

SKETCHES OF WW II

A Personal Memoir



The Author - Paris, September 1945

Paul F. Mosher

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Printed in the United States of America.
First Limited Printing November, 1992
Second Limited Printing August, 1993

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 92-90876

SKETCHES OF WW II

PURPOSE

These Sketches concerning the Second World War were written with my grandchildren in mind. As the years continue to pass, WW II will recede further into history. And, while the war will remain an important part of our heritage, soon few individuals will have any personal knowledge of this period and even fewer as to what it was like to have participated in the actual fighting. Thus, the necessity for this written record.

However, this material contains none of the grand military and political strategies of this conflict. It simply attempts to tell what it was like to be an infantry soldier as a member of a machine gun squad in Company I, 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division.

Perhaps my Memoir will also shed some light on what I was like as a young man involved in this war.

* * * * *

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the help of my wife, Lou, who read the text several times and corrected many errors of grammar and spelling. Lou was also almost able to convince me that each sentence should have its very own verb.

I wish to thank Richard Tobias, a fellow Company I member, for editing this material and for his many excellent suggestions.

My thanks also to Milt Apetz for the illustrations which he made available for use in this publication. Milt was also a member of Company I.

P.F.M.

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The illustrations appearing at pages 6, 18, 21, 37, and 73 were created by Milt Apetz. The illustrations of The Top Hat Warrior and the Machine Gun Outpost were made especially for this publication. The other drawings were made by Milt shortly after the end of WW II based on his personal combat experiences as a member of Company I.

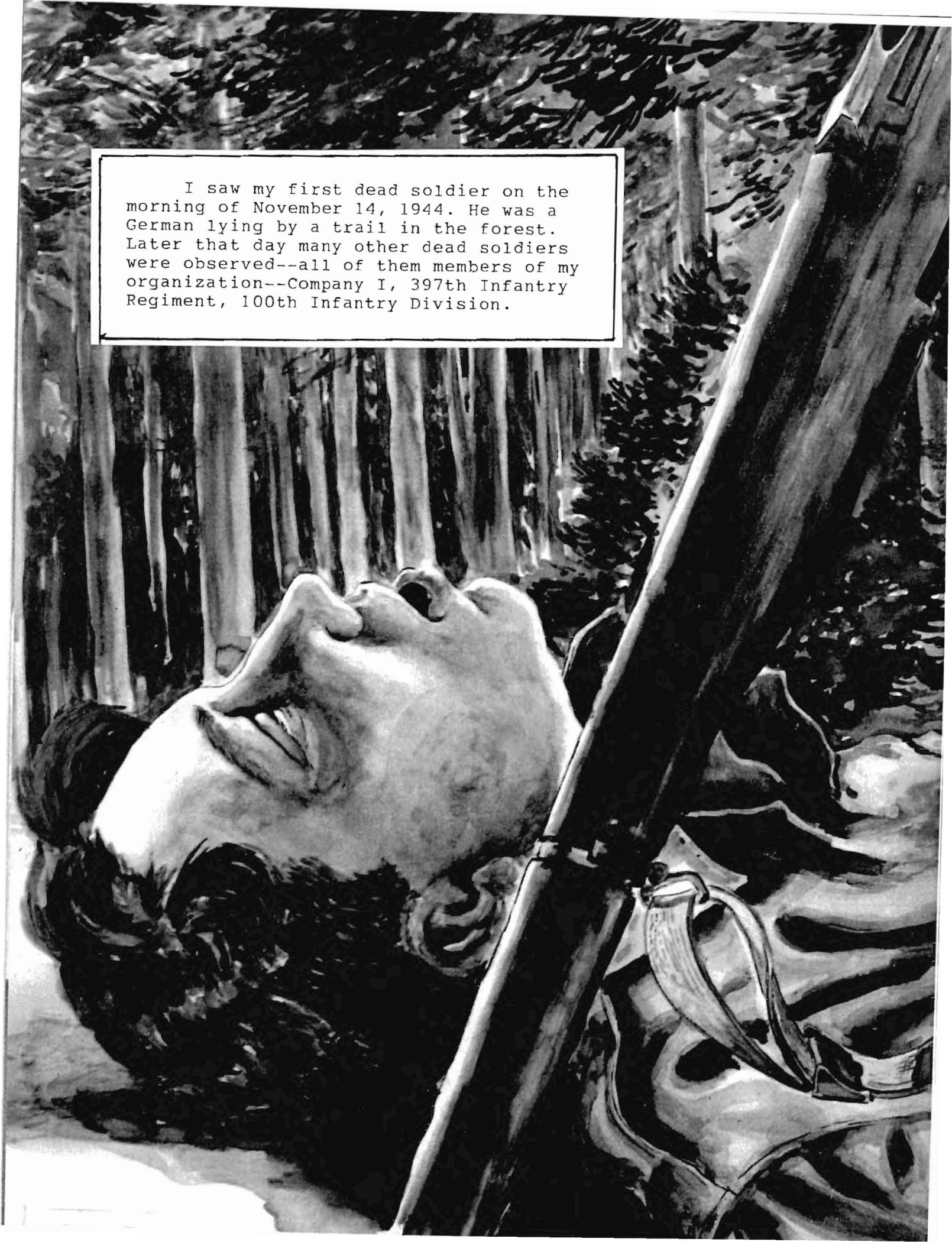
The other material is from Regimental and Division histories published in Germany before we returned to the States for discharge. Except, of course, the personal photos shown on the front and rear covers and at Page 82.

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I saw my first dead soldier on the morning of November 14, 1944. He was a German lying by a trail in the forest. Later that day many other dead soldiers were observed--all of them members of my organization--Company I, 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division.



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THE FIRST DAY

After the War was over our Division spent almost nine months in Germany before returning to the States. During this period our Regimental and Divisional "history" books were put together and published. One of the pen and ink drawings prepared for publication that I remember best showed a dead German soldier, as if in repose, on a forested hillside in the snow. What was not shown in the drawing was that his shirt and jacket had been opened and there was a morphine syringe in his chest. Apparently his comrades had provided this painkiller as they continued their retreat.

I know about the open shirt and jacket and syringe because the dead soldier involved was just a few feet off our path of march. The artist was a member of our infantry company and, apparently struck by the drama of the scene, recreated it in his drawing several months later.

The date was November 14, 1944 and this was my first look at a dead soldier. In the weeks that followed I remembered him in his stillness and realized how nice it is to have friends who care.

And we walked on by in our spread out formation. We were in the deep forest of the Vosges Mountains. Northern France. The real war would start for me and all of Company I in just a couple of hours.

The first incoming shell that Company I experienced was a tree burst directly over our machine gun section. One of our comrades was killed and two others wounded including our section sergeant. All I knew was I had to piss so bad I could hardly stand it. No more shells came in and, after relieving myself several times, I calmed down somewhat. I remember saying to my pal Norman Nisick--"Norman, you and I are not going to live! Christ, I heard about war being Hell and all that crap; but I really didn't think they were going to kill us this soon!"

Norman's reply was brief. "Hey, Paul, let's go." When

the Company slowly started forward, I grabbed the machine gun; Norman picked up the tripod. Due to that shell burst, both of us had received promotions--I was now First Gunner and Norman was Second Gunner. Of course, no one actually had to "announce" these changes--we were simply putting into practice the training we had received in the States. You simply moved in and took the other guy's place. I looked back once at my companions lying motionless in the snow.

So began our six-months of combat. Later, on this first day, we experienced absolute disaster! While still in march formation, we were suddenly hit by vicious German gunfire--I mean they threw everything at us--mortars, artillery, machine gun and rifle fire. Since, we were in a pine forest, the tree bursts were devastating! And the Germans had hit us so hard and so unexpectedly that the entire Company was in a state of confusion if not outright panic. Not from fear necessarily, but from disorganization. No orders to attack; to retreat; or to stay in place were being given. And we were getting the shit kicked out of us!

After what seemed to be an eternity (and it had been for many), the order was passed along to withdraw. The forest was deadly quiet--"deadly" is certainly the right word--as we cautiously started to leave. Of course, during the shelling, each of us had tried to find some sort of cover--a tree, a stump, a log, anything that would give one some comfort if not actual protection--and each of us could see several of our companions in similar prone or crouched positions. But when the order came to leave, many of our friends simply did not rise. And never would.

To add to our miseries it started to rain. But despite all our problems, we were alive! Nisick and I dug a foxhole/shelter. And we mounted the machine gun in front of the hole--for what, or why, I don't think we really knew. Nor cared. We certainly had no intention of firing the damned thing. In any event, I was absolutely miserable; chilled to the bone and was measuring my expected remaining

life span in terms of days or perhaps hours. And the fear was nearly overwhelming. Beyond any doubt this had to be the worst day of my life.

Then the night started. Now we can have some real physical pain. Mostly, because I had two hand grenades in each of my rain-coat pockets and every time I moved from one side to the other the grenades bruised deeper into my hip joints. Plus that, my back was killing me from carrying around that damned machine gun most of the day. And from time to time I worried about how secure were the pins in the grenades. As the night wore on, it became very clear to me that a test was certainly being made of the limits of my physical--and, more importantly, my mental endurance. The outcome of these tests was not at all certain. I knew I was very close to failure.

If the Germans had ventured into our area that night, they might have found a lot of willing prisoners. The conversation might have been as follows:

German: "Well, how about it?"

Reply: "I surrender! How's the food in the POW camp?"

German: "Terrible".

Reply: "That's OK --I surrender anyhow".

Or maybe that was just a nightmare caused by sleeping on grenades!

Many thoughts and reflections remained long after that First Day ended.

** We went into that first day short at least one officer in the Company. At the end of the day only one remained. And this shortage remained until the end of the war. Like most infantry companies we were never to have a full officer compliment. However, the one officer that remained at the end of that first day was a remarkable individual and an extremely courageous soldier. Ulysses J. Grant became a Captain and remained our Company Commander throughout the war.

** One of the guys I noticed on that day as being killed

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was a beer drinking Pollack who had been reassigned to our organization from the Coastal Artillery. Because he was only a couple of people ahead of me in the monthly pay line formation I heard the pay officer review his pay status--family allotment amount, War Bond deduction and particularly the amount of life insurance coverage. Frank must have been the only soldier in the outfit to have only \$5,000 in coverage rather than the \$10,000 maximum amount which was standard with all WW II GI's. I would stand there patiently in line with the others and listen while the officer would explain to Frank for the zillionth time why he should increase his coverage. Added pressure was applied as we prepared to embark for Europe. But, despite pleas and threats, Frank would not change his policy value. As I passed him that day I thought to myself, "Frank, you should have taken the higher amount."

** One of the first friends I saw early the next morning was my pal Albert T Klett--all six foot four of him, looking rather sad and forlorn. Not surprising, I felt, in view of what had happened the previous day. But the reason for his dim view of the world that morning differed from what I would have guessed.

There had been days and days of gambling on the troopship en route to France. Because everyone but the big winners was soon out of money, most of us played on credit--little hand-written chits showing the amount of the debt. In this manner, a guy might be essentially even, in total, yet have debts of a couple of hundred dollars. Albert T explained his frustration. He said "Paul, I have been checking around and while you may find this hard to believe--It's true--everyone that owed me money is gone; and every single person that I owe is still here! Including you!"

I was certainly happy to have been on the owing side. "And by the way," I said "with the effective protection program you are running, don't attempt to make any payment to me in the near future!"

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Albert T and I were still pals the next April when we closed the War down. And, quite likely, he still owed me money!

** We recovered slowly from the severe punishment we took on that first day. It wasn't just the loss of our friends and comrades either. What I lost that day was a lot of my confidence. We lost confidence also in some of our Company officers--but even more in the higher level "Brass." We wondered what the hell had happened. How did an entire Infantry company walk into an ambush of this magnitude. Someone had to have really screwed up! And, there had been a monumental mistake due to a simple error. Or, a simple mistake with monumental and tragic results. Take your choice.

By the time we got the full story, it really didn't matter much anymore. The dead were dead. The wounded carried away. And we had moved on.

The explanation was deadly simple. Two hills in the same immediate vicinity had identical map designations. (Let's use Hill 909 to illustrate). Thus it was reported that Hill 909 was clear of enemy forces. (The label "Hill 909" was simply a map marking which was used to indicate an otherwise indistinguishable part of the forest that happened to be 909 meters above sea level.) Almost unbelievably, another nearly adjacent forested hill was also 909 meters above sea level and therefore also carried the Hill 909 designation. But this one was occupied by the Germans. Company I had been ordered to occupy a Hill 909. But on the Hill 909 we went to the Germans were awaiting our arrival. And they most certainly gave us a deadly greeting!

Of course, the above explanation was what I "heard" was the cause of our near massacre on that disastrous November day. No one ever showed me a map and said "Paul, let me show you how this happened." About the best confirmation I ever had was the fact that the Colonel who commanded our Regiment was also killed from ambush while

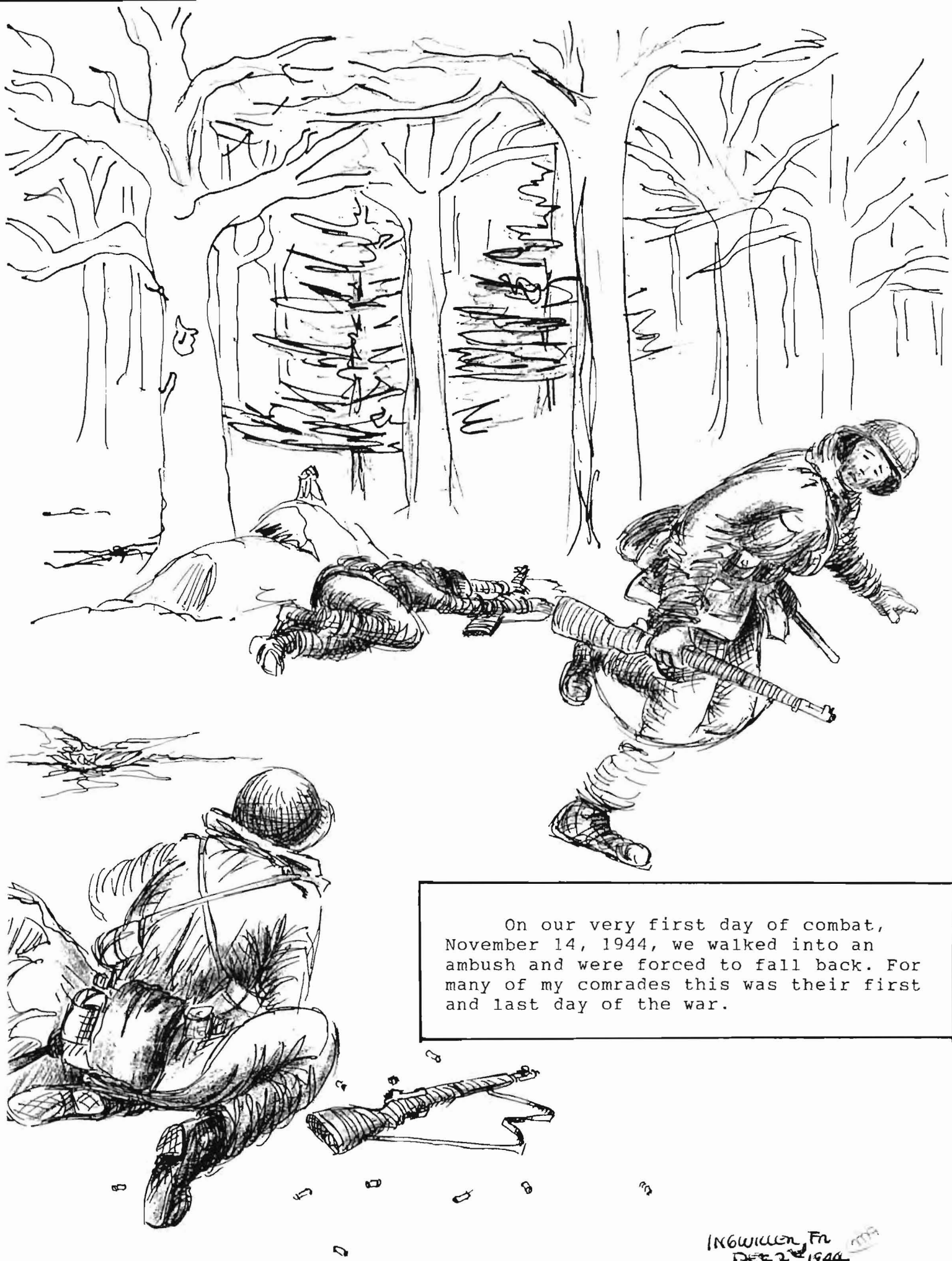
casually motoring along with his Jeep driver. His destination? Hill 909, unfortunately for him.

** Over a long period of time, I have often reflected on the events and feelings of that First Day. I have wondered about how the German soldiers felt as they saw us advancing in such well disciplined order. With clean clothes and recently shaven faces. So spic and span and neat and orderly that we might as well have had a sign out in front of our formation reading "We are new troops--fresh from the United States. We are here to defeat the German Army!" But the Germans would have thought, "Not today Amis!" And there would be a lot of wet palms and sweat running from armpits as they waited for us to come closer and closer as the order to "Commence Fire!" became imminent. And exhilaration when the order was finally given!!

But fear on the part of the German soldiers also. They were going to lose the war (and perhaps their lives). Not today. But they were losing. However, today they might achieve a victory. A little something to make up for the loss of the comrade that they had had to leave on a hillside with only a morphine syringe for comfort. But tomorrow?

** As for me, I never again experienced the depth of fear that I barely controlled on that First Day. Fear was a terrible, deadly viral infection and inoculation was only possible through the ingestion of nearly fatal quantities of the raw virus. I had taken my vaccine in a huge single dose.

My treatment had begun when November 14, 1944 ended!



On our very first day of combat,
November 14, 1944, we walked into an
ambush and were forced to fall back. For
many of my comrades this was their first
and last day of the war.

INGWILLEN, FR
Dec 2nd 1944

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NIGHT MOVE TO ST. BLAISE

It had been raining for the last three days. Not hard, but steady. Occasionally, a few large snow flakes were mixed in. We were now entering the Vosges Mountains and we could tell that winter would be with us shortly. However, as yet, we were not too cold--just wet and miserable.

Truly, the only remaining really dry place was your crotch. So, if you wanted a cigarette you opened your raincoat and field jacket and dried your hand between your legs before lighting up. Almost too much trouble.

When I first saw the edge of the forest it was still nearly a half mile away. Members of the rifle platoons had already progressed a couple hundred yards across the open field. None of us liked the looks of this. There was absolutely no cover until we reached the woods. Company I kept moving forward and the enemy guns were strangely silent. No mortars, no artillery.

Not even small arms fire greeted us as we entered the edge of the forest. No firing occurred for the very simple reason that the Wehrmacht was no where to be found. But that was not what they had planned--the Jerries had certainly intended to be here when we arrived and to give us a warm welcome.

Upon entering the edge of the forest it was immediately apparent that the Germans had yet to occupy these positions. Quite likely this was to be their main line of resistance for the Winter. Their preparations were elaborate. Construction had been completed on a series of trenches and bunkers (by "slave" labor battalions we were later told). The trenches reminded one of those shown in World War I photos except these followed the land contours. The sides had been neatly interlaced with tree branches to prevent collapse. The bunkers had been constructed to withstand very heavy shelling.

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Truly, it would have taken many days and perhaps weeks for us to dig the Jerries out had these fortifications been adequately manned and had appropriate artillery support been available. I hate to think of the casualties which we would have suffered. But they weren't there and we were. As I recall, a Civil War general advised that to win you need to be there "... fustest, with the mostest." And on this day we were certainly "fustest." And, by default, the "mostest."

But now what to do? We continued cross country for some time. Up one very steep forested slope, then down the other side. Up and down. I was carrying the machine gun and near midafternoon it seemed like it weighed 200 pounds. We were all close to exhaustion because of the extremely difficult terrain combined with the weight of the gun and ammo.

At dusk we came out of the forest onto a mountain highway. A rather narrow road, but it was paved. And it had stopped raining. We broke out some K-rations and relaxed sitting on the ammo boxes. Up ahead, the four platoon leaders of Company I conferred with our Commanding Officer. And, for the first time in quite awhile we had an officer, Lt. Stevens, leading our platoon.

This officer was a nice guy. We became good friends during his stay with Company I (and, for that matter, after the war). But he really had no business being an officer in a rifle company. Lieutenant Stevens had neither the training nor the temperament for this assignment. We called him "Shaky" in private. But not in derision, but more as a token of affection. We liked him in spite of his extreme sensitivity to the sound of artillery and mortar fire. A shell landing anywhere near us caused Shaky to hit the ground. And flat on the ground as if he wanted to disappear into the earth. When this would happen we would avert our eyes so as to not be staring at him when he got back into an upright position.

Shaky Stevens had graduated from University of Arkansas in 1936 and had received a commission as a second lieutenant

through his participation in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. Commissioned in the field artillery, he faithfully attended summer camp each year and he was a first lieutenant when he was called up in 1940. Shaky was first sent to Alaska but after three years he was redeployed to England.

Then came the crowning blow. Still a first lieutenant, this artillery officer was declared "surplus" to his organization and assigned to the infantry. Then, with only four weeks of tactics training, he was sent out as a replacement officer and ended up as platoon leader for the 4th Platoon, Company I, 397th Infantry. I don't think a day went by that Shaky didn't bitch about his frustrated career.

The Lieutenant and I often talked about the war. Nearly everyday he would say to me, "Mosher, I don't see how this war can last another week." My reply was equally consistent. I would tell him that while I was confident of our ultimate victory, the war would not likely end next week.

The conference broke up and now we would get our next mission. And, even though winter's early darkness was setting in, our orders were very simple--"Keep Moving!!" OK with us, for now we were on a paved road and it hadn't rained for several hours. We were in high spirits and we moved out confidently.

Now, Lt. Stevens was going down a road in France in the dark of night with a bunch of 19-21 year olds. No one seemed to know where to--certainly not me. But two things were clear--we hadn't found any Germans and all of us were near exhaustion.

Then, during a five-minute rest break, we found a cart, a simple two wheeler with no sides and a long handle for pulling. This farm cart was a life saver. I could not have carried that machine gun much farther. We had already been underway for more than 12 hours and, although we didn't know it then, we still had several hours of marching ahead of us. We loaded the cart with the two machine guns and the twelve

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or so boxes of ammo. A heavy load certainly but we had a strong cart. We were now getting our second wind.

Then a small disaster. The mortarmen who were walking to our immediate rear found out about our transport device. Now these guys were carrying about the same weight as we had been lugging around--40 to 60 pounds each-- and some of them added their mortars and shells to our already heavy load. No, the cart didn't break; but when we rounded a particularly steep curve, the load slipped and spilled out onto the pavement. The clatter of the ammo boxes and the guns was accented by the quiet of the surrounding forest. It was loud--really loud. Then silence again. I looked at the edge of the road--there was Shaky spread eagle on the pavement, avoiding the shrapnel of the non-existent shell burst.

Nothing was said. The Lieutenant got up slowly and made no comment. I thought to myself that here is really a courageous officer. His hitting the ground was something he could not control. Yet, he was sticking with his infantry assignment. To me, that really took guts and I was determined to continue to help Lieutenant Stevens survive this demon. And he did! The cart was quickly reloaded and we continued on. We were making a significant penetration into German held territory. This knowledge was certainly a factor in keeping us going. It was exciting! We were a single infantry company--way out ahead of the rest of the U S forces. We were making a notable contribution to victory and we knew it!

Except for infrequent 5 or 10 minute breaks, we continued to press on. The night became a blur. I recall seeing a burning farm dwelling. And in the light of that fire, I saw a dead GI by the roadside. New uniform. Not from our Company certainly; we all had dirty uniforms by now. Beside him was a bicycle. We hurried on. A dead GI? A bicycle? Didn't make any sense. But the memory remained.

Now it was late. Someone with a luminous dial watch (GI

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issue) advised it was nearing midnight. We had now been in pursuit of the enemy for nearly 18 hours. We had walked almost 20 miles since dark. Cart or no cart, we couldn't continue much farther.

We arrived in St. Blaise shortly after midnight and secured the town. This was easy--no German soldiers, just civilians. We were all dead tired. I don't recall even posting guards that night. Some 10 or so of us were in a building near the center of this village of only 30 or 40 homes. There was just one road in the town. We were asleep in minutes. Not so, however, with other members of Company I who were on the edge of town. Their sleep was continually interrupted. Retreating Germans kept arriving the rest of the night--not knowing that their line of escape had been cutoff. These arrivals, many in staff cars, were mostly rear echelon soldiers, often unarmed and certainly not in the mood to put up a struggle. After the initial surprise, they trudged off meekly to our hastily devised POW area. Some 150 surrendered that night.

But there was no time to celebrate. In our night march we had crossed into another division's sector. A unit from the 45th Division moved through our positions the next morning to continue the chase of the Jerries.

Shortly after lunch, we loaded into trucks for transfer to a new location. We had certainly done a good job on our night move to St. Blaise. There is nothing that beats the thrill of winning. But this current elation would be hard pressed to survive the cold and difficult days ahead.

Most of those in Company I who went to St. Blaise that night would not be with us when we again experienced the elation of victory that next Spring.

As we left St. Blaise it had again started to rain. And, again, the rain was mixed with large snow flakes.

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MOVE BACK FROM RIMLING

In war, timing is everything! When you consider it, a series of remarkable coincidences must occur for an individual soldier to become a casualty. Or not to be one, for that matter.

Early in January of 1945 the positioning of our organization appeared rather precarious to me. To go through the litany: The 397th Infantry Regiment was on the left flank of the Division; The 3rd Battalion was on the left flank of the Regiment; and Company I was on the left flank of the Battalion. Finally, my machine gun was positioned on the left flank of Company I. And from this position the forces of the adjoining division could be spotted--perhaps a 100 or so yards away.

These were the days of the Bulge. The last gasp attack by the Germans to forestall the relentless Allied assault. An attack which would not prevent the defeat of Germany, but, if successful in causing a major retreat or withdrawal by U S and British forces it might lead to a negotiated peace, in contrast to the announced terms of "unconditional surrender."

In order to blunt the German attack it was necessary to stop the German advance through the Ardennes. You may recall from the movie Patton the scene in which Scott announces dramatically that he would promptly move his forces into the battle area. Patton's tank and infantry divisions of the Third Army departed to the west--toward the English Channel. To fill the gap left by these departing forces it was necessary for the Seventh Army, which included the 100th Division, to spread out and fill in the empty spaces. And were we spread thin! Wise (and successful) generals normally favor having about a third of their forces back from the Line in reserve to provide mobility for both offensive and defensive moves. During those critical days of

Fighting in the Vosges Mountains in north-eastern France, we faced two tenacious enemies each day--the weather and the German Army. Neither gave in easily. It was a constant struggle to keep warm. And even more of a struggle to keep alive during frequent enemy shellings. The tree bursts were deadly.

The scene below is pretty typical. Narrow unpaved roads, tall snow-covered pines which blocked the sun. You were in continual gloom.



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early January, 1945, the 100th Division had its three infantry regiments on the battle line. Our unit, the 397th Infantry, was covering a front line nearly as long as would be more appropriately assigned to an entire division.

Of course, none of the above information as to troop placement was available to a Company I machine gun sergeant. These placements and strategies were not known in any sort of detail until the war was over and the various histories and memoirs were published. My contemporaneous view and knowledge of the war was limited to what I could see and, of course, the ever present rumors and scuttlebutt.

We did know that the Germans were very active in our sector. On New Year's Eve they had mounted a very serious attack against our positions in Rimling. Being on the outskirts of the village, the machine gun position and our section of hedgerow was not directly attacked. But the fighting in Rimling was ferocious. A measure of the intensity of the fighting can be judged by the fact that both a Congressional Medal of Honor and a Distinguished Service Cross were awarded for actions in the defense of the village. And while our casualties were rather light, the German casualties were significant. (John Sheets, one of our Company I members, confided to me many years later, that he personally accounted for 10 or 15 of these casualties.)

Around January 10 there was increased enemy activity in the Company I sector. While there was no noticeable daytime movement by the enemy to our direct front, the night time sounds were ominous. Engine motor noises were increasingly evident. The Germans were up to something.

And there was action on our side of the line also. For some time we had had the support of a tank detachment. Three tanks usually visible to us at our immediate rear. A couple of days before January 10, the Tankers had fired up their engines and had departed for the rear. "To refuel and get more ammo" we were told. But they hadn't gone anywhere to use fuel and they had never fired a single shot. The tanks did not return.

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I never cared for Rimling. I did not like the confinement of that cold and snowy hedgerow. And there were other reasons. For example. I had gone into the village of Rimling to pick up mail for the ten or so of us in the hedgerow. On my return journey, I was walking along the edge of an orchard when I remembered a forgotten errand. I turned and had walked about 10 paces when there was a shell burst to my immediate rear. I turned and looked at the pattern in the snow. It had hit at the exact place I would have been had I not reversed my direction. The conclusion was painfully clear--I had been the intended victim of sniper attack--and the German bastard was using an 88!

Now the dilemma. I was almost exactly half way to the relative safety of my hedgerow or the shelter of the village. Perhaps 150 yards either way. And some damn Kraut, very much unseen, had my range and by now had another shell in the 88 ready to fire. As the phrase goes, "I could run but I certainly could not hide." I elected to return to the hedgerow and no additional artillery was fired until I had almost reached the point where some other members of Company I were dug in. Hearing the approach of another shell, I ran hard and dived in on top of a couple of friends. Three shells landed very close but without damage or injury. The comment was brief and to the point, "Mosher, goddamnit, would you quit wandering around and attracting fire to our location!"

Next morning, at first light, I looked for the American forces which were to our immediate left. Or had been yesterday. Apparently they had pulled out during the night. I alerted Moon (Joe Schonarth, my platoon sergeant) of this change on our left flank. Moon walked out even further than I had gone, and finding no one, advised headquarters. We were told not to worry about the exposed flank in that this withdrawal was only temporary and part of a general troop rearrangement in this sector. None of us believed this Bullshit but really didn't care after we heard the news that

we were being relieved. And right now! Orders were to pack up and be ready to depart that evening.

Soon after sunset, the first soldiers from the organization which was to take over our positions made their appearance. They were new to France and although this particular unit had been at or near the front for almost a month they had not, as yet, gone head to head with the Germans. Their uniforms were noticeably clean. And, there were a lot of them. Relative to our numbers, at least. (Each infantry company is staffed to support two machine gun squads. Company I had only enough manpower to support a single gun.)

The changeover briefing was quick. Their sergeant noted right away that he would need a place to mount a second gun and would need to squeeze 6 or 8 more GI's into our limited area. He asked about my field of fire. Also, how far out in front was the enemy; what was the estimated strength of the opposing forces? Then he inquired about our flanks. I told him that there were Company I riflemen some 50 yards to the right and assumed that personnel from his organization would occupy these same positions. With respect to the left flank, I told it to him straight. I explained that the organization which had previously been there had "departed" the night before but I had been informed that they were expected to return. The sergeant considered this last remark carefully, but did not ask as to whether this expectation was realistic. I don't think he wanted to hear my opinion.

The balance of the relieving troops arrived and my machine gun squad joined the rest of Company I and formed up along a snow-packed road. We had a march of 5 or 6 miles ahead of us to reach the village where we were to spend the night. Bright, bright stars. Cold as hell, but since there was little wind, it wasn't noticed. What a pleasure to be out of Rimling and away from that hedgerow!

Walking down the moonlit road that night, I felt a sense of freedom. For the first time since we entered the

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Vosges Mountains in October, 1944, I could detect a small ray of hope. Or maybe some of my natural self-confidence was returning. Was it just possible that I could outlast this conflict? More and more troops were arriving as evidenced by the new people who had replaced us in the Line this evening. To date, it had seemed that each week there were fewer and fewer of us to continue the attack. It was just logical as hell that one day I would not be present when the remaining few were counted. But tonight I was alive! And the further we got from Rimling the more my spirits improved.

After we had walked a couple of miles, we heard the sound of small arms fire. Mostly German. We recognized the distinctive sound of rapid fire from their Burp guns. The noise was coming from the direction of Rimling. I'm sure that more than one of us reflected on the fact that our departure from that village was very timely.

Truly it was, as I determined some months later in at a side walk cafe in Paris. When I saw this G I with the shoulder patch of the division that relieved us at Rimling, I asked him if the name "Rimling" meant anything to him. It certainly did and he was able to give me the specifics of what happened the night we departed. Apparently, our relieving troops were not even completely organized for the night when the sound of vehicles was heard to their left flank. This was the area vacated while we were still there. About 15 minutes later when they looked to the rear they saw several vehicles approaching accompanied by German infantry. It was over in minutes. The Germans fired; the U S soldiers surrendered. My informant thought that although no one was killed or wounded no one escaped except himself and a friend. The rest were all taken prisoner.

Meantime, we were still headed away from the front. And many of our guys were limping --some rather badly. Trench Foot, which causes the feet to swell and is very painful, had hit almost all of us due to long exposure to the wet and cold weather. And those of us in the weapons section had the

added burden of carrying a heavy load of machine guns, mortars and related ammunition on these bad feet. It was hard going after 3 or 4 miles. Since, our two Company Jeep drivers were aware of this possibility, they started a shuttle service for the "lame and halt." They drove by, turned around and approached from the rear. This is where the weapons people were marching. I simply loaded these guys in the trailers together with their weapons and ammo. After three passes with the Jeep and trailer, I was walking alone at the rear of the column. A Company officer inquired rather gruffly, "Mosher where in the hell is the rest of the platoon?" I told him I had sent them ahead in the Jeeps. "Sergeant" he said, "you know goddamn well the Jeeps were just for guys with bad feet. Don't tell me all the guys back here had Trench Foot that badly." I lied, "yes sir, they could hardly walk." Conversation over. The officer looked at me incredulously, shook his head, and walked quickly towards the head of the column.

I continued to bring up the rear for the remaining couple of miles. Slept like a new born that night--only two other guys in the bed! No guard duty to interrupt my peaceful dreams. We were finally out of Rimling.

The next day we found out that the small arms fire we had heard the night before was at Rimling. Many of the soldiers who had relived us the night before were casualties.

In war, timing is everything! When you consider it, a series of remarkable coincidences must occur for an individual soldier to become a casualty. Or not to be one, for that matter.

SKETCHES OF WW II

WINTER

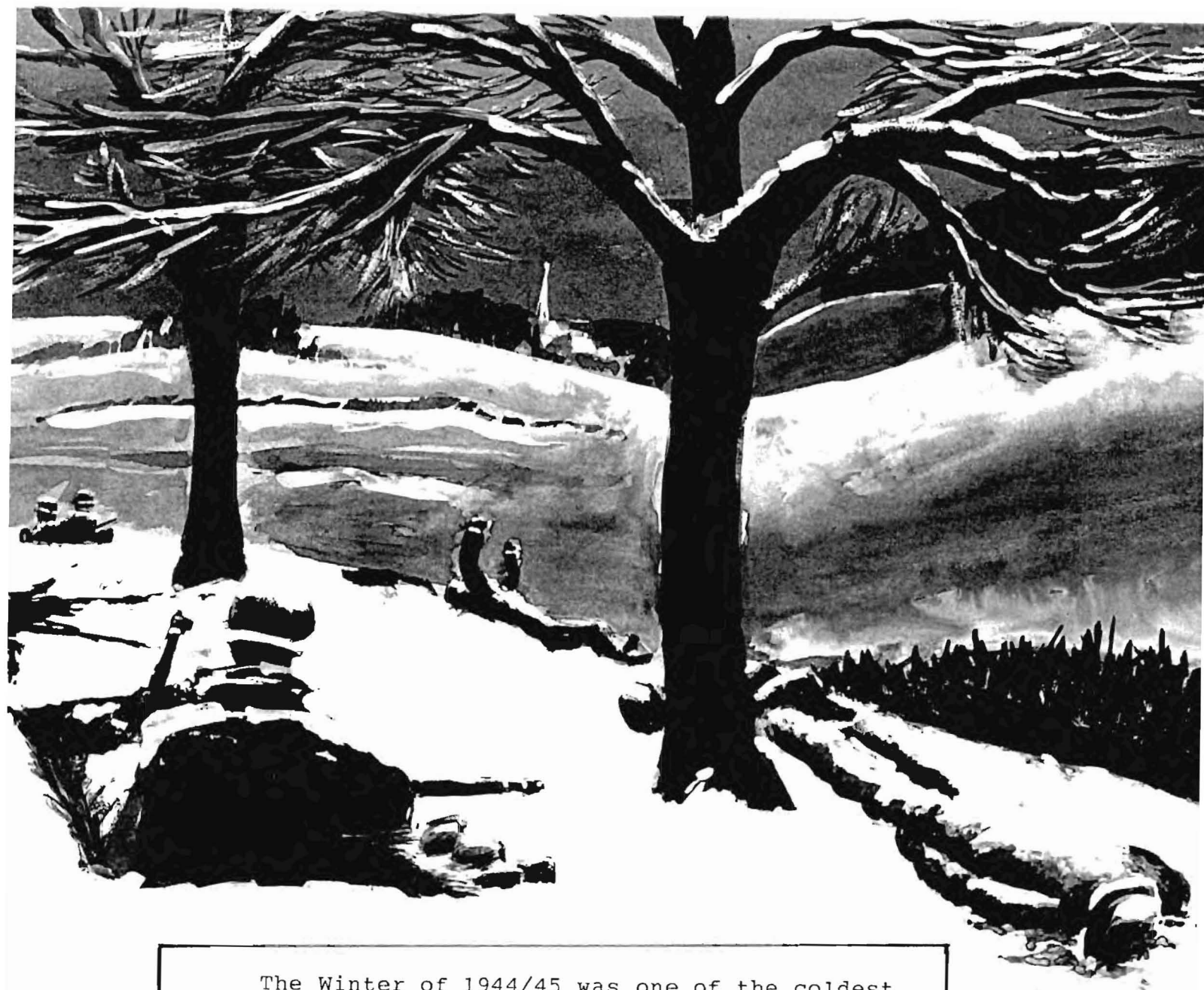
Phosphorous Shelling

The day after we departed from Rimling we were told very early in the morning to prepare to return to the Line. Many of us didn't even have time to shave nor write a letter to a loved one. We were also told our former positions were now in the hands of the Jerries. Sounded like real trouble ahead! However, when we departed about noon it was announced that we were not going to attempt to retake the village of Rimling--not for a while at least.

Our mission was to form a "secondary line of resistance" about a mile back from the front line. The idea was that if the Germans mounted a serious attack they would break through most likely, but then they would run into us. Remember, since the Bulge our forces in eastern France were spread very thin during those days of January, 1945. But, fortunately, so were the Germans to our immediate front. Gerd von Rundsted, the brilliant German general, had gathered up all his better units from our sector to use in his last gasp attack through the Ardennes. Thus, we almost had a standoff with respect to the remaining forces. Both sides were too weak to attack and too weak to defend.

Part of this "weakness" or inability to fight was directly attributable to the severe weather we were experiencing. We were cold to the bone--hour after hour and day after day. Being cold actually replaced the thought of being killed or wounded during those frigid days.

Our stay in the secondary line lasted only a couple of days. But there was one spectacular event which I observed. From our machine gun position we could look north for almost a mile. Apparently our troops had requested fire support. An attack? Whatever the reason, our artillery was joined by support from the 4.2 mortars operated by the Division's Chemical Warfare organization. Originally formed to deliver poison gas in the event the enemy choose to use this weapon,



The Winter of 1944/45 was one of the coldest on record for the Alsace region of northeastern France and the snowfall was above normal. The snow, the bitter cold, the frozen ground made our lives miserable day after day. It was often difficult to believe you could survive the war.

Especially, when you were at a lonely outpost late at night surrounded by barren trees and silence.

the Army used these large size mortars to make a very effective weapon using non-gas projectiles. This night the Chemical outfit was firing phosphorous shells. The effect was dazzling since when the projectile landed and exploded the phosphorous contained in the shell would be thrown in the air and a white smoke plume would trace the path of the burning material against a blanket of deep snow. To add to the overall drama, parachute flares were also being used to illuminate the entire scene. Ever since, a terrific fireworks display reminds me of the beauty of that night.

Beautiful, from my viewpoint, of course. I would imagine that if you were on the receiving end of a phosphorus shelling it would be anything but beautiful. "Horrible," might be a more appropriate description, particularly if you were hit. At least that was certainly the purpose of the weapon--to create a very painful injury that required a long time to heal. And it was most effective, in theory at least, against an enemy in open terrain. With a conventional shell of that time, the shell exploded upon impact and most of the deadly shrapnel went harmlessly into the air. Most of the conventional stuff could be avoided if you hit the ground fast enough. And practically no harm would be done to those that could find a depression or a friendly wall to hide behind. With phosphorous, the rules changed. The harm was done when the ignited material came down, burned through clothing and deeply into your flesh. In the open, getting in a prone position was obviously of no help. Only a solid overhead cover could provide protection.

The pyrotechnic display lasted most of an hour. Then silence. Then darkness. Then the bitter cold. Then boredom.

Welcome to the war of stalemate. On the home front, President Roosevelt was proclaiming, "There will be no Winter line. Our forces will drive deeper into the heart of the enemy." And certainly the Russians were. But we were headed for the "Sheep Farm" and inaction.

We would not be on the attack until mid-March.
Winter

Mittens

When I was four years old I lost an encounter with the family hand-propelled lawn mower. Or, stated more accurately, the finger next to my right hand's index finger was the loser. Just at the end of the nail. Cut off clean, in the days before the technique of sewing them back on had been perfected, it was lost for good. Not exactly a fatal handicap but often, during the winter, when I was a kid out sledding or ice skating it would give me trouble. If I hit the stub on something the pain would be very severe for a short period of time--just like a solid blow to the solar plexus. I would actually feel nausea.

The cold damp weather in the Vosges Mountains really zeroed in on my severed digit. First of all, the gloves supplied by the Army were unsuitable. They probably looked good on garrison soldiers at inspection. Made of wool, they had a leather palm and short cuffs. Wrists were always cold and fingers nearly frozen. The second problem was the fact that any adjustment or servicing of the machine gun could not be performed with gloves on. And, with gloves off your hands quickly became unusable in the extreme cold. Nearly every time I removed my gloves I managed to bang my cut off finger on something and then grit my teeth to keep from throwing up.

About the middle of our most severe weather, I received a package from home. Great news! Now I could enjoy a handful of cookie crumbs with my instant coffee made from genuine Alsace snow. Few cookies ever survived the long journey from the States to a front line soldier. During the five-week trip the packages were handled and rehandled. Poked, squeezed and crushed. Quite often we could empty the contents by simply making a small hole in the side of the box and draining the crumbs into our hand! If a whole cookie arrived, special care was in order because it was most likely hard as rock. Soaking recommended before biting down!

But, surprise! Upon opening the package, there among



Shown in this drawing are soldiers of the 398th Infantry ready to go on the attack. I witnessed this futile effort from my vantage point on the Maginot Line.

AP. 1/2/45

398th REG. WAITING TO GO INTO THE ATTACK. RIMLING, FRANCE Jan '45

the cookie crumbs was a pair of mittens. Not just any mittens, either. These were special. They had a fleece lining and a drawstring at the wrist to keep out the snow. And, the most important feature--there was a trigger finger! This meant I could use these mittens at all times, whereas normal mittens would have been useless since you could not fire a machine gun without your finger on the trigger.

I have no idea what inspired my Mother to make the mitten purchase. (Although, it would be my guess that she received her inspiration from an Ernie Pyle column--all mothers with sons in the Infantry read Ernie!) I only know that I used these mittens every day for the next several weeks until the weather moderated.

I can honestly say the addition of the mittens enabled me to survive that bitter cold Winter of 1944-45. Not well, but survive I did!!

The Attack

My machine gun was located about 50 yards in front of a large concrete bunker that had been a part of the Maginot Line. We had an excellent field of fire and we could look out over open fields to our enemy's position to our north. We were in a secondary line of defense with the main line of resistance about a mile away. Every thing was quiet and had been so for several days.

It had been snowing off and on for most of the week. Colder than Hell! We were at about our low point as far as manpower was concerned--Probably less than half of us who had entered combat just two months ago were available for duty. Only one officer remained of the original six--Captain Ulysses J Grant, who became Company commander the first day of combat. (And would remain so until the last shot was fired the next April).

About mid-morning we were advised that a large force from one of our Division's other infantry regiments would be

launching an attack through our positions. The warning advised to expect heavy friendly artillery fire.

I was in our foxhole with the gun when the first of the attacking troops appeared. What a spectacle! I hadn't seen so many soldiers at one time since we arrived in France. This was a full frontal assault by upwards of 1000 men. And being spaced in the approved infantry fashion there seemed to be many more than that. Shortly after the lead elements of the attackers had passed my machine gun position our supporting artillery started hitting the Jerries. The attack objective was most likely the small town located beyond a small wooded area.

As noted above, from my position I could clearly see the entire field of action. It was almost unreal, like being at the movies and watching the British troops in attack in India. Of course, our troops were not in neat rows but they were very exposed as they crossed the frozen, snow-covered pastures with not even a small bush for cover. But perhaps cover would not be necessary. Our artillery was steadily pounding the German positions. Smoke from our shells nearly obscured the village. Our infantry forces continued to move forward without incident.

Finally the last of our troops passed my gun position. The most advanced people were nearing the grove of trees in front of the village. Then it happened! The German guns came to life. The noise was deafening!

It was devastating. Everything the Germans had available began firing--mortars, artillery, machine guns and small arms fire. The attack came to a dead stop. And, even from my position fairly deep to the rear, it was risky to watch. Sticking your head and body up from the foxhole was dangerous due to the intensity of the enemy fire which continued at a high level for perhaps 15 minutes.

Then there was a pause by the German guns. While the initial shelling had simply blanketed the area, the Jerries were now selecting targets of opportunity. Any noticeable

movement by the attackers was promptly greeted by a well placed round in their midst.

Our artillery was quiet. Gradually, the German firing slowed down. Then silence. No noticeable movement by our soldiers in the open fields and no firing by the Germans. Soon, some of the attacking forces began to straggle by along the country highway which was to the left of my gun. They had apparently begun their retreat during the heavy shelling and were thoroughly disorganized. Many had discarded their weapons, the sign of utter defeat in any army.

I moved over near the highway to observe. I intercepted one soldier as he ran full steam down the highway. He still had a bandolier of M-1 rifle ammunition around his neck but his rifle had apparently been left on the battlefield. Likewise, his steel helmet had been discarded.

This soldier was in total shock. His breath came in rasping gasps. His eyes were glazed. Even though I had stopped his forward progress, his legs were still churning as he attempted to flee the demons he had encountered during that artillery barrage. I yelled at the soldier while holding him, trying to get his attention but to no avail. Someone tried to help me restrain him. It was not possible. The crazed soldier lurched forward, broke loose and continued to run to his perceived sanctuary.

I always wondered if he found a place or someone to give him comfort that day. Or, did he simply run until his heart burst along that cold snow covered-road.

The official history of the 100th Division recites numerous instances where our troops "... successfully assaulted defended positions...overpowered the enemy... broke German resistance..." However, on this day our soldiers never had a chance for victory. And I have been unable to find any reference to the attack which I observed. The words and phrases such as "ill-conceived", "disasterous", "stupid beyond belief" and "total defeat"

were never used in recounting our efforts. They would have had to have been to describe the attack which I witnessed.

Avila

I met Avila shortly after he joined Company I in December, 1944. We were in our Winter Line (The line President Roosevelt said there would be none of) and our manpower was at our worst ever level. Company I could only staff one machine gun. I was acting as Sergeant. Casualties had been very heavy--Wladecki had been wounded in the back, Lester had a hole in his leg. Paterson, Tucker and others killed; Schonarth was running the 4th Platoon.

Company I really needed another machine gun in this defensive situation and Avila had had combat experience as a machine gunner. As a matter of fact, he was a genuine rarity--a veteran infantry soldier. Avila had fought in North Africa and had held sergeant rank. Then, while in England awaiting deployment to France there had been some never disclosed trouble. After a court martial, Avila was put in the stockade. He joined us as a private upon his release. Years later, in discussing old times, Avila's name came up and it was mentioned that he had been "delivered" to Company I in handcuffs and leg chains by the MPs. I can't vouch for that story but simply recall Avila was well-trained and immediately likeable.

Not too long after Avila's arrival, Company I received additional replacements and a second machine gun squad was formed. Avila was put in charge and promoted to sergeant.

Meanwhile, events in the 45th Division occurred which would reach to Company I. Despite our entire sector being in a defensive posture, fighting continued all along the Line. Sometimes light; sometimes heavy. In one engagement, one of the battalions in the 45th had essentially been wiped out. While privates were available for restaffing the 45th simply could not come up with the required non-commissioned

officers needed to restore the organization to an effective fighting force. So, the Seventh Army took an unprecedented step--each organization in the Seventh Army was required to "contribute" to supply the need for non-coms. As part of the contribution from the 100th Division, Company I had to supply a machine gun sergeant.

Not much of a problem on selection. No long lists to evaluate. It was either Avila or me. Avila was sent to the 45th Division--I stayed with the 100th. Not necessarily because I was the better soldier--Avila had much more experience. I probably stayed with Company I because I had trained and had come overseas with the Division. (My first experience with the rewards of loyalty for service.) I was most pleased, of course, with the decision.

Not so with Avila. I ran into him quite unexpectantly in Nancy when I was in that French city on a four day leave. This was about six weeks after he had left Company I for the 45th Division. We greeted each other warmly. Avila immediately told me he had deserted and was on the run.

His story was that when he reported to his assigned infantry company in the 45th he was told the machine gun sergeant's position had been filled. They handed him an M-1 rifle and sent him out on patrol that same night. And, according to Avila, with a bunch of misfits and goof-offs that had been assembled to "rebuild" this decimated organization. His experience on this one patrol convinced him that staying in that outfit would have cost him his life. So, he departed immediately.

Avila stated he had contacted the 100th Division on an unofficial basis but they would not take him back. So he headed for the rear and was now engaged in the very lucrative Black Market in Nancy. He boasted of having 10 or 15 fellow deserters in his organization. I had no way to verify this, of course. But I could verify that he had the largest roll of high denomination Franc notes that I had ever seen, or would ever see, for that matter.

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I asked Avila if he wanted me to ask our Company CO, Captain Grant, if he could help arrange for his return. Avila declined, stating he had been AWOL too long for that type of rehab. He did offer to pay a handsome price for my leave papers so he could have them doctored and keep himself "legal" for a few more weeks. I gave him my papers but refused any payment. After all, what could the MPs do to me? Except return me to the Line a couple of days early! We shook hands. I wished him well.

Just before the war ended one of our guys from Company I asked me a question after being on leave in France, "Guess who I ran into in Paris"? I didn't reply quick enough and he told me, "Avila." "With a babe on each arm and a roll of bills that would choke the proverbial horse." Apparently, Avila was now a kingpin in the Paris Black Market/Underworld.

No further sightings of Avila were ever reported.

The Chaplain

One of the famous quotes from WW II that never seemed to be contradicted or disputed went like this "There are no atheists in foxholes." And, I suppose my experience supports this claim. I don't recall ever attending a church service when we were in the States, but during combat I did attend when available.

Periodically, when there was a lull in the shooting a message would be relayed that religious services would be held nearby and we could attend in shifts. There would typically be 30 or 40 of us at the Protestant service. I particularly remember the hymns. We sang my favorites from the Methodist Sunday School, like, "The Church in the Wildwood". And we would sing out, "Oh, come, come, come, to the church in the Wildwood...no spot is so dear to my childhood.."

The singing certainly reminded me of earlier and much

more pleasant days. The contrast between these memories and my present situation was so very dramatic. How did Fate arrange for me to arrive at this spot? Was survival a realistic hope? And, while during the prayer I may have faced the reality of dying, I don't remember being angry at God. I don't recall being angry at anyone. Most certainly, I was not angry at the individual German soldiers. We knew damned well the Jerries were also cold and miserable. And scared. And did they also sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with gusto as we did? They were after all, Christians, too!

One thing never changed. Our Southern Baptist Chaplain was always against sin--particularly drinking, smoking and womanizing--all the fun things! But, the sermon was always relatively short. What was there to say? A lecture on the evils of violence? Or how about an exhortation to remember to love your fellow man? Maybe a reminder of our Christian duty to help those whose pain and suffering was greater than our own? No. None of these subjects was ever mentioned. But we did hear often that we should avoid the evils of "...cigarettes and whiskey and wild, wild women..!" And, of these three the greatest problem was drink. And, just as the hymns reminded me of my earlier days perhaps railing against drunkenness reminded our Chaplain of his southern church roots. For sure, he denounced John Barleycorn vigorously. I'm sure that had Temperance pledge cards been available we would all have signed up! And, none of us stopped by a saloon after the services!

In fairness I should mention that there was not any direct encouragement for us to go out and kill enemy troops. It was more subtle. A prayer would be made asking God for our victory--not the defeat of the opposing forces. And, certainly, you came away from the services knowing our Chaplain was very certain that God was on our side!

I hesitate to repeat how cold and miserable the weather was that Winter--but it was certainly most uncomfortable. Even for those in the rear areas. No heat in the vacant

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houses, sheds and barns where our troops were quartered; vehicles that wouldn't start because of the cold; fingers that became inoperable in a few short minutes of exposure and food that was routinely distasteful.

But, occasionally, a little happiness did manage to sneak in--a letter of comfort and affection from a loved one, a package of cookies to be shared with comrades and, very rarely, a cake or loaf of bread with a pint of for-real whiskey concealed in the center. This booze was a real treat--either straight from the bottle or laced on hot coffee which we made in our canteen cup. There would be a warming in your stomach and you could feel a faint flush to your face.

However, for an enlisted soldier receiving an illegally shipped bottle was his only hope of tasting real U S of A whiskey--none was available to him regardless of enlisted rank. However, such was not the case with our officers--they received a ration of three bottles of the precious stuff at the beginning of each month. Included in this distribution was our Southern Baptist Chaplain--triple ranked--a man of God and an officer and a gentleman. And, the arrival of his liquor ration resulted in his monthly ceremony. He would summon available enlisted men and while they observed, he would open each bottle and pour the contents down an available drain or on the ground. The GIs stared at disbelief at such a sacrilege.

Did tears roll down the checks of these cold and miserable infantry soldiers who would have truly treasured a belt or two of the booze whose fumes they inhaled with such pleasure? No, not likely. They just shook their heads in absolute disbelief and obvious sadness.

I never understood the motivation nor the actions of our Chaplain at the time. But then, in the mid-sixties an appropriate saying became popular and I understood the action of this individual. The saying-- "The Devil made me do it!"



This photo shows an infantry company "on the road" most likely moving from one sector to another based on actual or anticipated actions of the Jerries.

Plenty of symbolism in this photo. In the center is a Medical Aid vehicle--a reminder of the wounded that may need care. And a cemetery for those whose wounds were fatal. An infantry soldier faced these two possibilities each day.

These soldiers are wearing their reversible parkas which were issued late in December, 1944. A most welcome holiday gift!

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THE BOXER

The heavy weight champion of the 100th Division was not a good looking guy. A rather long face with a prominent nose and high cheek bones. And the nose had a noticeable bend to it. Probably some opponent got in a lucky shot at some time. Not many did, because this guy was one tough hombre! After all, he was the best fighter in the entire Division--some 15,000 guys. And his cauliflower ears made his looks even more threatening.

During the boat trip to France from New York the Champ was featured in a couple of shipboard exhibitions, quickly flattening a couple of challengers in a makeshift ring on the main deck. I was impressed by his abilities--the two boxers would be gently sparing and "Bam!"--a sudden blow from the Champ and his opponent would be flat on his back. I noticed that the Boxer did not have a specific organizational designation. He was introduced as being from Division Headquarters. While I didn't ponder this matter, I rather assumed he was part of some special attack force. At least that activity would fit his pugilistic image.

We had moved into the Sheep Farm area at dark. There was three or four inches of relatively new snow on the ground. We mounted the machine gun on the tripod and cozied into the foxhole dug by the unit we were replacing on the Line. Now to our normal schedule--two hours at the gun and four hours sleeping. This was to be our "home" for the next thirty or forty days. And while all ground shelters were referred to as "foxholes," our accommodation could better be described as a bunker. It was six foot long and five foot wide and perhaps four foot deep. Very serious effort went into the construction of a good bunker. After making the excavation, we would fell several 6-8 inch trees for a log cover, then put the excavated dirt back on top of the logs. A top entry way was about three foot square. Here we would

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position the gun and usually dig the hole deeper at this spot so that the individual on watch could stand rather than squat or sit. All and all a very safe place.

When daylight came I had my first view of our field of fire. It was open to our immediate front for a good hundred yards, gradually sloping down to a sparsely wooded ravine. A few barren trees dotted the sheep pasture. Near one of the trees I spotted what appeared to be a snow covered log.

A couple of nights later a rather strong wind came up and drifted the snow cover. And when I looked out to my left front at first light the log had disappeared. It never had been a log--it was a dead German soldier. Since he was wearing a garrison cap rather than a steel helmet, we presumed he had been severely wounded by artillery fire. Then he had been laid on the ground in a comfortable position by his comrades. With arms folded across his chest he appeared to be sleeping comfortably.

Fritz, as we dubbed him, immediately became one of our comrades. Before we went to chow in the morning, we would yell out and remind him it was time to "hit the deck!" Or we would tell him we would all be gone for a few minutes and he would have to act as a look out during our absence. Fritz was a good soldier--no complaints about the food, always on duty, did not talk back to superiors. Since no stripes were visible on his outer coat, we felt that a promotion was in order. Should it be sergeant rank or perhaps a second lieutenant? Some recognition was certainly in order!

I'm not sure how our Company Headquarters found out about Fritz. Likely someone casually mentioned him. Anyhow, I received a call from the First Sergeant on the battery powered phone system about three weeks after we had arrived at the Sheep Farm. "Mosher", he said, "I understand you have an unauthorized addition to your machine gun squad." I knew immediately he was referring to Fritz. I confirmed his statement and noted Fritz was a good soldier. The sergeant advised that he had just heard of the German's presence and

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mentioned that the body should have been reported when discovered. I advised the sergeant that we had not killed he guy--he was there when we arrived and certainly Fritz had been no trouble to us.

A couple of days later just at dusk, I heard some one to my immediate rear. After we exchanged sign and countersign appropriate for that day, a really big guy in a clean uniform came up to my gun position. I felt I had seen this face before--high cheek bones and a bent nose. I was trying so hard to remember this guy that I almost missed his question as to the location of the dead German.

Then it all fell into place. This was the Boxer, our Division Champ! And he was not assigned to an elite attack force. He was a "grave robber" as those of us in the Infantry called members of the Graves Registration Unit. He had been dispatched to pick up Fritz. I told the Champ where the body was located, and, after repeated assurance that we had no mines or booby traps planted to our immediate front, he called his two assistants to come forward. The Boxer pointed out where Fritz was located and assured them it was safe to venture forward the forty yards into "no man's land". They returned shortly with Fritz on a stretcher. The Boxer and his helpers disappeared into the darkness.

The war had been over for nearly three months when I went on leave to southern France--Nice, Marseilles, etc. The main purpose of the trip was to visit my brother who was some 30 miles from Marseilles. I hitched a ride, but I had to walk the last couple of miles. It was an absolutely beautiful day. Blue skies, a very pleasant temperature. A wonderful day for a relaxed stroll down a quiet road in the now peaceful French country-side. I was hoping no vehicle would come along to offer me a ride. None did.

About half way to my destination I encountered a Prisoner of War work group digging graves in a small cemetery. There were four or five GI's and maybe 50 German

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soldiers. I paused to observe the action and then walked over to a sergeant who was seated in a Jeep. By now, we had been issued our ribbons and awards--I looked the part of a combat Infantry sergeant who had been in France for some time and had seen action--a real veteran. I asked him what was going on. The young non-com was very polite and more than a little wary. Who was this 100th Division sergeant? An inspector? What was up?

The sergeant quickly explained his job assignment. During the invasion of southern France the German casualties had been buried in this cemetery. However, with the end of hostilities, but not the animosity toward "the Boche," the French were demanding that the German bodies be removed from their soil. So, the German POWs were digging up their comrades for shipment home. And, it turned out that the US Forces were not pleased with the fact that some of our casualties had been buried in Germany, the land of our bitter foe. So, these bodies had been exhumed and shipped to France for reburial.

Thus, the sergeant was implementing a one-for-one switch. Dig up a Jerry and replace him with a GI. Watching this operation, I thought about the priorities given by governments and politicians to actions that would hasten the return to normal after the cataclysmic events of war. Hurry and eliminate the reminders and the entire conflict can sooner be forgotten. Maybe not forgotten, but many of the grim reminders could be removed.

Maybe these bodies were some of the "grim reminders" in this post-war period, but, to me, they were former comrades-in-arms. Both the GIs and the Jerries. We had fought a hell of a battle! I hoped their dying had been worth while. And, I thought about Fritz, my Sheep Farm companion, and wondered if he too had been returned to Germany.

I resumed my journey. Such a beautiful day! So wonderful to be alive!

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THE SHEEP SHIT MORTARMEN

A front line soldier seldom has "time on his hands." Since an unknown someone is always out there stalking and ready to deliver that fatal bullet, he is always on the alert and busy. Normally moving forward. And, if he is not moving forward and has become temporarily stalled then he starts digging. An entrenching shovel is his real pal. Also, since the enemy shelling might begin soon, the idea is to dig fast and with a purpose. Always on the alert, always busy and always digging!

This all changed when we arrived at the Sheep Ranch in January, 1945. We relieved another organization in what turned out to be a long-term defensive situation. The foxholes were already dug. The enemy was very quiet. Days past and still no indication we were going to press forward into Germany in the immediate future. We found ourselves with "time on our hands."

Just behind our dug in positions were large stone structures which had apparently been the farm buildings and housing for the hired hands. Frozen dead sheep in surrounding fields gave us both the nature of the operation and the Sheep Ranch name. Now at night, as always, there were three of us in each foxhole. One manned the machine gun while the other two slept--or tried to. However, during the day only one person manned the gun and the other two passed the time at the Ranch. We gathered at the house and adjoining buildings for letter writing, card playing, shooting the bull and napping during the long day time period. The Ranch was also headquarters for Company I's mortar organization.

Now the mortar is a very effective weapon when properly used. However, there is little use made of the weapon on the attack. During an offensive, the mortarmen, somewhat like us machine gunners, are behind the rifle platoons and although available to respond to any enemy action they are seldom

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called on. However, in a defensive position, such as at the Sheep Ranch, the mortars were always set up and ready to fire in the event of an enemy attack.

The mortar had one other important use. It was capable of delivering parachute flares. A very useful device --particularly when you held a position in relatively open country. Upon hearing suspicious sounds, those of us in outpost positions could simply call for a couple of flares. The mortarmen would drop the flare projectile in the mortar tube and the shell would detonate at a pre-selected height releasing a parachute carrying a brightly burning magnesium flare. Seldom was any enemy sighted. But I'm certain that just firing these flares discouraged enemy night attacks. I was always amazed at the intensity of the light from these flares. I could see every bush and rock to our immediate front.

So, we waited for the signal to again be on the attack. And we waited. But there are only so many letters you can write; in time the stories start to be repeated and even the card games get to be boring--especially when the winners already have all the money and the constant losers are playing on credit.

I don't know who came up with the idea for the "ultimate weapon," a weapon which if put in universal use could have quickly won WW II and caused all warlike conflict to lose popularity. Maybe it was McAfee or Larson--sergeants in the mortar squads. Or, perhaps McKisson or Bowman or Sullivan--they were each very imaginative and may have contributed to this invention. I was simply an observer, privileged to watch the weapon's construction and firing.

As previously mentioned, it was winter at a sheep ranch. Everything was frozen--including a vast supply of marble sized ammunition. Black sheep shit pellets. The idea was simple. The ingenious soldiers, always to be remembered in Company I military lore as the Sheep Shit Mortarmen, took

a few parachute flare shells and removed the parachute and magnesium. This empty cavity was then packed full of the frozen pellets. The timing release was set, the shell was dropped into the mortar tube and the missile was sent off to the enemy-held village to our immediate front.

The Germans would, of course, be aware a shell was on the way. In the quiet of a winter's day the mortar made a distinctive "Thunk!" as the propelling charge exploded at the base of the mortar tube. Then, two more shells would be quickly dropped into the tube. "Thunk!, Thunk!" All three shells would be in their arc at the same time. The Jerries would hunker down awaiting the expected explosions as the shells hit the street or house roofs. But no explosion occurred. Just a quiet "pop" as the shells exploded in the air. But no parachute came out. Instead, the enemy forces were subjected to an undeadly barrage of frozen sheep shit.

We thought this action on our part was funny as Hell! And a few more shells were fired. We laughed with pure fun. And we speculated on the reaction of our enemy across the way. What in the world would Jerry think when he realized that the U.S. Army was capable of such foolishness? Had we gone crazy? Was this a devious plot of an unknown nature? Or did he think that there was a bunch of guys in different colored uniforms just a short distance away who, like him, would rather not be fighting this stupid war?

And what about my claim that this weapon could have "won the war." Possibly, a bit of overstatement. I should have said the use of similar weapons could have brought WW II to an end. Imagine if you will what would have happened had the Germans retaliated in kind. A spiffily dressed American General and his aide are caught in the open as the German 88's zero in--the shelling stops. The aide surveys his commander and says, "Sir you have suffered a severe coating of horse dung." The General replies, "Captain, remind me to note in my daily report that this is truly a shitty war!"

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Really now, how could soldiers of either side pursue a war of this nature with real enthusiasm and seriousness? The laughter would have drowned out the pretentious pronouncements which continually exhorted us to seek out and destroy our enemy.

The Sheep Shit Mortarmen of Company I may have failed in their war ending effort. But their action has always symbolized to me how futile and insignificant are our individual actions in the grand scale of total war.

But, I also viewed their actions with considerable pride. At least on this one day the Sheep Shit Mortarmen gave true expression of a shared opinion of war in general, and, in particular, the one we were fighting!

Not many soldiers would choose a top hat rather than a steel helmet. But here in this drawing by Milt Apetz, he has shown me doing just that as I was attempting to guide some replacements into our positions.

I thought my act was funny as hell. The soldiers, newly arrived in France and trying to find shelter from the enemy shelling in the roadside ditches, did not share my humor.



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PUTTING ON MY TOP HAT

(My Visit to Klein Steinhausen and Gross Steinhausen)

When you have the opportunity to walk through northeastern France and southern Germany you visit many towns and villages along the way and have a chance to become familiar with many of their names. Few names, however, remain in memory for very long. A notable exception was my visit to the neighboring German villages of Klein Steinhausen and Gross Steinhausen.

We had jumped off from our Winter defensive line on March 15th and had encountered practically no enemy resistance. Our entry into Germany was without incident and was only noticeable in that the road signs were in German rather than in French. The afternoon we crossed the border we noticed some vehicles from a reconnaissance unit parked in a small courtyard. Since these Recon troops were used to find the enemy--not fight him--we could expect that the Germans were not too far away. They waved to us.

And we walked on. It became dusk. And we walked on down the road. It became dark. Still no sign of the Jerries. Now we had been on these "night walks" before--always with good results because we had been able to occupy substantial territory without a firefight. More importantly, we had been able to block the retreat of a significant number of German troops and reel in a large number of prisoners.

Then we hit the first "Steinhausen" and, without pausing, set off for the other one which was about a mile away. It was quite dark by now and the paved road was narrow with rather deep ditches on either side. Artillery fire from German 88's started coming in as we reached the village of about 40 or 50 homes (of stone, of course.). The artillery fire became intense. Our column of march started breaking up as soldiers disappeared into various homes or the preferred lower level cellar entrances. Company I then officially halted awaiting the barrage to cease. But there was no

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decrease in the number of rounds coming in. The shelling was continuous.

After a wait of perhaps 30 minutes, orders came down to get back on the street and continue through town to where we were going to dig in for the night. I was told to "empty out the cellars." I visited several. The problem was that Company K was also passing through town and they had no orders to leave these places of safety. Sorting out the soldiers was difficult. I visited several cellars that evening and used the same approach in each. If I didn't recognize anyone, I would simply ask if any Company I men were present. When someone volunteered, I would ask him to point out any others. Then I would tell them the orders were to get back on the street and head North. This was not an easy task. The noise of the continuous shelling was quite loud in the shelters. But we were good soldiers and only a few needed any extra persuasion. (A few well chosen cuss words can be of great help--when judiciously used!)

I was nearly to the edge of the village when "my shell" came in. The German guns that were shelling us were less than a mile away. I could see the muzzle flash of the German 88, hear the shell as it came in and exploded, and then hear the sound of the muzzle blast from the gun. I had never experienced this before. But then, I had never been under fire from German 88's that were so close. It was rather fascinating. (Think of it--a live demonstration that light and a projectile could both travel faster than the speed of sound!). Now the folklore among the troops was that you never heard the shell which hit you. I never subscribed to that theory. It just seemed to me that as long as you could hear a shell whine, it had not landed. And, until it landed, it was dangerous to me. "My shell" was in this "dangerous to me" category in that the shelling pattern which I had observed indicated I should avoid the next several shells if at all possible. I headed off the street toward a cellar entrance. I had heard "my shell" approaching. But as I got

to the entrance way, I saw two guys already at the door trying to get in. "My shell" was screaming louder and louder. And the damned door was either locked or jammed.

Recently when the cockpit voice recording of a fatal air crash was released, the final words of the co-pilot were "Oh Shit!" That was certainly my comment on that night. The screaming of "my shell" finally ended with a tremendous blast to my right rear. I heard the shrapnel cutting the grass and weeds. A few small tree branches came down. The shell had landed within a few feet of me and yet I had not been hit. Unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable! I turned, walked back to the street and continued my hurried journey out of town.

Two or three hours later the defensive positions had been assigned and we had dug in and mounted our machine gun. There is a lot of hard work involved in staying alive in the Infantry. A lot of people think survival is just pure luck. Hardly. It is work and thinking. But mostly work. And one of the tough jobs is providing overnight accommodations out in the field. Shelter should provide protection from mortar and artillery fire, as well as a place to rest your head. So, even though exhausted, mentally and physically, you still had to put in two or three more hours of effort to dig a hole. And then two guys sleep while the third kept watch. Two hours on--four hours off.

Now digging a hole large enough to allow two guys sleeping space isn't too bad. But getting a roof or cover on it sometimes posed a challenge. In the forests of the Vosges Mountains there was no difficulty--we simply sawed down two or three six inch pine trees. Then sawed the logs for the roof to a desired length--using some of the branches for a mattress. We covered the roof with about 8 inches of dirt and we were relatively safe. Only if a lucky shot came down on the unroofed front of the dwelling would we be in trouble.

However, when we left the Vosges Mountains and moved

out on the Alsace Plain, we ran into difficulties in getting roofing materials. Lots of farms; few trees. For this reason, we often stayed in a village or near one. Then, we would simply go into an empty house, remove a door or two, place it over the dug hole and cover with dirt. It was with this in mind that I went into the village of Gross Steinhausen to seek out an available door.

The first house I entered had a great closet door--just right. And when I opened it to remove the hinges I spotted an Opera hat on the closet shelf. This was the type of top hat that was flat when stored but popped out for street use. I got it down--I had never held one before--and I remembered those scenes from the high society comedy and drama movies of the late thirties:

Adolph Menjou, always the wealthy Uncle, pauses in the front hall as he is departing. He twists the ends of his thin mustache, looks knowingly at the wistful heroine and picks up an Opera hat with his right hand. Holding it by the brim he slaps it down smartly on his outstretched left hand and the crown of the hat springs out into place. Adolph places the Opera hat on his head with authority; admiringly glances into the hall mirror and taps the top of the hat twice with the first two fingers of his right hand. He turns and offers eagerly awaited advice to the blond heroine. Jeeves then hands him his cane and white gloves and Adolph exits to the sleek, chauffeured Pierce-Arrow.

Now it is my turn. I went into my impression of a wealthy playboy donning his top hat. Other than the three day beard, a dirty face, hair badly in need of cutting and a scruffy field jacket, I thought I looked rather good. Quite pleased with my stylish appearance, I returned to our newly dug foxhole carrying the closet door and wearing my Opera hat. It made for quite a number of comments.

We put the door over the hole, shovelled on about eight

inches of dirt and tried to get some some sleep. It had been a long 19 hour day. I stood a guard shift starting about two AM and then crawled back in the hole.

Just about dawn I felt someone pulling on my boot. An excited voice repeated, "Look at this! Look at this!" I squirmed to the fox-hole opening and looked out. Good God! There, no more than a half mile away were the initial tank barriers of the vaunted Siegfried Line. I don't ever recall, before or since, of experiencing such a visual shock. I simply stared. And then came the clear realization that this would be the place that I would die. No panic, no emotion. Only simple cold logic.

The Siegfried Line was, in my view, a monument to the German personality. During the winter, we had spent some time in and about the Maginot Line which France had constructed. The two opposing fortification systems which paralleled each other along their boundaries were a study in contrasts--at least in the Alsace area. The Maginot Line fortifications were almost graceful. The fortifications had smooth curves and they actually appeared to be constructed to blend in with the land contours. I do not recall any tank barriers.

There was no grace associated with the Siegfried Line which I saw in that early morning light. Huge concrete barriers in random order precluded the passage of assaulting tanks. Heavy concrete bunkers were visible behind these imposing barriers. Here the Jerries would have their machine guns to cut down attacking infantry. Behind the bunkers would be the German 88's and their heavier artillery. Power and strength--German style!

Company I, 3rd Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division of the Seventh Army had arrived at its rendezvous with destiny. We were there. The Siegfried Line had to be breached and it seemed very logical that Company I would be in the forefront of the assault I strongly felt that Company I would disappear as a fighting

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unit somewhere among those towering tank barriers. Some wounded would likely survive. How many? But I felt remarkably calm when I took my turn to go into the village for a rare opportunity to get a hot breakfast served by our cooks. Somewhat hot, anyhow.

Shortly after I returned to the machine gun emplacement the German artillery started shelling our positions all along the Line. According to normal practices you dig your forces in on the ridge line. This position has a full field of fire in front and the rear is protected on the back slope. We were dug in on the front slope, perhaps a hundred yards or so down from the crest of the hill. We had an excellent spot for viewing. We could see nearly a mile to either side. A gentle slope ran down from the crest of the hill some 500 yards or so and then upwards to the Siegfried Line. Barren pasture land. Sheep grazing country. No place to hide out there.

And Company I was certainly not alone. We could see perhaps 200 dug-in positions which had been prepared the previous night by other units of our Battalion--both Company K and Company L. The shelling by the 88's was continuous on those organizations. And, frequently, the Jerries would work us over, reminding us not to get out and try to move around. One of the histories of our combat activities reported that we received more enemy shells in our area that day than any other unit on any day of the war. It never stopped. The noise was deafening--not so much the explosions but the continued scream of the 88's on their way to targets. Very few casualties, however. We spent the day watching the shelling and awaiting our next orders. We expected to assault the fortifications to our immediate front.

Our orders arrived at about dusk along with a great and most welcome rumor. The orders advised that we were to be relieved that very night and pulled off the Line. The rumor, which we certainly wanted to believe, was that Patton's tanks had broken through and were behind the Siegfried Line.

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This could cause the Germans to retreat and abandon the segment of the fortification which was in our immediate area. We certainly hoped the Patton rumor was true but on the other hand we were somewhat anxious about any move to the rear. It could be just to regroup and then attack through the replacement troops into the Siegfried Line. We had our worries.

Just after dark I was told that I was to go back through the village to guide the soldiers who were coming in to replace our 4th platoon--both machine gun and mortar people. By way of briefing, I was told that the organization replacing us had never seen combat, had never experienced a solid shelling. They had only recently arrived from the States. Quite honestly, I was not overjoyed at my assignment. Although the shelling had slackened off as the day drew to a close, it was still very heavy at times. How would these guys react?

Then, just as I was to depart for my liaison duties, I remembered the Opera hat. I was improving in mood. In two or three hours we would be in the rear and, with a little luck, find a warm place to sleep--maybe for more than the usual six hours. I took off my steel helmet, picked up the Opera hat with my right hand and holding it by the brim, I hit my left hand smartly and the top popped up. I put it on my head, smartly tapped the top twice (a la Adolph), said adieu to my companions and headed into the village. I had on my Top hat!

When I was about half way through town, the Jerries started to shell in earnest. But in a predictable and obviously mechanical pattern. I knew where the next shell would hit based on where the last one landed. I walked through town with only a couple of stops in the protective cover of a recessed doorway.

I met the soldiers who were to replace us less than a half mile out of town. They had stopped just short of the shelling zone. The introductions were brief. I was wearing

the Top hat. The leaders of the soldiers I was to guide to the Line stared in disbelief. There was one officer and three or four non-coms. (No bars or stripes to indicate rank but they had field glasses. Which they likely would conceal when they heard that field glasses attracted sniper bullets.) In a very soldierly manner I outlined where we were going, the conditions we could expect during our approach, and the situation at the Line. I was particularly careful to mention that they should expect to be under heavy artillery fire while in route. They seemed to be listening carefully but their eyes kept glancing repeatedly at the Top hat. I'm sure they felt maybe I had been in combat too long. Much too long!

The trip that night was a real event. I was leading about 40 guys to their "great adventure." There are many "firsts" in our lives--the first kiss, the first drink, the first sexual adventure, the first cigarette. Many you remember. Some you forget. But hardly anyone forgets the scream and whine of the first German 88 that you know is headed your way.

The platoon formed up behind me and we got under way. I was aware of the approach of the first close shell but from the sound I knew the destination was a considerable distance from our road. At least a hundred yards. Then suddenly, I realized I was all alone. I turned and found the road deserted. Everyone was in the ditches by the roadside. I went back to where the head of the column should be and simply stood in the center of the road. After some mumbling of orders by the platoon leaders and some nervous chatter among the troops, everyone got back on the road and we started forward again. Another shell screamed over and everybody was back in the ditches. I waited alone again--me and my Top hat.

This was going to be a long night if I couldn't keep these guys moving. I held another conference with the leaders. I explained that I was not crazy. That I could be

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trusted. And I promised to give adequate and timely warning when we should take cover. I was most confident about a timely warning in that the German gunners were sticking to a pre-set firing pattern. I could look up the road and pick up the pattern of both timing and distance between targets. The key was to walk fast as long as possible and then get off the road about 3 minutes before the shells reached our position. Then get back on the road in a hurry before it was our turn again. And, of course, all the time hoping the Germans didn't suddenly alter their pre-set firing pattern. I knew what was going on, but I had trouble convincing the others that my method could be trusted.

But gradually it got better. As mentioned above, the first shell had dispersed the entire flock. By the time we reached the village, less than half the guys felt obliged to hit the ditch when a screaming 88 approached. Fortunately, the shelling in the village itself was light--certainly when compared to when Company I passed through the last time. Nothing at all falling at the Line. I had not lost a man. And I still had on my Top hat!!

Company I moved out immediately for the rear. However, when we were ready to depart, I was advised that I was expected to be wearing a steel helmet. Apparently, someone didn't think an Adolph Menjou type had a place in such a serious war. Myself, I thought it was funny as Hell!

We got our good night's sleep. And the rumor about General Patton's forces being behind the Siegfried Line proved to be correct. Even as Company I was departing the villages of Klein Steinhausen and Gross Steinhausen the German guns fell silent.

The next day we boarded Army trucks and leisurely motored through the Siegfried Line on a temporary road that had been bull-dozed out by our Engineers. It was impressive! The tall concrete tank barriers looked, from a distance, like cemetery markers awaiting graves to be dug and the bodies dumped in. It would never happen.

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My experiences in Klein Steinhausen and Gross Steinhausen had a very profound affect on me and my attitude about war and combat. Not sure I appreciated at the time how much I changed. I was very confident of my combat skills and abilities and my emotions were under firm control. The big chunk of metal that I had been expecting since the first day on the Line had arrived. "My shell" had come in, exploded, and I had survived. I had stared at the Siegfried Line, seriously considered my death, and had not been afraid. Perhaps, more importantly, I had worn my Top hat and stood on a roadway while others crouched in fear.

The Mistress of War and I had embraced!

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THE FUNNY MONEY CAPER

We arrived at the A G Farben plant in Ludwigshaven on payday. Or more precisely, the night before payday was to occur. No, not the payday for the U.S.Army--I'm referring to the payday for the A G Farben employees.

These were great days to be in the Infantry. No doubt about who was winning the war for the Allies. The Infantry was, and we were winning it big! As a matter of fact, Company I had been taken by truck to this industrial area on the banks of the Rhine river. The German Army was running away so very fast that we simply could not keep up by chasing them on foot. At the time, the Germans were just a few hours ahead of us--but safely across the Rhine in Mannheim and as they say "had burned their bridges behind them." Except, of course, the Germans "blew them" since it is rather hard to burn steel and stone.

But the expression of "burning bridges" would prove most appropriate. The German Army would never return. The Reich was shrinking and even the wide, fast flowing Rhine would not prove to be of much protection.

We piled off our trucks about dusk and immediately set about to "sweep and secure" this bombed out industrial plant. From what had survived, it appeared to have been a chemical plant. And while the facility looked deserted there were many hiding places among the pipes and storage tanks which could be used by any rear guard troops. Nothing and nobody found, however.

Part of the area which my machine gun squad searched contained a modest office building. When we entered the building a little after dark there were enough lights on in the corridors to see where we going and to to be reasonable sure no one else was there. I snapped on a wall switch and the room lit up revealing a typical neat, well organized office that probably was occupied by Farben staff people just a few hours ago. (On the lights, we also checked to see

that the "black-out" curtains were intact. They were.) Then I tossed my steel helmet on a table, seated myself in a padded swivel chair, put my boots up on the desk and picked up the telephone. I figured that if the lights worked the phone was probably working also. Dialing "0", the feminine voice at the other end of the line said "Ya?" When I responded in my most friendly Midwestern accent with a pleasant "Hello" the line went dead. Well, someone knew we had arrived!

Shortly after this, the lights flickered and then went out. Time to set up a defense perimeter.

The spot we selected to place the machine gun commanded an excellent field of fire. An angle of about 200 degrees and a range of 500 to 1000 yards. We were, of course, on the west bank of the Rhine river. And a very impressive river it was--particularly to an Ohio boy used to watching his Ohio river drift along at a slow and easy pace. This Rhine was different, a very swift current and certainly not a river to be navigated in a small boat. So, while we had an excellent field of fire, I couldn't for the life of me, figure out what we might have for a target. Unless the masterly skillful Germans launched a sneak U-Boat attack. Which they didn't.

After setting up my gun and posting guards, I returned to a nearby basement room to join my companions. In most industrial areas that Company I went through, all rooms were "basement" rooms because the upper stories had usually been burned out by Allied air raids. And in these basement rooms people carried on some semblance of normal activity. Anyhow, upon entering the room I saw that my two fellow machine gun sergeants were busily engaged in highly important office work. Oftentimes the dedication to duty by our brave infantry soldiers is just taken for granted. And certainly here was an example. Outside a war was raging, bombs were bursting in air, and you could see the rockets red glare. Yet, these two devoted combat veterans were taking their valuable time to determine that the payments to be made the

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next day to the plant workers were correct. That's right. They were opening and examining each envelope in order to provide assurance that there was no payroll hanky-panky now that the U S of A army had arrived and was in control.

All in all, I would estimate it took the two of them a couple of hours to assure themselves that everything was O K as far as the payroll was concerned. And they ended up with quite a pile of this "funny money". Marks, of course. We were familiar with Marks having been paid in occupational Marks a couple of times. But what the value of the currency of the enemy might be was certainly open to doubt. But that was not likely on the minds of these two conscientious investigators. The problem now was to safeguard this large stack of bills, which were estimated to be worth about \$10,000.

As previously mentioned, the plant had been abandoned by both the German Army and the civilian work force. Obviously, one could not just leave this money all alone and unprotected. This serious problem was best solved by the two soldiers involved who decided to retain the funds temporarily. After all, they were armed and could always call for help from their friends if a problem arose. None did.

You certainly have to admire the generous effort that these two soldiers gave in order to help protect the monetary well being of workers they had never met. However, despite their unselfish efforts, their "good samaritan" act would remain unnoticed and unrewarded. Before the money could be given to the appropriate employees, we were ordered to "move out". And my two friends were stuck with a big bundle of paper with definitely an unknown value.

Time and distance soon separated Company I from the chemical factory in Ludwigshafen. The war ended.

Then, after spending a couple of months in the southern Bavarian countryside, we replaced the French forces and occupied Stuttgart. Not the most friendly city by any means.

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The downtown area had been bombed out and burned out. Civilian casualties were reported to be on the order of 50,000 to 100,000. And, most of these people apparently died in shelters from oxygen deprivation resulting from the fire storm which occurred after one very severe incendiary bombing. Stories told by the survivors indicated temperatures so hot that the asphalt roads on steeply inclined streets melted and formed tar pools at the bottom of the hill.

Surviving the bombings was not the end of the hardships for the citizens of Stuttgart. At war's end they also had to survive the occupation of their city by the Free French forces. The occupying soldiers were mostly colonial troops from Africa under the command of French officers and non-coms. Many of the African soldiers had distinctive tribal markings on their faces and most wore bright red fezzes. During the war, these troops were on the immediate right flank of the 100th Division on several occasions. Word of their ferocity and ruthlessness in battle circulated widely. These traits apparently carried over to their occupation of Stuttgart and abuse and rape of the civilians was quite common according to the Germans.

Thus, when we arrived, we were welcomed as a contrast, but resentment of any occupiers was very apparent.

Not sure how the subject of Sergeant Wladecki's roll of "funny money" came up. Bill and I were both from Ohio and were close friends. Not drinking and girl chasing "buddies" --but solid friends based on shared experiences and hopes for our futures. Anyhow, the subject was raised and shortly after our arrival in Stuttgart, I was headed to the downtown area with about \$5000 in German Marks in my field jacket and a 45 caliber pistol on my hip.

On an earlier downtown visit I had seen a small bank on a side street that I felt would make the exchange which I had in mind. Namely, to accept the "funny money" from Ludwigshaven and give me Occupational Marks which was the

only currency accepted in the post exchange or for conversion to a money order if you wished to send funds to the States.

It was a small bank office. Only two or three teller windows. Each with bars in front of the cashiers and a marble sill extending out to the customer. There were four or five customers in the bank when I entered and approached the nearest cashier window. The conversations among the customers and the bank employees faded away as I stood at the counter. Very silent. When one of the bank employees came over to the window I told her that I wished to make an exchange. The German Marks which I had placed on the marble counter for occupational currency. She quickly indicated that she did not speak English and moved back a couple of steps--staring at my stack of bills as if I had brought in a bomb.

Looking in the direction of the only male employee, who was obviously the Manager, I allowed as how someone in the office probably spoke English. The man came over with the walk and air that all of us would recognize as "bankese" and asked in a partly British accent if he could be of help. Wire rimmed glasses, a well worn doubled breasted pin striped suit. Tie slightly soup stained and a tattle-tale gray shirt with a frayed collar. Under forty most likely, with thinning blond hair. Possibly a rejection by the German army but just as likely wounded and released.

I repeated my request pointing to my stack of German issued currency and the occupational Marks which I had spotted on a work table only about ten feet away. The guy was in a real spot. He couldn't deny he had the requested currency; it was right there in plain sight. So, he had to state the "rules". He advised that his instructions were that an exchange of this nature was not permitted under any circumstances. Some perspiration had appeared on his upper lip.

I reached down to my hip, opened the holster and pulled

out the 45. I slowly brought the gun over the marble counter with the barrel pointed slightly downward. Thus, when I released it there was a noticeable clatter on the marble as the gun came to rest. I had everyone's undivided attention when I repeated my request and strongly stated I was really not interested in his instructions but was only interested in him complying with my requested exchange.

The bank manager stated in a soft voice that he could not break the rules. I started to slowly lift the gun and stated firmly and with authority "Oh! I think you can break the rules for me!" He glanced at the gun, glared into my eyes very briefly, quickly turned away and gave some crisp instructions in German to the nearest clerk. She came over and picked up my pile of currency. Since I had pre-sorted the bills by denomination, the amount was quickly determined. Just as quickly, the clerk stacked up a pile of occupational Marks, walked over to the counter and slid the money out towards me. I holstered the pistol with my right hand while my left hand was dropping the crisp new bills into my field jacket pocket.

I did not verify her tally. I left! When I was out on the street, I knew that the "funny money" caper had been a success. A few days later when I checked on my favorite branch bank there were two soldiers stationed out in front with big MP arm bands. Maybe there had been a robbery. Or something. I did not stop to ask.



Marlene Dietrich was never a Hollywood super star. But she certainly was a super hit with the soldiers in Europe. Particularly, with front-line troops.

In this photo, Marlene strikes a familiar pose. Eyes that seem to share a secret with the viewer, as she prepares to light-up.

She is wearing a military dress jacket and regulation (for men) shirt and tie. The three bars on her left arm indicates overseas service of eighteen months.

The entire outfit is, of course, absolutely against all rules and regs since she was not a member of the armed forces.

But who was going to tell Marlene that?

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MARLENE AND ME

Andy Warhol said that each of us should experience 15 minutes of fame at some point during our lifetime. Maybe some of us get their 15 minutes by just being with someone who is already famous. More than likely, I got my quarter hour allotment by being with Marlene Dietrich.

And, about the same time, I came as close to being killed as I ever experienced during all of WW II.

A request had come down from Company headquarters for four soldiers, one from each platoon, to go to a Rest Center. I was "chosen" from the 4th platoon. I did not view this as being a particularly great opportunity since we were not currently engaged in combat having just been pulled back from the Rhine river. We had chased the Germans to the Rhine and after they crossed over they blew all the bridges. Pontoon bridges had been erected by our Engineers but the traffic was very slow and the Army had a huge backlog of organizations trying to cross the river.

We were one of the organizations on hold. And since the idea of a Rest Center was to remove a soldier from combat for a few days and I was already "resting". But I went. However, this Rest center was to be very different from previous centers--mainly because it was located within Germany. This was during the time of the Eisenhower rules of "No Fraternization." And the rules were strictly enforced. No talking to the Germans. No purchases --particularly booze. And, above all, NO contact with the lovely and likely willing Frauleins.

The facility itself was terrible, a monastery with doughnuts. Most likely it had been a school of some sort before the U S Army took it over. On the second floor a balcony overlooked the central downstairs area. Also on the second floor were dormitory-like sleeping rooms which the Army had filled with double-decked bunks. Downstairs we ate in a gym-like central area with tables and benches. The

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lay-out was very similar to many basketball gyms in the States, with added sleeping quarters.

Also, there was a bar. Well stocked, too. Whiskey, gin, scotch--all name brands. And very competent GI bartenders who could fix excellent mixed drinks. Sit down, order up. But use your three coupons wisely! That's right. The limit was three drinks per day. This was the reward for a hard-bitten, battle-wise, live-today-for-tomorrow-you-die, needing-a-haircut infantry veteran? No broads? Rationed drinking? They never treated infantry people like this at the Rest centers in France!

In desperate times, desperate men turn to desperate measures. I had no choice--I sacrificed my principles--I kissed butt. However, with a great deal of skill and, if I may say so, with considerable dignity.

In truth, it was rather easy. Since we were essentially confined to quarters in this Rest camp, the organizers must have realized we would need to be entertained. And while Bob Hope would not be appearing, we did have Marlene Dietrich performing in three shows a day. And Bobby Breen. And the full band which accompanied her was led by Jimmy James. Bobby Breen? and Jimmy James? --not exactly household names even in those days!

I started my clever scheme at the conclusion of the afternoon program. I approached the band leader and asked, "Are you the guy that had the early evening radio program on station WLW in Cincinnati? Jimmy James, his clarinet, and his orchestra?" I thought the guy would break into tears. Apparently, very few of those in his audiences had ever recognized his pre-Army fame as a radio personality and celebrity from Cincinnati, Ohio. Maybe none. I almost expected him to hug me and say, "Oh! you remembered me!" But he didn't, and instead, recognizing me for a true fan, invited me to have a drink with him. Imagine that. It was so unexpected!

Now if you will read again the above question which I

asked Jimmy James, you will note I didn't say I listened to his program. Actually, I didn't. The Jimmy James orchestra was sponsored by Jergins Lotion ("the hand cream for beautiful hands") and his music was the type of smaltz made popular by Guy Lombardo. Hell! I was a Benny Goodman fan!

But a thirsty one! We went up to the dorm room occupied by the band and Jimmy reached under his bunk and pulled out a gunny sack containing 15 or 20 bottles of wine. We drank from the bottle and exchanged tales of Ohio. Actually, he was a real nice guy. He introduced me to the other members of the band. All of them were in their late twenties or early thirties. Caught up in the draft, they were placed in the Special Forces and their job was entertainment. Most likely the best place for them. Wars are for old men--the Generals--and young men--the fighters! Not much room for "middle-aged guys". To earn my drinks, I spun a couple of tales "from the Front" and from their reactions and questions, I don't think they had ever spent any time with an Infantry soldier before. I enjoyed myself, they liked my stories and we all got pleasantly drunk.

I was invited back and did return for a couple of drinking afternoons during my short stay at the Rest Center. To the best of my knowledge, I never did tell Jimmy James what I really thought of his music. I hope not.

And what about Marlene? Our "affair" started out innocently enough. Obviously, this Rest Center was not a very exciting place. But who needs it? Particularly, the someone-is-always-shooting-at-you kind of excitement! Getting a cup of coffee in the middle of the morning without worrying about an unexpected enemy mortar shell does have considerable appeal. And, I was getting coffee when Marlene joined me at the urn. She was alone. Never one to be bashful, I told her how much I enjoyed her singing --particularly, every soldier's favorite--"Lili Marlane." (This song, an old German barracks tune was taken across

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Europe by the German army and had been picked up by the Allies from Rommel's Afrika Corps. In a very short period of time, it became the universal soldiers' song of WW II.)

However, I explained to Marlene that although a dear comrade, Homer Lester, could sing the song in both Italian and German he did not know the words to the English version. I asked if she might have an extra copy which I could take back with me. She shook her head "No," but glanced at her watch as she stirred her coffee and said she would "give me" the words. She nodded toward an empty table.

Our rendezvous! I quickly grabbed a pencil and a few pages of Red Cross stationery and we had at it. I remember her husky voice. Her cigarette with a bright red end from her generous application of lipstick. No rush. She had made a commitment to this enlisted man and, as she watched me complete a line, she gave me another. No small talk. No chit-chat. When we finished the words, Marlene drained her coffee cup, snuffed out her cigarette and said "Goodbye". My 15 minutes with fame had ended.

But what a really nice way to start a day! However, it didn't stay that way long. As Don McLean wrote in American Pie -- "...for this would be the day that I die..." I came close!

As previously mentioned, having a Rest center on German soil posed a number of problems--one of which was drinking and getting drunk. The Army's attempt to satisfy the thirst of a drinking Infantry soldier with three cocktails a day was ridiculous. And we were cut off from German bars because of the "no fraternization" rules. So many of the guys obtained booze illegally (Usually potato whiskey at about 200 proof) and got drunk at their bunks. This in turn led to quarrels and fights and one afternoon several of these drunken louts decided to play a game called "paratrooper". Easy game. You simply slugged down a double, held a handkerchief over your head with both hands, yelled "Geronimo", and jumped off the balcony to the hardwood floor below. Immediate

result--broken leg. Intermediate result--a comfortable hospital bed. Final result--you didn't get to go back into combat and get killed! Record number of jumpers in one day while I was there--eight.

In summary, there were a lot of on-site drunks. And the day before departing, I was outside the main doors of the Rest center building, leaning against a stone column when I heard an obviously drunken soldier shouting. At the top of his lungs he was proclaiming, "The goddamn Germans, I'll kill them all!" Then I heard the explosion of a gun and felt a nip like a bee bite on my left arm which had been touching the stone pillar. It was a stone fragment. I whirled immediately because I knew someone had fired at me at close range.

The noisy drunk had a 45 pistol in his hand and was still cussing the Germans. But two of his companions had now safely pinned his arms to his sides. They took the gun away from him and the drunk began to sob in his anger and frustration. I looked at the stone pillar--the bullet had the correct height for my heart and if it had been a few inches to the right I would have been killed. Without a doubt. I looked at the two guys still restraining their friend and they simply shrugged. I didn't say a word and walked away.

But I thought a lot about this encounter. And matter of factly about getting killed in this fashion-- after all the combat I'd been through to be killed by a drunk at a Rest center. I had a pull or two from a wine bottle from Jimmy and I recalled the movie "Viva! Villa!" which I had seen when I was ten or eleven. Wallace Berry played the part of Pancho Villa the Mexican revolutionary. Or to be more honest, Wallace Berry, as always, played Wallace Berry. This time with a big, black Mexican hat with dangling balls all around the outer edges. The movie concerned his campaign to bring freedom to the Mexican peasants. His exploits were being covered by reporters from the United States.

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They had reported: Berry/Villa rides and shoots and frees villages; Berry/Villa rides and shoots and frees cities; Berry/Villa rides and shoots and damn near frees the entire country. Then, nearing ultimate victory, he is gunned down walking along a city street--in front of a fish market. The U S reporters in their double breasted suits and snap-brimmed felt hats rush to his side. Berry/Villa knows "this is it" and, as only Berry could do, smiles broadly and apologizes for ruining their story on the revolution. He needs a favor. He requests that when the story of his death is reported that they omit the fact that he was shot in front of a fish market.

Same thing with me. I fashioned myself in front of the Rest Center giving my exit speech. I look at my companions and say, "This is it, boys. Tell my folks I died bravely in pursuit of the enemy. Don't mention I was at a Rest Center."

End of the fantasy. Early next morning we packed our gear and departed. We returned to the Line and the real world of combat as the war continued. The three other guys from Company I who went to the Rest center with me were killed. Perhaps they should have joined in the "paratrooper" game.

And the song? Fabulous! Many of us learned the English words and after the war was over "Lili Marlane" became our favorite drinking song!

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WAR CRIMES

The term "war crime" has always been unfathomable by my mind. Since war itself has to be the ultimate crime against society, how can something be worse? About the best explanation I was ever to offer to myself is that a war crime seems to be some sort of act that gives war a bad name or evil reputation. Mind boggling. Said another way --war, a respected institution (or a least an acknowledged institution) can get an evil reputation as the result of acts that fall outside the proscribed rules for killing! And those who do not adhere to the rules may be guilty of committing a war crime.

But, it should be noted that many of the so-called rules of war don't make any sense. Also, it certainly shouldn't come as any surprise that the commission of a "crime" seems to depend on whether you are on the winning side or, heavens forbid, one of the losers. And your status or circumstances can lead to irreconcilable situations. Women and children are generally considered to be innocent victims in warfare and therefore protected. Also, hospitals and those wounded or sick should receive special consideration. Whereas a soldier in uniform is fair game for killing. But Wait!! In a bombing attack thousands of "innocent" women and children may be mangled, crushed, suffocated or otherwise fatally wounded; hospitals and the patients destroyed. Yet the term "war crime" is not mentioned. However, if an enemy soldier shoots your comrade in the head, then throws down his weapon and offers to surrender, you have committed a war crime if you kill the now unarmed bastard in cold blood.

Whoops!! When I review the above, I realize that my remarks with respect to women, children and hospitals must be modified. Bombing of women and children and other non-combatants is generally all right but the "rules" prohibit the use of poisonous gases and other deadly toxic

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substances. Think about it--this may be the ultimate irony in that some of these poisonous substances may provide the least painful and quickest methods of killing large numbers of people.

However, it is rather doubtful that the long standing prejudice against these poisonous substances, even if effective and arguably humane, can be overcome in the foreseeable future. A "rule of war" once established is hard to change--no matter how inane. And, "poison gas" is a no, no, no, regardless of how quick and painless.

And all of us as individuals will be less than truly civilized and humane as long as we believe that certain acts of killing are justified in today's society as long as the killing is done in accordance with the "the rules of war."

To the best of my knowledge, my organization was never involved in a war crime situation. We captured large numbers of prisoners without extracting any revenge. I'm sure we killed and wounded considerable numbers of the enemy. But, within the rules.

My involvement in a war crime or a violation of the rules of war was strictly as an observer. And, it came as a complete surprise.

Company I was enjoying a walk through the German countryside in the bright sunshine. The enemy was fleeing. Since we didn't have any transport, we were walking. Up ahead there was some smoke in a rather large grove of trees. We paused until our most forward unit signaled an OK to continue. As we entered the wooded area it was immediately apparent that our fighter planes had intercepted a German convoy at this spot. Possibly, the Jerries were attempting to hide out during daylight hours before resuming their night time travel. We completely dominated the sky, so it was suicide for German military units to venture onto the roads during daylight hours.

Or, since the trees didn't provide all that much cover

it was more likely that they just happened to be in this wooded area when they were attacked in the daytime from the air. After all, why shouldn't they venture out in daylight? The convoy was clearly marked with large Red Cross emblems on white backgrounds which should have afforded protection from attack under the "rules of war". The bold markings certainly should have been visible from the air. At least that was my opinion when I saw what remained of the convoy some 24 hours after it had been attacked.

Apparently the medical convoy had been a mixed bag of transport--horse drawn wagons, sizeable trucks and a few passenger cars. Upon entering the wooded area, the neighing of crippled horses was heard before we saw the injured animals. Some were still trying to regain their feet and had dug seizable holes as they vainly attempted to rise on their broken limbs. Others just whinnied. The painful sight and sounds were too much for a couple of our guys--they dropped out of the column and humanely dispatched the injured animals with a bullet to the head. I heard 10 or 12 shots.

No dead or wounded Germans, however. Except one. I noticed a passenger car that was off the road at a 45 degree angle. Although the Red Cross emblem was still clearly visible on the rear of the car the front part had been destroyed by fire. Apparently the car had been enveloped by fire very suddenly and very intensely. A figure was visible in the front passenger seat. A blackened arm was extended out to the partially opened car door. The individual had been attempting to escape the searing flames. The remnants of fingers were still on the handle.

We continued on for about another five minutes until we had moved out of the woods and had left the destroyed German convoy behind. Once we were in the bright sunshine again, the Captain ordered a halt for a 20 minute lunch break. I probably had the cheese and egg mix. That was my favorite K-ration at the time.

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HEILBRONN-THE RIVER CROSSING

It was another bright warm April day in Germany as we walked along the highway leading into Heilbronn. We were in route march formation. Five paces behind the man in front of you. Five paces from those to the side of you. "Don't bunch up! Keep spread out!" These were the phrases we heard over and over during our training at Fort Bragg. That seemed so long ago. Now, as combat veterans, we were following these instructions automatically. And, since no Germans were expected on this west bank of the Neckar River, we were enjoying the sunshine and a brief respite from the worries and pressures of combat.

At the top of the last ridge before heading down a long slope to the river there was a Jeep sitting slant-wise in the middle of the road. From several feet away you could tell that the vehicle fluids on the pavement were mingled with blood. Then you saw that there were two soldiers (or, three?) in the Jeep. They had taken a direct hit from the front by an armor piercing shell. Sometime earlier that day, very likely these guys were also enjoying the sunshine as they rode along the highway. Then zappo! Unexpected, instant death.

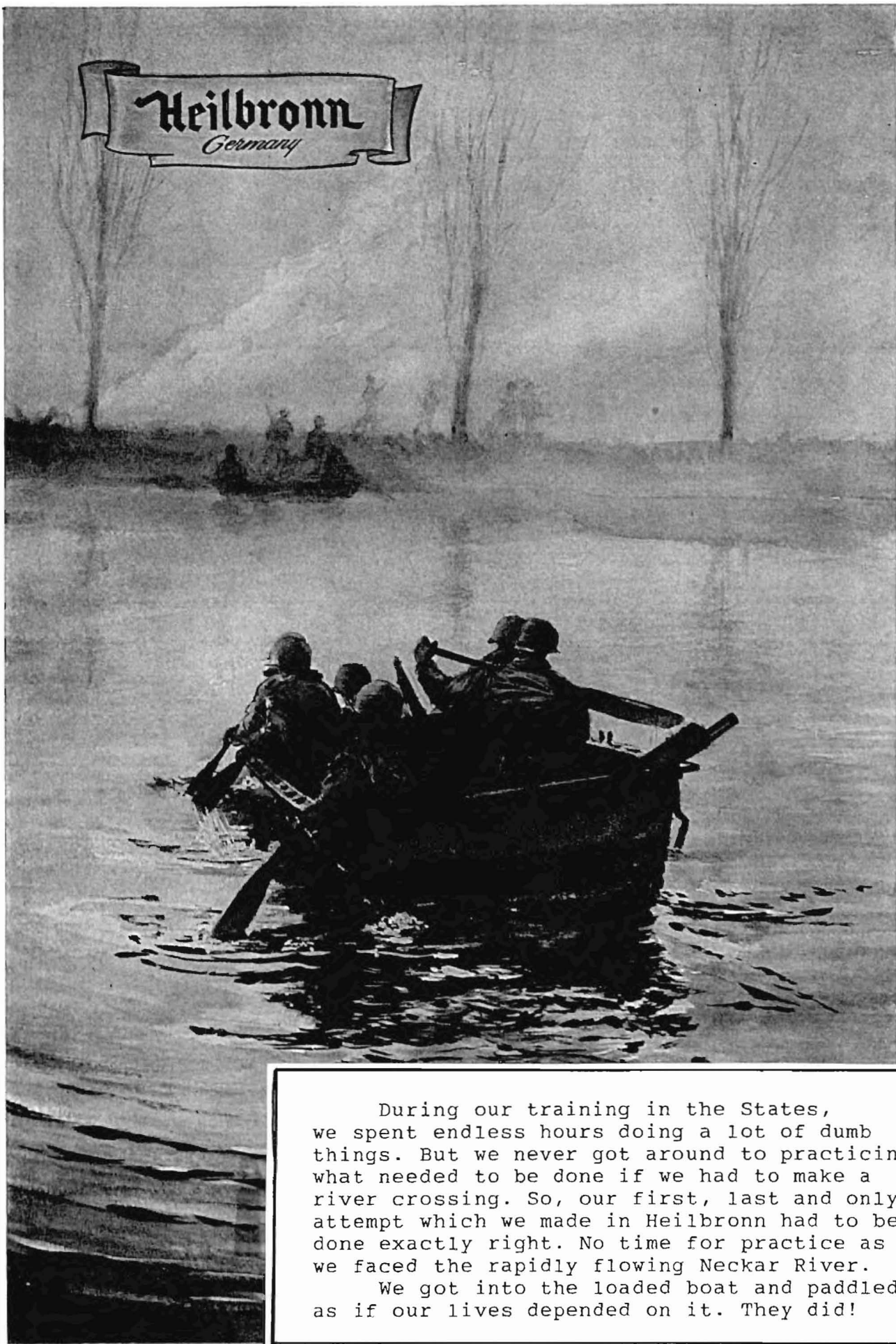
Welcome to Heilbronn!!

As we passed the Jeep, the war quickly returned. This was an enemy that had not quit. And we were to experience many similar demonstrations of the accuracy of German artillery in the days which followed. However, the remainder of this day and the night which followed was very quiet for us. No shelling in our sector of the city. We were billeted in homes on the outskirts of town which were relatively undamaged so there were blankets and real beds for everyone. All the comforts of home! But maybe a bit of uneasiness--we had been advised that the next day we were to make a river crossing. This would certainly be a new experience.

Early the next morning, I walked out into the street

Heilbronn

Germany



During our training in the States, we spent endless hours doing a lot of dumb things. But we never got around to practicing what needed to be done if we had to make a river crossing. So, our first, last and only attempt which we made in Heilbronn had to be done exactly right. No time for practice as we faced the rapidly flowing Neckar River.

We got into the loaded boat and paddled as if our lives depended on it. They did!

and assembled the other five guys who would be in the same small boat with me. We established who would carry what--machine gun, tripod, ammo boxes, and where we were to be seated. The necessity for speed was not mentioned. It was simply pointed out that we could expect moderate to heavy shelling both on the river bank and in the water.

And then I was interviewed. Really! A reporter from our Division newspaper wanted my reaction to the river crossing and any comment which I might have on the rumor that Coast Guard personnel would be in charge of the operation. My comments about the river crossing later appeared in print but my obscene remarks about the Coast Guard did not reach the reading public!

We were told to prepare to move out. Our platoon sergeant, Joe "Moon" Schornarth, came out the door at that moment and as he started down the stone steps, he dropped his carbine on the cobblestone pavement. We all stared in fascination as his gun disintegrated. Pieces all over the place. My reaction was immediate. I simply grabbed the barrel of the carbine of the "war correspondent" and before he could react I had taken away his weapon and handed it to my Sergeant. The disarmed soldier allowed as how I could not do this to him. I advised him to reassemble the carbine which was on the street. After all, he had the time and we had a war to fight. We then headed for the river which was about a hundred yards away. Houses on both sides of the street partially concealed our approach. The enemy shelling was sporadic.

The river bottom was covered with smoke. A greasy, grey cloud. Wispy in places, thick in others. This smoke was being generated to conceal the river crossings from the very watchful eyes of the German artillery observers. Each of us was given an oar as we headed toward the river's edge. We passed one of the machines which manufactured the smoke. These machines were all operated by black soldiers. I glanced at them as I passed and their faces and clothes had

picked up the grey smoke color. For some reason, I recalled reading a novel partially set in Harlem in the late twenties. One of the characters in the novel had used the derogatory term "Smokes" when referring to Negroes. How odd, I thought, that I would run into some honest-to-goodness "Smokes" in this far away place.

The actual river crossing was uneventful. We placed the gun and ammo boxes in the bottom of the boat, carried the boat to the river's edge--three guys on a side. We pushed the front of the boat out into the river and the first two guys jumped in. A little farther and the next two were in the boat. A final shove, the last two were in. The water was within about two inches of coming over the sides of the boat. We were seriously overloaded! But with shells falling nearby there was no time to readjust or rearrange, so we paddled like hell for the opposite bank! Fortunately, the Neckar River at the point of our crossing was only thirty or forty yards wide. Mortar shells and artillery rounds continued to come in during the crossing but nothing really close to our boat. We immediately set up a defensive perimeter and awaited the arrival of the rest of Company I.

While waiting, I found a vantage point which looked out to the North toward the hills which partially surrounded the city. An impressive circular tower was atop one of the higher hills--nearly a mile away. There were only fields between me and the tower. To my immediate front, starting about one hundred yards out, were the bodies of the soldiers who had originally assaulted this area. More than a hundred bodies were visible. I had never seen so many dead comrades.

Our river crossing into Heilbronn set the stage as to what was to follow. Lots of action. This was to be our first experience in house to house combat. Before now the enemy was often concealed in the forest. Never seen by many of us. Now the Jerries were up real close. It was early April. The weather was beautiful. And we were in for one heck of a battle over this pile of rubble called Heilbronn!!.

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HEILBRONN--THE FOUR SOLDIERS

Shortly after we had pulled back from the Rhine River in Ludwigshaven area, one man from each of the four platoons was selected to go to Rest Camp--three riflemen and one machine gun sergeant.

Within three weeks all of the riflemen and a machine gun sergeant from Company I would be dead.

By late March the cold damp weather and just plain exhaustion had taken its toll among members of the Weapons platoon of Company I. All of us had "trench foot" to some degree. Then there was the problem of the weight of the weapons and ammunition. Although the machine gun squad should have six men, we were usually short a man or two. This meant heavier loads for each of us.

Going into Heilbronn, we tried to compensate for foot and fatigue problems by establishing two machine gun squads with separate missions. One for assault and the other to deliver covering fire. If you had good feet (relatively) and could run, you were in the assault squad. I headed up this machine gun squad.

If you are to be successful (read--LIVE) in combat you have to have a keen sense of sight, hearing and smell. It is almost as if you are an individual radar station. The U S soldier owes much of his success to his ability to receive these battlefield signals and translate them into a plan. On the day I'm about to describe, I had an opportunity to devise and execute a plan on the spot.

Heilbronn had been completely destroyed. The city had been bombed as a secondary target when a much larger city had been clouded over. This meant a block by block struggle through the rubble.

Viewing our situation from the rubble, I knew that my machine gun could be best utilized by getting it to a high place and offering close supporting fire to the accompanying

riflemen. Such a spot was available in an essentially open second story landing. After placing the gun in a ready to fire position, I scanned my immediate front for signs of action and life.

To my left front I saw one of the riflemen who went with me to Rest Camp, leading out as first scout. As he walked along the foundation of a burned out building a single shot was heard and the soldier plunged headlong into what had been the basement of the structure. He was dead.

From my vantage point, it seemed obvious that the shot had come from a half destroyed house which was across the street and about 40 to 50 yards to my immediate front. However, rather than fire my machine gun, I chose instead to launch a rifle grenade.

Although not particularly popular or widely used the rifle grenade packed a lot of punch and had great range from the viewpoint of the infantry soldier. To operate, a small adapter (the launcher) was attached to the end of the carbine or rifle barrel. To fire, it was necessary to remove the regular bullet from the chamber of the weapon and insert a blank propulsion cartridge. Then put the grenade on the launcher, remove the grenade pin, aim and pull the trigger.

This very description as to how the rifle grenade was launched should serve to illustrate why this powerful weapon never achieved much popularity. In a close quarters situation, by the time a soldier was about half way thru the preparation-to-fire routine, his enemy would have shot him!

Then there was the matter of carrying the damn grenades. By the time a front line soldier got loaded with his ammo, regular grenades (the throwing kind), and rations he was not too interested in any additional weight -- regardless of its effectiveness. As machine gun sergeant and carrying the lighter weight carbine (and no throwing grenades) my load was somewhat less than that of a rifleman. As to how to carry them--there was a directional and

stabilizing fin behind the explosive charge which made them an awkward 10 inches long--I solved this problem by suspending the grenades from a cord and letting them hang in my chest area.

Because of this practice, I was warned by more than one of my associates that if I took a chest hit the grenades would likely explode and I would be very dead. I had the same reply for each of them--"If I take a chest hit, I'm most likely going to be very dead anyhow."

I continued to wear my rather conspicuous "necklace". And, the dangling grenades did serve me as a confidence builder. I have to admit that.

And now was the time to use one of my well-travelled grenades. I inserted the propulsion cartridge, put the grenade on the launcher and pulled the pin. Ready to fire. The trick now was to select the correct trajectory so that the grenade would travel in an appropriate arc and land direct on target. Pure guess ruled since I had never had the opportunity to fire the grenade on the practice range. But, I was lucky --or instantly skilled--because I made a direct hit on an overhang just out the front door of the building I had targeted.

What an explosion! I had no idea these grenades packed such a devastating punch. So, why not try another? However, as I started to reload and mount another grenade, a flash of white caught my eye coming from the targeted building. The front door opened slowly and a pole with a white flag appeared.

The firing in the immediate area stopped. After about 30 seconds of flag waving, 8 or 10 Jerries came out one by one and stood in front of the door looking for someone to take charge of them. Their war was over if they could just get some 100 yards to safety -- behind our front lines. After the Jerries had stood there a couple of minutes with their white bed sheet unfurled, a GI cautiously approached. Soon he was joined by a couple of others. They were all from Company I.

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Surrendering is tricky business even under the best of circumstances. The reluctance of the Germans to leave their front door and the cautious advance of the Company I people illustrates this point. The truth is that the surrender by an individual or a small group is just not popular with your fellow soldiers. As a result, you may get shot by your own companions if you attempt to walk into the arms of the enemy. Or, the "capturing force" may be shot as they leave their positions and attempt to reach the individuals who have signaled their intention to call it quits.

In this instance no shots were fired.

As our guys started to head the Jerries back toward the rear, I wanted to yell out that these were my prisoners!! After all, it was my lucky hit that likely convinced these Germans that artillery was about to come down like rain. But I didn't yell and we packed up the gun. We prepared to move past this captured strong point to our next objective.

The going remained difficult as we slowly picked our way through the rubble that was now Heilbronn. Quite a few snipers had to be dealt with. About an hour later we had only advanced a block or so. For some reason I looked to my rear and for the first time I could appreciate what a prominent perch I had selected for my machine gun and the launching site for the rifle grenade. Looked at from this view, I could fully realize what a target I must have made. Apparently, no German had looked up to see me!!

In Heilbronn the enemy was always very close. One of the only times the 100th Infantry Division was ever mentioned in the newspapers in the ^eStates related to our fighting in that city. Apparently it was a rather quiet day in the other sectors when our action was reported. The CLEVELAND PRESS wrote that fighting in most locations was rather light but that the 100th Division was engaging the enemy "...block by block, house by house and room by room." Rather dramatic and colorful language!! (And those people in the States with loved ones in the 100th Division always remembered those words!)

And, while we were unaware of this colorful description of our actions, we were very close to the enemy on a continual basis. A day or so after the death of the first scout, I had mounted the gun at a second story window. This was the front as the day came to a close. In the late afternoon we were joined by a forward observer from one of our artillery units.

In my view, these observers were always brave and crazy guys. Their job was to get in the best place to direct the fire of guns several thousand yards to the rear into their observed target area. They had two location options-- find the highest place in the immediate vicinity or join the troops on the line. As infantry soldiers we tried to avoid likely forward observer locations since if they were laying down a lot of obviously directed artillery fire the Jerries would shell the likely observer spots like crazy to knock out the "eyes" of our heavy field pieces. Eliminate the observer and the artillery would go "blind" and often silent.

On the positive side, when an observer was on the front line with us you did have a knowledge that any targets of opportunity would be fired on immediately. Also, the likelihood of having one of our own shells drop on your head was significantly reduced. After all, it was the observer's head too!

When the observer arrived the immediate sector was relative quiet. He would change that quickly and, as was standard practice, ordered up three or four rounds in order to establish his position. He was "zeroing in" in the true meaning of the words. Based upon the impact area of these shells, the observer could hit any target within his area. This was done by ordering the gun crews to change range and direction from these previously established "zeroed in" positions.

So, why not have a little fun? Mostly "not" as far as I was concerned but my vote didn't carry much weight. After

all, the observer had the phone line to the artillery fire control center. And he announced to his audience (there were four or five of us near the window) that he was going to bring the shells in much closer to our location. That he did--for his and our "entertainment". I doubt if I was ever any closer to a moving live shell. It didn't take a doctorate in physics to observe the impact area and, realizing the path of the shell figure out that it was passing about 10 or 15 feet above our heads. And, what a scream from the shell as it was passing overhead--just prior to a mighty impact explosion!! Fun?

A rather stupid bit of entertainment. Had the smallest of error occurred at the firing point those of us at the window would have been dead. From "friendly fire" yet. But the whole war thing was certainly in the "stupid" category. However, I did not have any negative philosophy about the war at the time. I was young, felt great and certainly confident if not truly brave. The daily actions were exhilarating. You were consumed by the action and the excitement of the daily adventures. And, while one had to operate under a chain of command, there was always considerable freedom of choice based upon the topography, appraisal of the enemy and knowledge of the actions of your comrades.

Of course, "freedom of action" did not include the decision to walk away as one might do as a civilian facing a difficult or unpleasant task, But certainly "freedom" when compared to the confinement as a bomber crew member or the ultimate non-freedom job--that of a sailor! What possible satisfaction could you get out of rushing out of crowded quarters and exhibiting all the required actions of a Zombie every time some one rang a stupid gong??

Not knowing if the forward observer had finished the evening's entertainment, I opted to leave for a short time to run an errand of some sort. Must have been to return 100 yards or so to Company I headquarters to pick up rations or

cigarettes or water or ammunition. Or, maybe it was to escape the screaming shells and the obviously demented forward observer.

As I exited the building it was late dusk and a gusty wind was kicking up the dust and ash so prevalent in this burned out city. Rather eerie. Approaching the Headquarters area I noticed that three or four bodies covered by canvas had been laid out awaiting pick up by the GRO. (Graves Registration). The wind was stirring the canvas flap. And just as I came even with the bodies, a little harder gust hit the canvas cover and gently lifted a corner and folded it back. I immediately recognized the soldier under the canvas cover. Another Rest Camp associate was dead.

I did not hear about the death of the third rifleman who had gone with me to Rest Camp until we had been out of Heilbronn for several days. The death of the machine gun sergeant of Company I, however, occurred in my immediate presence.

As previously mentioned, as we went into Heilbronn I headed up the assault gun team. The other machine gun sergeant, who was troubled by Trench foot was in charge of the gun assigned to deliver covering fire. We were in the factory district and in what had probably been some sort of chemical processing plant before the air raids. Open interior metal stairs in a steel and concrete building had survived the fire. The sergeant was at the trigger of his gun giving covering fire for a couple of rifle squads who were advancing to our direct front.

I recall watching the red tracers in their flight toward a seemingly empty building about 75 yards away. As I watched I was observing the erratic pattern of the red tracers as they reached the target. I made a mental note that the machine gun barrel should be changed. It was worn out. Recent heavy use and overheating had made it very inaccurate.

Suddenly there was a grunt, the machine gun went silent

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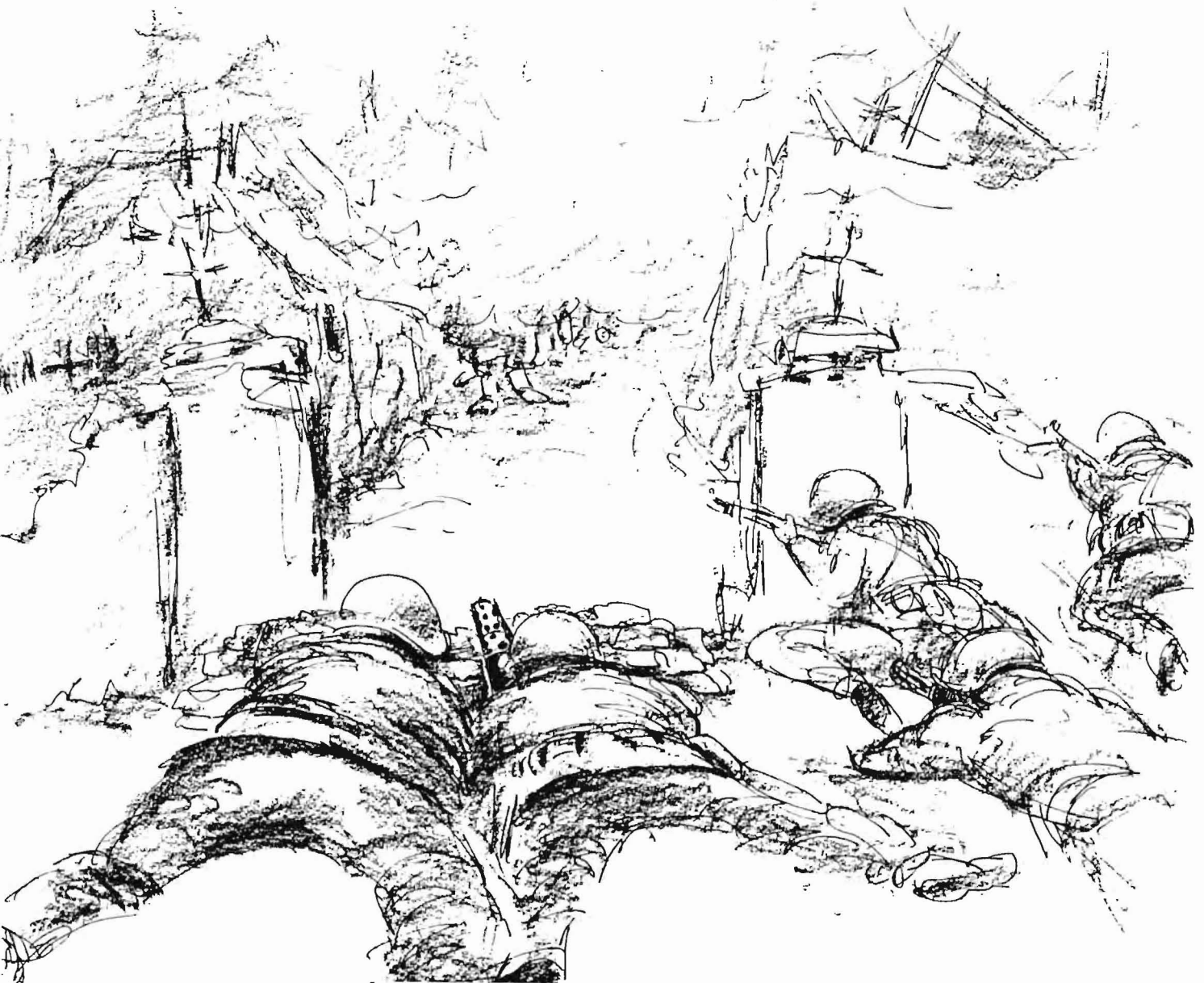
and as I turned my fellow machine gun sergeant was falling backwards. He didn't make another sound. He was dead with a bullet to the heart. This was hard to understand--several of us were at the opening where the machine gun had been mounted--yet only one person had been hit. This ruled out enemy automatic fire. Most likely a sniper had simply taken aim at the origination spot of the tracers with deadly results.

That evening we had both machine guns mounted rather close together with an impossible and useless field of fire. Without the usual good natured banter we spent a couple of hours going through ammo boxes and removing the red tracers and replacing them with regular bullets. We didn't use tracers again until we were outside of the city and back in the open countryside.

Three riflemen and a machine gun sergeant to Rest Camp. The three riflemen and a machine gun sergeant were among those killed in Heilbronn.

HEILBRONN, GERMANY
APRIL, 1944

Sketch by Milt Apetz, 1992



Hobnail boots could be heard approaching my machine gun position. All of us waited very quietly. It was an eerie feeling. The enemy was still not visible. But the sound of the hobnails on the pavement grew louder. It seemed that just the boots were advancing toward my position.

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HEILBRONN--HOBNAIL BOOTS

We were almost out of Heilbronn. We had captured the center of the city and manufacturing areas. Now we were in the suburbs. Still complete destruction but since the buildings were not as tall there was less fallen rubble in the streets.

When we stopped for the night, both machine guns were ordered to set up in the same church yard. An entirely unsuitable location, there was a very limited field of fire. And, since there was a solid stone wall about three feet high topped by a decorative metal fence, there was really no place to set up a gun. We had to make do as always. I located my gun on the paved walkway entrance to the church ground at the intersection of two streets. I was between two stone pillars each topped with a cross.

However, since we were on a paved surface, there was no way we could dig in to afford protection to the gun and crew. So we located some flat stones and erected a low wall in front of the gun. Company I riflemen were nearby behind the wall at this gate.

Bill Wladecki set up the other gun some 30 to 40 yards to my left. He avoided the church wall by placing his machine gun on a borrowed dining room table which had been abandoned near the destroyed church. I'm sure that we both hoped that this would be a quiet night. 'Fraid not!

When I first heard the hobnail boots they were too far away to discern the direction of march of the Jerries. But as the hobnails continued to hit the cobblestone pavement, it became quiet evident that quite a number of German soldiers were headed in our general direction. Perhaps 20 or 30 of them. I was manning the gun. The sound of boots on stone became louder and their destination was no longer in doubt. The Jerrys were coming down the street leading directly to my gun. There was something unreal about all this--the sound of the boots was very clear but no soldiers

could be seen in the darkness. It was as if just the boots were approaching all alone.

My finger was on the trigger. The riflemen were also in firing position. My assistant gunner and I were motionless as we stared into the near semi-darkness--a partial moon gave the only light. Firing would begin in a couple of minutes. Then, a strange sensation--the hair on my neck seemed to stand up and I felt a slight chill. I had read of this in suspense novels when someone was confronted with a real or imagined terror or danger--often of a supernatural nature. But this had never happened to me before. Hell, I had been scared many times but none of this "hair raising experience" stuff. That was for the movies and novels.

I wondered for a moment if I might "freeze". In the grip of terror--as they say. Not likely. I could feel the sweat running down my sides from my arm pits. Less than a minute to go before the familiar sound of the machine gun bursts would be pounding in my ears. Then, there was a perceptible change in the rhythm from the hobnail boots. Hardly detectable at first but then a noticeable decrease in the sound level. The column of soldiers was turning off of the street which led directly to my gun. In a very short time the sound of boots on the paved street could no longer be heard.

But the Jerries were very close. All of us were very silent and we could hear muffled sounds from the Germans. Apparently they were moving from right to left--directly in front of my gun, but unseen. They were moving towards the other machine gun. For a short period of time I was unable to hear any sound. Then the noises of the boots started again. One could only guess that these Germans were as confused as we sometimes were. They were likely receiving uncertain signals--march to your left, no, march to your right. One thing certain, they had failed to detect our positions. Most likely the group had gone down an alleyway to my immediate front to the next thoroughfare and then had made two left turns.

This meant the Jerries were now approaching from my left directly into the field of fire of the other machine gun. I was certainly not going to be of any help. From my position, I could fire to my front and my right but because of the wall, not to my left. Wladecki's gun would have to take care of these guys. And from the increasing sound level of the hobnail boots on the pavement they would soon be at Bill's position.

Now the 30 caliber light machine gun which we used in WW II was an effective weapon. One guy could carry it. And, when firing it could really deliver a lot of bullets very fast. It was not too complicated. But like most all guns which were fed ammunition from a belt, the mechanism was such that it first extracted a bullet from the belt, then the cycle would be repeated and the extracted shell would be placed in the firing chamber. Then, when the trigger was pulled the gun would fire and this cycle would be continuous. The purposes of the above is to explain that when you initially set up the gun you hand operate the mechanism to extract the shell from the belt--this is called "half-load". Then you repeat the operation putting the shell in the chamber--this is "full-load". You are now ready to fire!

The Jerries were getting very close. And, I knew that the other gun would be firing momentarily. The command "Fire" was given in a firm voice. You could almost feel the surprise on the part of the Germans when they realized that they were in the immediate presence of their enemy. The boots took on a different sound. A rapid scuffling. Then there was the sound of the machine gun--it went "ker-plunk"! That was all. The gun had only been on half-load. Now the sound of the boots indicated real panic. Shouts in German as the Jerries tried to get off the street.

And from the area of the gun came shouts of "Load the gun"! "Load the gun"! Too late. The Germans had scattered into the darkness.

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The sound of hobnail boots was not heard again. But no one got much sleep that night. All of us were sure that since our positions had been pin-pointed that some enemy action would follow. None did. Score for the evening: U S Army -0-. German Army -0-.

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THE PRESIDENT DIES; WE DRINK

We were making very good progress through the German countryside as we headed toward the city of Stuttgart. Beautiful weather for the near Mid-April period. The enemy was fleeing and we were trying to catch them. About three o'clock we approached a neat little village and, of course, the church bells were ringing. This was obviously the signal that the long dreaded event had arrived. The Amis were in sight. Hide all the silver and booze, send the virgins to the attic and display white flags from the windows.

Upon reaching the village, orders came down that we would stop here and standby for transportation. Good time to take a break, we had been on the road since early morning. I picked a likely house and we walked in. We checked the place over for possible soldiers who might be in hiding while the lady of the house checked us over. There seemed to be just this woman in her thirties and her mother in the house. When you think it over, it must be quite a sensation to have foreign troops just walk in like they owned the place. Go into all your rooms and look in all your closets.

But this lady was very calm and in quite decent English said, "You know, your President is dead!" The comment was directed toward me since I apparently appeared to be in charge. I said, "Oh! That's too bad," without emotion. She sort of stared at me and asked, "Did you know this news?" and I was honest and shook my head in the negative. Now for her real concern, the comment she had been waiting to deliver, "The war will end now, won't it?"

A most interesting thought. I realized then how far removed I was from the "big picture." Roosevelt, Smoosevelt, it was simply my job to help defeat the German Army. And here was this farm lady whose husband was probably fighting somewhere if still alive, who felt that Adolf Hitler and Franklin D Roosevelt were on a grand center stage and had been engaged in a personal struggle. I had no reason to

doubt the news about our President, I was sure she had the correct information. Then she said very positively, "Yes the war will end. You will surrender." She really wanted to believe those words. And I really didn't want to act like I knew all the answers (After all I had not known that my Commander-in-Chief was dead.) so I simply said, "No, I don't think the war will end now. It will continue and probably not end up the way you describe; I think we will win."

Obviously these were words the lady did not want to hear, but I think she knew in her heart that they were true. The war was nearly over and everyone on both sides was starting to realize it. No more was said about our surrendering and we had our coffee while the guten Frau went about her chores as if we were not around. And, as was our practice while waiting, we relaxed. We had long ago removed our steel helmets, of course. Then we removed our outer gear and weapons. Time to write a letter home or take a nap or just smoke and shoot the breeze with one another until we got the call to "Move out!" Looking back on that day, I wonder how we looked to that housewife. While we considered ourselves combat veterans, which we were of course, many were still teenagers--I was an elder at 22--and we certainly looked considerably younger with our combat gear off than when we walked uninvited through the front door.

Orders came to depart. And although no further discussions had been held with our "hostess," I smiled warmly when I said "Good-bye." Then as a complete surprise, the lady presented me with a bottle of schnapps. I gave her many "Thank yous" and tossed in a few "Dankes."

As I walked out the door, I glanced at the bottle. The container of clear liquid was sealed and had a label which was a complete surprise. I figured she had handed me a bottle of homemade stuff--most of these farmers had a bottle or two around the house "for medicinal purposes." But, as some of our Southern boys would say this was "store-bought" booze. Or more likely, a gift of long ago from Uncle Herman

in Berlin. The label read "ALTEN SCHWARZWALDER". Which translates into "Old Black Forester." Let me tell you it was some powerful stuff!

Based on the information we had received, it was clear that we would be on the road the balance of the day. And not walking--but rather we would be riding on the new tank destroyers that had recently been introduced to our battle sector. A neat vehicle from an infantryman's point of view--it was a rear-engine machine with room for three or four guys on the outside behind the turret and over the engine. Thus, you were sheltered from the wind and warmed by the heat of the motor. The good life!

Since we had the rest of the day off and I had a bottle of booze, it seemed like a good time to invite a couple of friends to join me in a cozy roost on a TD. The two pals joining me were Homer Lester and Earl McKisson. The old and the young! Earl was one of the kids of Company I. Certainly one of the brightest. Always cheerful and willing to help a fellow soldier. And also willing to join in a drink and to share his philosophies. Very mature for his age.

Now Homer was absolutely one of a kind. He was our most senior non-com by far. (Senior, in age that is, not rank.) A graduate of Cornell in the late 1920's with a major in chemistry, he came to the infantry the hard way--he enlisted. Apparently, Homer wanted to join the Navy in some sort of specialty branch where he could use his education and experience. When the officer rank offered him was below his expectations, Homer said, "Screw you!" and enlisted as a private in the Army to "get even." Not sure this was a winner for Homer but he never complained about his choice.

Homer was a very close friend--particularly after the war was over. (And we were dating a pair of lovely professional roller skaters). But even during the hostilities we were close. Although, I thought our paths had separated permanently when he shot himself with a his own 30 caliber machine gun. That's right! He shot himself with a

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machine gun! I'm quite sure that no other soldier can claim to have accomplished this most difficult task!

In order to understand how Homer managed to shoot himself with his own machine gun, you need to recall how the gun operates. First, you pull back the arming lever once to extract the shell from the ammunition belt. This is half load. Then you pull back the lever again to put the shell in the gun barrel. This is full load and if you now pull the trigger the gun will fire. For safety's sake the gun should always remain on half load. Second, the light machine gun was designed to be fired from a tripod which was about 18 inches high. However, shortly after we entered combat the Army decided to "improve" the weapon by putting a bipod at the front of the gun and a shoulder rest at the rear. This made the gun much lower to the ground. It also made it difficult to set it up in a defensive position. The front of the gun is OK on the bipod but the rear needs support to keep it off the ground. An ammunition box was the normal choice.

But there is no trigger guard on a machine gun similar to what you see on a rifle or pistol. This, then led to Homer's famous shot.

On that day, everything was quiet to our immediate front at our dug in defensive position. Homer decided to raise up the bipod legs. I was first aware of a problem when there was a single shot from Homer's machine gun. Then Homer yelled out to his first gunner, "Tucker, goddamn it, how many times have I told you to only half load the frigging gun!" Homer had shot himself through the calf of the leg. It was obvious what had happened--the gun was on full load ready to fire and when Homer stood in front of the gun and raised the bipod leg, the trigger caught on the ammo box and the gun fired.

Homer never mentioned the pain. He was much more interested in making sure his personal possessions were given to his friends. One was reminded of the death scene of

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a patriarch. There was Homer on his back passing out all his treasures--his extra canteen filled with schnapps, his customized trench knife, his special scarf, an extra pair of gloves and so on. It was rather obvious that Homer didn't expect to return. But it was a clean wound, right through the leg without touching a bone. And he was back with us in about eight weeks.

Yes, Homer was back and we were on the tank destroyer ready to go when I broke the seal on the gift bottle. And since it was my gift, I took the first swig. The sensation was something akin to the first big bite of a very spicy Mexican pepper. It simply took your breath away. Tears in your eyes. Your voice is momentarily lost. I handed the bottle to Earl and quietly commented, "Good stuff." And I quickly lit a cigarette. Earl took a pull and made a noise like, "Wow!" and passed the bottle to Homer. He took a drink--we were drinking from the bottle--and gave it back to me without comment. I knew what I had to do and I did it. I lifted the bottle and as I tipped it up I put my tongue over the end. I faked a pull and passed the bottle.

The TD rolled on. It quickly became dark. And I would take a "drink", smack my lips and pass the bottle to Earl, who would repeat the action and pass the bottle to Homer. And we talked and smoked and drank as the bottle was passed. And every now and then I would actually take a slug of the stuff! And, of course, we sang. Homer loved to sing. Certainly one of his favorites was included--Christopher Columbus, which must of had at least 50 really great disgustingly vulgar verses. I can recall one:

Oh! The cabin boy, the cabin boy
A sneaky little nipper
He packed his ass, with broken glass
And circumcised the Skipper!

It became dark but our backs and butts were warm--and

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the Old Black Forester was by now our real pal. We talked about how we would not only survive this war in Europe but also win over Japan. (We would be home thru the Golden Gate in 1948!) About the only thing I don't remember discussing was the sudden death of our President. But, maybe we did and, if so, we would have had a drink to his memory. This I did know-- we had really been working over that bottle.

Then, we finally arrived at our destination--the name of the town has been long forgotten--and we crawled off the tank destroyer. I had the bottle which I assumed would be nearly empty based on how many times it had been passed around. I lit a match and looked at the bottle. In all that time we had consumed less than one-fourth of the contents. Those dirty bums! Homer and Earl had also been tonguing it!! Wasn't there any honor among drinkers any more?

Quite often after the war, the three of us would lift a glass or two but I don't ever recall that the episode on the back of the tank destroyer ever came up. Perhaps each of us thought we were the only one with the tongue scheme and didn't wish to admit our deception to the others! We separated in Europe and did not return to the States together. I never saw either of them again.

I sent Homer an invitation to my wedding in 1946. It was returned marked "not deliverable". In the early 1950's I was in St.Petersburg which I recalled as being Earl's home town, but there were no McKissons in the telephone book.

Homer and Earl were truly great guys and I was fortunate to have them for friends. Both are now deceased.



These photos were taken as we paused briefly on April 20, 1945. We were approaching the city of Backnang. Although unknown to us when we were posing, we had fired our last shots in anger. Our war was over.

I'm on the left in the top picture with my fellow machine gun sergeant and boon companion, Homer Lester. In the bottom photo I am joined by my very good friend, Bill Wladecki. (Far right)

In the center is our fearless platoon leader, Joseph "Moon" Schonarth.

If we appear a little plump or bulgy, remember that somewhere in our jackets and pockets we are carrying every thing we own--including food, drink, shelter and spare ammo!

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LAUNDRY DAY

When I was growing up there was a strip on the comic page called Mutt and Jeff. I'm not sure I understood their humor but I was intrigued by the drawings. Jeff was always dressed like a diplomat on a formal occasion--morning coat, striped pants and a top hat. It seemed odd to me that he didn't have any other clothes. Mutt's clothes were more normal but he didn't have a lower jaw. A rather big nose and a bristly mustache but no chin. Mutt was in direct contrast to the German soldier who lay dead behind his 88 artillery piece. The German had only a lower jaw--no upper head.

Viewing the evidence, it appeared that this German artilleryman was likely attempting to sight his 88 when an armor piercing round from one of our tanks struck the muzzle end of his gun and then slid down the barrel and simply took off the top of the guy's head. But only from the mouth up--it did not appear the teeth in his lower jaw had been touched. The unfortunate artilleryman also had another distinction--he was carrying a long barreled Luger pistol. A very rare sidearm and a prized war souvenir for the GI who first arrived on the scene.

Seeing enemy dead never brought any joy to me. It was rather impersonal. (Whereas, seeing your own comrades and friends dead, called up feelings of grief and tragedy.) It was the forward movement, not killing, that counted. Killing "X" number of the enemy but not being able to advance was no victory. Penetrating enemy held territory equated to victory and any enemy casualties--dead, wounded and captured were simply a by-product. Many shared my view, and very few soldiers in our organization ever expressed feelings of deep hatred toward our German infantry counterparts.

This is not to say that we sympathized with their cause. We didn't. But it does say that we shared many things in common. One must realize that much of the real "suffering" of front line troops is the physical discomfort.

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When it rains, you are wet. When the temperature drops, you are wet, cold and miserable. You eat unappetizing canned rations. Sleep is almost impossible for days without end. You are beyond exhaustion. You are so dirty you can feel it. Add to this the fact that during all this, someone is trying to shoot you! So when you would see the green German uniforms you would see the enemy but you would also see someone whose circumstances was strikingly similar to your own.

Then too, there is a matter of pride. When we first went into combat in October, 1944 the soldiers we faced were top rate. True, they were without air cover but in the deep forests of the Vosges Mountains, air cover or air defense, was of little consequence. By late Spring of 1945, the quality of the troops which we faced was in serious decline and their numbers greatly reduced.

For example, in the incident just recounted, the artilleryman with the long barreled Luger was an obvious veteran. Besides the pistol, his uniform and boots reflected his veteran status. However, those with him that day reflected the dying gasps of the Third Reich. There were twelve or fifteen men with the veteran. All with new rifles, new uniforms and boots. They immediately showed a white flag and surrendered after the 88 was knocked out. Some could have been younger than fifteen, some were definitely middle-aged. You can't feel a lot of pride when you defeat such an inferior force.

This is in no way to imply that these so-called "Home Guards" were not to be taken seriously. Anyone with a weapon is a threat to your very life! Just a couple of days later We found this out.

But this surrender marked the end of our day. The start was quite different. That morning, as we were approaching a small village I was asked to bring up the machine gun. Just ahead was a village which was believed to be defended by the otherwise rapidly retreating Jerries. We were going to fire

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at them a bit and see if it brought any response. If our fire was returned, then we would call for some mortar or artillery shelling of the village.

We fired several bursts to our immediate front. Our tracers started a barn burning but no other response from the enemy. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted movement to my right front. Bill McKeown was firing the machine gun; Leon Brooks was feeding in the ammo belt. It was noisy as Hell! I knew Bill couldn't hear me so I slapped him on the helmet and signaled him to swing the gun to the right. He did so immediately.

About 100 yards to our right front was a large stone farm house. Movement could be seen near one end of the building. I could also see from the pattern of our tracer bullets that this gun barrel was badly worn and again in need of replacement. Because of this, the bullets were spraying wildly. As quickly as I could I opened the case of my "captured" German field glasses to determine more specifically the nature of our target. How many soldiers? Were they running in retreat or trying to surrender?

In moments I had my answer. My target was an elderly farm lady trying to take down her laundry!! I'll say this--that little old lady was really hustling! And she had better move fast--we were covering the entire end of the farmhouse with 30 caliber bullets! We stopped firing immediately. The farm lady was both unharmed and unruffled. She completed her job and disappeared into the house with her clothes basket.

For many years I told this Laundry Day story as representative of my contribution to the Great Allied Victory in Europe. Always good for a laugh. But as the years pass, and pass, it becomes more apparent to me that in war each of us are shooting at nothing really worthwhile. Few of us ever experience this futility first hand.

I did.

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THE UNRULY LIEUTENANT

Times were tough in Fulton, Ohio in 1935. I was out by the road when Charley Houseworth came by. His dog, Spider, was at the end of a rope. Charley had a 22 caliber rifle cradled on his right arm. I asked Charley where he was going, but I probably could have guessed the answer. He replied, "Paul, I'm taking this dog out to shoot him. He's been after sheep."

After a few minutes of conversation, including a stern warning of my responsibilities for a sheep killer, Spider was my dog. I had saved him from execution.

Ten years later I was a long way from Fulton. And a very happy machine gunner. The war was within a couple of days of being over for our organization. We couldn't find any Germans to fight. But prisoners were plentiful. So many in fact, that we had to open a temporary holding area until the proper authorities could take them off our hands. We simply had placed German soldiers of all ranks in an open field. Very informal. The Germans themselves maintained the discipline--digging of temporary latrines, distribution of rations and temporary care of the ill and slightly wounded.

I was not involved with this holding area. The assignment for my machine gun squad was to maintain a roadblock or checkpoint at a cross roads at the edge of the village. What we were supposed to block or check was not identified. Anyhow, in the late afternoon two members of a tank crew approached our location from the village. They both carried Tommy guns and were marching a German officer between them. Their intentions were other than honorable.

The officer had the physical characteristics of the type of person that have always given me a bad time for some reason. A large upper body and head, but with short arms and legs that just don't fit the body. Because of this mismatch, these guys always seem to try to overcome their short

stature by being obnoxious as Hell. This Kraut fit the mold. He walked with swagger, chin up and chest out. He, by God, owned the world! And, I imagine he thought he had been plucked from the mass of prisoners for an interview and a drink with one of our senior American officers.

I asked the tankers what was going on. For sure, they weren't taking this guy out for an interview and a drink. One of them spoke up very quickly and said, "We are going to take this son-of-a-bitch out in the country and shoot him." It was then explained that the officer had attempted to destroy their tank after a white flag of surrender had been displayed. I could tell they were serious. "Deadly serious" would have been a very appropriate phrase.

This officer was in a real jam. But if he understood any English or could tell from the gestures that he was about to be executed, he gave no evidence of it. Very doubtful also that he recognized the soldiers taking him for a walk. Although apparently they had offered to kill the bastard before.

This I found out some time later from the tank machine gunner, Ed Gore, who was a member of my machine gun squad and had had a front row seat so to speak. Which in itself requires a few words of explanation. A couple of days before this mess got started with this German officer, a tank commander of one of the tanks assigned to our unit asked if one of the members of my squad would like to ride in a tank for three days so his regular gunner could go to Rest Camp. Ed volunteered.

According to Ed, everything had gone smoothly for the first couple of days after he joined the tank crew. Since the Germans were retreating as fast as possible, he appreciated being able to ride rather than walk. And he was aware that at times we would walk the entire day as we tried in vain to catch up with the fleeing enemy. And Ed said he felt safe in the tank in that the infantry had provided them with very good protection. That's right. One of our jobs

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as infantry was to protect the tanks assigned to our organization. That's not quite the image projected by Patton's armored divisions or the forces of Rommel and Montgomery in their classic confrontations in Africa. But we were not with Patton and this was not Africa! The few tanks accompanying the 3rd Battalion of the 397th Infantry Regiment had a rather limited assignment.

Typically, if we came up against German tanks or strong roadblocks protected by artillery or anti-tank weapons, we would have to rely on our own artillery or air support to assist us in dislodging the enemy forces. This wasn't because the tankers with us lacked courage-- it was the simple fact that our battle sector was not suitable for tank warfare. In the forests or on the narrow rural roads, the tanks had no maneuvering ability. And, as they quickly learned, if they attacked a well-defended position head on they were easily destroyed.

So what was their mission? The tanks were very useful in helping to eliminate stubborn pockets of resistance or roadblocks defended only by enemy rifle, machine gun and mortar fire. According to Ed Gore, this was the very situation which one of Company I's rifle platoons had found itself in on the day of the confrontation with the unruly officer. We were on the road to Backnang. Within hours we were to fire our last shots at the Jerries. We all knew it was over. No one wanted to take a bullet now. But, up ahead, 15 or 20 Jerries had felled several large trees across the highway and gave every evidence of defending the position. There was no evidence that they had any tank or artillery support but they certainly had rifles and machine guns. An assault by our rifle platoon might result in 10 or 20 unwanted casualties. So, Ed's tank and another one responded to our call for help.

And, as expected, as soon as the tanks fired a couple of high explosive shells at the defenders and had generously sprayed the area with machine gun fire, the white flags came

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out. The Germans might be losing the war but they were not all stupid! Everything had worked according to the plans and desires of both sides--engage the enemy, fire a few shots in anger and suffer no casualties. The Germans would lose and go home. The Americans would win and go home. At last, we had this damned war down to a manageable situation. Something both sides could live with!

The Germans tossed down their rifles and started to line up with their hands clasped on the top of their heads. Our tankers unbuttoned their hatches and started to emerge. At this critical juncture the German Lieutenant made his move. He had apparently remained concealed and seeing the tanks with their open covers, he fired an anti-tank grenade at the lead tank. Although he was in full view, his movements were so quick and unexpected that no one had the opportunity to shoot him before he could launch his missile. It was, fortunately, a near miss. Then, also very quickly, the Kraut bastard now raised his hands in surrender. The tank commanders were incensed at this clear-cut violation of the "rules". They wanted to shoot the S O B right on the spot. The Company I platoon leader said no. The tankers conferred, and, after seeing we might need help with the prisoners, they generously offered to put the prisoners on their tanks and deposit them at the nearest POW collection point. (Couldn't blame them if the officer later tried to escape and was shot evading recapture!) Their offer was politely declined.

Thus, the officer ended up in the field which we were watching. And our tanker friends were still in the area. As previously mentioned, the POW collection point which we were temporarily operating was very informal and only a "prison" in the broadest sense of the term. I'm sure if some one desired to escape they could have easily done so. Likewise, when the tank crew members came calling, they probably had no difficulty in getting the Lieutenant released to their custody.

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I honestly believe the tankers were surprised when I refused to let them continue past our roadblock with the officer. They restated their argument that the officer should be shot. He had broken the "rules." I restated my refusal. What seemed to bother the tankers the most was that as combat troops we would not agree to their plan of action. Their attitude was that a refusal might be expected from rear echelon troops or the MP's but not from us. But in the end they gave up. The Unruly Lieutenant was turned over to my machine gun squad and we quickly returned him to the POW compound. Very much alive and well!

A day or so later, we fired our last shot. The war had ended. Everyone could go home--some sooner than others, it turned out.

We were trucked off to Bavaria where we spent two or three months doing almost nothing. Mostly running time wasting patrols through farm lands and small villages. In mid-summer we were dispatched to the city of Stuttgart.

We had plenty of free time. And, although the center of the city had been badly damaged (destroyed, really), it was still the place to go--the Black Market was there--and, of course, the girls! Thus it was on a bright, sunny, girl watching day that I spotted my favorite German officer--the Lieutenant from the roadblock of several weeks ago. His uniform was now devoid of evidence of rank and organization. Arms pumping, his body was being propelled along by his little short legs. The top of his head was at arm pit level of the others on the sidewalk. But, as he approached me and passed within speaking distance, it was obvious he was walking with a purpose. Eyes straight ahead. I watched him disappear into the Stuttgart crowd.

I stood there for awhile staring in the direction he was headed. I thought it was rather ironic that he had beat me home. I also wondered about what he would make of the rest of his life. Maybe I even thought about this in terms of the "life I that had given to him."

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The last time I visited Fulton, Ohio nothing much had changed. Still a village of 200 people. The friendly dogs remind me of Spider and my youth. I still think of Spider now and then. He was a great dog and I certainly never regretted saving him from being shot!

The German officer? I'll never know.

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COLLEGE CLASSMATES

In the Civil War and to a lesser extent in World War I military units often included friends, neighbors and relatives from the same city or local geographical area. This had good points and bad. Since knowing and trusting your comrades is very important in combat having a common geographical background strengthened soldiering relationships. On the other hand, if an organization suffered serious casualties, the impact on a local community could be very severe.

In any event, during WW II the method of entry into the service, the training and method of placement practically precluded acquaintances from ending up in the same organization. So, I was rather surprised when four of us from Ohio Wesleyan University went overseas with the 397th Infantry Regiment.

I was the only one of the four who remained in the Regiment when the war had ended.

Dan DeFranco was the first casualty. I did not know him personally but I learned when I returned to OWU in 1946 that he was an extremely talented and gifted individual. In addition to his brain power, he was what used to be called "the life of the party." The laugh a minute type; a clown complete with exaggerated actions and mimicry.

Dan's rifle company was quartered in a village near the front lines. Dan and several companions were in the loft of a barn. The next day was to be their first day of combat. Dan was standing when an incoming shell exploded fairly close--but not a hit on the barn. Following the explosion, Dan grabbed his stomach area and fell on the hay yelling, "I'm hit, I'm hit!" Since the barn had not been struck his fellow soldiers considered Dan's actions as a typical "performance." For a minute or two they were entertained. Then they realized that he had been really been wounded. Apparently a shell fragment had come in through a small open

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window. A one in a million chance and despite immediate medical attention, Dan DeFranco died.

Stu Blydenburg was next. Stu was hit during our Regiment's attack in the Raon L'Etape area. Shrapnel from a mortar or artillery shell nearly severed his left arm about half way between his shoulder and elbow. Stu told me after the war that he knew when he was hit that it was a bad wound and he had to stop the flow of blood immediately. But no Medic could be found. So Blydenburg devised a tourniquet using his scarf and his bayonet. Then he proceeded to walk through the forest for nearly a mile before finding an aid station. The alternative? Faint and bleed to death. To me, this is an excellent example of man's inherent courage and the desire for self-preservation. Consider the circumstances--you could demonstrate that a wound this serious can not be self-treated. And, if self-treated, the individual couldn't walk a mile for medical assistance. Yet, Stu Blydenburg demonstrated it could be done.

I really don't know what happened to Grover. He arrived in France with the Regiment and entered combat. But late in 1944 when I asked about him, the members of his rifle company told me that he had been evacuated to a Field Hospital. My source had no information as to the nature or extent of Grover's injuries. I learned nothing more about Grover while I was in Europe.

Shortly after returning to Ohio Wesleyan in the Spring of 1946, I ran into Grover in a local bar. He was alone in a booth and I sat down opposite him. After a few generalities about classes, I asked Grover about his injuries in France while he was with the 100th Division. Grover stared at me for several seconds, then said, "Paul, I was never in France with the 100th Division." I had the impression attempting to recall passed events had caused Grover considerable anxiety. He continued to stare at me, drained his glass and left.

Shortly after that I learned that Grover had dropped out of Ohio Wesleyan. I never saw or heard of him again.

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LOCH LOMMOND

Have you ever heard the recording of Loch Lommond by Maxine Sullivan? This 78 RPM single was on the juke box at the restaurant where I worked in 1940 during my senior year in high school. This was a very danceable tune and had some great lyrics relating to the famous lake in Scotland. The song got stuck in my mind and remained there.

But neither Loch Lommond nor Scotland was on my mind when an announcement was made at our barracks in Stuttgart that some passes to England were available. I opted to go. However, although transportation, food and shelter would be available at essentially no charge through the military you did need some personal funds for gifts, sight seeing tours and any travel and personal expenses if you ventured beyond London. Minor problem--I was broke!

Absolutely no reason to be without money, of course. There was plenty of money to be made on the Black Market. The profit in dealing in cigarettes, for example, was fantastic! Then there were opportunities in clothing, food and whatever. And why wasn't I getting my share? Very simple. I was much too busy pursing booze, wild wild women and partying at our Non Commissioned Officers club! So, I needed to borrow. And, of course, I turned to my friend, Bill Wladecki, whom I had helped in a somewhat shady currency conversion transaction several weeks before. When I asked for a loan of \$1000, Bill didn't even ask why I needed the money. And no inquiry at all as to how and when the loan would be repaid. (It would be a long time before I found another friend like Bill.)

Several days later I was on a sight seeing boat on Loch Lommond with a very attractive brunette that I had met in Edinburgh. Her name was Evelyn and she seemed surprised that I would pick this particular lake for a sight seeing trip. Seemed very appropriate to me, of course, since I'd heard Maxine describe it!

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Now to get this far I had travelled through three currency zones. That's right--currency zones. Leaving Germany with a pocket full of Marks, you were required to convert to Francs in Paris at the official rate. For those of us going on to London it was mandatory to convert the Francs to Pounds before crossing the Channel to England. Again, at official exchange rates.

Based on the scuttlebutt and personal observations, you didn't need a degree in Money and Banking to figure out that the official exchange rates were quite different from those at the market place. Particularly, between the Pound and the Franc. Based on this knowledge, I had a scheme for profit in mind early on in the trip. As required, I converted the borrowed funds from Marks to Francs and the Francs to Pounds. Then in England, I spent freely for drinks, food, drinks, the visit to Scotland, drinks and the day trip for two to Loch Lommond.

Upon returning to France, however, I bypassed the official exchange area in the costal city of Etretat and arrived in Paris with a sizeable wad of English Pound notes and ready to deal on the currency exchange Black Market. And dealers weren't hard to find. But I'd been warned, I had better pick out the right dealer, since there was a lot of counterfeit money in circulation. Some of it apparently very hard to detect. My travelling companion, Stanley Williams, hit on a great scheme. After checking out several Black Market currency exchangers, we found one who would make the exchange in his residence. It was Stan's opinion that no one in his right mind would foist off counterfeit currency from his home. A rate was agreed to and very soon we were in the dealer's apartment sharing Cognac, after having been introduced to the wife and daughter. The monies were quickly exchanged and we were back on the street.

But always the cautious, careful Infantry soldiers our next stop was a sidewalk cafe a couple of blocks away. Why? To obtain a certification as to the legitimacy of this huge

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bundle of oversized Franc notes. The Appraiser? The local waiter, naturally! I'm not sure how we communicated to the waiter that his expert services were being requested. Maybe Stan spoke a little French. But in any event, it was apparent that he knew his assignment and went about his work with an air of professionalism usually reserved for appraisers of rare and precious gems. Our expert would lick his thumb, remove a Franc note from the stack he held and, after several seconds of furrowed brow scrutiny, he would solemnly proclaim, "Bon!" and place the now approved note on the cafe table. We were seated outside and several times our expert would raise the note skyward to further assure us of his thoroughness. After several minutes of "Bons!" all the notes had received certification.

We then had a drink together and gave our "expert" a tip of \$50 or \$100 for his assistance. Later that day, I caught the train to Stuttgart and exchanged the Francs for Marks. Arriving back at the barracks I repaid Bill the \$1000 and still had a small profit.

End of the story. Well almost the end. I had given Evelyn my home address. Before I got back to the States, I had a letter from my Mother saying she had received a letter from one of "my friends". She enclosed the letter from Scotland. Evelyn stated the obvious--what a really nice boy "...Paul had been..." and what a wonderful time we had had in Scotland. She also made it very clear that she was hoping to marry a service man and be able to come and live in the States. In the Spring of 1946, my Mother received another letter from Evelyn. But this time the letter came from New Jersey. Evelyn stated she had met a very nice sailor, had married him, and was happily settled in the United States. No further communications were ever received.

I always wondered if Evelyn had a happy life in the States. And did she miss the "bonny banks and the bonny braes". And did she ever hear Maxine Sullivan sing Loch Lommond and realize why I wanted to go there?

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DEATH OF A CLOSE FRIEND

When I arrived at the chow tent I was not too surprised to see that a couple of Army Air Corps officers had joined us for lunch. The war had ended in Europe less than a month ago. It was a relaxed time. Other than a couple of stints at guard duty or road patrol during any seven day period, we were pretty much on our own. We still had not received permission from the French to take over Stuttgart, so on an interim basis we had been assigned as Army of Occupation troops in a farming area of Southern Bavaria. The Company mess was very informal. Stand up counters had been erected, covered by canvas in the event of rain. No sides. Food served on a first come, first served, basis. Enlisted men and officers ate together.

Friends from other organizations often dropped by and they were welcome to join us at mealtime. But the two officers which I had noticed did not appear to be visiting anyone in our Company. They were standing alone in serious conversation. I almost went over and inquired about a friend in the Air Corps whom I knew that was stationed in Northern France. Or had been at least, at the time I received my last letter from him. But, I figured, that would be like asking, "If you are from Chicago, perhaps you know my Uncle Herman." So, I didn't talk with them.

But I did find out more about the visit of the two officers when the next issue of our Battalion Newsletter came out. The Newsletter stated that the two were seeking news of a fellow pilot who had bailed out over this part of Germany after his fighter plane had been disabled by an enemy jet aircraft. Although another pilot confirmed that he safely parachuted to earth, the war had now been over for almost a month and the pilot was still unaccounted for. The article concluded with a brief comment that it was indeed fortunate that the war had ended before the Germans had had the opportunity to bring a significant number of these jet aircraft into their air force.

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I had no way of knowing, of course, that the officers were searching for Jim Hack who had been my high school classmate in Delaware, Ohio and very good friend. Jim and I had worked together in Bun's Restaurant (the local eatery), partied together and Jim had even worked for me for almost a year (1941-42) when I operated a fast food restaurant near the girls' dormitories at Ohio Wesleyan. We often double dated, going out with the freshman coeds. We were very close during this period. I joined the Army Reserves and Jim enlisted in the Army Air Corps in the Flying Cadet program.

Both of us entered the service in early 1943 and we corresponded on an irregular basis. I followed his cadet training and subsequent commissioning as a 2nd Lieutenant. He heard from me about my Basic Training at Fort McClelland and my days in the Army Specialized Training Program at The Citadel in Charleston, SC. And then my assignment to the 100th Infantry Division. Jim went to France as a fighter pilot and I went over as a PFC machine gunner.

During the period I was in combat, from November, 1944 through April, 1945 we probably wrote each other three or four letters. And despite censorship, we exchanged enough information for me to know that Jim was flying support along the northeastern front in general, and sometimes the 100th Division specifically. Jim, of course, knew exactly where I was from his aerial maps. I found myself greatly appreciating this effort from an old friend.

In June a letter arrived from his sister who still lived in our hometown of Delaware, Ohio. The news was quite disturbing. Jim was reported Missing in Action (MIA). His fighter plane had been shot down just a few days before the war ended and although a parachute was seen to open, the Army Air Corps had been unable to locate him. His sister stated that she was writing to me since Jim had mentioned in his letters that he was flying support to my Army organization. She stated that although the military was investigating, perhaps I could help somehow since I was "right there."

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This letter reached me shortly after we had left southern Bavaria, and had moved into position to begin our occupation of Stuttgart. A second letter from Jim's sister arrived about two weeks later. Jim was dead! His body had been recovered near a small farming community in southern Bavaria which she named. Apparently she had also been informed that Jim had been killed by civilians. In this letter the anger was as apparent as the grief. It must certainly be devastating to have a loved one make it almost to the end of the war and then be advised the person will not be returning. And told that the cause of death was murder and not the result of military action. The letter mentioned that she certainly hoped that those responsible would be subject to the strongest form of justice. Staring at the letter which contained the news of Jim's death, the gears began to whirl. Less than three weeks before, my organization had patrolled this very area as part of our Army of Occupation duties. I knew that area very well and recognized the name of the village.

Recalling the earlier news article about the visit of the two officers searching for their downed comrade, I checked out back issues of our Battalion Newsletter. I quickly found what I was looking for. Apparently, I had failed to see an article stating that the search for the missing pilot had been tragically successful. The pilot's body had been found, wrapped in his parachute, and buried in a shallow grave. He was found near the location where he was seen bailing out of his smoking aircraft. The investigators had determined that several local residents led by the town's mayor had captured the pilot. Then he was beaten to death by hoes and shovels and buried. The article concluded that the death was expected to be investigated by the War Crimes Commission. The town mayor was believed to be chiefly responsible.

I checked my map and compared the village named in the news article with the town in the letter. Identical. I could

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only conclude that the Jim Hack whose death had been reported to me by his sister was the pilot the officers were seeking when I had seen them in the mess tent several weeks ago. I was stunned!

Imagine the coincidence of this. The paths of two very close friends from a small Ohio town are brought together by one of them being brutally murdered thousands of miles away in a remote farm area in Germany. Add to this the fact that the pilot has flown many missions in direct support of the Infantry sergeant during the war. And when the pilot's body is found, the Infantry sergeant is located very close to the area in which the crime was committed. Much too far fetched for fiction!

My immediate reaction to this news was anger--anger, at myself. If only I had spoken to the investigating officers that day in the mess tent. Then, upon learning that they were searching for my friend, I could have mobilized a sizeable group of searchers among my friends in Company I. Or much more likely the Company commander would have made this matter official business and put the entire roster on the search. We had the time. In any event, I'm sure I could have taken some action which would have resulted in finding the body much quicker. But what then?

Good question. But at least I would have been directly involved. And this would have been helpful to Jim's sister since she would have received factual accounts from me rather than relying on sometimes delayed and often frustratingly incomplete information from the military. For example, I am sure in this case that when the MIA notice was issued that the body had already been found. Typical of the Army. Then they send out the death notice in a couple of weeks. The Army apparently believed this method enabled families to better accept the subsequent notice of death. More likely, it simply made the pain last longer.

One thing for certain, had I become involved earlier in this search and discovery mission, I would have taken such

action as would have been justified considering the circumstances. I would have been most willing to kill one or more of the bastards involved in Jim's death. The mayor I could have killed without a second thought because of his role as ringleader. The war had just ended. This would have merely been a brief extension of hostilities! I could have done the deed in those first few weeks after the war ended without sympathy or remorse for the perpetrators. There would have been no doubt about "justice being done!"

But, by late July in that Summer of 1945, things were changing. I was just beginning to appreciate the total devastation of WW II--particularly, in terms of lives lost. Jim would remain dead. So would my companions from Company I that had been killed in the woods and fields and towns in France and Germany. Also, millions of Germans. And still countless more Allied soldiers. So very many!

More and more, I viewed Jim's death, particularly coming so near the end of the conflict in Europe, to be a symbol of the utter futility of war itself.

Certainly that Summer of 1945 was a time of revaluation. Immediately after the war, I would have viewed the actions of the mayor to be an extension of hostilities. And, any action I took to punish the responsible individuals I could have justified in my own mind.

Then gradually I realized that the War Mistress I had embraced early in the Spring in Gross Steinhausen had broken our engagement. Actually, it had been more than an engagement, I thought of it more of a wedding with the vow "until my death us do part". Sure, there were promises from my Mistress that we would get back together again and have a fabulous reunion when we attacked Fortress Japan--but that seemed far in the future!

This war was over and I had to come down from a sensational high. The thrills and excitement of combat were gone. The spine tingling episodes would not be repeated. No more adrenaline would pour out in response to a near miss by

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an artillery shell or a mortar round. Time to reclaim my life now that the War Mistress had dumped me!

And, gradually life did start to return to normal. We moved into Stuttgart at the end of July and began to act like typical "garrison" soldiers as more formalized routines and duties were instituted. Then came Hiroshima, and it was totally over. Except going home.

And with the passing of time, my desire to seek personal revenge steadily declined and then ceased. I came to see Jim's death as simply part of this terrible human tragedy. I couldn't change it.

Not too long after we reached Stuttgart, I wrote Jim's sister that I had learned the mayor and several others had been arrested and charged with murder. They were in confinement awaiting trial. I stated that the matter was now in the hands of the the War Crimes Commission and I could do nothing more. We did not write again.

After I had returned to Delaware and Ohio Wesleyan University, Jim's family arranged a memorial service at the Lutheran church. This was about a year after Jim's death. The sister then had several of us to her house for coffee and strawberry cream pie. I asked what had happened to the German mayor. I was told that the family had been advised he had received ten years for his part in the crime. The fate of the others who had been charged in connection with the death was not known.

It was the family's decision that Jim's body not be returned to the States, but be interred in a military cemetery in France. I have not visited his grave.

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MEMORIAL DAY

The French Government was not being very cooperative with the Allied plan for the occupation of Germany. Or, more to the point--General Charles de Gaulle was very upset that his Free French Forces would not be occupying any of Germany's principal cities. Apparently, the Allied plan provided for Stuttgart to be under the control of the U S Forces. And, that organization was to be the 100th Division. But here was this significant problem. The Free French army under General Leclerc had captured Stuttgart, and de Gaulle was apparently not going to permit these soldiers to leave. At least not until he was satisfied with the overall political arrangements. Stuttgart would be held "hostage" until De Gaulle's demands were met.

As members of Company I, we were certainly not aware of this international political game. All we knew was that we were "on the alert" to move. Several times we actually assembled early in the morning with all our gear ready to move to our occupational duties--which rumor had it would be the Stuttgart area--only to find our orders cancelled.

Finally someone at a high staff level realized just how intractable the French could be and that they would not be moving soon. But we had to be moved from our current location and yet be quickly available at such time as General De Gaulle backed off. I have always thought we were sent to Southern Bavaria on the basis that we certainly weren't needed there, and thus we would be available to immediately move into Stuttgart.

On a personal basis, I can't think there could have been a better assignment. This was truly a rural area. We were quartered in a small village named Osterburg. Typical of this entire section of the country, the farming village consisted of 30 or 40 stone houses. One hard packed gravel road. There were no utilities--no electricity, no

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telephones, no central heat nor inside toilets. If you wanted light you lit a candle; for heat or cooking you built a wood burning fire. Any plowing, cultivating or hauling was done with oxen. All the horses had been taken long ago for use by the German Army.

The homes were two story affairs with sleeping upstairs and cooking and dining space on the lower level. Also on the lower level were the farm animals--the ox and perhaps a cow and a few goats or sheep. By sharing space in the home the animals helped with the heating in the winter. Their waste products were liquified, stored underground and periodically pumped out and spread on the fields as fertilizer.

There was not a single motorized vehicle in our entire territory of about 25 square miles. Very, very pastoral. Also missing were most of the young people of both sexes and all the males from 16 to 60, presumably in the military or serving their country in some other fashion.

But, Osterburg did have one feature that most similar villages lacked. On a prominent hill overlooking the village was a castle. Well, maybe not a castle with turrets and stuff--but certainly a very large manor house. One big enough for a great hall in which to hang perhaps 100 or so stag heads and antler racks without crowding. The Castle served as our headquarters. The company officers lived here with the headquarters staff and one rifle platoon. The rest of Company I was down in the village.

As previously mentioned, finding a more quiet and peaceful location in Germany would have been most difficult. Most areas of the country were experiencing the aftermath of six years of total war. Terrible housing and food shortages. Continued grief for missing love ones. Misery and despair. Osterburg seemed quite normal by contrast.

The weather was beautiful in May of 1945. Green meadows. Often deer could be seen in early morning or just at dusk. The grain crops were a deep green as they grew in orderly fields. There was no stress.

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Time for me to consider rejoining the rest of the world. In war, each individual must take such actions as are necessary to cope with his own situation. Some never do. Maybe some people are mentally constructed so they never can adjust to the stress of war. By "stress of war" I'm referring to the general situation--separation from loved ones; easy to dislike food; crude companions; uninteresting jobs; undesirable locations; etc.--the list goes on!

Now when you add to this listing the reality of combat it is essential for survival, in my opinion, that you learn to live with yourself and within yourself. At the start of our final offensive against the Germans, I finally made peace with myself as far as the war was concerned. I disconnected from my stateside emotions. I freed myself from matters not directly related to day by day combat. I simply closed the door on things past and made no attempt to connect with the future. Certainly I became a better soldier. And, also very important, I was satisfied with my life on a day by day basis. I had no complaints.

Then, just when I was set in a life style the war abruptly ended. Bruce Larson and I spent the better part of an evening (my 23rd birthday) in Altbach discussing this phenomenon. Bruce and I had been through the entire war together--Bruce was a sergeant in the mortar section and I had the same rank in the machine gun section. That evening, as we talked, I realized that I had been on a life style track that really contemplated no end. The war would simply go on. But it didn't. Combat was over. We both were in awe as to this unexpected turn of events. And we realized we needed to rethink our futures. Frankly, I was adrift.

Then, upon arriving in Osterburg, I started my return into the real world. And, frequently, a stiff belt or two seemed to be very helpful. Now to this end, as luck would have it, our troops had discovered a cognac distillery in the immediate vicinity. Quite likely we interrupted the aging process when our Jeep driver and a couple of

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companions filled a trailer with the stuff. And, they dropped off a five gallon can on my doorstep. Heavens Sake! Five Gallons. Only five of us lived there! I don't remember much about drinking the booze but I do remember a couple of hangovers caused by the raw cognac. Really monumental!

Life moved on. Very slowly. We set up road blocks now and then presumably to check papers of any travelers. But most of the people on the highways had no papers and they usually identified themselves as Polish "on the way home". They would point East, mumble something in a Slavic tongue and we would let them pass. Why not? At least, they seemed to have a plan. Also, on most mornings we would have a couple of hours of physical training up at the Castle. But quite often I would elect to remain in the village as house guard. My room was at the front of the second floor and had a large window overlooking the road. I recall spending considerable time reading and napping at that window in the bright warm sunshine. The only distraction being an occasional oxcart going to or from the fields. I needed this time alone.

On Memorial Day we went up to the castle. By now, we looked reasonably presentable. All of us had found someone willing to do laundry--usually the payment being soap which was an extremely scarce commodity in post-war Germany. Our field jackets had been well scrubbed and pants washed and pressed. No ties--instead most of us had a white scarf fashioned from parachute material. All and all, we looked quite good. We formed up in the village and marched to the Castle.

These Sketches were started in 1983 with some tapes I made at that time. One of the first ones I completed concerned our Memorial Day Services at the Castle. Part of the tapes were transcribed the following year. Following is a portion of the tape relating to this event:

"We held our Memorial Day Services in 1945 at the

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Castle. It was a beautiful place. Now, I did not live in the castle--I lived down in the village. But, anyhow, we trouped up there for Memorial Day, 1945. After the Chaplain had said all of his appropriate words, an Officer got out on the balcony and read off the names of the dead and seriously wounded from Company I, Third Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division. I did not know each of these individuals, but, I'll bet I knew 60 or 70 percent of them by their first name. It was almost 100 people that had made a sacrifice of their life or were so seriously wounded they had to be returned to the States for treatment. I think what impressed me the most was the impact this service had on the surviving members of the original Company I --those of us who came over on the boat together. There weren't any tears. We honestly thought what these people had done was very terrific and noble. I think each of us would have been glad to have substituted for them. It was only the luck of the mortar burst, that artillery shell, that separated us--we all knew that. Those that were dead had the same risks as we had had. It was like a lottery...."

In reading over this material at the present time, these words are still an appropriate reflection of my feelings which have not changed since 1945. To a very large extent, WW II ended for me on that Memorial Day.

Company I didn't have a bugler so Taps was not played. But I shall never forget that service at the Castle. Many Memorial days have passed since then. And the words which are said exhorting patriotism, the flag and then the playing of Taps always portray to me the grand glory and sadness of a total nation.

That day in Osterburg I was saying a personal goodbye to my friends and close comrades. I shall never forget them nor the events of WW II which we shared.

Paul F Mosher
Dallas, Texas.
November 11, 1992

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GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS OF COMBAT OPERATIONS

During the campaign in Europe, the 100th Infantry Division was a part of the Seventh Army which was on the right flank of the Allied Forces. During our initial fighting we were in the northeastern part of France and were joined by the 3rd, 36th, and 45th US divisions and the Free French Division. Other divisions arriving from the States joined the Seventh Army as the war progressed.

Company I had entered France through Marseille, moved north and relieved elements of the 45th Division on November 5, 1944. We went on the attack just a few days later just outside the town of Baccarat (SEE (1) ON MAP) which is southeast of Nancy. This part of France is heavily forested, mountainous terrain. Few roads available for transport. Our line of attack was generally eastward through Raon l'Etape ending in the town of St. Blaise near the end of December.

We were then transported north. After a disastrous engagement at Ingwiller (which is not covered in these Memoirs in that I was not present) we finally escaped the forest and moved into rolling agriculture land near the town of Bitche which is near the French/German border. (SEE (2) ON MAP) Arriving in this area about mid-December of 1944, we experienced very heavy fighting in the town of Rimling at year-end. This sector then quieted down and we remained in this general vicinity, relatively inactive, into the early part of 1945.

In March we attacked north toward the German border, arriving in the towns of Gross and Klein Steinhausen and the Seigfried Line on March 22. When the Germans retreated, we crossed the border near Pirmasens (SEE (3) ON MAP) and moving fast, we reached the Rhine river at Ludwigshaven near month-end.

After crossing the Rhine on a pontoon bridge at Mannheim, we swung southward toward Stuttgart which was our prime objective. First, however, came Heilbronn (SEE (4) ON MAP) and we entered the outskirts of this city on April 7. This was to be our last major engagement and our longest period of sustained fighting. No pontoon bridge awaited us here. We made a river crossing assault and the fighting was fierce. It was in Heilbronn that we finally made the newspapers in the States as they reported the 100th Infantry was fighting block by block; building by building and room by room.

When we emerged from Heilbronn a week later, there was increasing evidence that the war was coming to an end. We dashed toward Stuttgart. Thru Bachnang. On April 20 we arrived in the town of Altbach. We never fired our weapons in anger again.

The fighting had ended for Company I. Of the 190 of us who had started out 6 months before, only one officer and less than 25 percent of the original enlisted personnel remained.



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SIGNIFICANT DATES AND PLACES

<u>DATE</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>
October 6, 1944	Departed New York for France.
20	Arrived in Marseille.
November 5	Relieved elements of the 45th Division near Baccarat, France.
14	FIRST DAY OF COMBAT. SIGNIFICANT CASUALTIES.
23	NIGHT MOVE TO ST. BLAISE.
December 1	Attached to 45th Division. First day of Ingwiller engagement.
5	End of Ingwiller fighting. 70 members of Co I now remain out of original 190.
15	In Bitche area.
22	Moved into Rimling.
31	German offensive on Rimling.
January 1, 1945	Night attack by the Jerries repelled.
4	DEPARTED RIMLING. City captured next day from the organization which replaced Co I.
February 1	MOVED TO HOTTWEILLER--THE SHEEP FARM.
February 1 to March 16	THE WINTER LINE.

Note: Items shown in BOLD TYPE are covered in The Sketches.

SKETCHES OF WW II

SIGNIFICANT DATES AND PLACES (CON'T)

March	17	Company I resumed the attack.
	19	Crossed the border into Germany.
	21	KLEIN AND GROSS STEINHAUSEN. THE SIEGFRIED LINE IS DIRECTLY AHEAD.
	22	The Germans abandon the Siegfried Line. Co I is trucked to Primasens our first town in Germany.
	26	ARRIVED AT THE RHINE AND THE A G FARBEN PLANT IN LUDWIGSHAFEN.
	30	Crossed the Rhine at Manheim.
April	7	Entered the outskirts of Heilbronn.
	8	ATTACKED IN PONTOON BOATS ACROSS THE NECKAR RIVER.
	9,10	STREET BY STREET, HOUSE TO HOUSE FIGHTING IN HEILBRONN.
	12	DEPARTED HEILBRONN AND BEGAN THE DASH THRU GERMANY TOWARD STUTTGART.
	20	Arrived in Altbach. The fighting had ended for Company I.
May thru June		Occupation duty in Southeastern Germany not far from Ulm.
July		Assumed occupation duties in Stuttgart.
January	3, 1946	The 100 Infantry Division departs Marseille for New York. About 15 of the 190 of us from Company I who came over with the Division are returning.
	15	Arrived at Camp Kilmer for discharge.

Note: Items shown in BOLD TYPE are covered in The Sketches.

SKETCHES OF WW II

DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS AWARDED TO
Sergeant Paul F Mosher, 15120837, Infantry

GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL

AMERICAN THEATER SERVICE MEDAL

VICTORY MEDAL

EUROPEAN, AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN (EAME) THEATER SERVICE
MEDAL WITH THREE BATTLE STARS

ARMY OF OCCUPATION MEDAL WITH GERMAN CLASP

DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION

COMBAT INFANTRY BADGE

PURPLE HEART MEDAL WITH OAK LEAF CLUSTER

BRONZE STAR MEDAL WITH OAK LEAF CLUSTER AND "V" CLASP



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, FEBRUARY 4, 1944
HAS AWARDED

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

Sergeant Paul J. Mosher, 15 120 637, Infantry

FOR
HEROISM IN GROUND COMBAT

In Germany, 6 April 1945

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 19th DAY OF January 19 60


MAJOR GENERAL, USA
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL




WILBER M. BRUCKER
SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, FEBRUARY 4, 1944
HAS AWARDED

first Oak Leaf Cluster

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

Sergeant Paul J. Mosher, 15 120 837
(then Private first Class, Infantry)

FOR
MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
IN GROUND OPERATIONS AGAINST THE ENEMY

European Theater of Operations, during the Rhineland Campaign

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
THIS 19th DAY OF January 19 60


MAJOR GENERAL, USA
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL




WILBER M. BRUCKER
SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

E X T R A C T

HEADQUARTERS 100th INFANTRY DIVISION
Office of the Commanding General
APO 447, U.S. Army

14 July 1945

GENERAL ORDERS)
NUMBER 199)

Award of Oak Leaf Cluster to Bronze Star MedalI
Award of Bronze Star Medal.....II
Award of Purple Heart.....III

§§ §§ §§ §§ §§ §§ §§ §§

SECTION II -- Award of Bronze Star Medal

PAUL F. MOSHER, 15120837, Sergeant, 397th Infantry Regiment. Entered military service from Delaware, Ohio.

WILLIAM E. MC KEWON, 36896890, Private First Class, 397th Infantry Regiment. Entered military service from Grand Junction, Michigan.

FRANCISCO S. LOPEZ, 39283984, Private First Class, 397th Infantry Regiment. Entered military service from Victoriasville, California.

For heroic achievement in action on 6 April 1945, in the vicinity of Heilbronn, Germany. When the advance elements of the company were immobilized by constant sniper and automatic weapons fire from a building five hundred yards to the front, these three men, members of a machine gun squad, advanced across an open, fire-swept area in an attempt to silence the enemy forces. Advancing toward the foe by fire and movement, they made a successful assault upon the building, killing three Germans, wounding two and capturing seventeen. As a result of their heroic and aggressive action, the enemy position was neutralized and their company was able to continue its advance and take the objective without further casualties.

BY COMMAND OF MAJOR GENERAL BURRESS:

A TRUE COPY
Norman E. Hansen
NORMAN E. HANSEN
1st Lt., Inf Commanding

J. O. KILGORE
Colonel GSC

HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
U. S. ARMY RECORDS CENTER
ST. LOUIS 14 MISSOURI

IN REPLY
REFER TO:

AGCC-SR-A 201 Mosher, Paul F.
15 120 837 (1 Dec 59)

19 January 1960

•
SUBJECT: Letter Orders - Bronze Star Medal (First Oak-Leaf Cluster)

1. By direction of the President, under the provisions of Executive Order 9419, 4 February 1944 (Sec. II, WD Bul. 3, 1944), the Bronze Star Medal (First Oak-Leaf Cluster), is awarded to Paul F. Mosher, service number 15 120 837, for exemplary conduct in ground combat against the armed enemy during the Rhineland Campaign, in the European Theater of Operations, while assigned as Private First Class, 397th Infantry Regiment.

2. Authority for this award is contained in paragraph 11, AR 672-5-1, and is based upon General Orders 12, Headquarters 397th Infantry Regiment, dated 1 December 1944, which awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge.

By Order of Wilber M. Brucker, Secretary of the Army:


Adjutant General

39014

DELAWARE COUNTY, OHIO
Filed for Record JAN 29 1946

1946, at 10:43 clock A. M.
JAN. 29 1946
seems discharge Record.
Vol. 4, Page 337
County Recorder



Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

PAUL F MOSHER 15 120 837 Sergeant

Company I 397th Infantry Regiment 100th Division

Army of the United States

*is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military
service of the United States of America.*

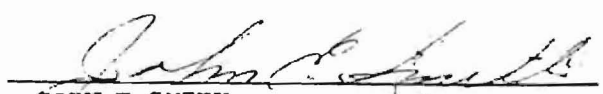
*This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest
and Faithful Service to this country.*

Given at

UNIT E SEPARATION CENTER #45
Indiantown Gap Mil Res Penna

Date

18 January 1946


JOHN E SMITH
Major AC

ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL Mosher Paul F		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 15 120 837		3. GRADE SGT		4. ARM OR SERVICE INF		5. COMPONENT AUS	
6. ORGANIZATION Co I 397th Inf Regt 100th Div		7. DATE OF SEPARATION 18 Jan 46		8. PLACE OF SEPARATION Sep Ctr #45 IGMR PA Unit 3					
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES 169 E Central Ave Delaware Ohio				10. DATE OF BIRTH 23 Apr 22		11. PLACE OF BIRTH Morrow Ohio			
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT See 9				13. COLOR EYES green		14. COLOR HAIR brn		15. HEIGHT 5 10	
16. WEIGHT 130 lbs.		17. NO. DEPEND. 0		21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. Manager Restaurant 0-21.23					
18. RACE WHITE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NEGRO <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify) <input type="checkbox"/>		19. MARITAL STATUS SINGLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify) <input type="checkbox"/>		20. U.S. CITIZEN YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>					

MILITARY HISTORY


22. DATE OF INDUCTION 28 Sep 42		23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT 29 May 43		24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE		25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE Ft Hayes Ohio	
26. SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO.		28. COUNTY AND STATE Delaware Ohio		29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE See 9	
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. Machine Gun MG 604				31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATA (i.e., Infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) Combat Infantry Badge Rifle M1 SS BAR EX Carbine SS 30Cal MG SS			
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS GO 33 & 40 WD 45 Rhineland Central Europe							
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS Good Conduct Medal Distinguished Unit Badge American Thr Ser Medal Victory Medal Bronze Star Medal Purple Heart Med w/1 OLC EAME Thr Ser Medal /2 Br Stars							
34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION 6 Feb 1945 France 5 Apr 1945 Germany							
35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES SMALLPOX 10Jun44 TYPHOID 3May45 TETANUS 26Aug44 OTHER (specify) Typhus 5Dec45				36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U.S. AND RETURN DATE OF DEPARTURE 6 Oct 44 DESTINATION ETO DATE OF ARRIVAL 20 Oct 44 2 Jan 46 USA 13 Jan 46			
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE CONTINENTAL SERVICE FOREIGN SERVICE YEARS MONTHS DAY 1 4 13 1 3 8 38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD SGT							
39. PRIOR SERVICE None				40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION, AS SPECIFIED IN W. D. DIRECTIVES, THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO THE PERSON AR 615-365 RRI-1 DEMOBILIZATION WAS ISSUED.			
41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED ASTP Basic Engineering, Charleston, South Carolina				42. EDUCATION - (Years) Grammar 8 High School 4 College 6 mo			

PAY DATA

43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES YEARS 3 MONTHS 3 DAYS 21			44. MUSTERING OUT PAY TOTAL 300 THIS PAYMENT 5 700		45. SOLDIER DEPOSITS		46. TRAVEL PAY \$ 22.25		47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER 219.25 J J MAHER JR	
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INSURANCE NOTICE

IMPORTANT IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY-ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL LAPSE. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D.C.										
48. KIND OF INSURANCE Nat. Serv. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U.S. Govt. <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>			49. HOW PAID Allotment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct to V. A. <input type="checkbox"/>		50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance 31 Jan 46		51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) 28 Feb 46		52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$ 6.50	
53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO Continue <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue <input type="checkbox"/>										

54. 		55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives) Lapel Button Issued ASR Score (2 Sep 45) 63 Inactive Service ERC from 28 Sep 42 to 28 May 43 incl	
56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED Paul F. Mosher		57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization - signature) M F EMERICH 1st Lt WAC	

WD AGO FORM 53 - 55
1 November 1944

This form supersedes all previous editions of WD AGO Forms 53 and 55 for enlisted persons entitled to an Honorable Discharge, which will not be used after receipt of this revision.

OHIO WORLD WAR II

CLAIM

No. 23608

SKETCHES OF WW II

THE AUTHOR'S MILITARY SERVICE

In 1940 and 1941 and despite the seriousness of the wars in Europe and the far east, in my view, it would be my choice to participate or not to participate. I'm sure many others in small towns like Delaware, Ohio felt the same way. Even with the event of Pearl Harbor, I could continue to rationalize that the conflict would not involve me. As a partner in a restaurant located between the women's dormitories at Ohio Wesleyan University, serving burgers and shakes and flirting with coeds was much more interesting and important to my life than the reports of fighting around the globe.

However, after enrolling as a student at Ohio Wesleyan my outlook quickly broadened and by the Summer of 1942 it became obvious that I would be a participant. Not wishing to serve in the Navy under any circumstances, I enlisted in the Army's Enlisted Reserve Corps program on September 28, 1942. I was called to active duty on May 29, 1943 and was sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama for Infantry basic training.

At the end of my basic training I was selected for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) and reported to The Citadel in Charleston, SC for pre-engineering studies. The ASTP concept was a good one--many of us bright young "collich" kids would be educated and sometime, somehow in the future we would become officers in the US Army.

Great idea, but unfortunately the real world of war and its resulting casualties, particularly in the infantry, could not wait for the "sometime, somehow" time period of officerhood to arrive.

Thus, while the battles on various US fronts continued to go well, the casualty rates among our infantry divisions were such that in late 1943 and early 1944 there was an immediate demand for replacements. Trained soldiers were only available in organizations such as the 100th Infantry

SKETCHES OF WW II

Division which was poised to go overseas. So, these divisions were stripped of their privates and the men sent out as infantry replacements in early 1944.

You can probably guess what happened next. That's right, these now skeleton divisions needed fresh faces to fill in the lower ranks and here was this very large group of young men in the ASTP program studying in various colleges and universities. ASTP was shut down forthwith in the spring of 1944.

In less than 30 days, I found myself at Fort Bragg, NC in Company I, Third Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division. This was to be my "home" until discharge in January, 1946. Some 3500 other ASTP men joined the three infantry regiments of the 100th Division under similar circumstances. This sudden influx of us "collich" kids could have set up a conflict with the somewhat older and well entrenched non-commissioned officers in the rifle companies. But none occurred. We were perhaps wary of one another at first, but soon mutual trust developed.

We trained hard that summer of 1944 and when we shipped out for France in October we were a well-trained combat ready organization.

These Memoirs attempt to reflect some of results of this training and, even more, the spirit of comradeship that exists within an infantry company.

A couple of footnotes:

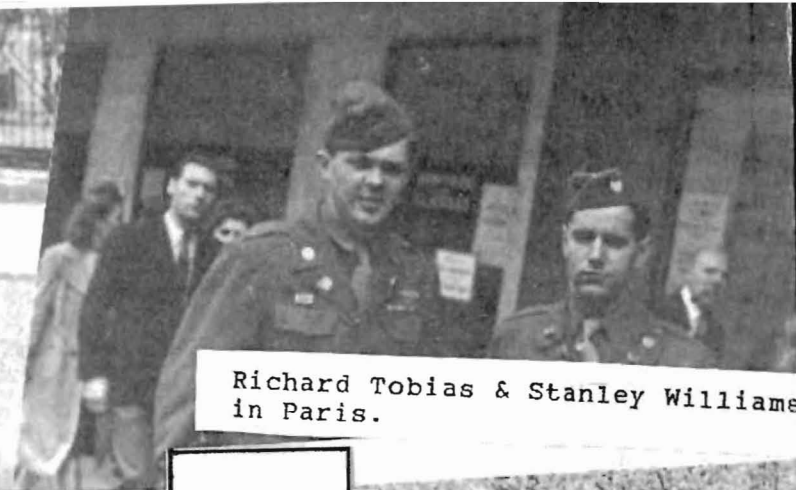
Although we ASTP guys were mostly privates when we joined the 100th Division, by the end of combat service we were the sergeants and officers who formed the backbone of the various infantry companies.

Service in the Army also enabled me to return to Ohio Wesleyan University under the GI Bill and obtain a degree in 1948. Both of these experiences have been most valuable my entire life.

Paul F Mosher
August 1, 1993



Bruce Larson & Paul Mosher
on Sonnenberg Strasse.



Richard Tobias & Stanley Williams
in Paris.



Earl McKisson
Sonnenberg Strasse.



Norman Nisick
In the Ulm Cathedral tower.



John Sheets & Albert T Klet
in Altbach.

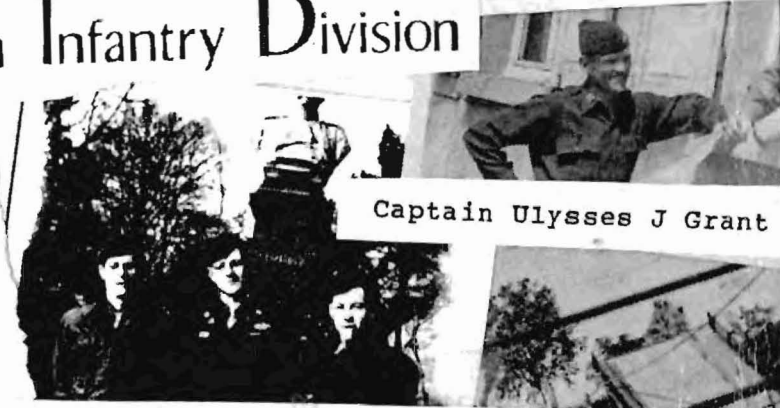


Joseph P "Moon" Schonarth

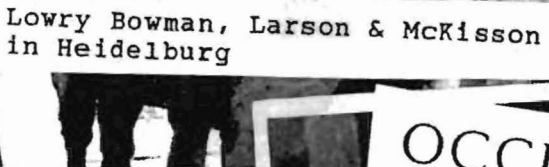
100th Infantry Division



L to R (rear) Larson, Lester, Nisick,
Mosher, Cohen & Williams.
(front) Polansky, Wladecki, Pelligrino
& Lynch at the Marseille staging area.



Captain Ulysses J Grant



Lowry Bowman, Larson & McKisson
in Heidelberg

OCCUPATION



AP CLOSING ON 100,000; BITCHE FALLS, FIRST TIME IN HISTORY

Saarbruecken—1,000 Yards

Troops of the 100th Division who
had been lying before Bitche since
last December's point while men
sion fought with Hedy, Irma & Homer Lester in front of the
Saarbruecken, NCO Club.
tal of the Saar

