A SOLDIER'S STORY

WORLD WAR II AS SEEN BY A COMBAT VETERAN

DECEMBER 6, 1943 THROUGH APRIL 10, 1946

STUTTGART, GERMANY
AUGUST, 1945

BY STAFF SERGEANT ROBERT G. TESSMER
DEDICATION

This story is written fifty years after the events occurred. It is an attempt to give my children and grandchildren, a perspective of what I was like as a young man and how the fighting of World War II affected me.

It is not an attempt to refight the great battles or to comment on the grand strategy of the combatants, as many hundreds of books have covered the subject thoroughly. From the German invasion of Poland in September, 1939 until their unconditional surrender in May 1946, millions of people suffered and died as a result of the madman Hitler's attempt to dominate Europe.

This book is an attempt to put a human, personal, touch on the Grand Conflict. Somebody had to do the job and I was chosen, along with many thousands of others, to fight and die for our Country. It is my fervent hope that you or your loved ones never have to endure the agony of war. To you, I dedicate these Memoirs.
PREFACE

Sitting here at my word processor in late 1994, I have come to realize that 50 years have passed since one of the most meaningful periods in my life occurred. Service to my country during World War II was not something that I had planned: it just swallowed me up in the events and thrust me into situations of mortal danger, severe discomfort, mental anguish, and a deep hatred for wars and those that live by the sword. It also gave me a sense of pride to serve with distinction, and to see the gallantry of my comrades in arms.

My High School years of 1941 through 1943 were generally uneventful. Pearl Harbor had occurred, but Japan was a long way from Dearborn. The war in Europe also had little direct effect as I didn't know too many people who had left to fight in it. My dad worked a lot of overtime at Ternstedt Manufacturing Co. My mom very carefully collected ration coupons and made our meals stretch. Gas was tight, so we didn't do too much traveling.

Since I was very active in the Boy Scouts, we held fund raisers for War Bonds, collected scrap aluminum pots and pans, distributed leaflets about blackout procedures and assisted Air Raid Wardens. It all seemed very far away and I can't say it had much direct effect on my life and school activities.

In my senior year (1943) I was accepted into the Army Specialized Training Program (A.S.T.P.) which meant that if I was drafted, I would complete 13 weeks of Basic Training and then be assigned to a college to complete my Engineering Degree. This sounded too good to be true, and it was. June 1943 brought Graduation, the Senior Prom and "Greetings" from my Draft Board. Not to worry, I was going to spend the rest of the war in school. I had been given a scholarship to Wayne State University, so I entered summer school to get a jump on things.
On December 6, 1943 I left by train for my Induction Center at Fort Sheridan, just north of Chicago. The first three weeks were busy with new uniforms, indoctrination, physicals, KP, Latrine duty, guard duty, lectures and movies on "Why We Fight" and how to tell "Good" girls from "bad" girls and what to do about it. I didn't enjoy it very much, as the wind off Lake Michigan made it very uncomfortable with snow and cold weather. Christmas leave to come home was most welcome.

Basic Training at Fort Benning was tough, but bearable, since it would only last 13 weeks. However, during this period a major change in manpower requirements to fight the war occurred. It was decided that the Army didn't need students as badly as it needed "Cannon Fodder". ASTP was abandoned, entire groups of air force cadets were washed out, coast artillery battalions were scrapped and countless desk jobs were eliminated. Twelve thousand of these troops were then assigned to the 100th Infantry Division in training at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Most of the troops that had made up the 100th Infantry were sent overseas immediately as replacements. Only a cadre of Regular Army officers and non coms were left to complete our training. What a Revolting Development.

The Spring and Summer were a blur of maneuvers, cross country hikes, combat drill, marching, and generally trying to keep out of trouble to avoid KP duty. I thought things were pretty bad there, but little was I to know they would soon get a lot worse.

In October, we transferred to New York to board our transport ship to someplace in Europe. My buddy, Corky Kovarsky's mother had us to a farewell dinner and that home cooked dinner had to last for almost two years.
U.S. DECLARES WAR ON AXIS!

18 to 65 Face Draft. Plan 4 Million Army

Detroit Times headline from December 11, 1941

Picture taken while on leave during the summer of 1944
First Group of ASTP Men Arrive As 'Fillers' for Div.

Scenes reminiscent of activation were being re-enacted with a "new cast" almost daily at the railroad siding near the Post Field House this week as the first groups of ASTP men arrived at Fort Bragg to take their places in the Century Division.

With the Division Band playing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and Maj. Gen. Withers A. Burress and high-ranking staff members looking on, the first fillers detrained on Tuesday evening and climbed aboard trucks to be whisked away to reception unit areas in the division.

The training program that awaits the new ASTP men is an arduous one, Lt. Col. Kenneth F. Eckland, Division G-4, pointed out. After being processed, classified and assigned to permanent units, they will be placed in special training detachments in each of the regiments.

The training detachments will conduct basic training starting April 3 for four weeks and as much longer as may be considered necessary, Col. Eckland said. All men will initially be trained as riflemen. Special training in other than rifle squads will be conducted after the fillers have completed their basic training in the training detachments and have joined their units.

"Many of these men already have completed their basic training program," he said. "Some went to ASTP from other infantry units, others from the air force, artillery, engineers or other branches."

"The purpose of this four week's training program is to give the men adequate instruction and training in a minimum of time to the end that they will meet the minimum requirements for duty with their respective units."

Most of the ASTP men are 18, 19 and 20 years of age, Col. Eckland said. All are high school graduates and many have had one, two or three years of college.

They have an average IQ of 128, all above 115, and some as high as 156 to 160.

"These men are intelligent, well educated and have had considerable schooling," he pointed out. "Because of these factors, we feel they will be able to absorb this training rapidly.

"I think the division is very fortunate in receiving men of their high calibre as far as age, education and physical ability is concerned."

All new men will be required to fire on the range and in transition firing with the M-1 rifle. Other phases of training which will be emphasized during the four-week period will be marching with full field equipment, scouting and patrolling, disciplinary drill and physical conditioning.
Photo taken during the summer of 1944 at Fort Bragg, N.C. during training with the 100th Infantry Division. Note marksmanship medals, crossed rifles on pins in collar and blue striped braid on hat, all denoting Infantry.
AN OCEAN CRUISE - THE CONVOY

On October 6, 1944, we boarded the U.S.A.T George Washington, a former German luxury liner. There were 7,000 of us and we straggled through the bowels of the ship following the man in front of us. The ship had been gutted of cabins and had bunks installed from floor to ceiling. There was only about 24" between bunks above and below and we frequently bumped each other when sleeping. Space was tight for our duffle bags and other gear so we were forever climbing over something. We were only allowed to use the assigned bunk for 8 hours as others used it in shifts. When not sleeping, we had to spend our time on deck, or in long lines for chow.

We were in a convoy, but I don't know how many ships were in it as we were so spread out. I'm sure our ship was the biggest target for Nazi subs so we did a lot of praying. The first few days were smooth as the weather was mild and calm, but we soon ran into heavy weather. Most of the guys were seasick so you can imagine what it looked like.

A word about food: We had two meals a day and we would line up through the ship passageways to enter the dining area. It was cafeteria style and after you got your tray you went to one end of a long table at chest height and proceeded to eat as you moved to the end of the table. We had about five minutes to eat and then walk the deck until it was time to line up again.

This experience was pretty miserable and I figured it couldn't get any worse. WRONG. As the seas got higher and more people got sick, they needed help in the kitchen serving area. I had a strong stomach so I was elected. Eight hours of slopping food on trays was enough to make me sick but I stuck to it because it gave me something to do to pass the time.
Fortunately, our convoy did not get shot at by subs, and we passed through the Straits of Gibraltar, into the Mediterranean, and landed at Marseilles, France on October 20th. We were billeted nearby before moving into action. Marseilles suffered little damage from the invasion shortly before and we thought this portended an easy war. WRONG AGAIN.

We were optimistic that the war would end soon because the Normandy invasion had occurred in June and things seemed to be going well. Besides, what German General cared about a few G.I.'s in Southern France about to enter the Vosges Mountains in the territory called Alsace Lorraine. We soon found out the hard way.
A VERY SMALL PART OF A VERY LARGE ARMY

I was a member of the Seventh Army, 100th Infantry Division, 397th Regiment, 3rd Battalion, Company I, 2nd rifle platoon, 2nd squad. The squad is the smallest fighting unit and consists of 12 men. The leader is a staff sergeant and the assistant squad leader is a buck sergeant. There are three rifle squads to a platoon. There are three rifle platoons with a fourth platoon of light machine guns and 60 mm mortars to make up a Company of about 190 men. There are three rifle Companies to a Battalion along with a Company of "heavy" machine guns and "heavy" mortars. There are 3 Battalions to a Regiment, which would be augmented with engineering troops, tanks and artillery. There are three Regiments to a Division which would total about 12,000 men.

As a rifle squad we carried Garand M1 semi-automatic rifles with a 9 round clip of 30 caliber bullets. One man carried a Browning Automatic Rifle with a 20 round magazine that could fire automatically or single shot. He had an assistant and an ammo bearer. Our light machine guns were 30 caliber and could fire automatically from a tripod mount, using belt fed ammunition. We had 60 mm mortars that could lob shells about 300 yards. The officers carried light carbines and 45 caliber pistols. Our First Sergeant had a Thompson 45 caliber sub machine gun. We carried several hand grenades that looked like a small pineapple. When you pulled the pin and threw it, you had five seconds to duck.

The Germans used a Mauser bolt action rifle with a five round clip, but could not fire repetitively. They did, however, have some other nasty armaments. The Burp gun was a machine pistol that had such a rapid rate of fire that it sounded like the name. Their hand grenades were called potato mashers and that's what they looked like, handle and all. They also used Panzerfausts which were shoulder mounted anti-tank weapons. The Nebelwerfer was a mobile rocket launcher that fired about 30 rockets simultaneously. This blanketed an area with devastating effect. Their best weapon was the "88"
artillery piece. It could be used for anti-aircraft, anti-tank or anti-personnel. Most artillery was fired with a high trajectory and the shells had a whistling sound, so there was some chance to take cover. Mortars were used up close and they had a loud "Cachunk" sound when they were fired, so that was the time to duck. The 88, however, could be fired flat, and when used this way, you never heard the shell coming until it exploded.

Since the Germans were fighting a defensive war, they made extensive use of mines. Anti-tank mines were buried in roads to take out tanks and trucks. Our main problem was anti-personnel mines. The "Schu" mine was a 1/4 pound block of dynamite in a wood box with a plastic detonator. They were not metal and could not be detected by a mine detector. They buried them in trails and in suspected areas of troop movements. If you stepped on one, you lost a leg at the very least. The other was a "Bouncing Betty". It was buried and attached to a trip wire. If you hit the wire, an explosive ejected a container to about 5 feet where it exploded, killing anything within a large circle. They also made good use of "Booby Traps" in buildings and we had to be very careful.

When we first went into combat, we dressed in wool trousers and shirt, wool sweater, leather combat boots, and a field jacket with many pockets, plus a rain parka. Our steel helmets had a separate fiberglass liner that fitted our heads over a wool cap. We carried a gas mask, a first aid kit, a folding entrenching shovel, a bayonet, and a small pack with K rations and personal items. Our water canteen was fitted with a cup. We had an ammunition bandolier over our shoulder and our M1 rifle. Everything that we used was olive drab color.

The basic K ration was a box, like Crackerjack, with a small can of eggs and ham for breakfast, cheese for lunch and something like Spam for dinner. It had instant coffee and sugar, three cigarettes, toilet paper, hard biscuits and hard candy. The box was coated with wax, so we could burn it to heat water in our canteen cup to make
coffee. Pretty basic stuff, but we had to make do.

Sometimes, we would get "C" rations, which was a box for four men. It had more variety and better tasting things. If our company cook could get through after dark, he would bring hot food in a Marmite can (insulated). Usually steak sandwiches and coffee. Since we couldn't carry blankets, our Supply Sergeant would bring them up to us in our foxholes. We were constantly wet and so were the blankets. He would try to dry them as best he could, but our standard issue was one wet and one dry for two men.

All things considered, we were a lot better off than the Germans. When captured, they were starved, having lived on Ersatz (phony) bread, coffee and dried meat. Their supply situation was poor as they didn't have enough gas for transport of anything but ammunition.
"We were handed from one front..."

On the march. This was before we started discarding excess gear.
INTRODUCTION TO COMBAT

On November 5, 1944 our Division was trucked from Marseilles to an area near the village of Baccarat, in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains, in the area called Alsace Lorraine. Here we relieved elements of the 45th Division and were officially on the Line. A few days later, our Battalion moved to Bertrichamps and came under fire from German artillery. There were no casualties, but it sure got our attention that they were serious. Light snow had fallen and the temperatures were below freezing and it made it hard to dig foxholes.

November 14th was our "Day of Infamy". We moved out in attack formations through the forest, climbing gradually upward. A fresh snow had fallen and the trees kept dropping snow and water down our necks. Normally scouts would have been sent forward to check out enemy positions but for some reason this was not done. (Stupidity?) We passed some dead German soldiers and it gave me a real gut-wrenching sensation. Baker was our squad leader with Jack McLean as the assistant. Ed Eylander was our B.A.R. man with me as his assistant and George Stout as the ammo bearer. John Weimerskirch and Allen McLean, Jack's cousin, were moving together with us through an area of woods that was fairly open.

I was in the lead squad next to Jack McLean when we came to a wide drop off with a hill up ahead rising above us. That was when we saw the barbed wire. At that point all hell broke loose. Mortar rounds were hitting the trees above, spraying shrapnel down on us. Then the German machine guns and rifles opened up on us from the hill in front. We had walked into a trap. The Germans were dug in to trenches and had strung barbed wire and mines in front of us. They started picking us off one by one as we tried vainly to hide behind trees. We couldn't see a thing to shoot back at as they were so camouflaged. I felt like we were pinned down for hours when Jack MacLean called out to me that he was going under the barbed wire and
that we should follow.

Just after he disappeared the order came to pull back. I jumped up and ran as fast as I could stumbling over bodies and wounded men. The shells kept coming and the bullets were whizzing all around. I don't why I didn't get hit because our situation was so desperate and the Germans had every advantage.

We pulled back a few hundred yards and frantically dug into the hard ground to try to make a foxhole. Total confusion reigned. We expected a counterattack but thank God, it did not materialize or we would have all died in our first day of combat.

Jack McLean became a prisoner after he got through the wire and rolled to the bottom of the depression and played dead. We did not hear from him until after the war was over and he wrote us a letter of his experiences. (See Appendix) My buddy, George Stout, was severely wounded and later died. Allen McLean was killed. Weimerskirch was wounded in the head but survived. Two other men from my Squad were killed and three wounded. Out of twelve men that started out that morning, only 5 of us were left. Our Company of 190 men had 41 casualties.

Our Company Commander had part of his hand shot off, so First Lt. Ulysses J. Grant took over. He was a rowboned cowboy from Oklahoma and only 23 years old, just 4 years older than me. He led our Company for the rest of the war and was the only officer in our Company to remain with us for the entire period of combat.

There were a lot of recriminations and changes in leadership including the removal of our Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel Beland, but it did nothing to bring back our comrades. We were a sadder but wiser group of soldiers now.
We didn't know it at the time, but we would not be out of contact with the enemy until April of 1945 for a total of 146 consecutive days in combat.

Our Battalion of about 800 men suffered 586 casualties during the course of the war. Replacements came and went and we often didn't even know their names until they were also casualties.

I have just recently read a newly published book entitled "When the Odds Were Even". It covers the campaign of the Seventh Army through the Vosges mountains and points out that no previous attacking force had ever been victorious in that terrain, especially against a skilled and determined fighting force like the German Army. They used slave labor to dig trenches and lay mines and string barbed wire. Although we had a superior air force and armored units, they were of little use because of the dense woods and mountainous terrain. Also, our artillery was ineffective against the German dug in positions. It called for man to man combat and we paid dearly for every yard of ground that we took.
Captured Item Co. Sergeant Tells Tale Of Nazi Brutality

By Capt. H. Graham

Six months of brutal torture and abhuman suffering in a German concentration camp were described by S/Sgt. Jack A. McLean, former Item Company non-com, in a letter to Lt. Gen. E. M. Reeder, received this week.

McLean had been missing in action since May 14 when Item Co., as first captured at Rekem, Liege and then ran through the Naafthal stockade to reach his raid. He then spent six brutal months in concentration camps at Münster, Hilmarsh and Celle.

Recovered at Münster

The escape from this living hell he describes came on April 23 when the 18th Arm. Div. boarded the Prison Camp at Münster, which was less than 20 kilometers from the last area occupied by the battalion.

American artillery barges, aircraft Splinter shrapnel and beatings by Nazi guards doomed almost daily advance.

The prisoners were in enormous-dug

S-Sgt. Cook, MIA Since Hotweiler, Now Home

S/Sgt. Kenneth H. Cook, of Hotweiler, who was missing in action since Feb. 24 at Lembach Farms near Hotweiler, is alive and home. It was learned this week when S/Sgt. Reeder received a letter from him.

He had been a prisoner at several German concentration camps and released in April at the final big American push.

In honor of Pittsburgh Pa.

McLean's fellow prisoners were American, French, Russian and many Nazi political prisoners. Many of them were informers for Nazi commandants.

Trapped in Water Drippings

McLean traveled three days without water in packed barracks known as a Hitler Youth Camp prison. This prison was a 500 yard rock trap in the side of a hill at Ganzacht. The roof dripped ice water, which saved the half-crazed prisoners from dying of thirst.

Many prisoners had legs and arms broken and limbs pained out of place. Others were beaten to death. Fifty-one out of 200 died here during the winter. Skinny, naked men twisted with running noses and bruised chases line through the camps they used for clothes.

Men Were Innate

Some of the men were screaming mad and ran wildly around their cells naked. One Russian prisoner buried his head into the wall until he collapsed.

Sgt. McLean's weight dropped to 129 pounds. His legs were twisted and covered with running sores and his head became puffed like the other prisoners, some of whom had heads like pumpkins.

'Versus ruled down my chucks that April 23 when I heard an American voice shouting some words. They were the first words I had heard since the first from Nov. 14 to April 23," he said.
Century Division Quick In Adjusting to Combat

100th Doughs Fought in Wooded Vosges With Punch That Makes Veterans

ONCE AGAIN, the wheel of fortune brings the 100th Division to rest inside the fold of VI Corps for a third time with the headquarters under which it received its baptism of fire.

In war, Maj Gen Willard A. Burress' 100th Division served twice under the veteran corps' direction, first upon entering the line in November, 1914, in the Vosges Mountains, and last in the struggle for Hellbronn in March and April of this year.

Separated and ordered under other control in each of these campaigns, the division recently became an occupational unit of VI Corps.

The war-to-peace cycle of the 100th Division under VI Corps in the ETO began last November 15 when the Corps began re-organizing the 12th Division in the Vosges near Rambervillers. Inside of two weeks, the outfit fresh from the States became an important fighting force of the veteran corps by blasting through the key bulwark of the Germans' winter line at Roon L'Etape and initiating the push east toward the Rhine.

This quick adjustment to combat began at the Meurthe River at Baccarat where the 397th and 399th Combat Teams crossed to move abreast down the east bank while the 398th and 100th Recon Troop held a line on the west bank. Advancing south toward Roon L'Etape, the 397th took Breitmarshausen, then blasted through the dense woods and mud to capture Clairupt.

Both teams struck a stone wall at the German winter line between Neuvalmouls and Roon L'Etape. Here, territorially difficult hill fighting called for stuff that makes veterans.

Typical of this bitter fighting was the struggle to wrench one of the key hills at the northeast gateway to the key communications city. Even without opposition, ascent up the heavily-wooded Hill 452-5 would have been difficult. As it was, men of the First Battalion, 399th Infantry, met deeply entrenched automatic weapons poised for the U.S. assault.

With Company A, commanded by Capt. Richard G. Young, blazing the way, the other two companies reached the summit, and met a determined counterattack coming from below. By nightfall, the hill was secure and resistance broken.

With the taking of these hills southeast of Roon L'Etape, the Germans were forced to withdraw and move east. The 397th quickly drove in to capture the city.

The 100th, settling the pace for other Seventh Army troops, then began a race east toward the Rhine. With the 397th Infantry as spearhead, the division advanced up the Rhabodeau River valley.

In the drive on Roon L'Etape, a strategic town on the Seventh Army Front, the 100th skillfully outmaneuvered the Nazis.—Charlotte (N.C.) Observer.

The woods were dense and the hills steep in the Vosges, but it didn't stop the Centurymen in their Rhine push. (100th Sig Photo)

Strategy of Mountain Country Fighting Won Praise of Corps Commander

Less than two weeks after landing in Marseilles, elements of the 100th Division were in action against the Germans in the heavy-wooded, precipitous Vosges Mountains. To historians, the Centurymen attacked the flank of the propped winter line along the Meurthe, thus throwing the enemy off balance and weakening the core of the enemy line in the resultant German forces.

But to Centurymen it was a story of zeroed-in hills, of the hilt darkness of thick woods, of continued rain and mud. Two mine-dotted peaks particularly, known as Hills 461.5 and 502, will always be remembered by the Century doughboys, for the bitter struggle to uproot the dug-in Nazis. In the ensuing drive the 100th had moved to within 12 miles of Strasbourg when it was ordered to another sector.

At the conclusion of the operation Maj Gen Brooks, sent the following letter to Century Commander Maj Gen Burress:

"With the final clearance of the hills from the difficult Vosges Mountains I wish to express to you my appreciation for the part played by your division.

"The 100th Infantry Division made a marked contribution to the success of the VI Corps attack east by the capture of Roon L'Etape, an operation which breached the core of the German defense position and at the same time drew forces from the center where the main attack was to be made and, second, by the prompt capture of Solremsch which blocked the enemy on the left and permitted the main attack to push through without delay."

"Your line Division has written a bright page in the military history of our armed forces."

Lt. Rudolph Steinman, 399th Infantry, a D.C. winner for his part in the Rhone struggle. (163rd Photo)
"The third battalion left..."

Note the symbolism of the Red Cross half track vehicle and the cemetery in the background.
THE MOVE EAST THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

In one of the farmhouses that we liberated, I found a small French diary and I started recording some thoughts. The transcript is in the Appendix and the names of the towns that we passed through had a special charm as well as vivid memories of roadblocks, shelling by 88's, snipers, mines, fanatical defenses, prisoners, and long marches, many of which lasted all day and into the night.

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These were mostly little villages in the forested hills. The homes were thick stone walled, with red tile roofs. The barns for the livestock were part of the home and helped provide warmth for the family. Most all of the civilians were gone but sometimes we would find a chicken or duck which we would kill and cook. Anything for a change from K Rations.

The weather was becoming increasingly cold with quite a lot of snow. The Germans continued to put up a lot of resistance and our casualties continued to mount. Since we had lost so many men I was made an Assistant Squad Leader. By now, we were veterans and proceeded to change things a bit.

We had long since discarded anything that we didn't need to stay alive and fight. Gas masks were tossed by the roadside as well as field packs. We carried everything in our pockets. The cold, wet weather had played havoc on our feet and "Trench Foot" sent many men to the Hospital. We were issued Shoe Paks which had rubber shoes with leather tops and removeable felt insoles. We could wrap one pair of insoles around our waists to dry out while wearing the second set. We were also issued warm reversible parkas, white on one side and light
green on the other. This helped out in the snow.

My feeling was that the more fire power we had, the better chance of survival, so I collected 6 B.A.R.'s for my Squad. We stripped them down by removing the Bipod, flash guard, and shoulder rest. We put as many 20 round magazines in a bandolier as we could carry. The text books called for an assistant B.A.R. man and an ammo bearer. We couldn't afford that luxury so each man was responsible for his own B.A.R. We also learned not to fire on automatic as it would quickly draw counter fire. We squeezed off single shots unless we had a worthwhile target.

On December 2nd we were ordered to take another hill near the village of Ingwiller, the entrance to the Saverne Gap, and a major opening through the Vosges. It seemed like a routine assignment and as we proceed through the woods, my Squad and the one on my flank became separated. Our Company First Sergeant (Regular Army veteran) Thomas DeVane was advancing between the squads and ran into a German emplacement. A blast from a "Burp Gun" literally cut him in half. We found the hill to be heavily fortified and had to withdraw with many casualties. It took two more days and four more attempts before we finally cleared out all the German defenders.

My diary entry for December 3rd refers to the heavy casualties. There were only 70 men left in the company out of 190. My Squad had only three original men left out of 12. We had picked up 4 replacements so we were a Squad of 7 men. Even our Battalion of 800 men had only 250 original men. Only one officer out of nine remained in our Company.

We were getting replacements but we were afraid to trust them until they proved themselves in combat. There was a "camaraderie" of the veterans and it was hard to include the new men.
By the 9th of December the Seventh Army had 7000 Germans trapped but they continued to put up a stiff resistance. Most of the time we were able to find houses to stay in for the night as digging foxholes was out of the question. Since we were steadily advancing toward Germany, we thought the war might be over soon. WRONG.

On December 15 I was sent back to a hospital in Saarburg. A piece of shrapnel had clipped my knee and I was awarded the Purple Heart Medal for wounds in action. Unfortunately, it wasn't a "Million Dollar" wound. We called that type of wound one that would get you out of the war, but not lose anything important, like a leg or arm.

I returned just in time to move to a new sector 10 KM from the Citadel of Bitche. The Germans shelled us unmercifully day and night with mortars and we couldn't leave our foxholes for anything. They were putting up a very strong defense and our casualties continued to mount.
This picture graphically demonstrates how we felt about now.
THE CITADEL AT BITCHE

The Citadel of Bitche was a fortified town from the middle ages. Despite being attacked on numerous occasions, it had never fallen to any enemy. It also became a strongpoint in the Maginot Line with a series of huge fortifications.

The French had built the Maginot Line as a defense against Hitler. It was probably impregnable but the German Army simply avoided it when they attacked France through Belgium. They then waited for the French Army to surrender. No shots were fired in anger at Bitche until we got there. The Germans had decided to defend the forts even though we were attacking from the rear.

The design of the major forts like Ft. Schirmeck was to build reinforced concrete structures as far as 14 stories below ground. They were interconnected by small railways in tunnels underground and could shift troops and ammo very quickly, wherever needed in the lines. The front of the forts facing Germany had earth sloped up over the concrete and the only thing that projected were moveable steel pillboxes that could be raised and lowered to fire. Everything was cleared out in front for clear firing. Tank obstacles and barbed wire prevented easy approach.

What we saw from the back were massive concrete structures over two stories tall with large moats in front of them. Entrance was over a drawbridge. There were numerous gun ports for machine guns and artillery pieces that interlocked each fort so that they protected each other. The concrete was over 10 feet thick on this back side and there didn't seem to be any way to get close enough to try to blast our way in.

Artilllery was used with 105mm guns and we watched the shells simply bounce off the walls. The Air Corps was called in and they dropped 500 pound bombs on the forts and didn't even dent the
surface. Division Artillery then brought up some 240mm "Long Tom" artillery pieces and fired them point blank at the fort with little effect.

Finally, an Engineer Battalion was able to work their way close enough to the fort to blow the main entry door. The fighting was fierce as the pasageways had openings for gun ports and it was room by room fight for many hours. I toured this fort at a later date and was amazed at how self contained it was. They had electric generators, underground barracks, mess halls, ammo dumps, elevators and everything needed for a long siege.

By now it was December 21st and we learned that the Battle of the Bulge had started in the Ardennes Forest in the north of France. Everything that could be pulled off the Line was sent as reinforcements to stop the German attack. We were ordered to spread out our Line to cover territory that had been occupied by the forces relocating to the Bulge. We had to pull back to a defensive line as we did not have the strength to continue to advance.

We had Christmas dinner in Rimling and it seemed to be a nice enough village. All we had to do was dig foxholes outside of town and man observation posts. We even got to spend some rest time in a house with a warm stove on occasion. Things were quiet. TOO QUIET.
RITCHE
The 16th Century Citadel
Supply entrance to Ft. Schiesseck. Small railway cars could roll right into the fort. Note steel cupola on top.

Personnel entrance. It was from the protection of logs in foreground that Baker-Bayard assault was covered.

These Maginot Line fortresses withstood intense shelling for many days. Finally breached by Engineers getting close enough to blow out the steel doors with satchel charges.

Closeup of entrance to mammoth Ft. Otterhell. Note thick walls and ingenious construction into side of hill affording minimum target.
Interior of a Maginot fort. Picture at right shows results of incessant artillery and air bombardment. 240mm shells bounced off these walls.
Fall of Bitche Paved Way For Drive To Siegfried Line and Rhine

In the action which followed the Vosges Mountains campaign, Gen Burruss' men became engaged in a prolonged one-two-three operation which resulted in the piercing of the heavily fortified Maginot Line town of Bitche, the parrying of a major German counterattack, and the final knockout punch for the key citadel fortress.

The build-up for this big-blow action began in early December when the unit, in a three-regiment combination drove northeast toward the fortress city. Wingen proved a hard nut for the 395th's First: Lemberg was rough for the 399th: and the 397th found Mouterhouse was bitterly defended. But these Germans last-stands, although requiring the works, only delayed the division in its push toward its objective.

At the approach to Bitche, the 100th seized the high ground to the west of the city, which was trapped in a bowl and surrounded by the elaborate fort system. The assault on famous Fort Schlesseck on the outskirts marked the wind-up of No. 1 blow on the German Line fortress.

Once artillery, having little or no effect on the four-foot-thick forts, was augmented by direct fire from Long Toms and T. 57. After a week of this, the 398th's Third Battalion drove up the bare ridge holding Fort Schlesseck's 11 forts and began demolishing these installations under a hail of direct fire from enemy guns.

With Century Division and Corps Artillery aiding in driving off one important counterattack there, the men of the 398th and 399th Engineers succeeded in blasting in each of the forts.

At this time, Germans in the Ardennes were doing things of their own which required that the entire Allied western line shift its forces.

A week after this shift—on January 1—the enemy lobbed a counterattack on the Seventh Army front, hitting the 100th, hard, on both its flanks. At the division's north, the krauts pounded at the 397th around Binning, but its brave infantrymen held the snow-covered ground by throwing back everything the had to fight with.

The 399th at the eastern flank, was forced to wheel its troops around to ward off the thrust which had penetrated the thinly-spaced adjacent unit.

By the end of 19 days fighting, the 100th had quelled the Germans' blow, and the division was essentially at its original positions.

The last in the three-punch fight at Bitche came two months later on March 15 when the entire Seventh Army jumped off. The 100th, continuing on its original mission, re-took Schlesseck and other high ground immediately before the city, cut around the north and south, and on the second day, occupied the fortress community.

Thus, the final thrust ended some military history of several centuries: eliminated any German bunking threat to the drive through the Siegfried Line to the north; and in effect, paved the way for the division's own race to the Rhine.

"...honored for the conquest of Bitche, one of the strongest points of the Maginot Line...

—N.Y. World Telegram
RIMLING AND OPERATION NORDWIND

THE COUNTERATTACK

The German attempt to defeat the Allied Forces in the Battle of the Bulge was not going too well, probably due to the addition of reinforcements from our sector. In view of this, the German High Command decided to try a break through in our area as a diversion and an attempt to retake Sarrebourg, a major French town that had been liberated by the Seventh Army and now occupied by the Free French Forces. The Germans code named it "Operation Nordwind".

My squad was assigned to an area outside of Rimling on a hill overlooking a large plain below us. We were next to, and just above, a road leading down to the plain. We dug a good sized foxhole with logs over it for a roof and had good camouflage but still could see everything on the plain and anybody approaching up the road.

On the morning of December 31st we could see a lot of activity in front of us. Hundreds of Germans were massing with tanks, flamethrowers, and armored vehicles. Our forces started to throw some artillery and mortar shells at them, but they just dug in and waited. Conventional artillery shells will hit the ground and throw shrapnel upward and anyone in a slit trench or foxhole will not be hit. Then the heavy mortar section began to fire at them with white phosphorus shells. The phosphorus shells hit the ground and exploded with flaming chunks thrown into the air and falling to the ground. A piece of phosphorus will cling to a man and burn a hole clean thru the uniform and into his skin. I'm sure we caused a lot of misery for the German troops but they continued to mobilize.

AT MIDNIGHT THEY STRUCK. The elite troops of the 17th S.S. Panzergrenadier Division launched a mass attack against our very thin line. As some of the troops advanced up the road next to us, we opened up with everything we had. Bodies piled up but they came yelling and screaming against us. Next, I looked down the road and saw
a flamethrowing tank advancing toward us. We were sure we were about
to be dead men - no way out. The tank approached within 100 yards and
I'm sure they knew we were there, but it suddenly stopped, turned
around and went back. The Germans broke off the attack and pulled
back. I've always thought that they overestimated our strength at
that point and chose to attack where they were succeeding in breaking
through our Lines.

About 40 Germans succeeded in getting into Rimling and set up a
roadblock and fought ferociously until driven back by tanks and our
riflemen.

Our part of the line had held but we found out the next day that
the regiment next to us was decimated and had pulled back a couple of
miles leaving our Company with no protection from being encircled, so
we had to move fast to try to fill the gaps while the Germans
continued to attack fiercely for several more days. We lost 7 more
men from our Company and suffered many wounded.

The Germans continued many probes and caused continuing
casualties but they were too weak to continue a major thrust and we
were too spread out to do much about it. We were like two punchdrunk
prize fighters slugging it out with no decisive effect.

With the rugged weather conditions and our weekend fighting
ability, we settled down into a defensive position that was called
the Winter Line. I received another shrapnel injury to my hand on
January 22nd and as a result went to the Regimental Rest Home for a
few days. This was my second Purple Heart and still not a "Million
Dollar" wound.

In my diary on February 3rd, I noted that this marked the 89th
day of continuous combat operations. Of the 50 men in my Platoon who
entered combat on November 14th, 1944, only 5 of us remained in
Company I. I was beginning to think my luck was running out.
When I got back to my Company from the Regimental Rest Area, we spent all of our time in foxholes in the forests waiting for any enemy movement. We did a lot of patrolling and probing of enemy positions. It was hard to tell what was worse – the boredom – the bonechilling cold – the water in our foxhole from melting snow – or the knowledge that after all this fighting, we weren't even in Germany yet and had to still face the Siegfried Defense Line. Our morale was very low.

"Th' hell this ain't th' most important hole in th' world. I'm in it."

Joe and Wille, the Infantrymen, drawn by Bill Mauldin.
**Enemy Was Forced to Abandon Push at Rimling**

**New Year’s Eve Attacks Held on All Fronts**

Following Gen von Rundstedt’s Ardennes offensive, the Century was ordered to abandon its offensive maneuvers against the Maginot City of Bitche and take up defensive positions along a greatly increased sector before the city.

At midnight on New Year’s Eve, the Nazis launched a furious counterattack against the thinly spread lines. Three divisions, spearheaded by the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier, struck again and again at the 100th Division’s positions. As each mad, screaming attack was thrown back, the Germans left scores of dead and moaning wounded.

Finally, after days of bitter fighting, the Germans abandoned the offensive with only minor changes in the Century positions, and Gen Jacob L. Devers, commander of Sixth Army Group issued the following commendation:

"The rugged American stubbornness of the combat elements of the 100th Infantry Division has played a tremendous part in stemming the tide of attack by superior enemy numbers. In the area of Rimling you successfully repulsed repeated enemy attempts to penetrate your lines; your great accomplishment forced the enemy to give up the offensive action on your front.

"Inflicting great losses to strong elements of three enemy divisions, you have successfully protected an important sector in the Hardt Mountains.

"I heartily commend all members of this division for their outstanding achievements."

"... during the past month the 100th met the German counterdrive with such effect that it was commended by..." — Newark (N.J.) Evening News

Krauts had to pulled from some pillboxes along the Bitche line. Here are two who surrendered to Lt Pinnell. A week later the Century drove through the Hardt Mountains. (100th Sig Photo)
RIMLING:

It was New Year's Eve... A bright cold moonstone down on the hills—the men of the Third Battalion were hardly aware that it was the beginning of a New Year.

Most of them slept. Somewhere, living in a foxhole was not conducive to blowing horns and throwing parties; they'd wait 'til they became civilians for that. Those who were on guard kept a watchful, lonely vigil in the night...

Something in the Wind

They had been keeping that watchful, lonely vigil for a week now—since Christmas Eve to be correct. The Jerries were getting ready for something but nobody knew just what—or where. Probably not here; it was too calm, too peaceful in the rolling hills around this little toy town. No, not here.

The clock ticked on, and the men looked into the glare of the snow in the bath of moonlight, music loudly on the blizzards, the weathering things that a man on guard will muse about—home, wife, sweetheart, postwar plans. The clock ticked on. It was 0005, 1 Jan. 1945.

Attack Stuns at Midnight

Suddenly—meaningly from nowhere, there were Nazis charging up the side of the hill, toward our positions. A guard saw them and a shot rang out, reverberating through the night air like a basement wall. There were more shots, sporadic at first and then like a dozen motorboats starting up all at once.

The report came quickly—"Attack in King Co. sector." The officers in the CP were aroused and at their posts. "Attack!" The rear CP in Guining was quickly notified. "Attack!" Everyone was awake now. Keen, tense. The white knuckles stood out as men in their holes gaped their rifles tighter.

Up the side of the hill, without any artillery preparation, poured the Jerries—about 200 of them heading toward the center platoon of King Co. They were like mad dogs—they were the fanatical SS troops. They shouted at the tops of their voices, "Heil Hitler!" and "Go to Hell you American sons of bitches."

Artillery Helps Stem Attack

As a corroboration from Capt. Longino's King Co., riflemen stained the white ground with the red of pure Aryan blood. The 54th artillery observers stationed in A Tower of Rimling picked them out like ants on a white bed sheet.

They called for everything. Within seconds came the reply, "On the way!" Explosions, ordnance explosions, German bodies in the air. More explosions and more German bodies. Then the screams of the proud SS troops lying wounded—"Help, Kamerad. Help, Kamerad."

In the CP deep creases in the brow of Lt. Col. (then Major) William Faubert were emphasized in the flickering candlelight of the cold bleak cellar. This was it, he knew. The Germans withdrew after the first artillery concentration—but they would attack again. Only stronger this time.

Not all of the Jerries had been killed that first time. Some had overrun King Co.'s position. They were in town and heavily armed. They were a menace, but the main force on the other side of the hill had to be considered first.

Germans Infiltrate Into Town

American tanks were in town in an assembly area and Col. Faubert decided he must call upon them to move up and fire in front of the next attack he knew was bound to come. Lt. Murray Lanier, who only a week before was a communications platoon sergeant, volunteered to go after the tanks with S-Sgt. Engleman, intelligence sergeant.

They set out after the tanks. Before they could reach them, they encountered the Germans who had infiltrated into town and the Jerries opened fire. Lt. Lanier, holder of the Bronze and Silver Stars in only two months of combat, dropped into the snow, dead from a bullet wound in his head. Sgt. Engleman crawled into a ditch and, moving inches at a time on his hands and knees, made his way back to the CP.

Finally the Jerries took cover in a house, not knowing that the only ammo remaining for the observers was one hand grenade which was later used.

Love Co. sent men to cover the house and the next morning took twenty prisoners.

Impossible to Bring in Supplies

Up to this time the battalion positions had not received much artillery fire, but then it came. For the next five days the Jerries continuously blasted the town with everything they had. There was not a house in Rimling that was not hit at least several times.

During the day the Jerries moved their tanks into position where they could place direct fire against our lines and the town.

The men could not leave their foxholes. It was almost impossible to take rations, ammo and water to the men. Heroic officers and heroic non-coms made continuous checks of the men in their holes to see that everything was all right, defying death each time.
More Than 600 Nazi Dead Proved Unswerving Determination Of Bn.

They attacked alone and were cut down by small arms fire. They attacked by day and they attacked by night, but the men fought grimly and resolutely and stemmed every tide.

King Co. Gets Brunt of Attack

The unit on the left of the battalion was forced back about 5000 yds. soon after the first attack got under way, and our flank was exposed. The enemy moved in close on the flank and pounded King Co. with everything in the book.

While the brunt of the attack hit King Co., the other companies were not without their own fierce life or death struggles with the enemy. Item and Love both had their difficult moments but did not suffer as many casualties as King.

Love Co. was the battalion right flank with exposed positions in open ground facing the town of Guiscard from which the Jerries could look right down the throats of Capt. (then 1st Lt.) Weiler's men. The Jerries who tried to attack across the open terrain were cut down by Love Co. riflemen and machine gunners before they could get started.

Despite this advantage, Love Co. men knew that each time they stuck their heads out of their holes, the Jerries could pick them off with mortar, artillery, small arms or automatic weapons. Artillery was Love Co.'s main worry.

Item Co., commanded by Capt. (then Lt.) Grant, had a platoon supported by two tanks covering a gap on King Company's left flank. They fought fiercely, desperately to cut down the infiltrating Germans and succeeded. Some Jerries got through to the town of Rimling, but they were either killed or captured by the men in the Company Cp's.

Rimling Was Given Up, Retaken In Push By 44th

Just for the records, here is what happened after the battalion was relieved at Rimling:

Because of the pressure of the Nazi attack, the outfit which took over the town deemed it best to withdraw to better defensive positions outside Guiscard. The line remained static until the German offensive was throttled in other sectors, and then when the big American push on the western front got under way, the 44th Div. retook Rimling.

It was virtually impossible to get chow, ammo and supplies from the rear cp in Guiscard to the forward cp in Rimling because the two supply routes were under constant and intense artillery fire. But, somehow—though once driven back by machine gun fire—the supplies got through.

Third Battalion Holds Its Ground

The little corner of ground being held by the battalion was about the easternmost piece of land in the entire sector. Other armies, other divisions, other regiments, battalions and companies bent backward with the German counter-offensive, but the Third Battalion stood fast.

To hold that ground meant everything. There was nothing behind the battalion. If the Germans broke through it might have become the southern arm of a huge pincer movement to join with the wedge in the north and threaten large portions of two American armies.

Col. Eshitt knew this. He also knew that the men in their foxholes, unable to move for long days and nights, hungry from nibbling on K rations, sleepy from relentless counterattacks, could not last.
The main body of Nazi troops.
The shooting fire from the flame-thrower had been coming closer and closer (it was the first time any of them had ever seen one).

"It was so close that we could feel the heat every time it passed over us," said Pfc. Edward Coteau, a 21-year-old truck farmer from Redbank, N. J.

All three expected to be dead by dawn. Not only were they running short of ammo, but they know that the single reason the Krauts hadn't rushed in and cleaned them out was that they overestimated the Yank's strength and were just waiting until the knob-defenders exhausted their ammo, or waiting for the light.

While waiting they pulled in a 50 mm. mortar and opened up. In addition, the Krauts threw in concussion potato mashers, one landing three feet away from the knob, and plenty of MG and small arms stuff.

"We thought that was it," said Dougher.

"But suddenly an American 80 mm. mortar from somewhere in the rear, which just happened to be fire-sweeping the general area, landed a lucky hit on the Kraut mortar.

"None of us could believe it when we saw it," said Dougher. "It was like a fairy story."

So they kept firing. They would spot something, fire a burst, fall flat. They did that over and over again.

Just about then, some Kraut to the rear of them yelled in a shrill voice, "Heil Hitler, you American son-of-a-bitch. Heil Hitler."

In the weird shadowed darkness, he kept yelling like that for an hour before they shut him up for good.

The knob was becoming increasingly annoying to the Nazis, because it formed a wedge in their groups. They couldn't completely reorganize into a single force again. Everyday they tried to get together, Maloy opened up with his BAR.

Then they made another wild rush. One Kraut even started climbing the knob before Dougher clipped him with
Battle Honors--Citation of Unit

27 June 1945

By direction of the President, under the provisions of Section IV, Circular Number 333, War Department, 1942, and with the approval of the Army Commander, the following named organization is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action:

The 3D BATTALION, 397TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, is cited for outstanding and exceptional accomplishment in combat during the period 1 January 1945 to 5 January 1945 in the Bitche sector, near Rimling, France. The 109th Division was assigned the mission of defending against an expected enemy attack in force, which had as its objective the capture of Saverne Pass, a vital terrain feature in the Seventh Army front.

The 3D Battalion, 397th Infantry Regiment, occupied a defensive position on the left flank of the Division. Suddenly, at midnight on New Year's Eve, the enemy (17th SS Pz Gren Div) launched a heavy and fanatical attack, the main effort of which encompassed the 3D Battalion and units on its left. The unit on the left of the 3D Battalion was driven back during the course of the day, some five thousand (5000) yards. Because of the width of the front, reserves were not available to fill the gap. A platoon of the left company was overrun by the enemy Tank-Infantry assault, and the enemy infiltrated in force into Rimling, behind the lines of the battalion.

Notwithstanding the exposed and tactically disadvantageous position in which the battalion found itself, it succeeded in restoring its lines, capturing or killing all of the infiltrating enemy. For five (5) days the battalion, in this exposed position, was subjected to repeated attacks from the front, flank, and rear, by enemy tanks and infantry, accompanied by mortar and artillery fire. Repeated attacks by troops of this Division and the Division on the left to reestablish the line and make contact with the left flank of the 3D Battalion failed. The 3D Battalion, nearly surrounded, still held on, despite heavy losses and a disadvantageous tactical situation, which warranted withdrawal.

However, in doing so, it inflicted such heavy losses upon the enemy and impressed upon him so successfully the will of our troops to hold on, that further offensive action on this part of the front by the enemy was discontinued. The action of this battalion, therefore, played a decisive role in thwarting the enemy from attaining his vital objective of Saverne Pass and enabled the Division to hold its position without a serious change in dispositions. The extraordinary heroism and determination, esprit-de-corp and effective fighting displayed by this unit in successfully accomplishing this unusual and rugged task was an inspiration to other troops in the sector, and reflected the greatest credit upon the armed forces of the United States.

BY COMMAND OF BRIGADIER GENERAL MURPHY:

J. O. KILGORE
Colonel GSC
Chief of Staff
LIFE IN A FOXHOLE

During the period of January 10 to March 17, 1944 we were in mostly defensive positions. We had to maintain suitable dug in positions against possible counterattack, so it meant that two Battalions out of three would be in a front line and the third would be in reserve. During the reserve time, we could shower and get some clean clothes and hot food. We generally stayed in houses, while in reserve, so at least we could stay warm for a change.

It was during this period that I was made a Staff Sergeant and given command of my Squad. Strength was supposed to be 12 men but we never seemed to be able to have more than 7 or 8 at a time. Replacements were slow in coming through.

Foxholes were usually shared by two men. One kept watch while the other slept. We dug them three or four feet deep, if we planned to stay for awhile. We would cut trees and use them for a roof to prevent tree burst shrapnel from raining down on us. My second wound was on my hand when I was in a roofed foxhole holding on to my helmet when a piece of shrapnel came between the logs. I had a hell of a dent in my helmet but not much damage to my hand. No Million Dollar wound.

We couldn't move around much during the day because the German snipers were busy. They would also throw a mortar shell over occasionally to get our attention. We didn't have any mines so we rigged hand grenades to trees with trip wires to alert us to enemy action.

Our mail came through pretty good and I received a lot of packages of food. Mom sent cookies but they ended up as pieces with 3 to 4 weeks of travel time. They were still good. She also sent me cans of tuna fish and did it ever taste good. Underwear, scarves and mittens were greatly appreciated as we had to throw most things away because we couldn't wash them. Anything that was dry was a real luxury, even it didn't stay that way for long.
I saw my first German jet plane and was very impressed by its speed. Our anti aircraft artillery couldn't touch it.

The various Chaplains would come up to conduct church services, such as they were. The old saying that "There are no Atheists in Foxholes" was very true so we appreciated their visits. I especially liked the Jewish Chaplain since he brought Matzos and Gefilte fish. Better than K rations.

After dark we could hear the sound of a horse pulling a wagon to supply the Germans facing us. We nicknamed the horse "Whirlaway" after a Kentucky Derby Winner. We plotted on how to ambush this horse and wagon and tried everything but to no avail. It was just too risky to try to get close.

We sent out patrols on many nights to probe the German defenses. Once in a while we would encounter a German patrol and fight it out with them. We tried to capture one of them to get information. I was one of the Company interpreters because I had taken German language studies in high school. However, I spoke High German and they spoke dialects such as Hessisch or Schwabisch. We eventually communicated however. I think every prisoner we took was secretly elated to be a prisoner because they got good food and didn't have to fight anymore.

We would occasionally see bomber formations going over our lines to bomb German cities. Naturally, we gave them a big cheer.

We got a publication called "The Stars and Stripes" to keep us up to date on the progress of the war. It also had pin up pictures and some good cartoons, usually of Willie and Joe, the sad sack infantrymen drawn by Bill Mauldin. We could sure empathize with them.
Our weather was a lot like Michigan with temperatures in the 20's and 30's, and a fair amount of snow. The heat of our bodies would make the snow melt in the foxholes so we tried to make a floor of twigs and straw to keep us out of the water. Didn't seem to help much. We couldn't build fires, but we did burn K ration boxes to make hot coffee in a canteen cup. Our mess sergeant would bring up hot food after dark, so we had one hot meal a day.

The Vosges mountains that we were in ranged from 1500 to 2000 feet in elevation. They were heavily wooded with a lot of contours making defensive positions tough to take. All we could think of was staying alive.

We had numerous occasions to pick up various weapons and other souvenirs. The German Luger was a preferred weapon. It was a 9mm pistol with a 10 round clip and usually carried by an officer. The Walther P38 was a more common pistol and more cheaply made. It also had a 10 round clip. We found a lot of medals, including Iron Crosses and other insignia. There was a lot of Nazi flags, armbands, and other paraphernalia. The Krauts were big on displaying things. During this period, I sent home some German helmets and bayonets, knives, and a Mauser bolt action rifle, banners, flags and military ornaments. We couldn't send pistols. Although I had some nice pistols, I knew I would have to discard them before we went on the attack. The rumor was that if we were captured with them, we'd be shot by the enemy.

One of the biggest problems we had all through the war was stationery. We couldn't carry it because it got wet. We'd find some in houses and get some from the Red Cross. We also used V Mail, which was photographed and sent over the ocean. It was greatly reduced in size and not very satisfactory to read. My mother kept all of my letters and in looking at them now, no two are written on the same type of paper. I tried very hard to put a good slant on our activities and not tell too much. Our mail was heavily censored and we could not
mention our location in our correspondence.

During this period I was offered a battlefield commission to 2nd Lieutenant and become a Platoon Leader. I considered the Pros: a trip to Paris for 3 days to become indoctrinated as "An Officer and a Gentleman", a gold bar and a clean uniform. I said "No Thanks" as I was a civilian at heart and couldn't wait to become one again. A commissioned officer was expected to be available for recall for several years after discharge. That's the way I missed out on the Korean War.

Some of my buddies did accept the commission, Lt. Ed Eylander, Lt. Danny Sacks, and Lt. William Edinson. I never knew how they made out with the Korean War.

In any event, I did get my trip to Paris. Two buddies and I got clean uniforms and traveled to the City Of Light. I didn't have any money as it was all being sent home, so the Supply Sergeant gave each of us two cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes and said he bet we could barter them for enough for a wild time. He was right. The U.S.O in Paris took good care of us with clean bunks and warm showers. We did the town, including a ride in a carriage past the Arc d' Triomphe and down the main boulevards. The War seemed a long way away but 3 days passed quickly and we had to return to our Unit.
In front of the Arc d' Triomphe in Paris during my three day pass in March 1945. We did the town up right by selling two cartons of cigarettes on the black market.
This is a typical foxhole for two men. One stood guard, while the other rested. If possible, we roofed over the hole with logs to prevent air burst shrapnel from coming down on us.

An Infantryman ready for combat. Note the hand grenades strung on his ammunition bandolier. He is carrying a B.A.R.
This is a thirty caliber, water cooled, heavy machine gun in a defensive position. Note the heavy snow.
Life is short —
but death is quicker.

Draw!

The chances for American victory may be more than 50%. But the chances of your being killed in action are still greater. The chances of being wounded or crippled are even four times greater than of being killed.

Draw!

These are the front and reverse sides of a German Safe Conduct surrender certificate. These were fired over by artillery shells. We didn’t think it was a bad idea to have one handy, if we needed it.
ADVANCE TO THE RHINE RIVER

On March 15, 1944 we were relieved by elements of another Division and we went into the attack. We now had the support of aircraft, but they were often ineffective against tanks and dug in German Infantry so we still had a real battle on our hands as we started to enter Germany. The towns we took were a blur but the names were becoming more Germanic and less French.

| Hottviller | Neustadt | Kleinsteinhause | Schorbach | Oggersheim | Grosteinhause | Pirmasesn | Ludwigshaven | Lambrecht | Mannheim |

The vaunted Seigfried Defense Line had been breached by Patton's Third Army and we only had to blow up some of the "Dragonsteeth" anti-tank barriers and clean out some pillboxes with flamethrowers and satchel charges. As we rolled into Germany, it was with a unique feeling of pride and attainment, if not superiority. After all, this is what we came for and gave so many lives for. Unfortunately, the Germans continued a fanatical resistance.

On March 27th Company I had reached Ludwigshaven on the Rhine River. The bridges were blown out and we had to wait for the Engineers to construct a temporary bridge so we could cross to Mannheim. In Ludwigshaven, the Post Office still had the Swastika flag flying and my Company Commander told me to take a couple of men and bring the flag down. We climbed several stories to the roof and tried to untie the lanyard. About that time, snipers opened up on us. We laid flat on the roof and shot off the lanyard anchor and the flag slowly fluttered down. I sent it home for a souvenir and still have it.

We went through the I.G. Farben Chemical Works and cleared out all resistance. One office was occupied by the Gestapo and on the wall was a beautiful banner with a red background and the black and white
Swastika and all fringed in gold. It's another trophy that I still possess.

While still in the Ludwigshaven area, Johnny Weber, a good buddy from High School, came over to see me from the 399th Regiment. He had been captured, but subsequently released, when the place he was being held was overrun. The house that we were occupying had a camera with one picture left. It was tiny film, maybe 8mm, so I had one of my guys take a picture of Johnny and me. This was the only picture of me during combat and is included in this book.

We crossed the Rhine River on March 30th and started moving toward the industrial city of Heilbronn on the banks of the Neckar River. By April 7th we had entered the town of Neckargartach, directly across the river from Heilbronn. All of the bridges were out and the Engineers were building pontoon bridges. As we watched the bridge get closer to the other side, the German 88's opened up and blew the bridge to pieces. The Engineers would try again and the same thing happened. Later it was determined that a civilian had acted as a spotter for the German artillery, so the engineers never had a chance.

We figured that if they couldn't find a way across, maybe we could just stay on our side until the war was over. WRONG.
This picture was taken of John Weber and me just before we crossed the Rhine River between Ludwigshaven and Mannheim. This is the only picture taken of me during actual combat operations.
HEILBRONN AND THE NECKAR RIVER CROSSING

The Engineers figured that if they couldn't build a bridge with the boats they were using, then we could paddle over in them. The first boats had the same trouble with the German artillery and a lot of men were lost, so a Smoke Detachment was brought up and started to lay down dense smoke over the river. The thought of paddling over that swift moving water in a dense smoke, with all of our equipment, was frightening.

Ten men were loaded to a boat and we paddled like our lives depended on it. I have no idea how long it took, but it seemed forever. We were getting a lot of machine gun fire from the opposite bank and couldn't see anything to shoot back at. Now I know how the guys in a beach assault felt; pretty helpless. We made the other bank without too many casualties and advanced enough to make a small beach head. However, no ammo or supplies or heavy weapons could be brought over, so we had to slug it out with what we carried.

Food and water were a real problem because all of our supplies were on the other bank and the only way over was by boat. Sometimes we'd find something to eat in a building or house, but we depended mostly on K Rations.

Heilbronn, in our sector, was a lot of factories and warehouses that had been badly bombed out. It was a honeycomb of places for the Germans to hide until we were right up on them. They had the element of surprise and we took a lot of casualties. It was almost hand to hand combat with bayonets and hand grenades. I remember climbing into a cellar and found a fellow 2nd Platoon Sergeant, Corky Kovarsky, grinning and pointing to the wound in his leg. He pointed out that it was his "Million Dollar" wound and wished us the best of luck while the Medic bandaged him. His war was over.
A lot of mortar fire and artillery fire was called in to soften up the defense but most of the time, the Germans were holed up in a building just a few yards from us and the mortars frequently dropped on us. As a matter of fact, Corky Kovarsky's wound was caused by "friendly fire".

As we moved through the factory area we came to a series of row houses. Probably ten to a row, all attached to one another. The first couple were on fire. My Squad and I entered the first house, not burning, to clear it of Germans. We found none and moved on, one at a time. When we reached the last house, the door was locked so I shot out the lock and burst into the house. The house was occupied by a very old man and his sick wife. They were terrified but we assured them we meant them no harm while we searched the house. The old man walked over to his door and picked up the remains of his lock and had a tear in his eye as he said "Alles Kaput". This hit me very hard as it summed up his situation. Alles Kaput means, loosely translated, "All is gone" and it would only be a matter of time before his house was destroyed by fire, if cannon fire didn't get them first. Civilians in any war suffer greatly and although we tried to avoid any injuries to them, many still died.

Block by block and building by building we fought. Supplies were critical and it was several days before we had any reasonable support. Finally, they got some tanks over and after 8 days of intense combat, we secured the city. We had over 50 men in our Regiment killed and over 450 men wounded.

There were so many acts of heroism and bravery in Heilbronn that our Division and Regimental history books devote chapters to them. I don't know what it was about Heilbronn that prompted the Germans to fight so savagely, but I'm sure it was another of Hitler's directives of "No Retreat". Many of the defenders were 14 and 15 year old kids and men in their 60's, but even with little or no training, they could still pull a trigger, from hiding, just as well as a veteran.
Engineers Build Ponton Span In Spite of Enemy Artillery

INFANTRY LANDS. Doughs of Co L, 397th Inf., charge up east bank of Neckar to secure foothold in Heilbronn.

After several unsuccessful attempts to construct a bridge at sites up and down the Neckar river, Engineers last week finally set up a steel trestle bridge that remained intact long enough to send a company of tanks and TDs to battling doughs on the other side.

The operation is known as "Little Anzio" among the men who took part in it. One Captain from Corps Engineers, a veteran of African and Italian beach landings and river crossings, said it was the first time in his experience that such a large a bridge was constructed at so small a bridgehead. At the time the 240-foot span went in, the bridgehead extended only 100 yards inland to the south and east, according to Capt. M. J. Bjeck, of Cicero, Ill.

Enemy artillery pounded at the bridge site almost throughout the operation. In mid-afternoon several direct hits knocked out four floats, allowing passage of only the lighter TDs. One hour later another hit knocked out five more floats, and by nightfall the bridge was three feet under water.

Nor was the work of Engineers limited to bridge building. Assault boat crossings were maintained at three points along the river, and two platoons of Co. B, commanded by Capt. John J. Upchurch III, were once deployed as infantry.

A covering smoke screen, laid down by chemical units directed by Lt. Col. Ward E. Betz, aided operations. Infantrymen using the span as a foot bridge looked surprised that it could have been constructed under continual enemy fire from artillery and snipers.
Centurymen dash through the rubble of Heilbronn in face of intense enemy fire. This was once a beautiful city.

A wounded infantryman is carried from the bridgehead battleground. Loading into an assault boat for the hazardous Neckar crossing.
Bitter Street Fighting Rages In City of Heilbronn

(Continued from Page 1)

Frankenbach in tanks and advanced on foot as far as Neckargartach.

Crossing the Neckar in assault boats, men of the 2nd Bn. cleared the west side of town by 5:30 p.m., encountering heavy sniper, automatic weapons and artillery fire on both east and west banks of the river.

Meanwhile, the 398th's 1st Bn. cleared Schwäbisch and the 2nd Bn. occupied Schlickert and Grossgartach.

All day April 5th, the heaviest street-fighting of the entire front took place in the Western part of the city. The Nazis, fighting desperately to keep their hold in the factory district, had to be routed out, building by building, street by street.

One company of the 397th was forced to withdraw when the enemy launched a powerful counter attack at 1:15 a.m., with percuission grenades and bazookas. At 6 a.m., G Co. counter-attacked, retaking two of their buildings formerly held by the battalion.

It was 10 a.m. before the west bank had been cleared, permitting another battalion, to cross the Neckar and strengthen the 100th's hold on the east bank.

Early in the afternoon, the two battalions on the east bank consolidated their lines and launched an attack to the south, clearing out the factory area. One 397th battalion captured an estimated 250 P.W.s from the factory buildings during this advance. During the day, three Nazi tank were put out of action.

April 7th was another tough one for hard fighting doughs of the 397th and 398th, as operations to enlarge the bridgeheads continued. Two battalions, attacking to the south, gained approximately 1,000 yards against heavy enemy resistance in industrial areas.

Three counter-attacks were thrown at the 397th during the day, but all were repulsed.

Meanwhile, another battalion on Sunday crossed the Neckar and Jagst River and continued the attack to the southeast, while still another battalion cleared the enemy from half of Jagstfeld.

Stubborn resistance still existed across the entire front on April 8th, as the engineers strove to complete a pontoon bridge under almost continuous enemy artillery fire. The bridge was completed at 6:12 a.m., and tanks and tank destroyers rolled across the span to join doughboys in the big battle.

Five more blocks of the town were cleared by two battalions of the 397th.

Near Weltkraiburg, elements of the 388th pushed under heavy fire to gain about 1,000 yards-larger advance of the day, while Lt Col. Ehrhardt's 388th Inf. men, pushing south to widen the bridgehead approximately 500 yards.

Just before 6 p.m., another Nazi counter attack was repulsed, with one company knocking out a Nazi tank.

Although the enemy fought stubbornly, approximately 1,000 P.W.s were taken by the division in the first five days of the battle.

They varied from Hitler Youth to civilians.

Throughout Monday and Tuesday, the two main bodies which had established bridgeheads on the north around Neckargartach and farther south in the city, were bottling up and examined up before driving forward. It was Wednesday before they managed to break the enemy's defense.

Early in the week, engineers managed to ferry some tanks, tank destroyers, half-tracks, and armored trucks across the river, and by Tuesday they were joining in the bitter street-fighting.

'Baby Battalions' Put In Appearance at Neckar

'Baby Battalions', reported at other sectors of the Seventh Army front, have been contacted by the 100th Division in the Neckar river area. More than half of the 364 prisoners taken in the first 48 hours following the breaching of the river were kids from 15 to 17 years of age.

Further indication that Germany was scraping the bottom of the barrel in a desperate attempt to organize manpower to stem the allied advance, came from officials at the Division PW camp. It was reported some prisoners were on their way home from Reich Arbeits Dienst (German Labor Service) when they were hailed off trains by Nazi officials and mobilized to defend towns in the path of the Allied steamroller. One German major was sent to the Neckar sector a few days before capture to look over terrain with the idea of assuming command of a force here. The major had a wooden leg.

Forty-two Kraut kids were taken by elements of the 388th Inf. and 10th Armd from one company of a 'special purpose' battalion. They were 17-year-olds with seven or eight weeks in the Army. Committed at Grossgartach, four kilometers west of the Neckar, with little or no training.

During the last part of the war, the German Army was desperate for manpower because of their great losses. They formed a force called the 'Volksturm' or 'Peoples Storm'. These were mostly elderly men or young boys. They had brief training but were fanatic in their cause of defense of the "Homeland."
It Took All Means to Win City of Heilbronn

Determination Needed To Breach Neckar

To all units of the Century and its supporting troops, the Neckar river city of Heilbronn will always mean pure hell.

For nine deadly days—April 4 to 12—the fighting men suffered all combat horrors of the knock-down, drag-out slugfest for this outer position of the German national redoubt.

Here in this once industrial city of 100,000, Centurymen, again part of the VI Corps, faced an enemy braced for defense with zeroed-in artillery and perfect observation from a ridge overlooking the city from the east. To reach this objective, doughboys had to cross the 100-yard-wide Neckar bordering the city on the west.

The river crossing began after a rapid push from the Rhine in the wake of the 10th Armored's advance through the area from Mannheim. With virtually no resistancefelt to Heilbronn, the move into this city was a fastchange back into action.

The Third Bn. 398th, crossed just north of the city limits in the early morning of April 4, and was followed by the Second Bn. 397th, the face of growing enemy automatic weapons fire.

Then the Third Bn. 377th, joined the beachhead forces. On the next day, the First Bn. 397th, plus Co. C, 398th, augmented this beachhead by establishing a second force on the center of the city.

Meanwhile, seven miles above the two-beachhead site, Second Bn. 398th, followed by First Bn. 38th, crossed the river at Offenburg, on the drive southward to join the other Century forces.

The pitched battle developed in intensity on all fronts, with each unit finding it necessary to assault each building to dislodge the enemy, bit by bit, yard by yard.

On the fourth day of the assault, men of the 31st Engineers, covered by smoke laid by the 163rd and 69th Smoke Generating Companies, completed erection of a bridge to the center of the explosive inferno, and 13 tanks and nine TD's, plus the remainder of the First Bn. 398th, crossed to join the bitter battle.

Inside of seven hours, enemy artillery destroyed the bridge and the Century's 323rd Engineers resumed moving supplies and wounded back and forth on assault boats and ferries.

Several large-scale German counterattacks developed during the first days in Heilbronn.

Throughout the operation, German Nebelwerfers and artillery maintained a roaring barrage over the blasted rail city, while GI shells answered back.

By April 10, the north and south bridgeheads around Heilbronn had been joined, the 397th had driven 10 miles east, and the 399th south. On April 12, the city itself was clear. The 397th took the eastern heights and the 399th those in the south, while the 398th Engineers finished construction of a heavy pontoon ferry which carried Second Bn. 398th, to the city.

With the windshield of the bitter battle, in which more than 1,300 PVT's were taken, correspondents described this fighting as the toughest on the Seventh Army front.

Taking of Heilbronn meant that the way was open for a drive south along the Neckar toward Stuttgart. Later, when the division took Bad Cannstatt, on the east bank of the Neckar, the men were placed in reserve for its first extended rest in over six months of continuous combat. The 100th was still in that position on V-E Day.

"...heavy fighting continues in Heilbronn where the 100th Division is fighting from house to house, and almost room to room."—Drew Middleton in N.Y. Times
The unending stream of "Supermen" with their hands up gained volume as we pushed deeper into the German Fatherland.

Our last days of combat were spent riding on the backs of tanks and tank destroyers during a nine day dash into the heartland of Germany.

Mounted on tanks, Centurymen pursued the enemy relentlessly, permitting the Jerries little time to regroup for a stand.
THE FINAL PUSH TO VICTORY

After Heilbronn, which proved to be the last major resistance which Company I encountered, we started our final push into the German Heartland. On the 16th of April, we were made part of an armored spearhead to drive deep into Germany.

We had a number of Sherman tanks and some Tank Destroyers. The Shermans were older models with 75 mm cannons and heavy armor. They were slow, but effective against roadblocks and houses. They were no match for the German Tiger and Panther tanks, however. The Tank Destroyers were new models, lightly armored, but had gyroscopically controlled guns that were 90mm and very high velocity. The T.D.'s depended on speed and could fire accurately while moving at high speed.

The German Tiger tanks had the disadvantage of manual control for the gun turret. It had to be cranked by the gunner and was slow to respond but deadly when it was in position. Their "88" cannon could knock out anything we had.

One incident that I vividly remember was coming up and over a hill when the lead tank took a round from a dug in Tiger at the bottom of the hill. The column stopped and two T.D.'s were brought up. They were directed to go over the crest of the hill, one to the right and one to the left, full speed, at 45 degree angles. The theory was that the Tiger could not follow them both and probably could not hit either because of the slow traverse of the gun turret and the high speed of the T.D.'s. It worked and the T.D.'s were successful in knocking out the Tiger so we could resume the advance.

For the next few days, we rode the tops of the tanks and T.D.'s with 8 to 10 men on each and advanced, mostly at night. We would move as fast as we could get through roadblocks and the occasional fanatical resistance. We didn't bother with prisoners but let the troops following pick them up.
During the 9 days that we were in this movement, our Regiment captured 79 towns and ultimately took 2259 prisoners. Our casualties were fairly light and we knew the back of the German resistance had been broken. They were thoroughly disorganized and had no idea what was happening because their communications and supply lines had been cut.

On April 21st we stopped at the town of Altbach, just outside of Stuttgart. This was to be our final conquest. Captain Grant told me to take two Squads (15 men was all I had) to the next village as we had been told there were some Germans that wanted to surrender. When we got there, to our surprise, there were 77 soldiers and two officers. We disarmed them and marched them back to the P.O.W. camp that we had set up in Altbach. I relieved one of the officers of his Luger pistol and have it to this day.

For us the War was over. Our Regiment had distinguished itself in battle and our Regimental History records the following:

Strength at start of combat - Approx. 3300

Killed in Action 383
Wounded in Action 1294
Missing in Action 298

Prisoners captured 6835

I know I must have had some good Angel on my shoulder to have survived 145 days of Infantry combat, through the most severe winter weather, and over mountainous terrain, being defended by fanatical German troops. I saw so many of my good buddies killed and wounded and it was just plain luck that I didn't get it too. I now know my blessings and thank God for his mercies.
Unconditional surrender of all German forces was announced yesterday by the German radio at Flensburg. Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz, successor to Adolf Hitler as Führer of Germany, ordered the surrender and the German high command declared it effective, the German announcement said. No immediate confirmation came from the capitals of the Allied powers, but President Truman and Prime Minister Churchill will broadcast at 3 p.m. ETO time today, and King George VI will broadcast tonight at 9 o'clock.

In London, the British Ministry of Informa-
tion announced that today would be V.E. Day, and that today and tomorrow would be holidays in Britain. In Washington, President Truman said he had agreed with London and Moscow to make an announcement of surrender until a simultaneous statement could be made by the three governments.

U.S. Celebrates Victory
2nd Time in Ten Days

King Expresses
Thanks to Ike

Shell of famous Stuttgart Rathaus stands amid leveled structures over which it once towered. Air bombing did most of damage.

And then, at 2000 hours of 5 May, under the commonplace heading of Operations Instructions No. 82, the following breathtaking message was dispatched to all division units:

EFFECTIVE AT ONCE, 100TH INF. DIV. TROOPS WILL NOT FIRE UPON ENEMY TROOPS UNLESS FIRED UPON OR UNLESS NECESSARY IN CONNECTION WITH POLICE DUTIES. PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN HQ. SEVENTH ARMY AND GERMAN FORCES OPPOSING SEVENTH ARMY REGARDING UNCONDITIONAL SURREN- DER BECOME EFFECTIVE 1200, 6 MAY 1945. THIS ORDER AFFECTS SEVENTH ARMY TROOPS ONLY. THIS INFORMATION IS NOW BEING ANNOUNCED OVER SEVENTH ARMY RADIO AT FIFTEEN MINUTE INTERVALS.

BURRESS
Maj. Gen.
This letter was written the day after the unconditional surrender of Germany was signed. It was also only 16 days after we fired our last shots, so the War was still very fresh in our minds.

Note that packages were taking about 45 to 50 days to arrive.

The P.S. refers to "Winnie" who was Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain.
May 8, 1945

Dear Mom & Dad,

Well, the big news is already a day old and still it doesn’t seem quite possible. You know, it’s funny but I didn’t have the least feeling of elation when I heard it. Of course I was glad but I guess I’ve been too close to it, sweated out too many close shaves and seen too many of my buddies get it, to be running around getting drunk, etc. Instead, I just sat down and thought it all over, and did a little praying. The gay celebrations are for the civilians I guess. A soldier who has seen six months of continuous combat can’t quite get the horror of it all out of his mind. I’m not alone in this feeling as a few of the boys,
mostly the older ones, felt the same
way. So if you see any of these big
deals shunting their stuff around
home saying "We did it again"—remind
them that there are a lot of fellows
who "did it" alright but will never
know it. I trust the folks at home
will say a prayer for those fellows.
We are having special church services
tomorrow so I'll be going to that.

I just came in from a running
volley ball game, made myself a
pitcher of Kool-Aid, cooled off a bit,
and decided to write this letter.

By the way I got another package
from you the other day dated March 19.
It contained cheese & crackers, bananas,
candy, dunks, etc. Made a hit as
usual. Thanks.

Well, things are rolling along as
usual. This morning we had a practice
march, drill, and lectures, and had the afternoon for sports. This garrison life is sure some change (for the better) after fasholes.

I've been having lots of target practice with my hogs and decided not to send it home for awhile at least. I'm going to see how things work, whether it's Pacific bound or what. I'm hoping for Army of Occupation so keep your fingers crossed.

I just learned today that Lt. Baker's returning to the Company. I'm sure glad to hear that. Lt. Colenso sends his heat as of a couple days ago.

Well, I'll sign off for now.

Love,
Bob

P.S. "Winnie" just came on the radio. Guess I'll hate to him.
OCCUPATION DUTY

On the 26th day of April, 1945 we assembled and moved into Stuttgart. The city had been badly bombed and was virtually destroyed. Formerly a city of 500,000 people, it was now almost deserted. We continued to mop up some stragglers of the Wehrmacht and collected many displaced civilians from Eastern Europe who had been brought to Germany in slave labor battalions. We were also on the lookout for Gestapo men and S.S.. Everybody denied they were members of the Nazi Party, but obviously many were lying.

We were able to get some clean uniforms and do a little housecleaning of ourselves and our weapons. May 9th was officially V.E. Day (Victory in Europe). It was happy time but also one of reflection on our experiences and especially the loss of so many of our good buddies. We were proud for what we had accomplished but appalled at the high cost in human lives.

Orders came down that we were to move down into Bavaria, south of Ulm, and break up into company sized units, each to patrol several villages. Our Company I ended up in Osterberg, an idyllic village of 30 or 40 stone houses, a single gravel road, no electricity and no water system. There was no evidence of motorized vehicles and they depended on horses and cattle for transportation. It had been untouched by the fighting. We "requisitioned" enough houses to take care of our Company of 190 men. Captain Grant and the Headquarters took over a castle on the hill above the town.

The houses were simple, but comfortable, and the beds had the most wonderful down comforters. We let the owners check in once a week and paid them to clean up for us. They weren't too happy about having to move out, but I think they were pleased that we didn't destroy anything or steal from them. As in France, livestock was housed in part of the house, with the living quarters upstairs. Naturally our accommodations smelled like cow dung, but we got used to it.
Our Company was assigned an area of about 25 square miles to patrol and it covered a number of other small villages. Regularly, we would set up checkpoints at road intersections and search for weapons or contraband. We observed hundreds of slave laborers that were moving back to the East.

In our territory was the private hunting preserve of Hermann Goering, Hitler's next in command. No one else was allowed to hunt in it so it was full of small mule deer. We would go hunting them for fresh meat for our kitchen, usually with a machine gun on a jeep. Brutal, but effective. I bagged my first deer with my Luger and I don't think many people have ever shot a deer with a pistol.

The castle was actually a large manor house and was owned by a Baron, who owned most of the surrounding land. The villagers were tenant farmers. The house had a large dining hall with dozens of stag heads adorning the walls. The Baron reportedly was a high officer in the SS and we found many Nazi artifacts. We also were tipped off about some arms and ammunition that had been hidden and we recovered them.

After a couple of weeks, the townspeople became more used to us and showed some resentment of our occupation. About this time, we had found a German S.S. uniform in the manor house. We decided to play a trick on the civilians and dressed up one of our guys in the uniform. He adopted a haughty look while we drove him slowly around the village in a jeep. He would point out people and whisper to us. They thought he was telling us about something that they would rather not have us know and became very subdued. We heard no more complaints.

In July, we moved back to Stuttgart and assumed responsibility for the city and environs. We were housed in a "Kaserne" or barracks, one of the few large buildings not destroyed. Garrison duty resumed with K.P., Parades, drills, etc. One nice thing was the Opera House that had not sustained too much damage and we could get to see some U.S.O. shows there.
In August we were alerted for shipment back through the States for reassignment to the Pacific Theater. The idea of the States was terrific, but the thought of Japan was revolting. Fortunately, the atom bombs were dropped and the war ended on August 16th.

I was given a 7 day furlough to travel to Switzerland at the end of August. We visited a town in the mountains called Engleberg and walked up into the snow on the mountain side. We also visited Montreaux, Basle and Gstaad. The Army did a great job for a total cost of $35.00, meals, transportation and lodging included.

In September, many of the men who had enough "points" were being shipped home. You collected points for time in service, combat, decorations, marriage, etc. Mostly married guys were leaving now. The Division was slowly being broken up with transfers to other units in Germany.

In October, I was transferred to Fountainbleau, France for training in office administration. I was to have 4 weeks of training and then be reassigned. Wow!, Paris was only an hour away and my buddies and I spent every weekend there. What a beautiful city. This training seemed like a let down for a combat veteran, but the benefits more than made up for it.

During one of my visits to Paris, I went to a performance of the Folies Bergere (for educational purposes only). While there I had a caricature made. After the performance, John Nagle who was with me, spotted General George Patton in the audience. I went up to him and got his autograph on my caricature. Little did I know then that I was soon to be working for him in the 15th Army Headquarters.
Full sized reproduction of a V Mail letter. It was photocopied by the Army for ease of transport. We did not like them because they were too small and impersonal.

Note the date is November 19th, just after our first day of combat. I had written to Dad to advise him that we were fighting but tried to word it in a positive way. I sure stretched it when I said the war was easy, but I didn't want to worry my folks any more than necessary.
My Squad in Stuttgart in August 1945. Note my Assistant Squad Leader, Max Simon the boxer.

Showing off my Luger pistol in Osterburg June 1945

One of my Squad in a German SS uniform in front of the castle in Osterburg - June 1945. We terrified the townspeople when we paraded him through the town.
During my furlough to Switzerland
Engleberg - August 1945

John Nagle and me in front of
the Opera House in Stuttgart
August - 1945

John Weber and me in
Stuttgart - August 1945
Ken Brown and me with Jokele in Frankfurt March 1946

This picture was taken in Stuttgart, August 1945
BAD NAUHEIM AND THE 15TH ARMY

After a very pleasant 4 weeks at Fountainebleau, interspersed with numerous trips to Paris, I received my orders to travel to Bad Nauheim, Germany and become part of the 15th Army Headquarters. This paper Army consisted mostly of senior staff officers and they had the responsibility of writing the history of the war.

The town of Bad Nauheim was just north of Frankfurt and had been a German tourist town noted for its hot baths (Bad means bath). It had not been damaged during the war and the hotels were very nice. We worked in the Grand Hotel and stayed in other hotels nearby. We had all types of recreation facilities and Red Cross entertainment. Life was pretty good.

On November 22nd we had a fantastic Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings, an orchestra, white table cloths, wine and liquers, cigars and the works. In my letter home, I compared it to the Thanksgiving a year before when we marched 24 miles through the rain to reach the village of St. Blaise, gateway to the Vosges Mountains. We surprised the German defenders at 8 o'clock at night and overwhelmed them with minimum casualties. We were exhausted from the march and the fight and collapsed into the nearest house. If the Germans had counterattacked, we'd have been in trouble.

The next day our Mess Sergeant brought us the finest turkey dinner that we could imagine. After nothing but K rations, we thought we'd died and gone to Heaven. Our respite didn't last long as we moved out to attempt to take the Citadel of Bitche.

General George Patton was the Commanding General for the 15th Army. He was not too happy about it but he got in trouble with Ike by shooting his mouth off about taking on the Russians now.
Patton claimed that we could lick them now and if we didn't we'd have to do it in the future. He was right, but it didn't sit well with the politicians.

General Patton would come to the Grand Hotel in his Packard Staff car with two flags, with his General's stars, on posts on the front fenders. He wore a shiny helmet liner, short Eisenhower jacket, jodhpurs, riding boots and twin pearl handled revolvers. He was quite a sight, while all of the other officers wore conventional uniforms. He also had his pug dog with him most of the time. When you saw him, you had better be on your feet, with a salute, or else.

December 6th marked the second anniversary of my entry into the Army. Also it marked 14 months of overseas duty.

On December 9th we received word that General Patton had been seriously injured in a car wreck on the Autobahn. He was noted for taking the wheel and flooring it and I guess it caught up with him. He ultimately died.

During this time, Ken Brown (Brownie) and I had a little white puppy given to us. We named him Jokele. He was 8 weeks old and we kept him in a box in our room in the hotel. We fed him table scraps and enjoyed playing with him when off duty.

On the 20th of January, 1946, I left Bad Nauheim for a furlough to England. We took the train to Paris and joined the boat train to Dieppe and then across the Channel to London. London had suffered a great amount of damage from the German V2 rockets and the Buzz Bombs. Many blocks in central London were clear of any buildings. We had a great time sightseeing and enjoyed the British people.
On the 21st of February, I was transferred to the I.G. Farben building in Frankfurt. Although Frankfurt was largely destroyed, this building was spared. Since my point total was high enough for early shipment home, they didn't give me too much work to do. We spent most of our time touring the city and playing with Jokele.

On the 9th of March I was offered a furlough to Copenhagen and jumped at it. We spent ten days enjoying the sights and sounds of Denmark, including tours up to Kronborg Castle and Freidricksborg Castle. My folks had sent me some scrap silver and I purchased a small tea bell at Georg Jensen Silversmith. You had to trade an equivalent amount of silver, as they had no supply. This trip cost me $50.00. You can't even buy a meal for $50.00 now as our recent Scandanavian trip proved.

March 22nd was my day to leave Frankfurt and travel to Namur, Belgium to wait for the boat home. Forty four hours on the train was a bear, but the thought of going home made it worth while. I tried to bring Jokele home with me but the Army would not allow it, so I gave him to a resident of Namur.

Our next leg was a 48 hour train ride to Le Harve, France to board the boat. We expected the voyage to be about 8 days in a Liberty Ship. Our ship was the U.S. Victory with 810 troops. It was a tub but it seemed like the finest cruise ship possible — going home.

Processing through New York took several more days and I finally arrived at the Michigan Central Depot in Detroit at 7 AM on Easter Sunday morning to a warm and tumultuous welcome from my parents and friends.

THUS ENDS A SOLDIER'S STORY
Caricature made at the Follies Bergere and autographed by General George Patton.
OFFICIAL SEAL:

The official seal of the Society of "The Sons of Bitche"
You must have been there to be a member of this select group.

Joe and Wille, the Infantrymen, drawn by Bill Mauldin.

"Fresh, spirited American troops, flushed with victory, are bringing in thousands of hungry, ragged, battle-ocary prisoners . . ." (News item)
FRIENDS FROM COMPANY I

George Stout was my best friend in training and going overseas. He was killed on November 14, 1944 during our first day of combat.

Jack McLean was my Assistant Squad Leader on that first day and he was taken prisoner.

Allen McLean was Jack's cousin and he was killed on November 14th.

Thomas DeVane was our company First Sergeant and he was killed at Ingwiller.

Harold (Corky) Kovarsky was wounded by our own artillery in the battle for Heilbronn.

Ken Cook was a close buddy and was captured at Hottweiller.

Paul Mosher was a machine gunner and the inspiration for this book as well as keeping our Company actively involved in Reunions.

Lowrey Bowman was a "Runner" or messenger for Captain Grant to communicate with other units. Very prolific letter writer and historian.

Richard (Toby) Tobias was a close friend and advanced to Squad Leader.

Ed Eylander accepted a battlefield commission and distinguished himself as a Platoon Leader.

Danny Sacks also accepted a battlefield commission.
John Nagle was a close friend from U.S. training and was transferred to Division Anti-tank Company.

Lt. Ulysses (Jerry) Grant was the Company Exec. Officer on November 14th and assumed command when our Company Commander was wounded. He was the only officer to serve continuously throughout our time in combat.

Ken Brown fought with distinction and we became very close after the war in Bad Nauheim where we shared ownership of "Jokele"

Other comrades from 50 years ago include:

- Mil Apetz
- Albert T. Klett
- Edward Cooke
- Joe Funaro
- Gene Hoiby
- Cliff Jimison
- Norman Redlich
- Henry Vogel
- William Edinson
- John Keelan
- Fred King
- Bruce Larson
- Danny Martin
- Tiges Martin
- Norman Nisick
- John Sheets
- Joe Sullivan
Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

ROBERT G TESSMER
36890212 STAFF SERGEANT COMPANY I 397TH INFANTRY REGIMENT 100TH DIVISION
7TH ARMY

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 SEPARATION CENTER CAMP ATTERBURY INDIANA

Date 20 APRIL 1946
(1) WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL
(2) AMERICAN DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL
* WITH, WITHOUT FOREIGN SERVICE CLASP,
ISSUED AT CAMS U.S. DETROIT, MICH.
ON JUL 9 1943

SIGNATURE OF ISSUING OFFICER OR AGENT
E. W. HENRY
MAJOR AC
EAME THEATER RIBBON W/2 BRONZE STARS GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL PURPLE HEART MEDAL VICTORY MEDAL WORLD WAR II DISTINGUISHED UNIT BADGE.

NO DAYS LOST UNDER AW 107; ASR 2 SEP 45.

CERTIFIED FOR MICHIGAN.

MERCEDES R. SCHAGEMAN
Notary Public Wayne County, Michigan

L R HORTON 1ST LT CAC

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.
DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS AWARDED
TO STAFF SERGEANT ROBERT G. TESSMER

GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL

AMERICAN THEATER 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 FOR BATTALION BRAVERY

COMBAT INFANTRY BADGE

PURPLE HEART MEDAL FOR WOUNDS IN ACTION
Decorations - Clockwise from Upper Right

Good Conduct Medal, Purple Heart, for wounds in action, European, African and Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, Victory Medal for Campaign and Service in World War II. Combat Infantryman Badge and the 100th Infantry Division shoulder patch.
Luger Pistol and carrying holster. 10 rounds of 9 mm parabellum ammunition. Usually carried by German Officers. Background is a Swastika of the Nazi Party woven into a small banner.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS OF COMBAT OPERATIONS

After landing in Marseilles and getting organized with our equipment, we were trucked north to the vicinity of Baccarat, France at the foothills of the Vosges Mountains. We relieved the 45th Division and became part of the Seventh U.S. Army. To the right of our Division was the Free French Army.

We went on the attack on November 14, 1944. This was hilly terrain, heavily wooded, and with few roads. As we advanced, we took the towns of Raon l'Etape, Senones, and St. Blaise la Roche by the end of November. We were then taken by truck through Saarbourg to Weiterwiller. By December 1st, we engaged the Germans again at Ingwiller with savage fighting.

Our next major objective was the Citadel of Bitche. Following that action we arrived at Rimling where we withstood the counterattack on New Years Eve. Our Division was forced to spread out to cover more area inasmuch as nearby forces had been moved to the Ardennes to support the Battle of the Bulge. We dug in defensive positions near Bitche until attack resumed in mid-March.

We then attacked through the German Siegfried Line and took Schorbach, Dorst, Steinhausen, Pirmasens, Neustadt and Ludwigshafen, across the Rhine River from Mannheim. After crossing the Rhine on a pontoon bridge, we swung south toward Heilbronn. Crossing the Neckar River by assault boat, we fought fiercely, building to building, through Heilbronn and completed the capture of the city on April 12.

We mounted the backs of tanks, formed an armored column, and made a dash into the German heartland through Backnang, Bad Cannstadt and ultimately Altbach, near Stuttgart, on April 21st For us the war was over. The Armistice was signed on May 7, 1945.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

G.I.: "Government Issue", also referred to any U.S. soldier
Dog Tag: Metal tags worn on a chain around neck with name, blood
type, and Army serial number.
Dogface, Dough-Boy or Dough: U.S. Infantry soldier
G.P.: "General Purpose" vehicle, also called a "Jeep".
SNAFU: Situation Normal All Fouled Up
FUBAR: Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition
Bought the Farm: Killed In Action
Over the Hill or A.W.O.L.: Absent With Out Leave
Mess Kit: Eating utensils
Sad Sack: U.S. Soldier, usually Infantryman
"Kilroy Was Here": A drawing of a figure with hands and large nose
peering over a wall. Origin unknown but very common and
painted on buildings.
Willie and Joe: Cartoon characters of 2 Infantrymen drawn by Bill
Mauldin for the publication Stars and Stripes.
Panzer: German Tank
Waffen S.S.: Select troops of the Nazi Party. Usually had the best
training and equipment.
SS Panzergrenadier Division: A fighting force of Nazi SS troops
with heavy tanks and armored personnel carriers
Volksturm: "Peoples Storm"- usually very young boys and old men
inducted at the last minute to fight the last battles.
Wehrmacht: The German Army
Luftwaffe: German Air Force
Burp Gun: A Schmeiser sub machine gun with a very rapid rate of
fire.
"88": A German multi purpose artillery piece that could be used
for anti-aircraft, anti-tank or anti-personnel. It had
a high muzzle velocity and very flat trajectory.
Hurry Up and Wait: Typical of everything we did
Frog: Frenchman
Kraut, Heinie or Jerry: Germans
Russkies: Russians
Greasegun: A cheap, stamped, 45 caliber, short barrelled machine gun with a 20 round magazine. Not of much use except in house to house fighting.

S.O.S.: Sh_ _ on a Shingle - creamed chip beef on toast

Ack Ack: Anti-aircraft fire

Screaming Meemie: German short range rocket bombs, fired in a cluster, to blanket an area with high explosives.

Buzz Bomb: A flying bomb with wings and a pulse jet engine fired over England. Inaccurate but terrifying.

V2: The first real rocket launched vertically and guided in a trajectory to land in London.

Meat Wagon: Ambulance


Flack Wagon: German, truck mounted, multiple anti-aircraft guns, also used very effectively against our ground troops.

Panzerfaust: German, shoulder mounted, anti-tank weapon. Very effective in knocking out Sherman tanks and blowing holes through building walls.

Luger and Walther P38: German pistols

Mauser: German rifle

V.W. or Volkswagon: Translation "Peoples Car". A mass produced, inexpensive vehicle built by the German Government.

"Gott Mit Uns": Translation "God With Us". Appeared on German belt buckles. Apparently it didn't work.

Schnapps: Most every farmhouse had a still and they made Schnapps out of potatoes. It was powerful stuff.
POSTWAR ACTIVITIES

Following my discharge from the Army in April of 1946, I tried to settle back into civilian life. I promptly enrolled in the University of Michigan School of Engineering for the Fall semester. I had a little trouble adapting to sleeping in a soft bed again and spent many nights on the floor. Loud sounds, especially whistling sounds gave me the jumps as I could envision another artillery round coming at me. I think all combat veterans had a lengthy period of readjustment.

In June, my cousin arranged a blind date for me with Claudine Waterman, then living in Plymouth. We went to the Walled lake Casino for dancing to the Big Band Sound. (Casinos then were for dancing, not gambling). We seemed to hit it off and continued to date.

I started my studies in the Fall and lived at Mrs. Springer's boarding house with John Weber and Clarence Schultz, high school chums. A year later, I joined Alpha Sigma Phi fraternity and moved into the Chapter house on Baldwin Street. It was tough getting to see Claudine as I had no car and had to go to Dearborn and borrow my Dad's car. Ann Arbor to Dearborn to Plymouth and back again was awkward but I did it for four years.

Claudine and I became engaged in 1948 but I wanted to finish college before marriage. She agreed reluctantly and I graduated in June of 1950 and we married a week later.

I started work at Ackerman, Blaeser and Fezey Co. as a draftsman and designer for automotive hardware. Soon after, the company was purchased by the Hupp Motor Car Co. We developed the first power window drive mechanism at this time. I left there to go to Ferro Manufacturing Co. as Chief Engineer. While there, we developed the first power seat adjuster for cars.
In 1955, I left Ferro and joined up with Bill Lattimore to start
the firm of Lattimore and Tessmer, Inc. Our intention was to design
and build automotive experimental prototypes. Our first plant was
2000 square feet on Van Born Road in Allen Park. A year later we moved
to a 7,000 square foot plant on Glendale in Redford Twp. Our business
continued to grow and in 1960 we purchased a 15,000 square foot
building on Telegraph Road, north of 8 mile, in Southfield. We
diversified into precision machining, short run stamping, die cast
die cavity sinking and engraving.

In 1973, I sold my interest in the business to Bill Lattimore and
became a Manufacturer's Representative. This evolved into a
consulting business for energy conservation for building owners.

Our first home was in Allen Park and son Craig was born there in
1952. Cathy came along in 1954. In 1955 we moved to Franklin St. in
Dearborn where Gary was born in 1958. In 1963, we purchased a home on
Shady Hollow Drive.

We have been blessed to have Craig marry Veronica Mulay and give
us grandson David. Cathy married Steven Gnewkowski and gave us
Michael and Karen. Gary married Mary Palmer and gave us Rachael,
Laura and Danielle. Our six grandchildren are the lights of our
lives.

We have been very fortunate to have good health and since we both
like travel, we have visited most countries in Europe, some travel in
the Orient, most of the Carribean islands, Mexico and South America,
as well as almost all of the United States and Canada.
POSTSCRIPT

Photo taken at the 3rd Battalion, 397th Regiment Reunion at the Park Central Hotel in New York on December 27, 1947. Pictured L. to R. Toby Tobias, Earl Lane, Corky and Florence Kovarsky, Myself, Ken Cook, Eddie Cooke, Danny Sacks and Wife and E.J. Smith.
TRANSCRIPT OF COMBAT DIARY KEPT BY
ROBERT TESSMER DURING WORLD WAR II
SECOND PLATOON, COMPANY I, THIRD BATTALION, 397th INFANTRY REGIMENT
100th INFANTRY DIVISION, SEVENTH ARMY


Oct. 20: Arrived in Marseille.

Nov. 5: Moved into position near Baccarat and relieved elements of the 45th Division.

Nov. 9: Moved to Bertrichamps – shelled often.

Nov. 13: Moved out of town 1 KM.

Nov. 14: Went on attack in heavy woods. Hit barbed wire on hill. Jerries had strong defensive positions and we were pinned down and eventually driven back. Lost 41 men from our company and 6 from my squad. Withdrew and dug in. Misery plus.

Nov. 16: Moved out in attack again – no opposition.


Nov. 23: Marched all day in hard rain – soaked to the skin. Had small fight at road block – great defenses. Moved into St. Blaise.

Nov. 24: Had Thanksgiving dinner in St. Blaise. Rained hard all day.

Nov. 26: Still in St. Blaise – bad shelling last night.

Nov. 27: Went back to Raon L Etape.

Nov. 28: Moved by truck thru Saarburg to Weiterwiller

Nov. 29: Marched 5 miles and dug in.

Dec. 1: In Ingwiller now.

Dec. 2: Company went on attack on hill. Repulsed three times with heavy losses.

Dec. 3: Attacked again – secured hill. Shelled all night – more casualties. 70 men left in Company out of original 190. Bad losses. Three original men left in my squad, plus 4 replacements.

Dec. 4: Dug in on hill outside of Kirchan. K Company took hill after a day of fighting. Very heavy losses. Battalion strength very low at 200 to 250 men.

Dec. 7: Moved into Lichtenburg. Town almost demolished.
Dec. 9: Marched 5 miles yesterday and five more today. Germans putting up terrific resistance. 7000 are trapped.

Dec. 15: Sent to Hospital at Saarburg for knee injury. Unit now dug in on hills overlooking Bitche. Looks like it will be a "bitch" to take - fortifications and pillboxes.

Dec. 22: Moved to a new sector 10 KM from Bitche. Received mortar fire continuously for 2 days and nights. 2 dead - 7 wounded. could not leave foxholes. T.S.

Dec. 31: Midnight attack by 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division outside of Rimling. Seven killed and many wounded. Shot up a lot of lousy Krauts.

Jan. 22: At Regimental Rest Home with shrapnel injury.

Feb. 1: In Hottweiler now. Battalion support. Colder than hell - have a warm stove.

Feb. 3: Today marks 89th day on line without rest. Getting tough on nerves. 5 men left in my platoon out of 40 who were original - great life.

Feb. 19: Promoted to Squad Leader of 3rd squad. Still dug in near Rimling - 106th day on line.

Feb. 22: Been in foxholes for a week now. Full of water - lots of mortars and sniping.

Mar. 17: In attack again - moved 2 miles and took Schorback. We're on the way to the Rhine.

Mar. 18: Took two more towns. In Dorst now - very little resistance. 1000 yds. from German border.

Mar. 20: Shelled unmercifully at Steinhausen. 16 casualties.


Mar. 26: Moved to Neustadt for one night, then to Ludwigshafen. Took up positions on bank of Rhine.

Mar. 27: Now in Epstein for one night.

Mar. 30: Crossed Rhine on pontoon bridge at Manheim. City in ruins from bombing.

Mar. 31: Moved to 3 KM from Konigsburg.

Apr. 7: Now in Sandhausen preparing for attack. Resistance very heavy.

Apr. 11: Still fighting for Heilbronn. Several casualties. We advance about 500 yds. a day thru a mile long factory district. Opposition fierce. Taken about 200 prisoners so far.

Apr. 12: The battle for Heilbronn is over. One of the toughest fights I've been in. Last two days we had tank support.
Apr. 16: Have been pushing forward steadily taking one or two towns a day. Met fanatical resistance in some of them. Good tank support now - God bless them.

Apr. 20: Part of an armored spearhead. Moved about 20 miles today and and 25 miles yesterday. Movement mostly at night and we catch the Jerries with the "Panzers" down. Took about 300 prisoners today. Beaucoup Pistoles.

Apr. 21: Moved into Altbach and took a total of 339 P.W.'s. Two squads from my paltoon took 77 prisoners with only 15 men.

Apr. 26: In Army Reserve

Apr. 27: Moved to Stuttgart - Army Reserve. City in complete ruins from bombing. This makes 175 days on line.

May 3: Moved to Salach near Ulm. Must be Army of Occupation. I sure hope so.

May 7: Today the Armistice was signed. A day of rejoicing for many. A day of Memorial for others. I'm very thankful that I, unlike many of my comrades, have lived to see the day that we fought so hard to make possible.
The following letter was received by Lt Edward S. Eyeland, Co I, 397th Inf from Sgt Jack McLean who has been missing in action since 14 November 1944.

Dear Ed;

Congratulations Kid, I always knew you had what it takes. I would have liked it if you had read the letter I sent to Allen explaining what had happened to me. Well, you saw me go through that damned wire entanglement. I made it down the slope, across the road, and threw myself into the ditch. The way I fell made the Krauts think that they had hit me and, brother I let them think so! I was so close, I could hear the bolts clicking, I was sweating plenty.

Ed, I knew it was damn tough up on the slope, but it was no fun down there waiting for someone to join me. I figured that someone must have changed the order. You knew damn well that I could never make it back up that knoll and through that wire again. I could hear the Krauts moving around close by, so I just stuck my head in the mud and waited until dark. At 2200 I started up the slope again, cut my way back through the wire. There must not have been any booby traps there or I sure as hell would have hit them.

George Stout and Weimerskirch were still there. Stout was hit in the leg and Weimerskirch was hit in the head. Both were conscious. I asked if Allen had got away, and they said they believed he had. They had both given themselves first aid and there was little else I could do for them. I loosened the bandage on Weimerskirch and wondered what to do next. They asked me to take off and see if I could find somebody to carry a stretcher. They couldn't give me any info as to the whereabouts of the company so all I could do was to try and get back to where we had started off in the morning. I travelled until four o'clock in the morning. You know I had the G.I.'s and was played out. I kept thinking that I heard voices and ran toward them. When I found nobody there I began to think that I was going nuts. I finally wandered into a tank trap. There was light snow and I slipped off of a log and god-damned near broke my leg. I figured surely that I was near some part of the outfit by then, so I crawled under a tank obstacle and tried to cover myself with fir boughs. I must not have made a good job for when I awoke there was a Jerry and a machine pistol and several comrades inspecting me. He motioned for me to stand up and come thither and that's exactly what I did and I believe that anyone else would have done the same. They took me back through the damndest American artillery barrage I had ever seen. Germany's artillery is bad but ours is so much worse. You must know that by now.

-1-
After we got out of range of artillery we were in a Jerry truck and suddenly a little British Spitfire came along. We left the truck in an awful hurry and hit the ditch along the side of the road. He strafed the rig and also bombed a building which I later found out was a Gestapo Headquarters, of the Shimeck Concentration Camp of which I was going to become well acquainted with. They threw me in there with French Alsatians, Russians, and the like—all civilians. I found out that a crew of American Flyers were being held there also. Now the prisoners themselves are the cooks in these camps. Some of them were collaborators and some were not. Who to trust was a problem. The ration was about 300 grams of brown bread and a pint of soup every day. The American Flyers were kept in solitary confinement and their soup was carried up to them each day. I sent one or two notes and got answers from them. Then one day I got to take their soup up to their cell and met them. It was about the time the Americans almost had the place surrounded. We discussed the possibility of a break, but one of the political prisoners must have overheard us, because the next day I was ordered not to leave my barrack. Up until this time I had the freedom of the camp.

We were moved soon afterward. My uniform was torn in the wire and I couldn't get a shave or anything. I looked like a refugee of ancient years. We were then hauled into Germany, Rhaetaht to be exact, and put into an old fort where the Air Corps again bombed the hell out of us. About Dec. 11 we were given a loaf of bread and told we were going on a trip. Well, before that a Jerry officer knocked the hell out of me the night previous. In the morning he apologized to me, saying that he thought I was a political prisoner and that the Germans did not beat P.W.'s, and that political prisoners were criminals and deserved to be beaten to death. I started to voice my opinion and he said that I would be treated all right if I were to act as a soldier, but if I began to get political ideas I would be treated like a political prisoner, so from then on I kept my mouth shut.

We were then told that we were going to an abandoned Hitler Youth Camp where everything would be sanitary and modern. I was tickled to death, because my last bath had been back in Marseilles, France. Well, on that loaf of damn black bread we travelled for three days in box cars with no water. When we finally were taken off, we were in a town of Gaslack. It was raining like all hell, and we walked 5 miles up the side of a hill. I kept straining my neck to see the camp. All I saw was a hole in the hillside covered with icicles. We were marched into a tunnel about 500 yards long which was lighted by electricity, but it was as dreary as a Frankenstein movie.
As soon as we were all in, we heard a hell of an explosion and the lights went out. Everybody thought that they had blown up the entrance and that we were due for a horrible death. The prisoners went into a panic and then the guards shot over their heads with their machine pistols. The bullets fell off the walls of the cave, but it was comforting because we realized that they would not have trapped their own guards, we hoped---one never knows.

Pretty soon the lights went on again and we took a look at our new home to be. The floor of course, was solid rock and it was wet. The water dripped down from the ceiling, which was quite all right with us, being that we were so thirsty at the time. Soon afterwards the Germans go some of the prisoners to bring in some lumber and start building a floor. I walked over to watch them, and a big lumber bum with a swastika on his arm and a rifle on his shoulder came over and knocked me flat on my rear. Then the Commandant came over and knocked him for a loop, took his rifle away and put him in solitary confinement. I later found out that this man had deserted Holland and joined the German Army. The Germans claim that they respect an enemy soldier a lot more than they do a deserter.

Well, they finally got the floor completed and had it covered with straw. Except that we were cold as hell, things didn't really look too bad that night. No food at all, but we were told we would get food in the morning. Three days later, I tried to stand up and I found the cave spinning around and around. That afternoon they gave us a pint of soup. Champagne never tasted as good as that miserable soup tasted that night. After our first meal at two o'clock I found that the toilet was at the other end of the tunnel and that water used to be there many years ago. It wasn't very sanitary with no water except what came through the roof. We had Russian guards with German Overseers and great big German Police dogs which the Jerries would have thrown at us at a moments notice. By voicing a few opinions I learned that I was not to trust any of the other prisoners. The Germans treat them like hell, yet they always squeal on each other.

I'd seen atrocities already, but nothing on the order of what I saw here. There was a short Jerry who was the Devil's grandchild, and a tall slim anemic bastard, who looked as sad as a sad sack. They carried hard wood canes and they tortured the prisoners to death, and I mean to death. They broke their arms and legs and pulled them out of joint. There were 500 men there through the winter and 51 of them died. Every day I would help take a dead man out to be buried and bring back the soup. I wasn't interested in the dead, but I was in the soup. It's hard to understand now,
because now I am full, just how much importance a man can put into a pint of soup. I had always refused to work, but one day the Moot (that's the short one) decided to give me a little tussel and once more the Commandant came to my rescue. I couldn't understand just what he said, but he screamed at me until his face was flushed. Then he screamed at the Moot and the Moot shook like a leaf. The next day the Moot brought me an apple.

Have I mentioned lice to you yet? Well, there were millions every night. Each night before we went to sleep we would search them out and try to kill them. What sights, what horrible sights—skinny, naked men covered with sores and bruises chasing lice through the rags they used for clothes. As I mentioned before, my clothes were all torn to shreds, but I was still the sharpest dresser there. 50% of the prisoners had no shoes at all, and the other half had wooden shoes and low cuts. Thank God for my shoe packs, the envy of every man there. Remember, it was the coldest part of the year. Many of the prisoners worked barefooted in the snow last January. The fashion in shoes was from 1 to 5 cement sacks wrapped around their feet, tied on with wire which cut into their legs and then later became infected. This, of course, did not stop the Germans from beating hell out of them. This place was hell. They even threw a Catholic Priest into this Godforsaken hole in hell, and he was in the height of his glory. He would starve himself to death and give his soup away to the sick. There wasn't a man there that didn't love him for what he did. He spoke English and I had many a long conversation with him. He said he would rather be there where men would listen to his preachings than to be in the finest Catholic Cathedral on earth where people went to Church for show only.

February brought the sun and I went to the entrance of tunnel. God, but the sky looked beautiful, especially when there were 2,000 forts and liberators in the sky. Every time they flew over, the camp caught hell. The fact that I was an Infantryman, instead of a flyer is all that kept them from killing me, I believe. Crud and Corruption. Two men went wild, one was a Frenchman and the other was a Russian. The Frenchman kept screaming pa pa pa pa night and day and the Russian just screamed. God only knows what he did scream, but it was the damndest noise I had ever heard. He would get up at night and run all over the place naked, and butt his head against the wall until he would knock himself out. He would run right over our bodies while we were asleep. We never paid any attention to him. We were too hungry to pay any attention to anything as slight as a mad Russian.

In March, the tunnel began to stink like hell. The smell was too much for me, and I would try to stand near the entrance, but they wouldn't stand for it. By this time my own legs were swollen up and covered with ulcers. I had kept as
clean as was humanly possible under the conditions with only cold water and a cold tunnel, but I was infected just the same. All this time I kept screaming about the rights of a Prisoner of War. The Germans acknowledged the fact that I had rights, but did nothing about it.

The bombers began to knock hell out of the electrical plants, and soon we were without lights most of the time. One day I couldn't stand it any longer and asked to be put outside so that I could work. They gave me a job cutting wood for the kitchen. The man who was in charge was a Czech, and he spoke English. He had me cut up some steak for the Commandant and right then and there I ate a sirloin raw. He began to slip me food every day and we worked from six to six and I could use all the food I could get. Before this, I had traded Lanes watch for tobacco. I sure hope he is alive, and well as I want to reimburse him for it. With the tobacco as a medium of exchange, and my contact with the storeroom man, I started to put on some weight. It was about time, since I was down to 120 pounds.

One day I was informed that I was being taken to a P.W. camp. First I thought that there was some catch to it, but later I found out that it was the truth. I knew what was beginning to happen. The Americans had crossed the Rhine and the Jerries wanted to get rid of us. They took me and 50 others out into the main tunnel and lined us up with the guards. Then they went to work with their clubs. They didn't even hit me once, but they beat every person there until he couldn't stand. God, what a sight. If a person tried to help another, he was beaten the same way. I was then loaded onto a truck, with 50 political prisoners who once again were badly beaten. Before leaving the Commandant gave me a cigar. The Germans are all nuts and as I said "Goodbye" to that filthy hole, I was sure that I would never want to return to it again. But in 24 hours I was wishing to Christ I was back. I was taken to another Concentration Camp. I never did believe that story about a P.W. camp. They put me in a bed where a man had died the night previous. There I contracted Scabies and the God-damned flies I found there, were so many more compared to the place I had just left. Sleep was out of the question. My legs were already swollen and then my head started to swell. I had seen heads swell up as large as pumpkins and I was beginning to get worried. Here I met a man that had been with me in another camp, and he had informed me that the aviators had been brought here and shot to death by the same guards which I had referred to as the Moot. Well, I sure thought that was the reason I was brought to this camp. I couldn't stand the fleas any longer and I figured I'd rather be shot that have to live through it that way. I demanded to speak to the Commandant. Anyway, I gave him hell, cussed him, with everything in the book and...
and back again. The interpreter only told him about half of what I said, but they gathered that I wasn't happy there. Once more the Air Corps came and gave the place hell. I was scared stiff, but I would have gladly been blown to bits just for the sake of destruction of German landscape. Night came and with it, no sleep. I was taken, and with 80 Russians, loaded on one truck. They were all sick and starving, and covered with fleas and filth. I was no better off than they were, but I raised a bitch about riding with them. One kind German guard understood just how I felt and said that I could ride up in the cab with him. He gave me some bread and gave me his coat to hold on my lap. I paid him back for his kindness by picking off the fleas from my body and sticking them in the lining of his coat.

By this time I would always hate the Germans no matter what they did to make me comfortable. I was told I was being taken to the Obendorf Concentration Camp. However, it was much cleaner and more sanitary that any other place I had been in. I was separated from the others and given a room of my own. There actually was an Army cot in it, too. But no mattresses or covers. Right then and there I swore that I would kill the next person that would open the door.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door and I grabbed a chair to do the job with. I hollered for them to come in and stepped beside the door with the chair raised over my head. Instead, someone spoke in English through the door. "Sgt. McLean, I am sorry about your mistreatment, at this place you will receive disinfection and hospital rations until you regain your health." Well, I was skeptical, but it sounded so good that I decided to give it a whirl. Ten minutes later the doctor came to see me and gave me a bath, covered my body with sulphur ointment, painted my legs with salve and wrapped them in clean bandages clear to my hips. I stayed there for two weeks. They gave me a blue serge suit to wear and I slept between sheets. However, everyone else was still being treated as shabby as ever. I did get my hospital rations and they were nothing but the best. Next, I got my uniform back, disinfected, cleaned and pressed. Once more I was told that I was going to a P.W. camp and this time it was true. However it was a Russian P.W. camp where I stayed. They were being fed better than I'd ever seen the Germans feed their prisoners before. They made me eat until I was so full, I was to sick to my stomach. A couple of days later I was transferred again to another P.W. camp which was also Russian. This time it was only for the afternoon. Although my legs were much better they were still bandaged and were not completely healed. I walked 25 kilometers and arrived at a new P.W. camp. My legs then were almost as bad as ever. The German guard took me to my barracks, and when I got there all I could hear
was the French Vooley-vousing. Oh God, how I wanted to hear the voice of an American. Just then the damndest string of cuss words came floating out of the corner and the tears rolled down my cheeks; I knew that no one but a G.I. could cuss like that. It was the first voice that I had heard since November, that made any sense and here it was April.

Here I received my first Red Cross parcel. Boy, it had everything in it to eat, and cigarettes also. I ate so much rich food I thought sure I would die. At this point I heard of Roosevelt's death. The Germans felt at this point that the Americans would surely surrender. They couldn't see how we could go on after losing so great a leader. Two days later they felt different about it and gave up the war and the Führer. I stayed there for about four days and then I was moved to Mimmingen, because the Americans were gradually closing in on us. Things weren't too bad there and we received lots of Red Cross parcels. On April 25, 1945 we were liberated by the 10th Armored and the 44th Infantry Divisions. We were busy rounding up a few prisoners and soon after we were flown to Le Havre, France. From there I wrote the letter to Allan that you found, and gave it my home address because I was told that I would soon be home.

I suffered like hell during my time, but I am quite sure that you and the rest of the boys probably went through worse up on that bloody front.

Remember me always,

Sgt Jack McLean