to disabuse us of that idea. We just never heard anything. We were in an area of many holes - already dug by the rifle companies, but darkness had come before we had arranged positions for the night.

The Company kitchen did not find us that night, either. It had been raining, moderately, all afternoon. We were wearing field jackets, which are really not waterproof. They repel for a while, but, eventually, they do get wet.

The full squad spent that night in one large hole. The position had probably been a platoon Command Post the night before. The hole was about four and a half feet deep and about eight feet square. There were logs overhead, which was a distinct advantage as we had observed a couple of days before when we saw the effect of artillery in the woods.

There were several problems. There was about four inches of loose mud on the floor of the hole. There was room for everyone to sit (helmets made a reasonable seat to keep you above the mud), but there was no space for any one to recline, even if we had had any way to stay out of the mud.

Water was dripping steadily between the logs covering the hole. It was continuing to rain, moderately, but relentlessly. As the interior of the hole was warm enough with eight people in it, I reasoned that if I took my jacket off it would be dry by morning. WRONG! The only way to dry a garment in the absence of artificial heat is to wear it. In the morning every one was reasonably dry except for me. I was chilled and had nothing to put on except a soaking wet jacket.

Once again the kitchen was absent. Fortunately, we had our day's supply of "K" rations. Everyone in the squad was fatigued. No one had slept in the preceding 24 hours or more. We improved our gun positions and tried to get dry and warm. Fires were not allowed, either in daylight or dark - smoke and light. As evening approached we made sure that we had a hole to call our own for the night.

Ted Kassel and I found a two-man hole near our gun. The position was a narrow trench about 6' 2" long about 30" wide and had a cover of logs, except for about 18" at one end. We figured that we could manage to sleep in that space.

We secured a poncho over the entry hole and at dark we crawled in and went to sleep. About nine the next morning we woke under the call of nature. In trying to get out the entry hole, now covered by the poncho, we found that the poncho was sagging almost down to our feet. It had rained steadily all night and the poncho had held about five inches of rain water. We both got toward that end and threw the weight of water up.

When we came crawling out of our hole the men of the section were quite relieved. They had been unable to find us. Those who had been told where we were to be

found had not found their way back to our hole, or, if they had, did not recognize it with all the water hanging in the poncho. We had slept more than 14 hours.

Still no breakfast came from the kitchen. Thank goodness for "K" rations. "K" rations were a remarkable adaptation to the needs of troops for short time replacement menus. The various rations were; "A", "B", "C", "D", and "K". The "A" was the garrison ration of mixed fresh and canned or frozen food, with something more than 3500 Calories a day for Infantry. (In 1964 the ration for new infantry trainees contained more than 5000 calories a day.) The "B" ration was the completely preserved version of the "A". In most every situation the Army tries to add fresh bread to the "B" ration, but otherwise all the food is canned or otherwise preserved.

The "C" ration is a set of three meals in one large box. It consists of six cans of about 4 ounces each. Two cans are included for each meal. One of the two cans contains the basic food for the meal, the other contained the accouterments, such as hard biscuits, (hardtack), coffee powder, envelope of sugar, packet of toilet paper, packet of four cigarettes, or with the appropriate meal, packet of tang. The "C" ration is designed to sustain a soldier for up to about 30 days.

The "K" ration was three meals each in it's own box. Each box was about 1 1/2" X 3 1/2 " X 8". This was the biggest box that could be fitted into a field jacket pocket. The inner box was covered with a heavy coating of bee's wax, which gave enough fuel to heat the meat portion of the ration if the situation permitted. The breakfast was a small can, about 2 ounces, of scrambled eggs. The remainder of the package included the toilet paper, a small bar of dried fruit, four "hard tack" crackers, a packet of four cigarettes, a packet of "tang" (citric acid) powder, a packet of instant coffee, and two sugar packets.

The lunch menu was a small can, same size, of processed cheese, tasting generally of cheddar. The other ingredients were comparable to the breakfast. The evening meal included as its meat element a can of "Pork and Apple Loaf", generally referred to a "Pork and apple leaves". What it lacked in flavor it made up in hunger. The "K" Ration was to be limited to one week at the very most. It did not contain sufficient calories for continuous use.

The "D" ration was a bar of concentrated chocolate. It contained a lot of fat, but little sugar. It could not be used for more than three days. It was absolutely not enough to run on.

The significance of the continued dependence on "K" ratios was hunger. We had now been on "K" rations for more than two weeks. The ration did not have enough bulk to let the stomach know that you had eaten. We had read that the effect of smoking was to deaden the sense of hunger. By the late afternoon of this day, a weak, watery sun had come out by mid afternoon, I tried my first cigarette. I tried one of a brand from the rations - which no one had ever heard of before or since. The two most frequently found brands were "Fleetwood" and "Chelsea". They were reported to be the mildest, with almost no nicotine, but they did reduce the hunger pains. The third unknown brand was "Parliament" in a blue package.

Late that afternoon we changed positions again. We were moved over to the east side of Bertrichamps. The town had been taken and left again. This night we were in temporary reserve. The rifle companies were holding in place. Our platoon was mostly together, in a couple of small houses along the road.

__"No use both of us getting killed, you go."___

That night we made contact with our kitchen personnel briefly. Nothing spectacular, but we learned that they were still alive. We saw Lt. Nealand, our platoon leader, for the first time since we left the bivouac site out of AIX. It was no special treat. He made an appearance and immediately left. I don't know where he was staying or where he had been, but when he showed up he started telling us how rough he had had it for the past few days.

The next day some of the sections moved out to support companies which were again in the attack. First section was not yet so deployed. One of the units of the platoon headquarters was a transportation unit. There was a corporal who had control of the seven jeeps of the platoon. His main function was to insure that ammunition and supplies were maintained to each gun position. The deployed sections were forward toward Clairupt and Thiaville. The road from where we were to where they were was under sporadic artillery interdiction, "H & I" fire, as we knew it. Harassing and Interdiction - the accent was on the first "a".

As the afternoon wore on it was obvious to all present that the forward section would need ammunition. The Transportation Corporal, in conversation with the section driver scheduled to make the run, arrived at a decision. He had planned all day to accompany that run as some sort of morale display. Finally he announced his decision to the driver. "No use both of us getting killed, YOU go."

Thus born, for me, was a statement reflecting the ultimate disdain for the other person. I used it to parody the statements of decision of responsible persons for another year and a half of combat. It surprises me just how often that essence was included in command decisions. "You are less important than I. You take the chances while I sit it out."

The next day we were on the road, literally, we were marching forward. The company we were supporting was leading the attack. We moved rather quickly to the town of Reon l'Etape. Nothing seemed unusual as we moved down the main street, until snipers and German machine guns opened up down the street. The fire caught at least one Rifle Company and the support units in dispersed columns down the street. The soldiers disappeared quickly into every doorway.

Mortar platoon, with first section now leading, was led through a covered passage way and a courtyard to an alley where courtyards were found for each gun crew to set up the guns. Almost as quickly as we got azimuth and distance to put on our sight we started

receiving German 80mm Mortar fire in the area. We heard three rounds hit. One short of our position, one long and the third was just over the wall from us in the little garden where 2d squad had their gun set up. We knew that 2d squad was in deep trouble.

The men there reacted well. The squad leader was killed immediately. Staff Sergeant Lawrence Gibson, the section sergeant was badly wounded along with a couple of lesser-wounded crewmen. Jim Roberts the #3 gunner (carried the base plate and was responsible for setting the gun in the initial prescribed base direction and quick stake lay-out) was injured. I did not see the dead and badly injured, but I did see Jim. He was being led out toward a medic jeep. His wound was a nick on the ear lobe. It was probably a bit bloodier than having an ear pierced. However, from his position next to the crew gun, the round landed within a few feet of him. He saw the dead and wounded around him. He went into shock, that inexplicable killer of the nearly wounded. He was sent to the hospital and returned several days later, after his condition had been controlled and stabilized. There were many things, which Jim had rather be doing than working on a Mortar crew in France, but he was no coward. He really was in a life threatening state of shock, for which he had to be treated immediately.

As the positions of the enemy were discovered, we were put to good use. We fired many missions that afternoon. We changed positions only slightly, only a block or two, for the next several days. We, the first squad, of which I was the #1 gunner, were put on a schedule of providing "H&I" fires every 15 minutes, day and night, in addition to all the called targets. We were kept hopping and sleepless.

During this time we were on "K" Rations and we were short of water, one quart (one canteen) a day was made available. I had neither the energy nor the water to shave. (At that time with a good razor, a good brush, good shaving soap and plenty of hot water it took me almost 30 minutes to shave - painfully.) On the seventh day in that position Lt. Nealand made his first appearance at a platoon position. He was freshly bathed, uniform pressed and all leather shined. Seeing me he said, "Shelton, I think you ought to shave a little." I held my tongue, which wasn't easy, considering I had fired missions at 15-minute intervals for days on end.

The next day I shaved, down to within one inch of my jaw line, and up to within one inch of my jaw line.

The next day or so we moved out again following the rifle companies who were hot on the heels of the Germans. This time we were riding on our squad jeep. We found that we could all ride if we were willing to overload a bit - seven in the jeep, two in front and five in back, and one on the front of the trailer. We moved down the road to Mouanmoutier, where we were directed to set up our guns in the area around a textile mill where, I understood, fabric was woven. I never got inside the factory so I didn't check it out.

As a couple of our sections turned into the gate of the property a Frenchman, who seemed to be living in an apartment house across the street from the factory, was calling to us in French and motioning to us. I tried to communicate with him, as he seemed intent on telling us something. I knew not one phrase of French, so I ask him in German if he

spoke German. As we were near the German border, in an area that was said to have a reversible flag, French on one side and German on the other, he did. In German he quickly told me that we were setting up our guns in an area that was laid with mines by the Germans within the last day.

I relayed the information to the Section Leader. We quickly were ordered to dismount our guns and we moved on a bit down the road. The Section Leader later reported that the Engineers had been called and, sure enough, the entire area had been mined. We had been extremely fortunate that none of our vehicles or us had set one off. My hours in the study of German had already paid off, big time.

That afternoon we progressed toward Senons. We were on foot again, and observing carefully. This was the first time that I had seen the local farmers cleaning up their land. The locals were gathering up the dead Germans who had been killed on their property. The bodies were loaded on the peculiar barrows the French farmer used, no sides, and carried to a collection point near the road. By the time the bodies were to the road a vanishing act had taken place. All boots, belts and all warm clothing had vanished. During the process the blood was still running from the bodies. Rigor mortis had in most cases not had time to set in.

In the early evening I saw some of the depredations inflicted by the Germans, too. We stopped at a roadside farmhouse to set up guns and to investigate whether we could stay the night if the situation allowed. After my gun was positioned I accompanied the second section sergeant in an inspection of the house. It was disgusting. The Germans had defecated on the floor of every room of the large house - which, otherwise, would have been satisfactory for at least two squads. The situation developed, however, that we did not spend the night in that area.

We were ordered back to Reon l'Etape. We were in a short reserve while higher headquarters planned how to react to the next situation.

That night our section was billeted in a shop in downtown Reon. The particular shop was a music store. Downstairs was the shop, while upstairs were a couple of rooms where the shopkeeper lived. The instruments were interesting, but most of us kept our hands off, as they were not ours and the shopkeeper had to make a living, too.

One man in the section, however, a Pfc. in his early thirties and by the name of Lester Tidwell, from central Tennessee, found a "fiddle". He was determined that he was going to get it home. He didn't play, but many in his family did. In examining the "fiddle", one of the men squinted through the sound holes and discovered a tag glued on the inside of the body. It gave the name and the date of either the construction or the repair of the piece. "Antonio Stradivari - 1721" Isn't that odd. I haven't thought of that in years, and the date is my house number here and now! I, too, saw and read the yellowed tag. It looked as though it could have been genuine. Lester left Reon l'Etape with a "fiddle" wrapped in his sleeping bag. As far as I know he did send the instrument through the Army Post Office to his relatives at home.

The next day we were on the road again. We were trucked several miles, and then dismounted to move behind the rifle companies through a few more villages. We engaged in several exchanges of fire during the afternoon. The day was very cool, with drizzle. The most poignant feature of the fall of 1944 was the smell of wood smoke in the heavy damp air. In the cold rains of November I am still transported in my mind to the woods and villages of eastern France if I come upon the wet aroma of wood smoke.

One of our stops that day in late November was in the sales yard of a lumber sawyer, or saw mill. In looking at the 1/250,000 scale map, I'm led to believe the town may have been La Petite Reon. We often stopped several times in the course of a day to fire missions in support of the companies. The individual missions, by and large, are no longer remembered.

The review of the Division maps shows that I have inverted some of the actions. The reconsolidation at Raon L'Etape did not come until the 26th of November, after we had passed through La Petite Reon. From La Petite Reon we walked through the hills to the village of Le Piud. We had been on the move all day long. As darkness fell and the pangs of hunger moved us, we took out our "K" and consumed it. The day happened to be Thanksgiving Day. We walked until about 5 PM. When we got into the town we were assigned to buildings for billets, but first we were taken to an area where the kitchen had set up a mess line. We were to have Thanksgiving dinner.

There we discovered a terrible truth. On our extended diet of "K" rations, our stomachs had shrunk. We had had three-ounce meals for most of a month. Following our ingestion of the three ounces just a couple of hours earlier, we could not eat the good food. There was no room in our stomachs. We tried to take a few bites and a snack or two for the next day.

That night, after we were assigned to billets, I had what was almost a sobering experience. As the village had not been carefully checked out, we went through the house carefully, to be sure we did not have German guests hidden anywhere in the building. I was checking the attic when I fell through the ceiling. I did the classic thing, falling through to the waist and catching myself with my belt gear and hands. I had fallen through just over the inside pit latrine. My feet were just above the seat of the “two-holer”.

It was a couple of years later that I learned that Lt. Melvin Groot, who had earlier lived next door to us in Louisville and who had married my cousin, Silvia Motsinger, had been wounded in the same village, I do not now remember whether it was the same day or the day before. He was shot through the mouth, from side to side. He lost most all his teeth. It just happened that the restoration and the partial plates that were required, ultimately improved his appearance, as he had been badly buck -toothed. The next day saw us moving out again toward St. Blaise.

We ended up that night in a little village of Champany. We were there for a couple of nights. We had our guns in defensive position, but I do not remember firing them in that reprieve.

This was the location in which I got to catch up with my letter writing. I remember how natural it seemed to sit at a table in country farmhouse dining room writing by the light of a single candle. *

This was the location, too, where our one French speaking man in the section was conversing with the house grandmother. He asked her, as she had been saying how young we all looked, to guess my age. She came over and studied me carefully. I still had my narrow beard, with much white showing in it as well as the white in my hair. She solemnly declared that I was the exception - I was above 40. This was less than two weeks after my 19th birthday. I do not doubt that I looked more than twice my age, particularly by candlelight

In this location, too, I discovered that candlelight is an excellent light for doing portraits in charcoal or soft pencil. I did sketches of a couple of the men in the section. I have no idea what happened to them. Probably the men I drew sent them home.

The next day, Lt. Nealand came by again, for his third appearance of the war. Passing me outside the house he said, "Shelton, I see you shaved a little." "Yes, Sir." I replied. The next day the platoon sergeant visited us during a stop and announced to the section that everyone must be clean-shaven. That amused me greatly, as I had no interest in having a beard now that I could get to hot water. What I thought was funny was that I had noticed the day before that the entire Third Section had started growing "Goatees", including the lieutenant, section leader. I was curious as to whether Lt. Nealand would discover that one of his fellow officers was becoming hairy, too. It took a few more days before I saw any of them with a shaven face. *

Without planning it I had challenged the platoon leader twice in about six days. I do not think he thought much of me by then, I certainly had not been discourteous nor had I failed to carry out his instructions.

It was after Champany that the Division returned to Reon l'Etape and Tidwell found the "fiddle".

After the war the 100th Division put out a little brochure relating bits of the Division combat history. On the back cover was a photograph taken down the Main Street of town on the day we had first gone into Reon l'Etape. The photo shows the riflemen standing in doorways down the street. It shows a 81mm Mortar crew running past the fountain at the corner, just in front of the camera. I believe we were those mortar men. I think I can identify myself. The picture was taken about 10 minutes before the second squad was hit.

The record says that as the Division moved, the 397th Combat Team (our regiment and supporting troops) were attached to the 45th Division and remained on line. The best reconstruction I can make at this time is that this was the period we were in the vicinity of Ingwiller.

I remember that we were in a position for a couple of nights. It was a bit unusual and I learned a few things. We, the first section, were billeted in a grain mill. Our guns were set up about 40 yards from the mill in a location that gave us clear overhead in our

primary firing direction. There had been and was quite a bit of artillery going both directions. Many treetops had been loosed. Then, too, many trip flares had been put out by both sides. There had been rain and there were breezes, even at night. Trip flares kept going off throughout the night. It seemed that the woods had to be full of movement. We fired a lot of missions. I wondered then how many were only in response to the trip flares.

One night while we were there we fired a particularly heavy series of missions. Capt Dunlap came up from Battalion Headquarters to see what was going on. He didn't stop at our platoon, but went on through the rifle company's position and into the area we had bombarded. When he returned four or five hours later he told us that our missions had done very well, that the area was littered with "good" German soldiers. He also expressed his opinion on why so many trip flares were going up. Two reasons, treetops and branches falling across wires, and many flares set up with twine instead of wire. The rain was causing the twine to shrink.

For the nights we were there the only place to sleep was on the concrete floor. The only thing we had to cushion the concrete was one blanket. I discovered it is barely possible to sleep on solid concrete. It requires a very careful adjustment of position. There is a line of muscles down your body on either side of the front or back. **B**y placing yourself just so, you can rest on muscles instead of corners of bone. That discovery came in handy several other times in the next six years.

The maps which I marked in 1945 show that we spent several days between Ingwiller, Wimmenau, Wildenguth and, I'm sure, others that don't show on this scale map. The next area I remember was the little village of Melch. We had been in almost continuous contact with the Germans. I remember one morning, as we were on the route around Wimmenau, after a night of frequent warnings of infiltrating Germans and frequent missions, seeing the positions that the Germans had just evacuated, especially those in the slopes of the hills around a road junction we had fired many rounds at the evening before. I examined one position while we had a moments halt in our movement. The position was a troop shelter rather than a fighting position. It was built into the hillside on the east side of the hill, the side protected from fire from our position. The shelter was dug into sandstone and covered with large logs. The entrance was offset for protection from shrapnel and from light leakage. The probability of the position being hit was very remote, as it was not visible except from the rear. The chance of damage was remote. The construction would easily withstand one of our HE light shells, 7 1/2 pounds of steel and explosive.

We still encountered occasional scenes of carnage, where mostly horse powered troop and supply columns had been hit by air power and massive artillery strikes. We were still repulsed by the slaughter of men and beasts, but we were now almost accustomed to the smell of death and rotting flesh. We could smell the result of a recent death by explosion, even though it had just happened and the bodies had been promptly removed. The combination of explosives, blood and death had its own fresh, sweet smell. There was no difference in that smell whether German or American. It was in this area that we came on the site of an encounter of the night before. There had been shells and perhaps small arms fire, we could not determine that with certainty. I remember one

particular German soldier who died there. He was wearing his glasses and cap. He looked perfectly at ease. Someone asked, "What killed him?" Nothing was obvious. There were no rips or holes to be seen in his uniform, or in him. He was turned over, and there was still no evidence of the cause of death. We guessed that it had to have been concussion, although there was no external blood to be seen. There were dozens of bodies, all German. No American corpses to be found.

Now back to Melch. Much of the journey into Melch had been through narrow back roads, more trails than roads. The whole area was mostly forested. Small villages were set deeply inside the large woods. Such was the village of Melch. We were in the last hours of light as we got to Melch. We set up our mortars along the road where we could get the overhead clearance and set up security for the night. The whole first section was together. Nothing was unusual for the night.

We moved out shortly after light the next morning. Unusual in this move was the fact that we were heading right through the woods, up hill. When we got to the top of the hill we went down the other side. There were no trails; there were no positions from which we could have fired without at least half hour of tree cutting.

About mid morning we heard a jeep making its way toward us through the woods. It was Edmund "ED" Schuler, the squad driver. He had a full 1/4-ton trailer behind his 1/4-ton jeep. It was loaded with ammunition for our use when we got to the bottom of the hill. It was a magnificent example of what a skilled driver can do with a great tactical vehicle. I honestly would not have believed that a jeep and trailer could be put through that steep, steep heavily wooded hillside. About noon we were at the bottom of the hill on the road that leads to Mouterhouse. The rifle companies were ahead of us.

We had our mortars set up, now to give support to the companies, which may have needed our fires. As we were not immediately required and as we were not far enough behind to be required to move, we smoothed up our gun positions and got under concealment to eat our "K". Ed was pulling his jeep and trailer back off the road on a small trail to get it just back out of sight. I was about 50 yards from him across the road and in low-lying pasture, when there was a roar of explosion. I glanced up to see a jeep wheel and a gas can arching high in the air in my direction. I had to move to dodge the larger parts of the jeep.

I ran quickly to see what had happened - he was my squad's driver - he obviously needed help.

He had backed a few yards off the main road and up the trail. There were tracks of other vehicles tires in the dust both before and behind the wrecked jeep. The right front of the jeep was gone. His right front wheel had been turned a few inches out of the trail in the correction of the placement of the trailer.

Ed was about 3 yards from his jeep. His forehead was smashed. His brains were on the windshield frame, the hood and even on the trees nearest the jeep. Ed was unconscious but he was still alive. The medic jeep-ambulance was there in just a very few minutes. We were told that he lived for three more days without regaining consciousness.

Ed had been in the platoon when I joined it in April. He was an easygoing, soft-spoken, very gentle man. He had no enemies and would go out of his way to avoid being unkind to anyone. Ed had gone through a great deal of kidding from his platoon mates. He was one of those few males who had one un-descended testicle. He was familiarly known among a few of his friends as "One Nut" Schuler.

The sudden loss of a friend is one of those things that you are never prepared for but which never really surprises you, either. The Engineers reported that Ed had run over stacked anti-tank mines. The Germans were using 14-pound Teller (plate) mines, made of ceramic and filled with explosive. There was enough explosive in the two to blow the front quarter off a medium tank.

We were rather depressed in the late afternoon, as we had to overload the other jeeps of the platoon to advance to new positions to support the rifle companies. I was sitting on the left rear corner of the second squad jeep as we roared toward Mouterhouse. We were doing about 50mph, as the road was receiving rather heavy shelling from the German artillery.

I just happened to be looking down at the rear tire over which I was sitting when there was an explosion under the tire. Everyone in the jeep heard the noise but did not know what had happened. I did. We had run over an anti-tank mine. The detonator had gone off, but for some reason the main explosive did not. We had come through a one in a million failure. Ten of us on that vehicle would see another day - maybe!

As we got another 500 yards down the road we came under automatic weapons fire. The Germans in town were still resisting being chased out. The crew of a quad 20mm anti-aircraft gun, that is four machine guns on a mount to fire as one, each of them with a barrel more than 3/4 inch in diameter, was holding out in one of the corner towers of the church on the square, or from a position on the hillside behind to give the impression that it was coming from the church building. I suspect that the crew was a bit unhappy at being noted by ground troops in a position from which they could not easily escape! The German weapons, generally, had a much higher cyclic rate than the American guns. We had one burst of fire ricochet around us before we wheeled around the corner. We set up our support base from the northeast part of town in support of the rifle companies still clearing the center of town. We spent the night there.

The next morning we were moving again. Now the roads were almost urban. We were out of the large forest and in an area of heavier population and more industry. Pastures, cattle and wood lots were predominant for the next few miles.

After a couple of hours, nearly noon, we dismounted, again in an area of steep hills with heavy woods. This time there were narrow roads and unpaved trails throughout the area. We were directed to the area where we were to establish our positions. Our fields of fire were to be unusually wide - from northwest to northeast. This was an area dominated, according to the map, by a group of fortifications, known as BITCHE and Camp de Bitche. Really, it consisted of a fortified area that had been a war citadel since the previous century. It had never been taken by siege or assault. It had been incorporated into the French Maginot Line (France's ill-fated fortified line). When the Germans

captured France and the Line, they resighted the weapons to put the strength to defend from the south and west, the direction from which we were to attack.

That first afternoon we prepared our firing positions, digging in our guns, and finished digging shelters for ourselves. We still preferred small group shelters, for two main reasons; it is easier to dig a shelter for four than it is to dig two shelters for two, therefore, with the labor of four, the position can be completed faster and have a greater protection factor (depth, diameter of overhead logs, and thickness of soil overhead). As the next day or two went by we improved our area by preparing defensive positions in the event we had to defend the area on the ground. One of these added emplacements was our primary guard position for the section.

Our platoon was spread over several hundred yards of the woods, centered on clearings. The rifle companies were in defensive positions a couple of hundred yards in front of us. The Mortar Platoon Headquarters group was with the first section. Our section was in a point formed at a curve in the paved road, which was on our right, and an unpaved trail which continued north at the curve, and was on our left. The platoon headquarters was just to the left of the trail, with the entrance to their position almost on the trail.

We had a new man in the section, Ludovico Massachi, a kid of Italian extraction from one of the large cities of the Midwest - perhaps Detroit, not that it is important, at this point. Ludovico, "Lou", was a happy-go-lucky worrier. He felt quite safe when he was with one of the older men, but when on guard he was nuts. He would drive a sane man wild. He was scared worse than I was on my first guard.

Ted Kassel tried to break him in by standing guard with him. He did so for the first two days. Then he came to me and said, "I can't do guard with him, he drives me wild. You stand with him for a few days."

Thus, I had Lou as a security partner. The first night I found what Ted was talking about. Lou heard noises where there were none and saw things move where there was nothing.

On the second night I was standing with him, sometime about 10 PM, I heard something. I whispered in Lou's ear for him to get over in the corner of our guard position and keep absolutely still. I then concentrated on what was going on around us. The night was very dark. There was once again a full cloud cover, but this time there was no moon over it. What I had heard was someone who stepped on a dry twig. I had used my eyes, ears, and every other sense to evaluate what was going on for a month now. I was not to be easily fooled. The sound came from the trail in the direction of the road. That probably meant that someone was coming toward us from behind us. I had a sound power phone connected to the Platoon Headquarters shelter. I blew into the phone, the method of silent call. I had heard a muffled laugh from there a few minutes earlier. Apparently they had been playing cards, or something similar.

I cautioned them that we had strangers in the area - to remain silent. Seconds later I heard a brush of pine needles against a field jacket.

I had a carbine, semi-automatic, and a cal. 45 automatic (semi) pistol. I could see absolutely nothing. I reasoned that if I fired without a seen target, I would get return fire as a seen point. The odds were not with me. I listened intently for a few more moments; then I blew for the Platoon group again. I reported that we had apparently had a hostile patrol through the area, and it seemed that the group had moved up the trail in the direction of the rifle companies. I suggested that they call to advise the next company that they were in store for a surprise from the rear.

In about five minutes a firefight started about 150-200 yards up the trail. I heard several pair of boots pounding back down the trail. The rest of the night was quiet.

The next morning the platoon sergeant was anxious to know everything I knew. I went out with him and described everything I heard and everything I did. I started out near the road. I found the broken twig. I found five sets of hob-nailed boot tracks; one print was within two inches of the edge of the entry to the platoon shelter. That is, three inches to the left and a German soldier would have fallen into the headquarters shelter. We could discern at least three sets of tracks back through the area. I explained why I could not fire either weapon. The platoon sergeant suggested that what we needed was some grenades, which we could use without giving our position away. He departed before 10 AM to go back to pick up a case of grenades. We did not see him again until after we moved again. It was now about the second week of December.

The Division was trying to take the fortified positions over the town. We were getting stories of Artillery Observers who were incredulous that the 155mm Long Rifles would only raise a little dust with a direct hit. Eight-inch howitzers, noted as the most accurate artillery piece in the US artillery, were doing no better. We heard fighter-bombers attacking the positions daily. We never moved forward. We could cover the two positions from where we were. The range of our mortar was just over 36 hundred yards, about 2 miles, with the HE Light round only. The range was less than 1 mile for the HE Heavy or the White Phosphorus rounds.

On December 16 the Germans made their major effort through the Hurtgen Forrest. The Battle of Bulge was begun. We, the 100th Inf. Division, were the northern unit of the Seventh US Army. The Third Army, Patton's unit, was to our north. He pulled all his southern units northward, opening our flank. To keep contact and secure our flanks we started moving on the 20th of December. That evening we walked most of the night, ending up in a dairy barn near the top of a hill, overlooking rolling hills of pasture This was on the hill just to the south of the village of Urbach. There, on the 21st or 22nd, I watched two tank units, one German and one US in a direct tank battle. It was interesting. I couldn't see enough of the overall action to tell what each side was trying to accomplish tactically. I could only tell that both sides were firing and both sides were losing tanks.

It was in this dairy barn early on the morning of 22 or 23 December that I got a lesson on the danger of breakfast. I opened my "C" ration - we had recently graduated from "Ks"- it was the only breakfast ration, corned beef hash. It was made of corned beef, potatoes, onions, and fat. The can I opened had about 3/4 inch of hard fat across the top. Hungry or not, no stomach I knew of could stand that. I lifted off the fat and ate the meat. I later heard of a soldier in another unit who that morning had had the same breakfast.

He, however, was wounded. He threw the can instead of trying to save the meat, and it landed on an anti-personnel mine. A fragment wounded him.

On the night of December 24th we moved to a town several miles from the front, presumably to be in position to move where needed. We had Christmas.

The sun sneaked over the horizon to a brown haze. Gradually the sky overhead cleared. About 10 A.M. the Army Air Corps started forming. They were making massive raids over central Europe. We happened to be directly under their designated assembly point. The squadrons and flights would arrive and join the ones already there until their numbers were in the hundreds, when they would fly off in their intended direction. There were B 17s and B 24s and possibly others. By 2 P.M. the sky was a solid mass of condensation trails, as securely socked in as if we had wakened to a sky full of stratus clouds.

That morning we had a mail delivery, one of the few in the month. I was very lucky. I got a package from Aunt Lillie. That dear Aunt had scraped and saved her ration points to collect enough to put together two to three pounds of Chocolate Brownies. I was truly touched. They could not have come any day of the year to be more appreciated. I opened them carefully, seeing them only dimly through a film of tears of appreciation. Then I saw that they were green and hairy. They had molded, big time. I didn't get to taste one, but I have remembered that gift for fifty years as one of the most appreciated I ever received. I was remembered with love on this day of love in which we were very actively trying to kill our fellow man.

That evening we were back on the road again. There was snow. Not a lot, but there were white patches on the ground. There was some ice on the roads. The temperature was in the 20s. We were marched to a position, a small flat area along a streambed close behind a long finger of ridge. There was a circular cut about 75 feet in diameter forward into the ridge. This was the designated area for the section for the night. The remaining squads of the platoon were close beside.

We set up our guns and fixed the direction of expected action. We worked for quite some time in trying to dig shelters in the ground. The ground was frozen solidly. There was no way that our backpack entrenching tool would make a dent in the ground. We spread our shelter halves, blankets and crawled into our blanket sleeping bags. The sky was clear, the stars bright in the black sky. It was after one in the morning when we got to lie down.

The next day we worked from sun-up to dark trying to dig shelter positions. This time we worked with full size pick-axes, axes, saws, shovels and crowbars. By late afternoon we had brought light logs from a nearby patch of woods, to get some overhead protection. Our, Ted Kassel and I, position was a two man hole, with offset entry, that is a six and a half foot trench about 30 inches wide with an "L" cut at one end so that we could enter the hole from the side instead of the top.

One of the last things that Ted Kassel and I did that afternoon was to put into our shelter an improvised stove. The stove itself was a two-gallon oilcan, which we dug into

one sidewall. We had cut a small feed door and a hole to fit into the can for a 76 mm anti-tank shell can as a chimney. This appeared to be a good solution for avoiding freezing. We had everything arranged. Ted was to test the fire. He had strips of the waxed inner boxes of the "K" rations we were back on, and a few twigs. He laid his fuels in the stove and put a match to them. They started to burn as though the stove might work. Then, all of a sudden, there was a thirty-foot column of red flame shooting from the little chimney. There was a huge puff of red flame and white smoke through the entry hole. Something had gone seriously wrong. I had been about 50 yards away doing something else when I saw this display. I sprinted over to see what was left of Ted, just as he dragged himself out of the hole. He was singed and reddened, but not hurt.

We both realized what had happened. The Artillery worked just as our mortar rounds did. They came with a full number of powder charges. Any target not requiring a full charge was adjusted by taking off the extras. We had picked up a can that had been used to store the extra powder bags. We had just detonated enough explosive to send a 76mm Anti-tank round about 5,000 yards.

We were in this same general area for about two months with periods of being pulled off on other missions. While we were here in late December, it snowed. We had about one foot of heavy wet snow. It did help insulate the positions, so that with our small stove, which we could feed ever so lightly, we could keep warm for the whole night.

The first move from this position was not long in coming. We were moved into the little village of Bettviller, just about a mile up the slope, over the crest of the hill and straight down the road. Our section was assigned to an Alsatian village farmhouse. It was the first house in the village from the east, but it was the third from the main north-south street and the village square. This move was part of the adjustment of lines in settling the defensive sectors until the Army could get on the offensive again.

It was nice to be in a building again. Most of the squad was resting in one room, although other areas of the house were available to us, such as the kitchen and barn. There were always some of us up and on guard, day or night. Our gun was emplaced across the road on the far side of a stone wall. The mortar was placed to fire over the roof of the house we were in. The yard where the mortar was placed was about 40 by 60 feet and backed up to the barn doors of the house on the main street. I mention this to indicate the relatively good protection we had from direct fire (mortars are designed to fire from defilade, they have a very high trajectory to fire over obstacles).

One of the earlier things we undertook when we moved into the house was to care for the livestock. There were four or five cows in stalls in the barn. The civilians had been moved out, so the cattle were not being cared for. No food or water. It was a little trouble, but we could not stand the idea of the animals suffering. We also took care of the animals in the barns of the houses around us where there were no troops assigned. *

The war had not stopped, we were still shooting and being shot at. One day shortly after we moved there we were subjected to several volleys of artillery, apparently directed at our positions. Some of the guns were pretty large. We had had glass in the

windows before: the window frames were blacked out on the inside with blankets. After one of the barrages the window on the North side of our room was blown in. A round had struck the window frame. Every piece of GI equipment in the room had shrapnel holes in it. The main thing I lost was a pair of field pants, which I had never worn. I had just been issued them and was saving them until I could get some sort of bath, to be clean when I first wore them. Every sleeping bag, canteen, ammo belt or jacket in the room at the time was cut. It must have hit while we were on the guns, as no one was in the room. And if we were not working the guns, more of the gun equipment would have been damaged, such as gun sights and field equipment.

I remember spending several hours in front of the door of that house one night at this time. The Germans were expending a lot of ammunition trying to find our guns. By this time I had become quite good at listening to the incoming rounds and knowing whether to duck or not. This one night I spent a lot of time back against the door, within the stone doorway, and some time low against the wall. We were getting mortar rounds on the road between the wall on the other side of the road and our house. Artillery shells were hitting the buildings 30-40 feet on the other side of the wall. That night the flash of the exploding shells almost constantly lighted the area. The first time I had been in that density of incoming fire. The splatter of fragments against the walls and cobbles of the road was very sobering. The next morning we were still getting an occasional high velocity round. In the mid morning when I checked my mortar I found a high velocity round lying about 8 feet from the gun. The shell was broken open with the explosive exposed. The shell was still smoking, but the fuse had failed.

We were in this position when the evening of December 31 arrived. Some time before midnight the Germans made an attack with everything they had available. The front pretty well exploded. Every unit along the front gave ground, except for our regiment. We fired a lot of ammunition that night. The Germans came out for us and they got it. The German positions on our direct front were in a wood line about 700 yards from our position. The Rifle Companies of our Battalion were about 200 yards ahead of us.

There were many good stories going around, as well as several bravery awards made during the days before and after that attack. One involved a reconnaissance patrol that went into the woods in front of us and found two platoons of tanks. The patrol leader had his small unit create havoc before getting the hell out. The Germans were preparing for the New Year's Eve attack.

The Division on the left flank of our own was one of those that had been forced back. Our Battalion was one of those assigned to regain the lost ground and reestablish the line.

We moved several miles south and west, executed the attack and took the ground. What we found was that we had captured a section of the Maginot Line. It was the first time I had ever had the opportunity to investigate such a major series of fortifications.

About the second day we were in the sector I got permission from my section leader to take a couple of men and inspect the Maginot positions. We went into the tunnels through a troop door on the French side. It was indeed seven levels deep, with

ammunition bunkers, troop quarters, mini-railroads, elevators for troop lift into the fighting positions, ammunition tubes, secure comfortably warm living conditions and everything else touted for it.

We had an exceptionally interesting hour, and for two reasons a very exciting time. The first incident was when I chose to climb up the ladder (the power was off for the elevator), to reach a machine gun emplacement, a "pill box", if you will. It was a steel cupola emplacement for a machine gun. It could be rotated for a sizable sector of its visibility. I climbed up to the cupola, looked through the embrasures to awe at the field of fire and excellence of the developed killing zone, and climbed down to the bottom of the shaft just as a tremendous explosion occurred those 15-20 feet above me. An armor piercing round had hit the pillbox. I was not injured, but it was very, very close.

We exited the system at one of the higher levels and walked down the crest in the direction of our positions. We noted that one of the rifle companies was being instructed in the use of the 2.36 " Anti-Tank Rocket Launcher (Bazooka), with the machine gun "Pill Box" as the target. Aware of the German observers to our west and northwest, we walked below the crest.

While walking along at a level below the crest, but above the military crest- I was in the lead (somehow in any group of equals or near equals in rank, I ended up in the lead) when, suddenly, my feet went out from under me and I was off on a wild slide down the back slope of the position. There was, indeed, a spring near the top of the ridge. The water which had seeped out had frozen in the deep snow and produced a slide of solid ice and a 60 percent grade on a three hundred yard unbroken slope. Near the end of the slope was a three high band of concertina barbed wire entanglement. I was sliding at about 60 miles per hour toward the obstruction that could slice me to cold cuts. Fortunately the snow here was deep enough at the entanglement, and hard enough with ice, to reduce the total height of the barrier.

As there was no means visible to stop my progress, I had to do something. By jamming my boot toes down on the ice I turned myself to a helmet first position. I put my hands down under me and as I was almost at the barrier I threw myself up with a huge effort, dropping my hands to my sides as I went over. I was injured. One barb caught the back of my right hand as I went over. It tore a three-inch rip between my wrist and knuckles. No damage beyond the skin.

When we got back to the platoon we were questioned with interest by our fellows who wished they had gone with us. Later in the afternoon I heard the result of an encounter earlier in the afternoon. The Section sergeant for our section, Sgt. Jacobsen, "Jake", reported that he and some of the other sergeants had met with Lt. Nealand. He and they made the point that we had had losses. We were still functioning fully, but we were short of Noncoms. He recommended that I be promoted to corporal; the other sergeants supported him. The response of Lt. Nealand was, "I don't intend to promote anyone who is smarter than I am." Jake swore that those were his words. Everyone tended to take Lt. Nealand at his word. He probably did not want to have any one around to whom he felt inferior. That certainly had to include a lot of people. I thought it was

rather funny, but it did make me a bit angry, too, that I was not going to be recognized for any accomplishment or potential.

Another thing I did while we were in this position, firing missions were few, was to decide to test fire the .45 cal "Grease Gun", automatic submachine gun, which I had been carrying since shortly after our patrol infiltration in December. I chose an appropriate clear space, notified the units around us, and cut loose at a post. The bolt slammed forward - and stayed there. The gun had a blow back system. The heavy bolt carried forward, picking up the round. When fully forward the bolt with pin in place, fired the round that blows the bolt back for a new round. Nothing happened. I had been depending on that grease gun for protection for weeks, and nothing. I turned in that weight that afternoon.

After the three days in that mission we returned to the house in Bettviller. Here, in looking back on it, I am amazed at the freedom I, as a Pfc. in a mortar platoon, was allowed. I needed to know what was going on around me. I never wandered off without the knowledge of my immediate superiors (Lt. Nealand never knew), but I did get around. One day I moved out toward the woods from which the New Year attack had come. I found a destroyed bunker from an earlier defense line. It was now a pile of broken concrete slabs slabs about 16 inches thick. I had my binoculars and, from the slight elevation provided by the pile, I was studying the front of our battalion. As I was concentrating on the front, I heard a long, moving rip of many machine guns. I looked back and saw a low flying ME 109, German fighter plane, heading directly toward me with a full line of fire on the front edge of the wing. It was strafing right at me. I rolled under one of the broken slabs as newly broken concrete flew everywhere. I never suspected that the pilot was after me, not even after the position. I believe he had been working over a road behind me and just overshot his target. It was exciting.

Within a day or two I was back out looking at the view again. As I moved toward the position, I heard a sharp snap near my head. I did not recognize the source. About 30 seconds later it occurred again. After the fourth sharp snap at ear level I finally put the facts together and decided that I was the target of a sniper a few hundred yards away. The fifth shot convinced me. I suddenly quit giving him a target. I moved quickly and low to get out of his sights. The area I was in was a flat field.

I had not gone very far when I was again pulled up short. I had noticed a P47 flitting around overhead and dismissed it. I didn't have to worry about our own aircraft. Suddenly I heard the sound of a projectile heading toward me - from above. I looked up and saw the plane pulling up from a short bombing dive. I hit the ground as I listened to the projectile pass overhead and hit in the field about 150 yards behind me. It was a bomb. It was a dud. It was, I surmised, directed to a building that was being used as a company headquarters along the road behind me. I again looked at the plane; it was not a P47 but a FW 190, a German plane that was quite similar in line to the P47.

The next opportunity to get out I went the other direction. It was now about the sixth of January. I headed down the street into the center of Bettviller. I saw the church steeple and decided that that would be a good place to see what was going on. While I was heading through the cemetery to get to the steeple Lt. Turner, the section leader, who

decided that I should not have all the fun by myself, joined me. He told me he was to be joined by Nicky Powers, the fire direction corporal for the platoon. Nick was a soft-spoken southern lad, very bright and well educated. He, too, was ready for an adventure.

The Lt. and I started up the steps of the tower. The final stretch to the bell chamber was by a ladder. The bells were gone and a shell had blown away both the front and the back of the tower at the level of the bell room. The floor was still there, but anyone there was outlined against the sky when observed from the direction of the Germans. We kept flat and as still as we could while observing. We were busy orienting the map and ourselves when we heard an artillery round coming our way from far ahead, from the German direction. The round hit several hundred yards short of us. In about one minute we heard another round heading our way. It hit about 150 yards short of us. We considered whether the observer was aiming toward us and using the "creeping" method of adjusting. We decided that if we had been observed on our way up we had already been seen, if not we would be if we tried to move now. We decided we were better off remaining low and still. Rounds continued at regular intervals until the rounds were now passing the tower at our level, striking the buildings in the block behind us and across the cemetery. The Germans were, indeed, using the tower as an aiming point. Whether they knew we were there or whether they were just fixing a point for target computation we could not tell, but we felt very strongly that they were coming too close not to be doing their best to get us.

After a few more minutes, after it appeared that they were not going to get any closer (we could have caught the shells going by with a catchers mitt), we decided to go down. As we had no communications, Nicky was to bring a roll of wire, WD-1 and a sound power phone; there was nothing more that we could do there now. He had, we thought, had time to arrive, so there was probably a change of plans. When we got out of the steeple and into the cemetery, we found Nicky. He had gotten as far as the cemetery when the third round of the adjustment had landed just at the base of the steeple, at the edge of the cemetery. For the next few minutes he had been more concerned about the flying shrapnel than he had about getting into the tower. We laughed all the way back to the building at the thought of Nicky hiding behind grave stones for protection from being killed. The Lt. decided that would we should return to the position before daylight the next morning with communications and something to put behind us to keep us from being silhouetted. That was determined to be the course of action to be followed.

The next morning before sun up, we started to the church. The morning was hazy above and foggy on the ground. We had no trouble in getting to and up the steeple to our observation platform. We proceeded to put up a screen behind us so that we could lie on the floor without being seen.

As the sun came up we were looking over a wide expanse of low fog. Nothing seemed to be going on in our sector of visibility. As we continued to scan the front we saw the fog sinking down the ridge distant to our left front. On the ridge, rising from the fog there seemed to be a file of thirteen trucks. At least we assumed they were trucks; but according to the information we had on our map they were in front of the unit's line. We wondered why a convoy would be on the German side of the lines. Then, as we watched and the fog continued to thin, the fact struck me. These were not trucks. They were

German TANKS. We were seeing approximately one company of large tanks looming over the third (2d) battalion. *

This time we had communication. Lt. Turner got on the phone and got connected to the supporting Artillery Battalion. He described the target: he didn't think they believed him. They stated that if he was seeing what he was telling them they couldn't help, anyway, as the 105 mm howitzer would not stop the large German tank. They did fire one volley, though, and took correction to be in the target area. The supporting artillery then gave the target to the larger artillery, the 155mm and 8-inch howitzers. The larger stuff fired several volleys. Two or three tanks were actually hit. The fire was area fire, not a single tank or direct fire. The tanks that were hit were put in gear and moved - so much for the effect of the heavy artillery.

Lt. Turner suggested to the Artillery that perhaps some fighter planes could do some good if we could get them. The artillery said they would see what they could do. After a half hour or so there appeared a handful of fighter aircraft. Several passes were made with machine guns and a couple with small bombs. At least one of the tanks was hit. I remember Lt. Turner's excitement on the phone as he screamed, "One's Knocked Up, One's Knocked Up!" Fortunately, I was holding on to the frame of the floor, or I may have fallen from my laughter at the Lt. Most of the tanks made their way down the other side of the ridge, with only one or two badly damaged ones remained in the open.

As this activity had taken an hour or more, I had been scanning farther and farther into the distance. The fog was now completely gone.

Well to the right of the tanks and two or three kilometers more distant, I spotted some movement. I could pick out a double column of Infantry approaching, one column on each side of the road. The unit seemed to be the size of an Infantry Regiment. It was about six kilometers from where we were. It was headed for the town where third (2nd) Bn. was dug in. Lt. Turner started the process again. Again the Artillery demurred. The target was outside their area of responsibility. They again did not seem to want to press the matter. Lt. Turner insisted as much as he could. He offered to adjust the fire if they could get permission to fire in the area or could get the general support, heavy stuff again. The heavy artillery fired one round in the area on coordinates that we provided. The round hit very close to the road just ahead of the advancing column. Almost immediately the columns turned to the right and started angling back to the north, away from the 3rd (2d) Battalion back in the direction from which they had come. Again we were a bit put out. We had had about a Regiment in view and could not get support to really engage it.

About two o'clock in the afternoon we heard something new. We had observed several missions fired by the Germans. We knew the sound of the various types of their larger weapons, but this was wild. We heard gun batteries firing, individual batteries, all across our front. Among the sounds of the artillery guns was the wail of the "Nebelwerfers", literally, fog throwers, and otherwise known as "Screaming Meemies". The air was filled with the noise of rounds in flight. The sound became a wild, screaming, roar. Then, as one, all the rounds landed at once on the village of Rimling, where 3rd (2d) Bn. was. We had witnessed a perfectly executed Time On Target, "T-O-T".

The "T-O-T" is an artillery officer's masterpiece. The flight time of each gun is computed from gun to target. Each gun is figured into the plan. The time is selected for the round to land and backed off to the time for the gun to fire. In this instance I believe that every gun within range was computed into the mission. The firing began 45 seconds or more before the mass hit. Then the village exploded in one great cloud of smoke and debris.

We could see what had happened. The coordinated attack on Rimling was planned for that afternoon. The fact that we had discovered the tanks before they were ready disclosed the serious level of the activity. The fact that the tank attack was blunted caused the Infantry to be turned back at the first instant that they knew they were observed. The Germans, having lost the opportunity for a coordinated attack went ahead with the artillery for the shock effect and, I expect, just for the fun of it.

The Germans did not give up the effort for Rimling, but it was a day or two later, at night, that the Bn. had to fight the Germans belly-to-belly to hold their positions.

Let me add just a word on the Nebelwerfer. The weapon is probably more familiar to most people now than it was then. I don't think I had any idea what it was until after I heard its scream and saw it's effect. The projectile was a rocket. A single rocket was 150mm (about six inches) in diameter and was about 3 1/2 ft long. Most weapon rocket motors have a single venturi jet at the base. This rocket, however, had circles of small openings, each angled to the side, causing the rocket to spin for added stability in flight. The launcher for the rockets was a wheeled group of five tubes. The launcher was handled much as an artillery piece, it was pulled by vehicle, had spreading trail and all. The great number of small rocket jets on each round produced the wailing scream.

When seen from the front as the weapon fired, the group of five rockets rising upward and forward - very slowly at first, like a hand full of balloons, then with steady acceleration until they hit or expended their propellant. The whole sequence of the firing seemed to be in slow motion if you were the target - from a range of 300 yards.

During this week or so we were in Bettviller I had one occasion to try something new. We were hungry. Some one in the group, there were other than just our squad in the building, found the families side of cured bacon. Several of the men took to slicing and cooking a portion occasionally, to help fill out whatever ration we were on at the time. Someone, who didn't like fat, cut out the whole lean strip from the slab and left the fat for everyone else. We had a pretty good idea who, but making a fuss over it would prove nothing. I looked around the house and barn to see what was available. I found enough food that I thought I could fix a pretty good meal. I checked with Lt. Turner who approved my idea.

I got a couple of the men to help me and early one morning got started. The kitchen had a pretty good wood fired stove, complete with oven. There were a few chickens around, including more than one rooster. We selected the biggest and toughest. There were potatoes, apples, carrots, cabbage and, best of all, the ingredients for biscuits. The little team got busy and early in the afternoon had the whole first section, about 15 men, in to dinner. We had not a lot of food, but everyone enjoyed a sit-down home-style

meal complete with biscuits and gravy and ending with apple pie. I regretted not being able to fix for the other 35 men in the platoon, but I think that most understood the limits.

About the middle of January we moved back out to the position we had moved into Christmas night. The squads were realigned slightly so we prepared several new positions. The first squad, this time, prepared a full squad living bunker. We worked in teams, some teams felling trees and cutting them for overhead cover, some teams manning picks and shovels for digging. The position was dug into the hillside so that we could cut an entrance straight into the position. We could walk into the shelter. It was more than seven feet deep and about 10 feet across. (A letter from the period, found again after some sixty-two years reported that it was 8x16 feet.)

We had learned early that, unlike pine needles, which pack and do not make a usable sleeping base, the small fir hands make a long lasting, light and soft base for sleeping bags. We spent hours trimming the hands from the fir branches.

We had good overhead cover, standing height, walk-in entry, proximity to the gun pit, a spring just 30 feet from the doorway, and a properly prepared latrine 150 or so feet away. We were really living - if we could get enough to eat.

Now that we were in a true defensive position the kitchens were trying to feed us - but not very hard. As we went through the next few weeks we were slowly getting weak from lack of food. I remember keeping note of the food we were receiving during that period. Our usual breakfast was two pancakes, each slightly larger in diameter than a silver dollar. The pancakes were made from the sour German flour. There was nothing to go on the pancakes. The beverage was one half-canteen cup of weak coffee. The coffee, as were the pancakes, was cold. There was nothing, such as cream or sugar, to go with the coffee. That was it. Total calorie count, approximately 125. The other meal of the day would come up in the late afternoon, about three PM.

The jeep that brought the meals had to come out the road from Bettviller. The kitchen was located several villages south of Bettviller. The road ended in a trail at the top of the ridge. There was a space of a couple of hundred yards from which the vehicles could be observed by the German observers. It was in this area that the trail was so muddy that a jeep and trailer could easily get bogged down. This meant that for each trip of the kitchen jeep we had to have a team at the crest of the ridge to push the jeep to keep it from getting stuck, and a team to help get it out.

The afternoon meal usually consisted of a watery cabbage broth and a small hunk of bread. It rarely contained any meat or other protein. The probable calorie count was about 300.

Several things were happening in the platoon on the political level during this time. One of the section sergeants accepted an opportunity to go back for a short course of training to become an officer. Changes had to be made to fill the vacancies created. This was no big deal except any change would break up efficient working teams.

Let me see. Several things happened in the five or six weeks were in the area during January - March. Where do we begin?

Well, as I was talking about shelter and food, let me continue. As to the squad shelter, there were two great advantages to its size and location. The immediate access to the spring gave us a close place to clean up. We built a stand for holding our helmet as we washed up every morning. We kept as fresh and clean as we could. Shaving was not an every morning activity, as heating water took long enough on the one burner Coleman stove to keep it a group activity. Then, too, we had already reduced our shaving materials considerably. We could not get razor blades, and shaving with two-month-old ones was not effective.

Someone had found a razor and blades in the toilet kit of a dead German Captain earlier. The razor and blades were stainless steel. The blades were unbelievable. With proper preparation, with hot water, good brush, shaving soap and hot towel, the whole section could get a good shave with one blade - more than one time. The best blades we had ever heard of. For body cleanliness we would take a "pot" bath, otherwise known as a "whore's bath". This consisted of using a pot, a helmet, of warm water, stripping by halves, top or bottom and washing. "First you wash down as far as possible, then you wash up as far as possible; finally, you wash possible."

For the first couple of weeks this was done in the open or carefully in the end of the shelter (so as not to spill water in the shelter). Eventually, at our urging, the platoon arranged to continue to use the house in Bettviller as a platoon rest point. The family had been allowed back home to reassume our chore of taking care of the animals in the neighborhood. They were glad to have us continue to use part of their home.

What we did was to send a small group of men in to Bettviller each afternoon, weather and situation permitting. During the three hours or so, we could heat water on the heating stove in the parlor. We could get our pot bath, wash out socks and underwear to hang over the stove to dry. We could clean our weapons, get warm, and, if lucky, get a warm nap in the corner. This became the best day of the week.

We still had no way to get a change of clothes, or to clean any of our heavy inner or outerwear. That didn't come until the middle of February when it was announced that the platoon was to have showers. One half of the platoon was scheduled one night, the other half another night. We had to be transported back to the shower point, back about 15 miles, even past the kitchen.

On the way back to the shower we stopped in the vicinity of the kitchen. A few of us went to the cooks to find out why we could not get any food. What we found was that the cooks maintained that they could not get any more food that they were doing the best they could. What we found interesting was the cooks were, on this ordinary evening, half-drunk and had a large reserve supply of schnapps - though, none to share with us. (We later reported to the Section Leader what we had discovered, so that he could see if he could find out what was converting our food into their schnapps.)

The shower point was set up in a freestanding barn. It had a clothing exchange. The procedure was that you went in to the clothing exchange and dropped off your dirty clothes, holding on to your pistol, field gear, wallet and boots, placing all these things on a bench while you took your shower. There were probably four stands of four showerheads each in the shower area. The barn had vertical wood board sides. The wind whistled through the inch wide spaces between the boards. The temperature outside was not above 20 degrees. The temperature inside was only a few degrees higher. It was a miserably cold shower, but we were later given a set of freshly laundered clothes - someone else's, but freshly laundered. That was our one shower between October and April. There may have been one other, but it made no impression if so. I do remember once years ago stating that our showers were no more often than one in six weeks, but I don't remember any other shower point in that war.

We were back in the platoon area before daylight.

One afternoon, as I was going from the platoon position in to Bettviller, we were going up the slope of the ridge ahead of us. I was in the lead of the column, as usual, and we were going to go around the ridge at a level to decrease to a minimum the time we were under observation. As I reached a trail-wide flat line I heard a single artillery shell coming in. It was not very large, but it was coming in very close. I sat down to reduce my chance of catching a fragment. By the time my butt was down, I knew that it was not only coming close, it was coming directly at me. I rolled over on the trail completely horizontal, flat on the ground. This was a position I almost never assumed. I had developed a very, very good ear for the incoming round. I could judge the danger by the sound. I had also found that you usually could not do your job if you spent your time flat on the ground.

The round hit. As I had swung my legs up and gone flat, I had taken myself out of the line of sight of my buddies following me up the ridge. As the fragments went sailing away, Lyle LaPoint, one of my friends popped up over the edge with real concern showing on his face. He was sure that the round had directly struck me. It had not, but without changing position I lay my right hand up to my right into the center of the crater the round had created. It had been about 75mm and with not much fragmentation.

One other afternoon, as I was on the ridge to make sure that the kitchen jeep got over, we got a different kind of shell. This one came in, and we heard it only after it had hit the ground. It was a hyper-velocity, anti-tank round. The ground was frozen below the first few inches of mud, so the round clanged and went singing off at an angle. The gunner got off another round or two, but we were faster than he was. We weren't there when the second and third ones arrived. That was probably the 88mm Anti-aircraft, Anti-tank gun which was so effective.

During this time, too, the Army must have been thinking several months ahead. Our squad was issued a brand new item in the inventory, a 81mm Jungle Mortar. It was weird. It had a smaller base plate, a barrel a full 81mm in diameter, but only the length of a 60mm mortar. It was only half as high as our regular gun. We got firing tables with it, too. The only round it would fire was the HE Light. The range was reduced to about 1600 yards, maximum, less than half that of our usual piece.

One day we were told to load up our new toy and prepare to move to a new position to fire a target. We picked up what we needed and moved up toward town where we could meet the squad jeep. We moved back to the dairy farm where I had had the fat layered corned beef hash "C" ration just before Christmas. The position was now on the front line of one of the rifle companies. One section of one of our Machine Gun Platoons was in support of the company. I went out to the MG position with the rifle company officer. I was to do the observation for the mission.

I knew most of the men of the machine gun crew, whom I had not seen for a long, long time. It was nice to see they were still alive. I didn't spend long with them, but I was enlightened to see the changes that they had undergone.

They had been in this position for several weeks. Their fields of fire were great. This was the area from which I had watched the tank battle at the beginning of the incident of the "Bulge". As the Germans could not approach them in daylight without being seen, they had turned to trying to get to them at night. The defenders had simply put out alarm devices, such as wires with tin cans, to trip them up. The machine guns could then cut them down. The Germans had then taken to turning loose small flocks of sheep and goats to trip the alarms. After the machine gunners stopped shooting at sheep, they tried the Ulysses trick of moving up among the sheep and goats.

One night when the sheep tripped the alarms, the machine gunners opened fire. The noise ceased. The next morning they cleaned up the field of fire. One of the men pulled a German soldier up beside the gun position; from then on the crew included him in all the conversations. One man insisted in shaking the German's hand each time he left or entered the position. It stayed cold enough to keep the body frozen. They were not in any way desecrating the body.

The lieutenant pointed out our target. It was one standing type foxhole. The observer working from there had been giving this sector hell. From the map I computed the range. It was about 1400 yards away. I found that there was no position here that would give protection from direct observation from the muzzle flash of our gun except a small area behind the farmhouse. I could stand off to the side and see the target and talk to the gun crew, too. I computed the data, saw that it was put on the gun, fired the base round and with two more rounds we dropped a round in the hole. Later we saw another German soldier drop into the hole. We fired a three round volley. One dropped into the hole with him. The next morning a third soldier was seen to go into the hole - I presume they had removed some during the night. One more shelling group of three rounds, and one more round in the hole. That dispersion pattern at that range with the little jungle mortar was remarkable. It was better than anyone would ever expect. It surely made a believer of me in the efficacy of mortars in both the defense and in the offense. I took my crew back to our position outside Bettviller. We were told later that observation and harassing fire from that position had ended.

During the period of political activity in the platoon I was made the temporary squad leader of one of the squads of the third section. I moved down to the other end of the platoon area, into a position that I shared with Sgt. Deep. He had joined the platoon with the other ASTP. I had known him since we joined the Division. He was a Catholic

young man of Arab extraction. His name was Farris A. Deep. He was from Birmingham, Alabama. We and one other man in the platoon always called each other "Mo". Soon many in the platoon called each of us "Mo". I have no idea how or when it started, but I would guess it related to the three stooges. Two things happened while I was with the third section that I would like to tell.

First had to do with the position which "Mo" Deep and I shared. At first there was a third man with us. He later was moved to another position. The hole that we called home had been built across a natural drainage path. The team that had prepared that position had been aware. By digging across the drainage path they were able to reduce the amount of dirt that had to be moved. In order to prevent the accumulation of water, they had made a tunnel under the position with the fiber shell cases from the shells we fired. They had built up the lower side with the dirt removed from the sides. They ended up with a position that was hard to avoid. Literally. While there was snow and ice, all one had to do to get to our hole was to step onto the slope which led to it. The ice would take care of the rest.

When I joined the 3d section I knew the men and I knew I had a good crew. Not as good as I, but good. We had no trouble in adaptation. I remember one night when we were called to fire an emergency mission. I was the squad leader, but I was closest to the gun. By the time the #1 gunner arrived I had the gun laid to the target. The #2 gunner started throwing in the rounds. He had not heard that it was a search and traverse mission which required three changes of controls between rounds. The #2 was going to demonstrate how fast he could feed the mortar. I made all three adjustments between each of his rounds. We fired the fasted search and traverse on record. We got a lot of praise and a lot of laughs over that.

While I was there the winter was deep. We had again collected a full field of snow. In mid February, we had about 8 inches of snow over the landscape. The only tracks were those that we had made in our daily movements. With a full moon for much of the night we had a peculiar situation for security guard: too much visibility. The full moonlight on a full field of snow would prevent anything from moving within 400 yards without being seen. The temperature was sharp, and an hour of guard was challenging to the ability to endure cold.

One night about the midnight section security watch, I was very alert. There was nothing in sight that was out of the normal. There were patches of woods in the distance, standing blackly still in the brilliant light. Every stem of weed or brush stood out clearly. There was nothing moving. The end of my period of watch was near. Our place for observation was just in front of the entrance to our hole. From there we could observe in every direction while hidden in the shadow of the shrubs growing on the side of the drain beside the hole, and be in body defilade.

We had only one pile jacket liner in the section. The man standing the guard in the open got to wear the only warm garment available. As the end of my time arrived I carefully surveyed the area all around. It was perfectly clear. I dropped down and into our hole, closing the poncho closure. I was taking off the jacket and had put the guard grease gun down and had taken off my pistol belt to get out of the jacket. While the jacket

restrained my arms and I could not grab either weapon, something hit the poncho cover of the entrance and then hit the top of the position. The experience in evaluating things immediately told all three of us the same thing. Someone had stepped into our natural drain entrance and had slid while standing to hit the hanging poncho and fallen forward to hit the top of the position with his arms.

In two seconds I had shucked the jacket off my arms, grabbed the grease gun and charged out of the hole, ready to do serious damage. I expected to engage someone by the legs as I came out. I was in the open. There was nothing. Absolutely nothing. I was in shock. There had to be someone there. We had all heard it.

We had heard a body hitting our entrance cover and then hit the roof. There was nothing there. Everything was clear, as far as I could see, for hundreds of yards, nothing but clean snow under brilliant moonlight.

The problem then became personal. What had created that impression? It certainly wasn't human. I went over the area carefully. There was no sign in the approach to our position. Then I looked on the top of the position. There were tracks of a large hare (rabbit). A rabbit had stepped into our drainage ditch; slid down to hit our poncho covered entry, then jumped to the top of the position and continued his midnight perambulations of the countryside. That was one more time that I thought I had almost bought the farm. For about three seconds I had thought it was life or death - now! The night continued, with my partner with the pile jacket liner and the responsibility for my life.

A few days later there was a change in the weather. What had become a serious stretch of below freezing temperatures gave way to a gentle spring-like rain. Eight or more inches of snow became a life-threatening flood to many men below the surface, in holes that were not intended to be flooded.

In the early morning hours we heard some yells for help, very faint and far away. Not knowing what the problem was "Mo" and I went to investigate. We found that one crew was trapped in their hole. They had one of the holes with a vertical entrance hole connected by means of a short tunnel to the sleeping area. The flood of melted snow was pouring into the vertical hole. The vertical hole was full above the tunnel. The four men were trapped in the sleeping area. They were all on rubber air mattresses, but they were against the roof of the chamber.

We quickly saw the problem and tore the logs off one side of the top of their position. They all came out, wet, but thankful to be out. They had had quite a scare - quite removed from the expected threat of active warfare. They had left quite a bit of equipment in the hole.

It was a week or so later, after the water disappeared that I suggested that one of them go back through the hole in the top to look for lost equipment. He came out with a full outfit for four, including the wristwatch of one of the men who had left it in his helmet while he slept. (When he wound it, it started right up. It really was waterproof.)

One of the other things that happened that winter, a bit earlier, while I was still in first squad, was my only incident of conspiracy to commit larceny. I mentioned that we were loosing weight on about one quarter of the calories we required to run on. Well, one afternoon, while a few of us were on our clean up afternoon in Bettviller, we decided to take action.

We had observed that a unit had moved its kitchen into a house in Bettviller, only about 75 yards from our platoon rest house. We could not help but notice that they were actually throwing away more uneaten food each meal than our platoon was getting each day. We felt that that was not just. We decided to correct the matter. As the evening meal was completed by the unit we laid our plans. We waited until just after dark.

We divided into two groups. One group, two men, went up to the kitchen and engaged the kitchen personnel in conversation. The five remaining of us went to their supply trailer. Each of us reached in and lifted out one large , #10, can of food. We had no idea what we had, but we knew we each had some "B" rations. We walked back to the platoon a bit heavier that night. The next day, about half way between the two-dollar pancakes and the cabbage broth, we called the platoon out for lunch.

The men, when they heard there was food, lined up in the eight inches of snow with mess kit at the ready. We had two cans of canned tomatoes and one can of green peas. The other cans that we had stolen were "Pork and Gravy", which we thought we could not properly prepare in our positions. We sent those back with the kitchen personnel to be served at the second meal on threat of serious consequences if they did not show up in addition to anything else they might have had.

The platoon continued in line, for seconds, until every drop of tomato juice and every one of the peas was consumed. Neither was heated, and the temperature was not melting the snow. There was a bunch of hungry men. I originally wrote that the food was by the case, but to be conservative, I think that “cans” is closer to correct.

We considered that we were hungry. Most of the world was hungry. We had all lost weight, but who hadn't. The next time I had a chance to check my weight I was sick and had lost something like 20 pounds. I was down from my freshman high school weight of 174 pounds to about 150, fully dressed.

I have considered this situation many times in the intervening years. I have never arrived at a different conclusion than I did at the time. In the same circumstance I would do the same thing again. I knew then, and I know now that, technically, it was a violation of the law. Justice, however, could not accept the depravation we, as a platoon, were experiencing among the plenty demonstrated by the other unit.

Another almost disconnected thought is a memory of moving into or around Bettviller during this period. It was night and there was snow and ice everywhere. I was never very good at keeping my balance when my feet went out from under me. The night in memory was that vehicles had rutted the ice on road. They had melted, refrozen and were completely unreliable as footing for foot soldiers. I have decided that the time of

this incident was the first movement from the position in the valley into town, between Christmas and New Years.

We routinely carried about 50 lbs. of equipment, without our compliment of ammunition for the attack situation. I knew that every step was treacherous. Yet every few paces I hit the ice with a thirty-five pound bipod on my shoulder and 15 pounds of equipment hanging on my waist. We got where we were going, but I was pretty black and blue when we got there.

During our winter sojourn in the Bettviller Valley we were exposed to a good share of the potential of the German Army inventory of direct and indirect fire. We had many shelling by their 120mm mortars, much larger than out own. I seriously doubt that any of our positions would have withstood a direct hit by them, but despite many near misses we never had a direct hit. We could hear them coming for about one half second. There was just a quiet "swish" - KABOOM! We got caught out in these attacks many times, but never had casualties, although we were seriously scared on more than one occasion.

It was several months later that I learned from a letter from my sister, Martha, that her husband had been killed. Her husband, Captain William H. Derr was killed. I had no idea that he was on the continent. When I heard that he had been killed, and where, I figured that he was about 15 Kilometers from where I was at the time. I never knew. *

In early March we moved to a little village, Hoelling, the next to the rear from Bettviller. We were again quartered in a house, with the guns nearby; although we were in Regimental reserve and did not expect of be required to fire. We were never far from ready, however. We were in this position only a few days.

One day while I was standing guard in front of the platoon headquarters, my partner and I got into a debate as to what the family in the house cross the road was doing. They were carrying pails of slop into the barn end of the house. He maintained that they were feeding hogs. I said, no, not all day. Even hogs don't need that much food. I bet that they were making something much more interesting. (The recently recovered letters show that I supported the pigs theory, while he suspected the still.) We decided that as they were supposed to be friendly and they probably spoke German I could communicate, so, after our stint of guard, we went over and asked. They were making schnapps. They showed us their still, with the clear alcohol running in a steady stream out the spigot. They invited us to sample it with them. They claimed that it was of excellent quality. It was. Despite the fact that we saw nothing but old potato peels and apple cores in cloudy water going in, the clear product was clean tasting with a mild taste and a substantial jolt. We were definitely not drinkers, so what would we know? (I had tasted a few different samples from Bourbon to Cherry Bounce, to Elderberry wine, to Gin etc. to know what was decent and what was not. This was very good if you were into drink.) *

From here, we were moved by truck to a larger town a few miles to the rear. I believe the town was probably Petite Rederching, though I could be challenged on that. The objective was preparation for the attack. We started early in the morning and spent a very hard day of all-out work in getting all our equipment up to snuff. I have a picture of

our squad, standing in front of our squad jeep, each of us nearly black from cleaning the equipment. I remember that my own hands were nearly black, showing a lighter tone at the wrist where the long sleeves gave them some cover.

The activity of the day was renewal of our gear. The interest of the day came shortly after noon when four German reconnaissance aircraft, in this instance, FW 190s, came over the area. The area contained nearly seven thousand troops - a complete Reinforced Regimental Combat Team. We had a bit of everything. The aircraft came over rather low and rather slow. The Anti-Aircraft Artillery unit opened up against the aircraft. Then, so did everyone else. Even I, with my .45 Cal pistol, fired at the aircraft.

The planes started loosing altitude, smoking, in erratic flight. All four hit the ground without getting away from our area. I would not be surprised to find that they were over weighted with small arms rounds. They must have hit a solid wall, with most of the seven thousand men in the area all firing at them.

That evening we moved.

THE CHANGE

Finally, now as the grass was beginning to show signs of coming to life, it was time to start moving. The powers that move armies decided that we had sat in one area long enough. The Seventh US Army was to go on the attack. We were loaded into trucks and moved about ten kilometers, about a two-hour walk - something was up. We were unloaded in a real "Germelshausen" (the German version of Brigadoon, the Scottish equivalent.) We were told that we would follow the rifle companies at dawn the next morning, March 15th, 1945. It was to be a general attack along the Seventh Army front.

The village was Hottviller. It was between the French Maginot Line and the German Siegfried Line. It had been abandoned since the late '30s when the lines were firmly drawn. We were assigned a house to rest in before the attack. I was back with 1st Squad now. We were assigned a second floor in a house on the main street of the village. We went upstairs and found ourselves under the stars. There was no roof at all. We were open to everything that went on above us. We began to get really scared.

It was an hour or two after full darkness when we were assigned billets. We were to jump into the offensive in about seven hours. We were advised to go to sleep to get a good nights rest.

The out-going artillery was heavy. I had been listening to artillery for months. I had heard massive outgoing and massive incoming barrages. This was unbelievable. As the hours went on the rapidity of the barrages increased. The sky was clear, except each battery of artillery lighted a section of the sky as it fired its contribution to the horror. Soon the sky was a constant glow of artillery blasts. The reverberations sounded like nothing more, in its rapidity, than the sound of rice being poured from a bucket onto a sheet of tin. We felt each round by the blast at gun and at the target, just hundreds of yards over the hill. I was scared. I lay, trying my damnedest to go to sleep, while watching the sky and absolutely shaking from head to toe. It was not because of the cold, as the evening was only cool. It was pure fright. We had already been warned that the first few kilometers of our path for the next day would be through anti-personnel mines. Sudden - dismemberment - or death.

Before daylight we were lined up along the main street and started moving in double column behind one of the rifle companies up the trail to the right of the village. It was about one half mile before we came to the clearing at the top of the ridge. We were into the minefield. *

I computed later that we, the mortar platoon, had each been carrying about 106 pounds of equipment that morning. I had my mortar bipod, six rounds of HE Light ammunition, mortar sight, binoculars, pistol, ammunition, rations, a canteen of water, and full field equipment.

There were some 52 men in this, the largest platoon in the Battalion. We carried six mortars and somewhere between 150 and 180 rounds of ammunition. When we got to

the edge of the ridge and onto the flat top we found ourselves on soft ground, much of it had been plowed the preceding fall. Every footstep left a print. We had been warned that the first few kilometers were to be through mines. We were warned to place every foot in the print of the man in front of us.

Someone took a false step. I was near the front of the column. I found that I was having to place my left foot in the right track. With 100 + pounds of extra weight, it wasn't easy. While we made our way across the broad, broad ridge of mostly plowed ground, through occasional barbed wire defenses, we heard machine gun fire over and around us. There was nothing we could do about it except hope. There were areas of unplowed ground, in which we could see the humps caused by the anti-tank mines. These were easy to avoid, even though many of these were booby trapped with trip wires that would catch the unwary. The real and perceived danger lay in the "shu" mines the non-metallic anti-personnel mines, which were placed in the plowed ground earlier in the season.

Suddenly there was an explosion close behind me. I looked around and saw that there were only a few men following me. I heard later that a friend of mine, a young student from Boston, (Charles Ayres) one of the brightest men I knew, was down. He had had to straighten the steps. His first out of track step was his last on two feet.

We got through the minefield with eleven men, one and two thirds guns and 21 rounds of ammunition. Not that all were casualties, but after the first five or six, no more could get by without risk of excessive dead. I later heard, too, that several heroic moments ensued as the casualty numbers rose. The medic assigned to the platoon was the first to the aid of the first man wounded. As he knelt to administer aid to my buddy with the foot blown off, he put his knee on another covered "Shu" mine. These were wooden boxes containing about 1/2 pound of plastic explosive. His leg was blown off at the hip. He died before he was removed from the field. Next was our Italian man from the mob in New York (John Malone). In all we lost 11 men in half that many minutes, including those injured by stone and dirt from the blasts. (Years after writing this I learned that the first to hit a mine was John, Charles, it seems, was the third.)

As we, the leading squad of the platoon, exited the field of mines, we saw the enemy ahead. Our rifle elements had moved to the right and we were now in the lead of the attack. We saw the German machine gunners. We saw the burst of smoke as the "Nebelwerfers" sent their hands of five balloons floating directly at us. I hit the ground only once, just before the "Screaming Meemies" hit the ground among us.

Later I saw another friend of mine who had received a wound from the "Nebelwerfers". He was the only member of the company whom I knew to wear shatter-proof glasses. Without his glasses, judging from the thickness of the lenses, he was nearly blind. He had had his home optometrist make him some shatter-proof lenses. A fragment of the rocket hit centered in the left lens of his glasses. It did not penetrate. Both his eyes were blackened, and his face down to his mouth was purple, but the lens stopped the fragment. Anyone else in the company who had received that fragment would have been certainly blind or dead. He was not in the Mortar Platoon, but was in one of our machine

gun platoons, so close were we to the attacking unit and their direct support, that he was wounded by the fragment of the rounds which landed around our platoon.

As we cleared the top of the ridge we moved back down to the right, below the crest and into the cover of the woods. Most of the trees in these woods were deciduous. The leaves were on the ground and the new growth was too light to give protection from observation. The overhead limbs increased the effectiveness of artillery rounds, if we were to receive any. We were through the hell of the first half of the day.

We dispersed through the woods until we could see what the next step would be. We knew we would continue to move, but we did not know which way or when. We looked for firing positions in the woods. There were none. The overhead was rather heavy. We needed two things to be able to fire, a direction and overhead clearance. We had neither.

Then the inevitable happened. "B"(?) company needed our support. They were being held up by a machine gun on the slope ahead of them. They were pinned down and couldn't move without casualties. The company commander was one known to be a qualified observer, able to give corrections to bring our fire to the target.

The one complete gun was mine. We had no place from which to fire. We had to go back up to the top of the ridge to find an immediate overhead clearing. On the ridge was an opening about 50 yards across, with tank tracks pressed about one foot deep into the turf. We snaked our way to the middle of the opening with our guns and ammo on our backs. We found that there was a German infantry group on one side of the field and an American group on the other. We were in the middle of a small arms firefight, with a Rifle Company waiting for our fire to assist them in breaking out of a bad situation.

Gordon "Jake" Jacobsen, the Section Sergeant, was the senior man present. He had the radio talking to he B Co. Commander. I heard him take map coordinates. In a moment he gave us an azimuth to set up the mortar. Then he gave us elevation and number of extra range charges. We carefully placed the data on the mortar and hoped. I heard Jake warn the officer that we were extremely short of ammo, to please make every round count.

We fired the first round. In about 45 seconds we were listening for the first correction. It did not come. In 75 seconds Jake was back on the horn seeking adjustments. "No Correction", announced the commander. "You got the MG with the first round!"

By this time the rifle units, which had been contesting the ground from either side, had moved the site of their contest and we slithered off into the woods again.

Before nightfall we were walking again. The massive attack had penetrated the German winter defensive position, and units of our Division had re-encircled the earlier sought fortification of BITCHE and Camp de'Bitche. They fell for the first time in their history. The next few days our moves were made up of short hops by jeep to keep up with our rifle companies. Each hop punctuated by a mission to break a position holding them up.

About the 17th of March we ended the day in a position that felt very isolated. We, the men in the section, had no idea what the situation was. We knew that some of the platoons of the rifle company were with us, or, rather that we were with one of the rifle company platoons, which is the last place we wanted to be. We were put in position at a farmhouse in the middle of a field on the crest of an open ridge, which made us very uncomfortable. We were consigned to the potato cellar under the stone house. That was fine. That was safest place around. We had the whole section together. We were not called upon that night to fire any missions.

When we got down for the night, we had candles for light, room to move around and blackout security. We knew there was no chance to get out of that position without a fight. We could go out for guard duty, even for missions, but to get 100 yards in any direction would mean a fight.

Then Lou Massaci told me his hand hurt. I looked at it. It was just a scratch - but he had blood poisoning. I had had it once while I was working as a butcher at A&P. I knew how dangerous it is. I had given mine good treatment and avoided the odious consequences. I told Lou that we had to soak his hand in hot water, as hot as he could stand, and with all the salt we could come up with. The section came up with every salt packet they had for the pot. We poured water from several canteens, put the Coleman one burner on and a helmet for soaking. We took turns keeping the water hot and Lou awake to keep the hand in.

That night, too, was following a mail delivery. Lt. Turner had got a can of "Grapefruit" juice from home. His mother had sent it. He showed not a bit of surprise. He simply got his church key (the lever, pointed beer can opener popular at the time) and opened it, offering any and all a shot of absolutely great Scotch Whiskey. I have no idea how his mother had accomplished the feat, but she had sent him 48 ounces of good whiskey in a sealed tin can with a "Grapefruit Juice" label. It was the first time I saw an officer offer to share such wonders with tired enlisted men. Lt. Turner was, in his way, an exceptional human being.

The next morning, as soon as we could arrange it, we got Lou back to the Bn. Aid station. He came back after one day. He was a believer. The Doctor had told him that if he had not soaked the hand all night in hot water, and the salt didn't hurt, he would certainly have lost his hand. As it was, he had only one night of pain and inconvenience. After that it was very difficult to get far from Lou.

The next few days sort of run together. Three or four stark incidents identify the period.

We were pursuing a broken enemy. They had the benefit of knowing the terrain and the roads. We had the superior air power and unit mobility. The stops for firing support missions were fewer and fewer. I remember one day about the 21st or 22nd we were moving along toward the Rhine, without our knowing even where we were. Remember that privates in the units did not have access to maps of any kind. Only rarely did we get to see even the 1/25,000 tactical maps carried by the company commander and the fire direction center. On the map of Europe we knew only that we had entered the

domain of the new Germany. In mid afternoon we were brought to a halt in a small town and told to find positions and a place to spend the night. There was the first, if not the only, beer ration issued.

I didn't drink beer, not for any moral reasons, but because I was just nineteen and, although I knew I was a full man, I had not developed a craving for the taste. I was thirsty, however, as the day had turned hot. I guess we lower ranks got one or two cans each. At the appropriate time I stuck my can with a bayonet. It proceeded to spray a stream about 15 feet. It was under high pressure. I waited for the air and foam to run out. When I picked up the can it was completely empty. Not a drop. That was it for the beer. - If I had more than one can I had given it, or gave it, to one of the older soldiers.

Then I found that a shop next door to the house we were to stay in was a butcher shop. It had a couple of carcasses. The best of which was veal. Several soldiers were hacking off pieces of meat without any knowledge of what they were doing. I chased them out. I told them they were ruining good meat; I could cut it to make it go around with good cuts for all. They backed off and I got to work cutting up a veal carcass. There was, indeed, enough for all who had the means, knowledge, or desire to deal with it. I thought a large veal steak was very tasty, myself. Most all of the meat in the shop was left to feed the civilians after we moved on, even though they were Germans.

That night I slept in a feather bed. Soon after I started scratching. Within a month I was treated for scabies. They were probably the result of the comfortable night in the first real bed of the war.

A few days later, I remember, we entered the town of Petersburg, Germany. It was a beautiful sunny day without much to distinguish it from any other until we got to the outskirts of the town. Before we got past the first house of the village an armed soldier who was openly reinforced by a .30 caliber heavy Browning machine gun stopped us.

His instructions were simple and straightforward. No one was to past his post until they had drunk half a canteen cup of the best wine available, which he proceeded to produce.

Petersburg was the home of a number of wineries with some of the best wines of the region. The Rifle Companies with the attached machine gun units from our company had captured several. No one objected and we went into town unhindered.

We were assigned a location with instructions to stay loose. No one knew how long we were to be here. There was nothing new in that.

The men of the section positioned their mortars and started their reconnaissance. We had a nice solid cottage of someone of better than average means. There was an abundance of canned fruit and vegetables, and a very handsome wine cellar. There was a full kitchen of equipment for producing a feast of style, if all could be put together, and beautiful china, crystal, linen and lace tablecloths. We had the making of a delightful feast.

When some of the others got in, we discovered that there were pigs on the hoof and a cellar with vegetables from the previous fall. I ask Lt. Turner if I could prepare a dinner for the section. He told me that he had just been given the word from platoon that there was to be no drinking whatsoever, by any member of the company. I explained that we were not looking for an opportunity to get drunk, but that it might be nice to have a fine dinner amid nice surroundings to include two wines. He was not hard to convince. He went back up the channels and got an exception for Shelton's dinner.

One of the men from Tennessee, either Julius Maples, the second squad driver, or Lester Tidwell, the second squad factotum who had absconded with the fiddle, killed the pig and brought in a whole hind quarter, ready for trimming and putting in the pot. By the time that they got the meat ready for the pot I had a pot ready for it, and a fire to support it's cooking.

We had some time for the meat to be done after we got it in the oven. During this time we prepared the vegetables to put over it and started the other trimmings. About 4:30 PM when the meat was about right to have the vegetables added and for me to start the other stovetop and oven dishes, we got the order to load up and move out. No warning. Move out, NOW!!

There was no time to do anything about it. I dumped all the prepared vegetables into the roasting pot, wrapped the whole thing in two blankets and put that one pot in the back of the jeep before we jumped in and were off for another wild ride.

It was after nine that evening when we found out where we were. We were in the IG Farben Industry plant at Ludwigshafen, on the west bank of the Rhine River and across from Mannheim. We were a pretty dejected group who were dismounted to set up our mortars outside a bunker, and who were told that was it for the night. A bunker of small size, no idea what our surroundings were, and no idea what the condition of the roast was, but, basically, there was no hope for saving it.

After we got our tactical situation under control, I gave my attention to my afternoon's efforts. I took the roasting pot into the bunker to the only light and slowly unwrapped the blankets. When I lifted the cover the aroma was magnificent. I opened the cover expecting to see a mostly done roast of pork with a pile of raw vegetables. But no, the hours of insulated cooking with the temperature of the meat had thoroughly cooked everything. The whole thing was still piping hot. We had a magnificent feast of roasted pork and vegetables. I carved.

There was dinner for everyone around. We had riflemen from several units coming by for servings. It was most satisfying, even without the silver, lace, wines and velvet chairs. Before we left the cottage I had stuck a carving knife in the straps of my left boot and the carving fork in the right. It was a good move. It was well used. We didn't even get to wash the pot.

The next couple of days were very educational. The Farben Industry was a great user of slave labor. The laborers from several eastern European countries had been

housed in bunkers deep under the buildings along the river. Their conditions had been considerably worse than ours. I'm sure they didn't have even a final feast of German Pork.

The laborers were gone by the time we got there.

That second day we looked around our vicinity of the plant. There had to be a better location than a small bunker with little space for our weapons. We found very nearby, with the same coverage available for our mortars, a large laboratory/office building. The offices were open and unobstructed. There was room to house several companies of troops if convenient. The rooms were generally poorly placed in that the windows were all toward the east, the direction from which the Germans were now seeking us as targets. By stretching our available materials, we could put together enough black out curtains to give us room to move. One of the good points of the place was that there was one large laboratory on the ground floor given over to nothing but batteries. The individual batteries were in glass containers, with the usual acid and lead plates. There were hundreds of them. The communications people with us connected them to the building wiring, so that anywhere in the building one could have light with the flip of a switch. We were most careful, however, not to flip a switch outside the blackout area.

Essentially, the fooling with the electricity, and roaming to see what we could put together about the slave labor, gave us something to think about other than ourselves and the fighting which was going on two hundred feet from us in the row of buildings facing the river. There, the war, in increased intensity, prevailed. The Germans still had a great quantity of high velocity AT/AA artillery available. They were attempting to keep us from crossing the river. By constant small arms and artillery bombardment day and night, and by combat patrols sneaked across the river by pontoon and skiff under the cover of darkness the Germans kept our rifle units from getting any rest. We fired many missions to hold off the patrols and to try to destroy some of the enemy support weapons. The German mortar positions were within range of our guns. This was unusual and resulted from both mortar units being too close to the units they supported.

After a day or two we moved out and crossed the Rhine over a pontoon bridge put over the river into Mannheim. Then out into the river bottom plains east of the Rhine. During this time I remember spending one night in a small German Town, where we were out of the pressure of missions, and could spend an hour or two looking about the village and in cleaning up. We found that the church down the street from the field edge building we were in was the church on whose door Martin Luther had placed his points of disagreement with the Catholic Church. At least that is what we were told. You see education happens to those who travel. We even read an English version of the proclamation. (I now doubt that this was really the church of Martin Luther, I do not know what church he was serving in at the time. My sneaking look at a photo, which I remember to have been taken in the town, disclosed that it is marked "Epstein". I can't even now attest to the correctness of the town name as shown on the back of the photo.)

I remember spending one day in a modern house in a new looking village. I thought the furniture was remarkable. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. It was in the mode of "Art Deco". The furniture was of modern shape, all beautifully veneered with smooth curves and lines. The curves were in traditional items such as "Grandfather"

Clocks and sideboards. I wrote home and even sent a picture or two of the furniture as well as of some of the men of the company, cutting up for the camera under the absence of pressure.

Here, after nearly fifty years, I remembered that I still have some of those pictures. I also remember that when I could not recall the name of the section leader I went back to the photo album and pulled the edges loose from his photo. I found the name and the date. I did the same for these photos. The town was Plankstadt, Germany. The date was March 31,1945

Early on the morning of Sunday, April 1, 1945 we moved, into the little town of "Waldorf". I thought that was funny, especially when I found that two doors from the cottage we were in, was the "Astoria" Hotel. I really spent Easter Sunday two doors from the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. The hotel looked just like every other village hotel. There may have been 10 rooms, but maybe not.

That was the day for two major events. The first and more major occurred in mid morning. I got desperately ill. I vomited for hours after my stomach and gut were empty. I could not even take a swallow of water without vomiting violently for minutes at a time. Lt. Turner was having the very same symptoms.

We compared what we had eaten. Neither of us had eaten anything other than issue meals for several days. We could find nothing causative in our history.

At mid afternoon, while lying on a bed hoping to survive, I heard a strange roaring noise. It was outside and nothing in my experience put a name to it. The closest thing I could come to describe it was the sound of a jeep pulling an empty 1/4-ton trailer at 40 mph or more over a street littered with more rubble than I had observed to be the case in the area.

I went out to find what it was. A couple of the Machine Gun sections of our company were next to us. They had mounted captured twin mount German Machine Guns on the AA pedestals for their jeeps. When I got to the gate they were firing at an aircraft, they said. I never saw it. I heard the damndest noise, but never saw the craft. Several others agreed that it was an airplane making the noise. We later found that it was the Messerschmitt 262, the world's first operational jet fighter. What it was doing in a ground support mission, I have never figured out, but perhaps it was really on a pursuit mission which had given out and was just using up excess fuel rather than try to land with it.

We moved again before nightfall. We were doing about 25 kilometers a day by now. Much of our time was spent sitting on the jeep waiting for the traffic to clear enough for us to move. We even found the vaunted "Autobahn". Both double lanes were bumper to bumper with American Army vehicles, all four lanes moving the same direction. Delays occurred where the Germans had blown sections of pavement and we had to make our way. Not detours, but simply four-wheel excursions through streams or gullies. It was during this period that I managed to get some reading done. I remember at

this time reading the science fiction novel, "Donovan's Brain". Don't remember who wrote it, but I thought it pretty neat.

One afternoon, I, sitting in my usual position over the rear wheel of the jeep, at the town square of a village, reading "Donovan's Brain". A tank company was coming into the square from the north as we tried to get out to the east. The tankers were ebullient with the recent successes. They had just captured a stock of Dark Chocolate. I do not now remember the brand, but the name screamed quality. It was supposed to the finest dark chocolate in the world. I have always been a "Chocoholic". The tankers were sailing the flat disks to us by the handfuls as we passed them. They had cases of the delicacy stacked around their tanks. I gratefully accepted several of the discs. As we moved slowly along, I carefully unwrapped one of the marvelous treasures. It smelled delicious - until I tasted it. It smelled of heavy dark chocolate. It tasted of burnt coffee. Not bad, if one had a taste for coffee evaporated in the pot and then scorched on the bottom. I could not swallow that first bite. Everyone else was enthusiastic at how good it was. Something was wrong.

We ended our movement about 20 Km from the river city of HEILBRON, on the Neckar River. We had a few minutes to get ourselves ready. The delay was the German artillery covering the road. The units ahead of us had found the density of troops the Germans would allow through the road without massive barrages. As long as the jeeps and small vehicles kept large distances between and went through at breakneck speed they were not harassed. We waited our turn and charged like mad down about three kilometers of road running along a ridge toward the town just west of Heilbron. There we dismounted, gathered up our load and started walking. In retrospect it seems funny, some of the things we saw.

That day as we went down the main thoroughfare, in a spaced column, we saw a beautiful NAZI dagger lying on the stoop to one of the buildings we were passing. All it would take was to reach over and pick up that most treasured souvenir. Because of the experiences we had had in the past few weeks, including many booby traps the day that Lou Massaci had had his blood poisoning, no one would pick up the knife. Until, finally, one of the last men in the column, without even thinking about it, reached over and picked up this classic example of the booby trap. He looked and put it in his jacket pocket for later appreciation. He never thought of the danger he was putting himself and his buddies in. He, therefore, ended up with one of the most sought after mementos of the war. These, in many cases, were the men who got medals; men who had not thought about where they were going or what their actions would create. Medals, in many cases, reflected the efforts of someone to get himself out of a position that his thoughtlessness, or that of another, had put him and others into.

We walked into Heilbronn and into the battle that was to get both the first and second battalions of the Regiment the Presidential Unit Citation, a recognition that was not won easily. It usually required heroic effort by most of the members of a unit over an extended period. We got it and felt we earned it several times over.

All six squads of Mortar Platoon were placed in the area of a meat packing plant. The first section guns were on the west side of the refrigeration building. The third

section guns were on the east side of the same building. The packing plant faced the Nekar River. The Germans held the north/east side. We were on the south/west.

The artillery in both directions was furious. We received frequent shellings. We fired targets several times a day.

As luck would have it, several months later, I was present as Nick Powers, our fire direction NCO, cleaned out his combat gear. He came out with the platoon combat map of Heilbronn. I asked for it rather than for him to throw it away. Therefore, I have the map marking the points that our platoon fired on during this momentous but little known battle.

During the few days I was in the position, the fighting by our rifle companies was rather heavy, mostly in exchanges of fire of all types across the narrow expanse of water, as well as by cross water excursions by both sides. We fired missions of various types at all hours. (Although Sgt. Jacobsen, at the 2002 Convention of the 100th Division Association, remembered the period as being very quiet.)

The first section was housed in the refrigeration building. It was mostly underground and it was solid. It also contained about a dozen beef carcasses that had not had refrigeration for more than 10 days. There had been no electricity to run the compressors. We were once again sleeping on un-softened concrete, but now in the full fragrance of rotting flesh. The alternative was to move out into the open, in which case ours would soon join that of the beeves inside.

While here we set up a latrine in a small building near but safely separate from our living quarters. I noticed as the few days progressed that my urine took the color of the motor oil of the period, a dark brownish green. My feces, on the other hand, looked like mashed potatoes, with almost no color at all. I was not a well man. I felt unbelievably tired. I could not get enough rest. I had not been able to keep anything down since Easter in Waldorf.

On the route across our sector of Germany I had come across a jar of preserved Goose eggs. I fixed one. It looked and smelled delicious. So good, in fact, that I had requests from several men to fix for them, too. All the others ate and digested in good health. I lost mine with a vengeance.

The only thing which I managed to keep down during this period, from the 10th to the 13th(?) of April, 1945, was one "K" ration cracker and one half cup of "Tang", the vitamin C substitute for orange juice. The only thing I had kept down since the 1st was small amounts of water. The funny thing about that cracker and "Tang" was that I consumed it in the entryway to our sleeping area. The bottom of the entry stairwell had a small area that had light from the outside and a small space, large enough to hold a stretcher. While I ate I watched as a medic worked on the leg of a soldier who had been hit on the other side of our building. His leg was shattered so that bleeding could not be controlled in time to get him back to the Aid Station. By this surgery, he did live. That was the scene of my only nourishment in 13 days.

On the morning of the 13th(?) the third section had an urgent mission to fire. They needed all the help they could get in carrying ammunition to the guns. I, of course, grabbed two boxes of HE Light, four rounds to the box, seven and one half pounds to the round. We were just carrying it from the central platoon ammo storage point to the section, not more than about 75 yards. I got about half way to the gun positions before the boxes slipped out of my hands. I could not pick them up again. I didn't have enough strength.

I had to admit I was no longer able to hold my place in the unit. I would from there become a burden rather than a worker. I told the platoon sergeant that I thought I better go on sick call. He asked no questions, but called for a jeep to pick me up to take me to the Bn. Aid Station. It was back in the town from which we had walked into HEILBRONN less than a week before. I remember the date as the 13th of April, but that may be incorrect. The 13th may stick in my memory as the day I was admitted into the hospital – a day or two after the sick call.

The admissions clerk, at a typewriter near the door, was the first one to see me. He asked the usual; name, rank, serial number, and complaint. But before I could respond to the latter he saw my yellow eyes, looked at my yellow nails and yellow skin and entered the diagnosis: "Hepatitis" - to which the Doctor, as I passed by him, added, " Infectious, Acute, Moderate." I was told to wait outside for evacuation to the rear. I was exhausted. I could not have cared less.

That afternoon I was taken by ambulance to the 54th Evacuation Hospital. From the time I got into the ambulance my feet were not allowed to touch the ground. While lying on the stretcher, waiting for the first examination by the nurse, to separate the really serious from the merely desperate; triage. I became filled with an overwhelming pride at being an American Soldier. I was sick. I knew my situation was not a matter of life or death in the next few minutes, but, as I watched, men with shredded arms would protest that the man with the puncturing shrapnel wound needed care first. This pattern repeated, over and over. Every man was concerned for the condition of the other man as being more important than himself. That was what it meant to be a soldier for our country. I was still alive when the seriously wounded were moved to wherever they were taken.

I was taken into a squad tent and placed on the ground on one side of the tent, about in the center. The patients filled the tent in two rows, head toward the outside, and feet toward the center. It was dinnertime by the time I was placed. I did not feel that I could eat or drink anything that evening either. I slept lightly, but well, the whole night.

The next morning we were offered breakfast. I tried a bit of coffee with lots of sugar. Some of it may have stayed down. Nurses brought pans of warm water so that we could wash hands and face. What a lot of dirt we dropped there. For lunch I felt much better. The lunch smelled delicious. I tried to eat. I did eat a light serving of macaroni in tomato sauce and one half canned pear in light syrup. I remember it well. I felt stronger and better than I had felt for many days.

Several of us were carried to airplanes on an unpaved strip not many yards from the hospital area. We were put on C 47s for the flight from the Field to the General

Hospital. I was allowed to sit up. The wounded were kept on the stretcher for which there was space. We were airborne for about 10 minutes before I had to grab the bag to catch my ill-timed lunch. It certainly didn't stay down long enough to give me much nourishment, but I was encouraged by the fact I had felt like eating it.

The flight ended at Rheims, France. We were moved by ambulance to the Hospital. I did not know that this was Eisenhower's field command location, but I'm sure I would have been interested if I had known.

I was put in a ward with about 19 other soldiers all with the same diagnosis as I had. "Hepatitis, infectious, acute, moderate." The hospital was a typical structure of the type, constructed of frame, in wards connected by enclosed passages. It kept some space between groups but kept all groups available to the central caregivers.

As the number of patients was rather large for the number of hospital personnel, we were allowed certain privileges. We were declared to be bed patients, but we could get up to go to the latrine - if we felt like it. If not we could call for bed service. I didn't see anyone who couldn't make the distance down the passage to the facilities.

We were to have an absolutely controlled diet. The one thing we could not digest was fat of any kind. The first meal we had in the hospital was steak. It was trimmed of all fat, dredged and browned in its own juice. It was good, both ounces I could eat, as well as the two bites of dry, baked potato. We could have hard candy anytime. In fact, we had a specimen box next to each bed that was kept full of hard candy. That was the source of energy that we could handle.

Isn't it funny that I can't remember anything else about the food? No special pluses or minuses. No fat. Anything else goes.

It was while I was here that I got the package from Martha. She had shared my passion for dark, semi-sweet chocolate. We had liked them by the half or whole pound bars, which "Hershey" put out. The package was a shoebox filled with the large bars of semi-sweet chocolate. They smelled great, but I now knew that they could kill me. With regret, and with survival in mind, I asked the nurse to take them to a wound ward and share them with the patients. She reported that she had done so.

I remember that while we were here, and not really capable of spending much effort on anything, hearing of the Death of President Roosevelt. I don't remember when he actually died, probably before I left the unit but we got the news here. I would guess that we learned of it by reading it in Time magazine and hearing of the funeral. There was nothing we could do about it so we didn't worry about it.

While I was here the doctor noticed, as he was examining me, a spot on my leg. He asked if it itched. I agreed that it did. He prescribed several days' self-applied applications of sulfur ointment. The scabies, "The "seven year itch" from my night on a feather bed. That was uncomfortable, but it worked.

During about our third week here we were surprised one night to hear what sounded like a furious ground battle in progress. There were automatic weapons, small

arms of all kinds and even explosions. The only thing missing was the artillery. We had no idea what was going on. We heard the next day that there had been a rumor that the war was over. It was not. A couple of days later, however, the local shooting started again. The war in Europe was over. We were still alive. The level of celebration was higher among the civilians and rear echelon soldiers than we felt, as we knew that the war was not nearly over in the Pacific. I, for one, could not build up a real desire to go fight in the island campaigns.

It was about this time, while we were still confined to bed, only getting up to go to the latrine, that we received a challenge from another ward to a softball game. I don't know how the challenge was transmitted, what made us think we could play, or what had happened to all the medical staff. We went out one day and played softball. Even I played. This was the first time in years that I had even tried to play, as I had not had the occasion since I had started wearing glasses. We had a good game and came in exhausted but exhilarated. We knew we were tired, but no one quite realized how devastated we were going to be in the morning. We could hardly get out of bed. There were more calls for "ducks", male urinals, so called for the shape of the vessel, than in any day prior to that.

The only men who could get about without serious pain were the few who had not felt well enough to try to play. After a day or two some of these men offered to give rub downs to those who could stand them. They helped, some. We were still recuperating from the unwise exercise when most of us were alerted that we were moving again. We had been bed ridden for 30 days. The program called for 60 days before you could be ambulatory. *

We were allowed to walk to the ambulance for the ride to the train. As we were sitting upright in the ambulance we got a glimpse of the front of the Cathedral at Rheims - for whatever that was worth. I think we all had heard of it, but may not have had a good concept of context. It was impressive.

I think we had a couple of hours train ride to the next hospital, at least I remember leaving the Field Hospital in Rheims in an ambulance and getting out of the ambulance at Vittel, but only vaguely the trip between. It was not in ambulance all the way, and it wasn't by truck or airplane. I do remember how silly I thought it was when they insisted on our getting on litters as we got out of the ambulance so that we could be carried to our rooms. The young man in the room hopped out of bed when he saw me being brought in, to help me by turning back the bed covers for me. I was a bit embarrassed, for while I was still in pajamas, I was wearing my combat boots, fully laced and strapped.

The hospital I went to (I don't remember ever seeing any of my former ward mates again until after I left the hospital) was the 23d General Hospital. It occupied the "Grand Hotel" in Vittel, France.* It was, for it's day, truly grand. The hotel was huge, spreading, and built of cut limestone blocks. The overall design was Hellenic style, with columns at each carriage portico. The building was generously supplied with supporting space. The dining room was adequate to attend to all the ambulatory patients as well as the staff. There was a group of beautifully appointed buildings close at hand, including a gorgeous theater, of the style of the eighteenth century, with seats with gilded frames and

velvet upholstery, a large set of studios with natural light for art work, , good quality equipment and supplies for modeling clay, drawing, painting or perhaps a dozen other crafts. Patients could engage in a number of diversions according to their rehabilitative need. There were walking paths, a golf course, equestrian paths, and even tennis courts. There were benches along the paths, so that the patients, formerly the rich and aged, could sit and rest.

I was assigned to a room on the ground floor, on the west side, the back of the hotel. My roommate was a young man of my age. He, too, had Hepatitis. He had been hospitalized for several months. They were trying to get him strong enough to stand a trip by air, so he could be evacuated to the U.S.

When I first saw the Doctor I asked him some questions about the disease I had. I was told that very little was known about it. The problem seemed to be an infection of the liver, which interfered with the production and distribution of bile. The result was an inability to digest fat, a distribution of the bile into the blood and the resultant yellow color. He told me there seemed to be three types, possibly from different causes. The first type was only seldom fatal. The next was often fatal, and the third was almost always fatal. They thought the disease to be spread by any of several means, most likely through the air, food or water. The basic way you could tell which you had was by how close you came to dying. I had the first type. My roommate had the second if not the third. He remained confined to bed until the time I left about a month later. He had not got strong enough to be moved. He looked fairly well, a good-looking young man with a good nature.

During my first week or so there I ended up feeling pretty stupid a few times. I said that our room was at the back of the hotel on the ground floor; well, there was a seldom-used service road that went across the grounds some distance from our window. The road was gravel. Three times I found myself flat on the floor. I had thrown myself there before I knew it. Any vehicle moving on that gravel road sounded exactly like a volley of high velocity shells coming in - and I prided myself in not hitting the ground unless it was necessary. My ear and brain heard and evaluated before I was aware of the sound. My roommate was kind, he never laughed - after he first found out why I was on the floor. Little by little I got control of that reaction, though the tendency was there even years later if all the sounds were just right.

I was declared ambulatory after about a week and set about to gain strength and to keep myself occupied using the facilities. I hated to leave my roommate by himself, but I did everything I could for him when I was about.

I took a walk almost every day. I would walk as far as I thought I could go and still get back without problems. I looked over the arts and craft studios. I decided to do some metal work, as I had been able while in Jr. High to make iron bend to my will. I made a ring out of a block of aluminum. It turned out rather well. That ended my interest in metal work.

Then I started using the art studio. I had made a few pencil and charcoal sketches back in November. The availability of the studio and equipment gave me a chance to

improve my skills. I started by copying some photographs from the news magazines. The first was a portrait of General Eisenhower. It turned out pretty good. I followed that with a portrait of Gen. Bradley. It also turned out well. I asked the nurse if I could hang them on the wall of our room, which was done.

Soon one of the nurses asked if I would make a charcoal portrait of her. I explained that I had never tried to do more than a life sketch. I tried, and she was pleased. Another nurse ask for one. She was happy. Then the Colonel, one of the department heads ask if I could do one of him while he worked in his office. That was very difficult, as he could not hold still long enough for me to get the direction of a line. I spent about half hour and succeeded in getting only a likeness. It was not satisfactory for either of us. That was my last try at doing charcoal portraits.

Shortly before the middle of June I was declared ready for non-combat troop duty. I could go back to my unit.

Thus started a train trip which lasted two days and a night, followed after a couple days break by another full day. The transportation was my introduction to the famous "Forty and Eight" of WW I fame. The name came from the design capacity of each car. They could hold either 40 men or eight horses. There were no accommodations, not even seats. Neither windows nor privies, no water, just a double sliding loading door on each side with a step below the door.

The speed of the train was just a little bit faster than a good walk. Some men actually did get off and run along side when they had to have some space or exercise.

The fun came when the call of nature made itself known. There were two obvious choices. Number 1 or number 2. Number one was no problem. That called for a visit to the downwind side door and let fly. Number two was more determined. There was no way to accommodate the need. In case of real, real pressure there was no choice but to head for the step below the door. While one hung onto the door frame with one hand he lowered his pants and drawers with the other, then while hanging lower, necked in the wind, he let loose with whatever came. There was no choice, and over the course of the two days, as one might expect, everyone who wasn't terribly constipated had to make at least one try at the exercise.

The afternoon of the second day found us in the freight yards of Koln, with an umlaut over the "o", or Cologne, Germany. The section of the yards where we were placed was within the border of the Replacement Depot. We were going through the system as though we were completely new and didn't know where Europe was. The accommodations were six man tents in a pasture. Meals were served in the middle of the company street. Fortunately, I did not have to endure many of them.

One of the meals was a "hoot". There was no special holiday, as far as I knew, but the meal was a full-blown "Thanksgiving" dinner. With both halves of the mess kit you could almost get what you needed . This afternoon there was turkey and gravy, with an appropriate number of vegetables. Right next to the end of the line there was a handsome

bread pudding. The last item was fresh vanilla ice cream - the first ice cream I had seen since New York. Everyone was going down the line taking everything in order.

When I got to the ice cream a thought occurred to me. "Is this bread pudding or is it turkey dressing?" The server without changing expression replied, "Turkey Dressing." I wondered how many men had assumed, because of the placement of the dish on the line, that it was bread pudding, a popular dish in the Army. The thought of putting good vanilla ice cream on turkey dressing gave me many a laugh after that. A great many men had tried the combination that day.

The second day a trainload of replacements for the 101st Airborne Division was brought in on the way back to their unit. They arrived about nine P.M. so they were directed to wait on the "40 & 8"s until the next morning. Most of them were drunk as skunks. I have no idea where they had come across that much liquor. Not only were they drunk, they were also all armed. They had their side arms, rifles, and sub-machine guns with full loads of ammunition. I don't know who issued them ammo, but that was a foolish thing to do. I probably would not have thought anything of it, except that that evening I was paying the price of my obvious authority. I was corporal of the guard that night, and in my area of supervision was the train in which the drunken paratroopers were shooting up the neighborhood. I was called out by the cry, "Corporal of the Guard, Post number seven!" which meant, "Corporal; things are getting out of hand", several times that night.

We managed to get through the night without anyone being killed. Early the next morning, before the paratroopers had time to realize that they were hung-over, their train was moved out toward their unit. I wouldn't swear that all of them were aboard, but I'm sure they never worried about it.

One of the few days I was there I walked into town to visit the Cathedral of Cologne. It was a slightly better than average Gothic structure, which was dedicated Lutheran or some such denomination, in which the preacher mounts a podium half way to heaven from which to harangue the parishioners. The overall effect was pleasant enough, but nothing really outstanding. The Army chaplains had a service there each Sunday, which I thought I would attend if I were still there over the weekend. I was not.

Funny, but I cannot remember our out-movement. I remember getting onto another 40 & 8 for departure, but I remember nothing of the trip, nor do I remember where I dismounted. I do know, however, that it must have been at least a whole day's trip. I remember arriving back to the unit in the mid morning. I was absolutely beat. I remember stealing a nap during the noon hour. I didn't have the strength to go work a half-day. I therefore suspect that we had spent most of 24 hours on that trip. By tearing the edge of a photo, I just learned that the town was Bad Ditzenbach. That was in the southern portion of the U.S. sector of Germany.

We were billeted in a Hospital/Watering Spa. The resort was run somewhere between a resort and a hospital. There were a number of "Sisters/Nuns" who ran the therapy portion. The gimmick was that the area was an area of natural springs, both sulfuric and carbonic.

The "sisters" could provide you with therapeutic baths. I managed to take advantage of them on two occasions. It was the closest thing we could find to a Saturday-nighter. For a fee, rather modest, they would provide you with a tub, about 6' 4" long half filled with mineral water of a pleasant temperature. The tub was cedar lined so that the water didn't cool too fast, and the depth was such that you could take a nap, if you could float. Overall, it was a very nice experience.

It was here that I got to do a bit more after-duty-time exploring. Our days were filled with patrolling the countryside to make sure everything was peaceful. I never saw anything not absolutely bucolic.

One Saturday afternoon a few friends and I made our way to the top of what proved to be a plateau to our east. From the valley they seemed to be hills, but from the top, it was obvious the whole area was a large plateau with deep valleys eroded into it. One of the things we found was a healthy lumber industry. The forestry service was running a managed forest on the tops and sides of the Plateau. The harvest of the lumber seemed to be interesting. I don't know what time of the year was preferred, but while we were there in mid June, the chutes, which were used to guide the logs from the top of the hill to the bottom, were covered in dry needles.

We, in the spirit of adventure, stepped off the top of the Plateau into one of the log chutes. We got the fastest ride you would ever expect. We ended up skiing down what seemed to be a drop of a thousand feet on boot soles, at about 60 mph. It was fun, but I was glad that I had managed not to fall. One could have gotten seriously hurt.

One day a group of the soldiers got permission to go hunting. I don't remember the number, but they got several "roebuck", the small native deer, maybe 45-50 pounds each. The entire catch was put into the "beef" stew for the evening. It was hardly edible. The gamy taste was not accommodated in any way. Also, the fresh killed meat turned out to be quite chewy.

One other thing I thought was rather funny. On the way to the mess hall one evening a couple of my friends and I were horsing around speaking some German. I said something with an umlaut, such as schoen (umlaut over the o). A complete stranger in civilian clothes, who was near us at the time, came over and said in perfect English that that was the best pronunciation of the phrase he had ever heard from a non-German. We never found out who he was, but we surmised that he was an American in the Strategic Intelligence Services. It was a bit flattering, however. My tutor, Bill Buursma, had made his point.

One Sunday afternoon several of us visited the mineral spring outside the Spa, for which the area was noted. I had visited Hot Springs, Arkansas, famous for the waters. I didn't think I had a lot to learn about this particular mineral spring. I was in for a surprise. The water tastes like lemon soda. Not sweet, but lemony acid with carbonation. It was really quite refreshing. I remembered, though, the concoction that Mother chose to drink when she became constipated. It was a lemony carbonated combination which taste just like this water (Citrate of Magnesia?). I had one small cup and quit, despite the fact that it

tasted rather good. I never asked how the other men fared, those who let their tastes urge them on to less restrained indulgence.

While we were here in Bad Ditzenbach, I was given orders to go on a three day R&R. I had just gotten back from 60 days rest in the hospital, so I was ordered to go on R&R. I guess that everyone else had gone and they were having trouble getting volunteers. I went. The trip was to Nancy, France. * We had fought most of our combat time within a few miles of the town. I don't know what they had on the Army command to require soldiers to continue to be pushed in there when not many seemed to wish to go. I went because of curiosity. There must be something there for them to set up an R&R center there. There wasn't, at least there was nothing that I saw.

I was there for three days. It took one full day each way on the 40 & 8. We lived in French Army barracks, ate in French Army mess halls, with American cooks. There was nothing I found in town to make it interesting. I wandered, with a couple of other soldiers, through the town. There I first realized that the fashion of putting a glass fan covering over the door stoop was not an exception, but was a definite style. That was one of the few cultural gains of the visit.

The other was an afternoon spent at the local wine shop with the old Frenchmen. Three of us decided to see if we could sit as long as the locals over a single glass of the "vin ordinare". We sat most of the afternoon over a single glass of the terrible vinegary red ordinare. I don't see how the old men survived the occupation if this was what it consisted of.

That same evening the mess hall issued as part of the dinner a shot of French Cognac. It was about 1/4 of a coffee mug, as a matter of fact. The mug held about 12 ounces. Most of the men around me cared nothing at all about good Cognac. I collected a few of the offerings until I had my coffee mug nearly full. I spent the next hour or so, in the mess hall: sipping on a reasonably good brandy. I, for one, enjoyed it.

The return to the unit was a repeat of the trip from the Hospital and the "Repple Depple". I spent another day on a 40&8. When I got back to the unit they were within a couple of days of moving on to another village in the south of Germany. On one of those last days I was detailed to work in the company supply room. For some reason it seemed to surprise the administrative types that I could read, write and figure. Goodness knows they had enough trouble with it.

At the new village we were given a lot of inspections to upgrade our appearance and our equipment readiness levels. Mostly, however, the men were recuperating. They were losing their fighting foibles. We spent our days keeping very busy keeping peace in the many miles of miles around us. We never saw anything out of line. We were there for only a limited time. It was here that I met two of the sections replacements. They were brothers, Frank and Bernie Kissane. They were in their thirties, had families and steady jobs interrupted by the draft. They looked like nineteen year olds. Frank was muscular and athletic in build. Bernie was pudgy and round. They were from Michigan, had a good sense of humor, were bright, and worked in one of the Auto plants. Everyone liked them.

They certainly didn't look like twin brothers, but they were obviously devoted to each other.

The name of this town, which I never got to know, except for the road on which we were billeted, was, according to the photo stripped from my ancient album, Wielder Stadt - which is an odd spelling. As the river, on which I later served in other units was the "Weil", I would have expected this town to be Weilderstadt, but, as I say, I later served in Weilheim, and Weilmunster (umlaut on the U). Maybe this was just odd.

I remember traveling around the area a bit, both before and after the end of my combat period. I remember, for example, going through "Goppingen", umlaut on the O. I knew that it was a famous University town in past centuries. There was not much to be seen as I went through on the back of a jeep.

Speaking of "just passing through", I remember passing Strasbourg during November 44. It had nothing to do with our tactical situation except that the French had recently recaptured it. Our Division Rear, logistic tail, was there. We got into downtown Strasbourg, dismounted at the warehouse, went through the Battalion's baggage until we found our companies duffel bags and got out the prescribed items of winter equipment which had been packed therein.

The next move I remember in the summer of ‘45 was back north to Stuttgart. We were housed the first night in the international Red Cross building. The second night we were in pup tents pitched on the park lawn of the Stuttgart Opera House. We were covered with bed bug bites from the Red Cross building. We were not going to spend another night there without protest. (The Red Cross building was completely dusted with DDT after that one night.) We were not ordered to return to the building.

The second day there we started our peacekeeping rounds. We were the show of force. Where it had been mounted patrols before, it was now to be static guard posts, just like back at Fort Bragg - except now we had ammunition.

That first afternoon we were with our jeeps in front of the Red Cross, waiting until time to leave for our posts. One of the new replacements was sitting on the steps of the building, with his chin resting on the barrel of his carbine. He was absent-mindedly sliding the bolt of his carbine back and forth. We heard a muffled shot. I was about 40 feet from him. The carbine had gone off. The bullet entered under his chin and came out with a big hole in the top of his helmet. This was a reminder of how much blood the human body contains. The quantity that ran across the sidewalk and down the gutter was impressive. I never learned the new man's name.

We spent only a couple of days on the Opera House lawn, among several hundred thousand spectators, before the unit moved out to Bad Canstadt, or Fuerbach, actually the Kaserne, at the top of the hill above them both. Here we had our quarters while we continued training for the coming assault in the Pacific.

We went into serious physical training and psychological indoctrination. At the same time we were allowed more free time than we had ever expected. We had an end of the training day - something we hadn't had, even in Fort Bragg, N.C. On more than one

Sunday afternoon the Special Services Office arranged concerts of some quality at the Opera House. One week the chorus of the Stuttgart Opera gave a concert of the choruses from Wagner Operas. One weekend there was a concert of the best concert artist available, including some Russian singers who had been prisoners of the Germans and who were said to be from the Moscow Opera. For those of us who liked classical music, there were a few afternoons of quality. We were participating along with the citizens of the City. The concerts were not only for the GI's. The programs, in fact, were a continuation of the local Sunday evening concert known as "Opera Abend", Opera Evening.

It was July when we moved to Bad Canstadt. We stood shifts of guard at all the critical points in central Stuttgart. I remember spending many day and night shifts in the entrance to the underground portion of the Stuttgart Telephone Central. Bombs had heavily damaged all the building above ground during the war. We were keeping it from being damaged further. There were many hours to do nothing. I figured I could keep my eyes open and my mind busy at the same time. I carried a German "Worterbuch", dictionary. Each tour I assigned myself a number of words to learn. I would learn the word, then proceed to use it in the many permutations demanded by the grammar. It did pay off. I became more and more fluent with the language, without ever talking to a native German.

It was here in the Kaserne out of Stuttgart that we settled in to the long haul of occupation. We knew that we were preparing for the invasion of Japan, but other things had to go on, too. I was selected, for example to represent the company on the battalion newssheet that was mimeographed every few days. I was in the newspaper office when General Eisenhower visited the camp. I met him, but I didn't get to interview him. (It was 1953 when I met him again. I was a Captain on the security detail for his appearance at Fort Knox, Ky., shortly after his election as President. I was to encounter him again, indirectly, before he died.)

The Heavy Weapons Company had a Recreation Room on the third floor of our barracks. I did not drink for entertainment, so I seldom spent my time there in the evenings. Ted Kassel, was, and I consider, still is, a good friend. He had been junior Ping-Pong champion in Chicago before he entered the service for college work. We played a lot of "table tennis". I had played before, but Ted took us to new heights. The rooms were perfect for normal Ping-Pong, but there wasn't enough room for us to get back far enough from the tables to fully handle the fiery shots he would put over the net. The exercise was great. A two hour game in the forth floor table tennis room could sweat five pound off you.

Ted was also a musician of sorts. He played piano. I only sang and played tuba or sousaphone. Obviously, there was no availability of Sousaphones, so we got the latest sheet music from Special Services. He played and we both sang. It was there that I first heard the melody of "Twilight Time". I was enchanted with it. We had quite a thing with that song. We even did it for some of our friends, so much did we appreciate it. Later we were to hear it for years as a top ten hit.

One of the amusing things that happened there at the Kaserne was that there was some 1500 pair of skis, and complete equipment. It had been the home base of a Mountain Battalion. Skiing was a part of the instruction. We had decided that this was the year that we would learn to ski, all things being equal. Before the first snow we were all dispersed - and that winter there was no snow. NADA. ZIP. No one learned to ski that didn't already know. A few of my friends, who had come from colleges in the north and who were fully accomplished skiers, pretty well spent the winter at the centers in Garmish and in the Alps where the near professionals could hang out for the winter, even if they were in uniform.

There was a period earlier in the summer in which we spent a number of days in a small town in southern Germany, not related to any I've mentioned.

I remember a swimming pool; the photo back says it was Remmiegen, German, and July 1945. Just behind the pool was a complete ME 109, German fighter aircraft. It had crashed, but the only damage seemed to be the landing gear and propeller. One day I got in it to try it on for size. It was too small. I could not have flown it, as I did not have room to fit all the way into the seat and cockpit. I was glad to have the chance to see what the pilot who had accidentally strafed me had had to contend with.

At this town we were engaging in the Regimental volleyball tournament. Our team was good. We had a few men, who had also been ASTRP, as had I, who thought they were God's gift to sports. One of them was a five striper who loved to give the rest of us a hard time. He finally got to me in a practice game one day. When he was advising me of a less than perfect play I had made, I commented, " Dick, (Richard Setter) the main difference between your play and my own is that I make mistakes and will admit it." He backed off a bit, but I felt great. I was no slouch when it came to the game. I don't think we took the Regimental Championship, but we may have. We were good.

Sometime in the early fall I was promoted to buck sergeant. I don't know what had happened to Lt. Nealand. I had worked at positions calling for rank above my own most of my time in the unit, and was still a couple of stripes short. The only advantage I noted from the promotion was in advancing tens of files in the pay line. That was real, albeit small, compensation - also there were a few more dollars in my pay each month - as a corporal I had been drawing some 54 dollars a month, now I was drawing something like 86 a month.

I thought it was neat working from the Kaserne, during the workday the work uniform was fatigues with combat boots. We did a lot of long marches and some hill climbing as part of our continuing physical fitness training, so the uniform was appropriate. We were doing less of the running the gun for score. It seemed that all we had to do was keep our skills reasonably fresh. We had no more to learn about firing the mortar.

We usually changed to the "Shade 31" uniform for the retreat formation. The shade "31" was the new shade adopted by the army near the end of the war. It was darker with not so much yellow in the fabric as the older "Olive Drab". With the newly approved "IKE" jacket we had a uniform that was not only practical but also which was not unattractive to the young male figure. The weather even in the heat of the summer was cool enough in the evenings to permit the wearing of the "31s".

As an NCO I was now eligible to attend the NCO club down toward the middle of Stuttgart. The distance was not too great to be more than a long, easy walk each way. A few of my friends and I would wander down a couple of nights a week. There was often a live musical group, soldiers playing for their professional proficiency, I suspect. The special service people had put out the word among the civilian population that volunteer hostesses would be appreciated. The young ladies were screened for character and motive before they were accepted.

At one of the dances my friend Eugene and I met two girls named "Lillie" and "Lilo". He chose to dance with "Lilo". I was, therefore, with "Lillie". We danced a couple of times. The next time I was at the club so was she. I walked her home after the dance. I met her mother. There was also a young sister whom I met sometime later. Lilly had served as a Women's Auxiliary member for the Luftwaffe, or the German Air Force. She was, as far as I knew, a basically sweet, innocent young women caught up in a situation of which she was as much victim as participant. I don't remember her last name, but if pressed I would guess that it was something like "Hoffman", or "Hauptmann".

One of my buddies kept asking me if I had gotten to her yet, "She's ready, you know." "NO, she is a friend in a situation that is not easy for any of us."

Her Mother invited me to Sunday dinner where I met the younger sister, about 13. They were a nice family with no father figure. He had been an anti-NAZI to the point that he had committed suicide in 1937 - or had otherwise been put aside. Lilly and I went walking one Sunday afternoon. She took me up onto the top of a small hill overlooking the Canstadt-Feuerback valley that was important in her memory. Her mother asked me to send word to a relative in the U.S. that they were alive and well. I did so with no misgivings. I got a fervent "thank you" letter in return with a $20 bill as a thank you, with an innocuous message in return. By the time the reply came I had been transferred to the 15th Cavalry. I returned the $20; we could not spend American Money. Neither could we even exchange it for occupation funny money. I never saw or heard from Lillie and her family again. I don't doubt that they came through the occupation in good order. They were proud, independent, hard working and ambitious. In addition they seemed to be good, basically honest, upright people.

It was probably in late September that I was transferred to the 15th Cavalry. There was no one whom I knew who went with me to the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop of the 15th Cavalry Group. There were several other transfers from other combat units, but none from my unit. There was no one from my infantry battalion.

I was a "three-striper" with 49 points towards rotation. The number needed was about 55. Points were given one for each month on active duty, another for each month

overseas and another for each month in a combat area. Five points were allowed for a "Purple Heart" and five for each valor award. There were probably other considerations, but it was obvious that I would never get out of Europe.

The comment on the awards reminds me of another amusing situation during the period at the Kaserne. It was time to get in the award recommendations for those who were thought deserving of awards during the war in Europe. I was asked by my superiors to write recommendations for members of the Section whom I thought deserved the Bronze Star or other award for valor. I wrote up every member of the Section who had not already been recommended, except myself, of course. It was no problem, whatsoever, to remember a number of occasions in which each man had distinguished himself by an act of bravery, heroism, unselfish valor or honor to the service.

Everyone for whom I wrote a recommendation received the award. (I learned in 2001 that I apparently had not written one for Ted Kassel, my squad leader, as he never received an award.) The writing of a recommendation for me was assigned to another person. I did not receive it. (I guarantee you that I did deserve a number of awards, just as did almost every Infantryman I knew.) There are intelligent people who can write and there are those who cannot. (Protect me from those latter!) (Who, me?)