

27 November 1944

Thanksgiving Day

Waiting for us were chow trucks laden with a Thanksgiving dinner and all the trimmings. Everyone ate until they were sick but happy, even though it was raining. Letters were there from wives, girlfriends, and others.

We moved from this area, with full bellies, farther back from the front lines to a large draw between two bare hills. There we lay down and rested until dark. The night became so black that you couldn't see anyone next to you. I heard someone calling for all squad leaders. It was my captain. We reported to where the sound came from and learned that we would march about a half-mile to where we would get on trucks. Of course we were expecting to go back to some rest area, but this was not the case. I stumbled back to my men and gave them the news. It was so dark that we had to grab the man in front of us by the cartridge belt to be led to where the trucks were waiting for our arrival. We boarded the trucks and rode very slowly with only blackout lights to feel the way along the narrow, rough roads. The convoy traveled through Raon l'Etape and up the Rabodeau Valley to the front lines where the 397th Combat Teams had been pushing. We stopped at a typical French village and were assigned specific houses for each squad quarters. The Army had set up showers in one of the houses. There was a shower and a shave for everyone and a letter or two sent back home by all. Mail from loved ones was distributed out to the lucky ones.

Clean clothes that did not exactly fit were exchanged for our dirty ones. It was a first-come-first-served policy to try to get clothes that fit. Plans had now been changed; the

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entire 399th Regimental Combat Team was now in reserve. Meanwhile, my platoon sergeant had been promoted to first sergeant and now I was both platoon sergeant and platoon leader since we did not have an officer to fill that slot.

I reorganized the platoon, making new squad leaders to replace the two that had been wounded. Our platoon was now narrowing down as combat time proceeded. We were now in Alsace Lorraine and the language of these people had changed. German was spoken in this area as we were close to the German border and this area had been in dispute between France and Germany for years.

Just when we had begun to get used to the basic conversational words with the French, the language changed. Now it was imperative that we learn some German. My squad was quartered in a typical French village house with its stucco finish and log designs lay right in the concrete. The two-story house inside was very simple with very little furniture. The roof was covered with wooden shingles. Some of the houses have the barns for the cattle on the first floor and the people living on the second floor. We had to double up on the beds because there were not many to a house.

The quilts were really thick, feather ones that would not half cover your body. Unless the room was really cold, one could not stand to cover with them, as they were too hot. Several days were spent with the usual rifle cleaning and inspections. The weapon must be kept as clean as possible so that it will function when needed. Hot meals were served of C-rations for lunch. A few of the new kind of C-rations were making their way to the front lines—cans of frankfurters and spaghetti and meatballs—and they were delicious. Of course, the old kinds outnumbered the new by ten to one. The old ones, however, still were much better than K-rations with dog biscuits that every GI was given while on the front and on the move.

On the morning of 2 December, heaven—living with a roof over our heads—was over. We received the traditional five-paragraph field order that we were moving out. We were to move forward in the direction of Lemberg, our next objective. At dawn, we began dragging our feet across the Lorrainian Plains in the direction of the Maginot and Seigfried Lines. Files of soldiers on both side of the road, with ten-yard intervals between them, marched wearily along the gently rolling farmlands. A very few carried bayonets. Most of them had been left with the chow trucks at one time or another.

When walking through the small peasant villages, a natural tendency for the Joes was to utter their “conquered but murdered” foreign languages, which they had learned. They all got a kick out of flirting with the short-skirted women, and of making deals for a few chickens. At one town one of the guys made such a deal thinking that we might remain there for the night and he might have a nice juicy dinner of fried chicken, but he was terribly fooled. We stayed there only a few minutes and we moved out. He had to carry his M1 rifle plus a nice live frying-size chicken.

A nice walk in
the park.



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After a few hazardous miles coupled with some 88 shells landing nearby, the chicken earned its freedom in the mad scramble to hit Mother Earth. For three days we and the rest of the regiment traveled on foot over hill and dale, through forest and plains, through rain and occasional falling 88s, through the villages of Schalbach, Wickervilles, Sieweiler, Petersbach, Petit Pirra, Formulae, Moderfield, and Puberg.

Our second night was spent at a very small village where the peasant farmers had built their houses right on top of their barns. The people lived in the second story and the odor from below was terrific, but they had become accustomed to it and didn't even smell it. They were kept warm by the heat from the animals. We had them move into one room while we took over the rest of the home. These were Germanic people and were quite nice about doing favors for us. We gave them little cans of instant coffee, sugar, soup, and cigarettes from our rations. K-rations were issued for two meals and at dawn we were on our feet and at it again. Every village we passed through we were welcomed by the townspeople who crowded out of their homes into the streets and waved as we quickly walked by, stopping only for a ten-minute break every hour. During a break, the men stepped off each side of the road and reclined on the hard but restful ground, welcoming a few moments of relaxation.

Our helmets were used as pillows, bathtubs, wash bowls, and sometimes latrines. Two things a doughboy never lets get more than an arm's length away are his steel helmet or his weapon.

Late the third afternoon on our way toward the Maginot Line we moved into an assembly area at a thickly-wooded area on a slope. Here we spread out into a perimeter defense that is good for all round protection against the enemy. Foxholes were the order of the day and after

putting the finishing touches on them, a hot meal was brought to us. The tired, battle-worn men ate their chow with a spoon which they carried tucked into their boots. When chow was over they washed their mess gear with dry dirt rubbed on them and once more tucked back into the boot. Only one man per squad was on guard, so they gained some much-needed sleep. At dawn, our battalion moved up through the 398th Regiment in the small town of Wingen and jumped off on an attack in the northerly direction.

Our Company L moved to the left side of the climbing highway through thick, dense woods and up a huge, towering, bare hill with some scattered fruit trees on it. On this hill were some well-hidden giant Maginot pillboxes that had been abandoned by the retreating Germans. We moved to the top of the hill where there was a clear view in every direction; truly a panoramic sight. Down in the valley in one direction laid the tiny villages of Soucht and Meisenthal and to our front was Goetzenbruck. There was an open field to our front and a wooded area on the left of it. Our advance was halted for a while awaiting orders. Permission was granted to move to the left of our sector to avoid going across the open field. We moved in a column of platoons to the woods on our left front. Our advance was evidently seen by the German forward observers because we were soon zeroed in on by German artillery for most of the way to the woods.

Snow began to fall that afternoon, adding to everyone's misery. Then we began to receive occasional 88 fire, which slowed us up quite a bit. We descended the gradually-sloping wooded area into level country for about one hundred yards when German rifle fire sent us diving to the ground for cover. We were pinned down by enemy machine-gun fire and immediately fired back with everything we had.

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Snow had been falling for about an hour then and the ground was fast becoming white. Dusk was quickly approaching when I gave the order to dig in. Digging a foxhole in frozen ground was quite a task but when it is necessary to dig while lying on one's side in order to protect your self makes it doubly difficult. This was necessary because of being in direct contact with enemy rifle fire. We hardly thought of this and the mortar shells bursting nearby. After darkness came we were able to improve the holes a little more, but were not able to cover them because of ever-increasing artillery fire. The enemy withdrew shortly after dark, but we didn't know it until after daybreak. Shells began to explode closer and closer and I became very nervous trying to squeeze myself into a smaller target in the snow-sodden tiny foxhole. I removed my raincoat, which had been keeping out some of the dampness and put it over the hole to keep from having to see the blinding shell fire. This fake shelter eased my tenseness some. The Kraut artillery made it very difficult to sleep during that perilous night. Most of the trees in the area had been topped by the many tree bursts.

At dawn, the men began eating their "delicious" K-rations. Word came from the CP to send some men down to pick up their K-rations and a can of water. Everyone filled their canteens with water and packed their K-rations while the platoon sergeants were at the captain's foxhole getting attack orders. We were to move forward and take the two towns of Sarreinsberg and Goetzenbruck, then reorganize and continue on to Lemberg. It was understood that the Germans had already withdrawn beyond the two towns and into Lemberg. We then moved forward once again; our battalion went through the woods, down the hill and into Goetzenbruck and Sarreinsberg without much resistance. We cleared the houses to see if any German soldiers were hiding in them.

We wasted no time in reorganizing the 3rd Battalion and moving up the highway toward Lemberg. All went well for about two kilometers when we ran into enemy fire from a line dug in outside the town. Our battalion quickly deployed on each side of the road. My company, L, went to the left of the highway through the wooded area and began to dig in. Companies K and I were pinned down by heavy artillery fire, and the rest of the battalion, Companies L and M waited for further orders from the regimental commander, Colonel Tyschen. The situation was grave, but the colonel decided to throw a pincer attack at the German army in Lemberg. The 1st Battalion was to move across a wide-open area and attack Lemberg from the left flank. Our 3rd Battalion was to wind around the hills and through the woods to attack from the right center of the town. The 2nd Battalion, meanwhile, was to move wide to the right flank and take the high ground on the right of the town.

We wearily dug in the mud on the high ground near the top of the huge hill. This time digging three-man foxholes in order to get a little much-needed sleep. This meant sleeping for four hours, then be on guard for two hours, and then back to sleep. Our supplies of K-rations were also eaten. We had plenty of time and were not under rifle fire, so we chopped down trees and put tops over our foxholes, preparing for artillery fire, which did not come for us that night. The enemy supporting fire was busy up ahead of us.

We were in reserve, so we had it relatively easy while Companies K and I were having a rugged time of it. They were the attacking companies of the battalion this time. At the bottom of a steep, sloping hill, Item (I) Company made three futile attempts to infiltrate across the Lemberg-Mouterhouse road, but German troops, snugly dug in on Suicide Hill, fiercely drove them back with machine-gun and small arms fire. A portion of Company I was pinned

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down and could not move for several hours. Our artillery batteries poured high-explosive (HE) artillery rounds with some white phosphorus (WP) into Suicide Hill, but they were unable to help Company I in getting across the highway. Finally, Company K literally "flew" across and drove several hundred yards ahead under extremely heavy rifle and artillery fire.

Realizing that they might be encircled by being too far out in front of the rest of the battalion, Company K wearily withdrew along with Company I. Freezing rains had been pouring most of the night and many wounded lay all night in the icy downpour. Some of them died and a few were paralyzed before the very scarce litter bearers were able to get to them and carry them to safety.

"Pop" Warner was killed the first week in December and "Libby" DiBattista was wounded. On 8 December, the third anniversary of our declaration of war, came the fateful day for our Company L. At daylight we were up and preparing to move forward. Companies K and I were still pinned down. We moved up about 300 or 400 yards and paused while our antitank guns were brought up to us. These guns were to fire down a deep ravine at a big log blockhouse from which a 20mm gun had been firing against Company I. The anti-tank crews fired many rounds of HE accompanied by WP. A direct hit was finally made and knocked out the German gun. As this was going on, the Germans were directing their 88 artillery guns toward our antitank guns. Shells burst all around us, but we were lucky and sustained no casualties from that barrage. We remained in that position for some time while the battalion commanders were informing the regimental commander of this gross situation.

Colonel Tyschen changed his plans for the regiment. The city of Lemberg would be cut off by the 2nd Battalion crossing the Lemberg-Bitche Railroad and highway. The 1st

Battalion would attack from the southwest, Companies K and I had been pinned down the previous afternoon and night and had suffered many casualties.

Company L was assigned the hazardous task of fulfilling the 3rd Battalion's mission. We were to drive into the town from our position southeast of the hill, around to the left where there was a deep ravine, and up another hill across an open field to the very high railroad embankment. We would have to move across the barren hill, up the tracks to the left for a short distance and through an underpass and then into town. This seemed like a suicide attack order to us but it had to be done to take Lemberg. We moved out in a column of platoons with the 3rd Platoon leading the way, followed by the 2nd and 1st Platoons. The advance was very slow because of the terrain. The woods were so thick at one place that we had to beat our way through. Soon after we left the area where the antitank guns were, we began to receive burst after burst of 88 shells, which were whining down on top of the trees above us. Some of them got through and burst at ground level among the charging soldiers.

Fortunately we were well spread out. The artillery kept cracking around us. The Germans really had us zeroed in and they knew it. They could see us coming for a long way through their field glasses and could guess at what our routes of approach would be.

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Adam Breuer's Notes Written by G. Tyson

Bill Zilliox was suffering from a bad case of trench foot and could hardly walk, much less run. The night before this engagement, some of his buddies tried to convince him to go back to the aid station for treat-

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ment, but he refused to give up. Bill was a great combat soldier. Breuer also had a bad case of trench foot. One by one they went through the ravine, spread out, because the first ones through had experienced sniper fire. Breuer ran his turn; zigzagging, trying to avoid a sniper hit, and a shot just missed him. Next it was Bill Zilliox's turn; he was Adam Breuer's foxhole buddy. He followed Breuer's example, but wasn't as lucky. The sniper fired two shots and one of them hit Bill in the head, instantly killing him. Once up the hill under tree cover and after about a twenty-minute wait, the 88 shells started coming in on top of us. It was during the third "batch" that Adam Breuer was hit in the rear of his right leg. George Demopoulos, our medic, was close by and asked Adam if he was OK. Breuer said he was hit, but that the other more seriously wounded should be looked at first. George administered first aid to the others and then crawled over to where Adam was and applied a bandage to his leg.

He told him to go back to the aid station and take Bob Hamer with him. Bob also had a bad case of trench foot. The three headed back to the rear. The sniper had been killed so their journey was a little slower and safer than it would have been earlier. As they passed by battalion headquarters, one of the officers thought they were deserters and pointed his pistol at Breuer who tried to explain to the bewildered captain that they were walking wounded and were wearing bloody clothes. The battalion executive officer came upon the scene, discovered that the men were, in fact wounded and ordered the captain to release them. The exec apologized for the captain's foolish mistake and told them to be very careful on their way back to the aid station.

Upon arriving at the aid station they were split up. The doctors decided that Breuer's leg needed surgery and evacuated him to a clearing hospital where he underwent two operations. As it turned out, his feet were a more serious problem and he was unable to walk for three to four weeks. He rejoined Company L in Lembeck later that winter.

Notes from Bob Hamer

My memory of that time is very hazy and do not remember much after Lemberg. A couple of things I do remember and have been urged by Tyson to relate.

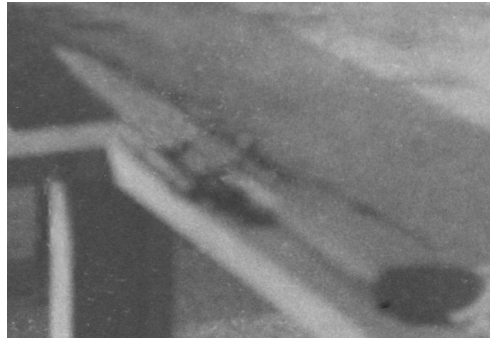
After one grueling recon patrol that turned into a combat patrol, we returned to our holes to be greeted by artillery fire—not theirs, *ours*. We found out later that one of our own officers had called in a mission based on our patrol and missed the yardage distance by a few too many. We were getting what was meant for the Germans and it took a while to get that mess straightened out.

Another time was when we and others were being bombarded by Screaming Meemies. My sniper's rifle was sent up from battalion where it normally was kept due to the sensitivity of the sight. Our sniper scopes did not compare with the German's Bausch and Laumb sights in that theirs were quite rugged. If we inadvertently bumped our rifle against the ground



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Bob's Sniper's
rifle

or a tree, the calibration was no longer valid. Anyway, back to my story.

There was a Screaming Meemie weapon system mounted on the back of a truck in front of us. I and a helper—whom I don't remember until he comes forward—were dispatched to our front for about 200 yards into what seemed like a "no-man's land." There we could see the vehicle that would back around a curve on one of the mountain roads, fire, and then pull forward out of sight. We watched it for a while and decided which of the crew should be taken out for the most effect. We thought it best to try for the giver of commands and that's what we did. I took the time while the vehicle was out of sight to determine (guesstimate) the yardage and was ready the next time it backed up to prepare another round of its own kind of hell. Back it came, I took aim and fired, the person dropped and the vehicle took off. So did we. For a while after that we were subjected to mortar fire but it finally died away and we never were bothered with that particular Screaming Meemie problem again. At least, not from that spot.

Melville MacDonald urged me to send for my medical records, which I did, and it opened up a section of

my life that I needed to recover. Apparently this is what happened to me: Upon arriving at the aid station, I was diagnosed as being in some sort of shock that made it difficult even to tell them my name and unit. (Adam Breuer told me years later that he had filled in that information for me). According to medical records I was suffering from acute hepatitis without jaundice. I was told that this ailment sometimes caused a temporary amnesia. Who really knows? Some doctors dispute this theory. By the time I became aware of what was going on, my trench foot had pretty well healed up. I was also diagnosed with amoebic dysentery and that turned into ulcerative colitis of the intestines. I was in a hospital in Baccarat, France, for a while. One night I thought I heard a Model A Ford outside the hospital and mentioned it to one of the attendants. He told me that he hoped that "Ford" did not stop there because in reality it was a V2 rocket, also known as a "buzz bomb," going overhead heading for England.

I was put on an American-built hospital train headed for the northern coast of France. We were involved in a train wreck with our heavier U.S.-built engine plowing right through the middle of a French-built train with wooden cars of the "40 & 8" type. Many of our U.S. patients were killed when their cars tipped over and they were not strapped onto their litter holders. A lot of them were impaled when they fell on the litter holders, which were now on the bottom. We finally got to Cherbourg where we shipped out to England over the choppy North Sea on an English hospital ship and spent some time in a hospital somewhere north of London. Many guys got passes to go into town, but I was told that I was in no shape for that. I was losing weight so fast that "they" were

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worried about me. After a while we were put aboard a hospital ship that was bound for the States. This one was a converted banana boat and I swear you could still smell the fruit. We landed in New York one day after President Roosevelt passed away and we were put into a hospital in or near Nyack, New York, another town to which I never got a pass. I finally got to go on a bus to New York City and Times Square. I will never forget it as I thought it was the dirtiest place I had ever been in for a civilized area and not being in a war zone.

Everybody was given free phone calls home and also a choice of the general hospital closest to my home. I picked one in Illinois close to the Mississippi River since I was from Iowa. When the assignments were posted, I found that I was assigned to Brooke General Hospital in San Antonio, Texas. I played "motorboat" with them by saying, "but, but, but. . . ." They referred me to the doctors, who told me that the Army did not think that my relatives should see me in my condition. My weight was around 90 pounds and I looked like an escapee from Buchenwald. The idea was to get me close to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas where they got fresh fruits and vegetables to use to fatten me up. When I finally gained up to 115 pounds I was allowed a convalescent leave. That was late in May 1945.

When I returned to the hospital, I was accompanied by my fiancée, Helen. We would have gotten married in Iowa, but a soldier had to have his commanding officer's permission to marry. We got permission and married on 6 July 1945. I finally got separated from the Army in August 1945 with a 50 percent disability.

In 1948 I was urged to join the Iowa National Guard. A local policeman that I knew—he was an

artillery battery commander—called me to see if I could show his men how to field strip a .45 automatic. I told him I thought I could. After that I waived the 10 percent disability I still had and joined as a PFC. I found that I had an affinity for teaching military subjects. I then proceeded to study the Army 10 and 20 Series and passed them all, which qualified me for a commission in the National Guard. That was great except that I still had to be recognized federally. My disability did not affect that and I was federally recognized in June 1951.

I attended the Artillery School in Fort Sill, Oklahoma from October 1951 through January 1952, which was supposed to qualify me through lieutenant colonel. I moved up through the officer ranks to 1st lieutenant and then my civilian company, Collins Radio, moved us to Texas in 1959. I had to take a leave of absence until I could find a slot in Texas. I joined the 90th Infantry Reserve and commanded a 105mm howitzer battery in Sherman, Texas, to where I had to commute each Tuesday night. I joined the Texas 49th Armored Division and was promoted to captain shortly thereafter. I was assigned to battalion staff where I was the communications officer until my retirement in 1971.

I retired as a captain because the Honest John Missile had been introduced and I was no longer qualified. It wasn't worth another three months at Fort Sill without the family.

Notes from Orland Gabriel

We had been in the "winter line" for a number of days, a foot or more of snow, good foxholes, light action, and blessedly, no "GIs." I had saved a nice supply of

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Orland Gabriel

tissue, stored above the webbing in my helmet liner. A very convenient place to keep said item dry and clean. Also handy when needed.

We were positioned at the "Splinter Factory," so-called because the trees had been decimated by German mortar and artillery fire. Mostly mortar, for they had the entire area "zeroed" in and the mortar shells would drop right in unannounced.

I was the platoon runner in the platoon CP fox-hole with Lieutenant Roy

Simmons, Sergeant George Tyson, and medic George Demopoulos. I was standing outside, sorting K-rations that were to be delivered to the rest of the platoon when I felt like I had been hit in the head with a sledgehammer. A ten-pound one, at least. Then I heard the sound of an explosion and shrapnel and wooden splinters rained all around. A piece of metal went through my helmet, liner, toilet paper, and made a fair dent in the top of my skull. I consider that the inch of tissue cushioned it enough to prevent it from penetrating my hard head.

Demopoulos told my wife many years later that when I picked myself up off the ground and crawled into the hole with blood streaming down my face, he thought I was dying. Thanks to the toilet paper I wasn't. It did give me a couple of weeks back in Paris in the hospital.

The medics there said that it was a rare thing for a head wound patient to “walk in.” George Demopoulos was an outstanding medic and we all treasured him. He was awarded the Silver Star and two Bronze Stars—even though he shot at Lieutenant Simmons and me one night . . . but that is another story.

—Staff Sergeant Orland Gabriel

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Our advance around the hilly area was slowed down to a near halt when we reached a very deep ravine that dropped off, making a rather steep cliff. One by one we carefully climbed down. At the bottom of the ravine were thickets so thick that we had to beat a path, foot by foot, until we approached another hill that was still a good distance away. At the bottom of this area our advance was halted and the Jerries kept up their ceaseless shelling of the entire area.

My platoon began to really feel the effects of the murderous shelling while in this deep ravine. Several good friends such as Eugene Greenbaum, George Rex, and others were killed by these artillery shells. The litter bearers had been busy continuously for the last two days evacuating the casualties to the aid station for immediate treatment. Those who needed more were then sent back to the field, base, and general hospitals. There was a great shortage of litters and bearers. None of the fighting men could be spared as there was also a scarcity of men in the squads at the front. I helped give first aid to one of the boys, but I did not think he would live through the day. Also, a shell made a direct hit on a GI's head. After what seemed like hours of the Screaming Meemies landing all around us, we cautiously moved out of the ravine and up a shallow rising hill which wound around to a railroad embankment still a good distance away.

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For about five minutes the Germans halted their supporting artillery and mortar fire. We moved up the hill about 200 yards and it started raining shrapnel all around us again. I was at the head of the platoon, crawling around a tree in an attempt to get away from the tree bursts when my men relayed word to me that something was wrong at the other end of the platoon.

I hurried back about a hundred yards where one of my men was hysterical and yelling, "I can't stand it any more." He kept screaming it over and over. I had learned that the best way of quieting a hysterical person was to slap their face. I did that and the man, suffering from battle fatigue, snapped out of it and came to his senses. I had him help the litter bearers carry some of the wounded back and told him to stay there a while.

The reason for this incident was that some of his buddies around him had been hit. When his best friend came to help, another shell hit a tree above them causing it to fall on and kill both the casualty and his friend. That was just too



Lemberg underpass

much for the brave assistant BAR man and he went into hysterics.

I believe the two men killed were Billy T. Roberts and Sergeant Francis Touri. They were both very good soldiers and Billy was a devout Christian. A little to the left of this, our old faithful medic, George Demopoulis, was called to help a boy that had his arm torn nearly off by a large piece of shrapnel. The man was conscious and well aware that his arm was being amputated by the very efficient aid man. The GI was a very good patient and remarked that he was not too sorry about his misfortune. At least, he said, he could now leave the front and go home before long.

I returned to the head of the column. At every hesitation during this attack the men began digging in, in the event we would have to remain there for awhile so at least they would have some protection. There was a misty, freezing rain falling all during that day. The 3rd Platoon, meanwhile, had reached the railroad embankment. Several of the men ran up the embankment and were hit by machine-gun fire from inside the town of Lemberg. The 2nd Platoon was called up and committed on the left side of the 3rd. They tried in vain to cross the railroad. There were bursts of 20mm fire coming from up the tracks on their left flank. The 20mm guns were firing down the tracks and riddling everyone that poked their heads over the embankment.

Our 60mm mortar men rushed up to the edge of the woods behind us. With the aid of one of the riflemen, who was used as an observer, they directed effective mortar fire and knocked out a machine gun and one of their flak wagons. My platoon was sent up a draw to the extreme left flank and infiltrated on the dead run to the underpass. Just as we were approaching the underpass a squad of German reinforcements came pouring through it. Three or four grenades got most of them and the others turned and fled back through the underpass. At twilight we assaulted the

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underpass and took cover there for awhile. A burst of 20mm fire hit the underpass and a piece of steel ricocheted and hit one of my squad leaders in the arm. We were too closely grouped but that was the only way into town. The enemy was only about 75 yards away in the buildings on the street.

My platoon was given the mission to take the first four houses and then wait for the 3rd Platoon to crawl through the underpass. There was a bank about three feet high on the left side of the street.

The first four houses on this *strasse* (street) were on the left side and then more houses on both sides. We were to cover their advance after we had completed our mission. My squad was to lead off. We fired at the windows of the first house for about a minute. Then the bazooka gunner fired one round at a downstairs window. Four Krauts ran out of the house and up the street. One of them fell, hit by rifle fire, but crawled out of sight. My first scout and I crawled up to the front door of the first house. We threw a grenade inside the door, hesitated a moment and then dashed inside followed by two more men. The Germans



Lemberg
underpass

Lemberg
underpass.
Note scars



then directed mortar fire at the house we had taken. We had just closed the door when it was hit directly by a German shell. No one was hurt and two of my men went down into a dark basement. The rest of the company was temporarily held back in the underpass by the Kraut mortar fire, but finally my assistant squad leader ran in through the blown-down doorway of the house.

The two men I had sent into the basement had wound down the old wooden steps into a wine cellar; they could not see a thing. One of them lit a match to see where to step. A cold chill ran through them when they saw three frightened French civilians standing in a corner. With the aid of a couple more matches, they searched the rest of the cellar. There was no one there but a really old man, a young man, and his wife. They were brought up to the main floor where they were questioned. They said the German soldiers were still in town just ahead of us. There were bloodstains all over the hall. The other two squads of my platoon stayed in the first of the Lemberg houses and gave over the second home for the company CP. Everyone was cold, tired, wet, and very battle weary. To top this, we had not had any chow whatsoever since the early morning and that

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was a breakfast K-ration, which does not stay with one very long. There was no possibility of getting any chow to us either because Lemberg had not been officially taken.

There were still Germans ahead of us, and the roads leading to Lemberg were not cleared either. Unfortunately, none of us had any food with us. I usually tried to carry a little extra in my ammo bag, but rations had been too slim lately to save any. I gave orders for everyone to sleep in the wine cellar in order to be safer from the artillery fire.

Two men would be on guard at the same time, one to guard the rear and the other guarding the front of the house. This guard would be rotated every two hours to keep anyone from being on duty too long and by chance fall asleep. We searched the wine cellar looking for something to eat and to sleep on. One of the men had some candles. Evidently the Jerries had been interrupted while eating by our unmannerly rush into Lemberg. They had left a little of their food on an old antique table. None of us would touch any of that Limburger cheese and the hard bread for fear that it might be poisoned. We thought our food was bad, but those poor Krauts did not have anything fit for us to eat.

Machine guns had been attached to the 3rd Platoon. They were set up in a barn at the head of the street on the right hand side, one to cover the street to our front, the other was to cover the bare hill on our right flank. As we were entering Lemberg from the southeast, meanwhile, the 1st Battalion had moved in to the town from the southwest supported by four Sherman tanks. Three out of the four tanks were blown up by mines as they crossed the open plain into Lemberg under cover of a smoke screen.

The 2nd Battalion had a bad night of it also. At dawn, the Germans counterattacked with hit-and-run flak attacks of 20mm directed against their foxholes. One platoon was virtually wiped out. We had a fairly quiet night of it except for the two machine-gun sections at the head of the company.

There was a graveyard to the left front of those guns. A brave squad of Germans had come down from the graveyard and spoke to the gunners in English after they had been halted. The Krauts gave the proper countersign. They then sneaked up to the machine gunners and one of the section sergeants discovered their mistake at the last minute and fired at the Germans who fired back critically wounding him. We later found out that he had died.

On 8 December a vicious German night patrol captured three men of our machine-gun section, Tech Sergeant Clarence Conroy, Corporal Stanley Douda, and Al Wicken-den. Sergeant Monroe Dixon was also killed during this encounter. Two of the machine-gun section escaped through a hole in the loft of the barn. They jumped from the loft and ran down to the 3rd Platoon CP, who sent men up to search but the hit-and-run patrol had quickly taken off.

Company I had been cut down to about 40 men by the last two days of murderous artillery and automatic weapons fire. They moved into Lemberg in the early morning hours along with Company K.

My squad moved up to the barn where the machine-gun section had been captured the night before. In some of the unoccupied houses we found some canned fruit. We had not had any food in over 24 hours and we were all very hungry. Most of us ate too much of it and became a little sick. I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't found that fruit.

The streets were kept clear because every once in a while we would receive 88 artillery fire. We remained there taking it easy until about noon.

I was called back to the company CP. We were to attack the hill on our flank. The bare hill, which was rather steep, had large flak towers from which we had been receiving fire. Behind this hill (423) lay a number of fortified houses.

I was made the platoon leader of my platoon, which was called the "Fighting 1st." One of my sergeants, Dan

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Lemberg
today

Downey, was sent to the CP as first sergeant as he was replacing our former first sergeant, Roy Simmons. My platoon led the way with the 2nd Platoon on our right.

I believe that I broke the world's record for the 220-yard dash in going up that open hill. I led off and told my men to follow and stay up with me.

About then machine gun and 20mm guns opened up from the houses behind the hill. We were pinned down for a while and began firing at the house ahead of us. I had the men crawl along side of me in an effort to be on line with Company K on our left.

A key machine-gun nest was knocked out by a platoon from Company K. They set up 60 and 80mm mortars and made it too hot for the Germans guns. After many rounds of .30-caliber ammunition had been fired from our rifles, we assaulted the houses. We ran zigzag for short, quick rushes until we reached them. The Germans could not stop us stubborn Yankee soldiers and were forced to withdraw further into town. Our platoon had to reorganize again when we stormed into the houses. The men, in running and fighting up the hill, had joined with the leading platoons. We were really lucky in taking that open hill and

mopping up the houses with just a very few casualties inflicted by the enemy.

(continued on page 53)

Jim Paine's Event

My last day of duty with Company L in 1944 was on 11 December. I rejoined them later.

Company L had entered Lemberg, France, on the day before after a fierce artillery and small arms battle. I was carrying the SCR radio and we were the lead platoon on the attack. I was asked to head up the burial detail of fellow company men who been killed in the encounter. The attack had been made while a light snow was falling and an accumulation of eight to ten inches during the night made finding the bodies very difficult.

A jeep with trailer was sent to the company area and I joined the three-man detail and was seated next to the driver. We had found the bodies and had placed them on the trailer. This was after a thorough search of the area some distance from where we were housed. The driver was taking me back to the company when we hit a mine. It was believed that this was a "glass" mine



Lt. Melville MacDonald and Jim Paine

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that was not detectable by mine detectors and the snow had covered any sign.

I remember that in training we were told that there would be a pop like a firecracker but that there would be insufficient time to react. Well this was true! I heard the pop, but my position in the Jeep gave me a clear area to my right and I tried with all my weight to push away from the jeep. This was all the more difficult because the canvas top was on the jeep. I received only some shrapnel and suffered a broken foot, but the force of the explosion broke the bolts holding the windshield on and the other passengers were not as fortunate.

After determining that I could not help any of them, I used my rifle as a crutch and made it back to the company area, using the tire tracks to find my way and to avoid other mines.

Somehow a picture that returns to me is that of battery plates flying through the air as if someone had thrown up a deck of cards.

(continued from page 52)

One by one the houses were taken and about 25 of the enemy was captured. The southwestern section of Lemberg was now in our hands. The 1st Battalion, meanwhile, accompanied by Sherman tanks, rolled down the main part of town. The tanks sprayed the houses and then the 1st Battalion riflemen ran in, shooting. Company L took about two hours to clear the houses on hill 423. Awaiting further orders, our company then reorganized and moved up the road to our left flank for several hundred yards, where we were billeted in other houses. The roads leading into Lemberg had been cleared by then and the S-4 (supply officer) had the battalion kitchen set up in the town. I don't ever remember the word "chow" sounding so good to me

before. We had not had a meal in over 30 hours. After we had eaten and received seconds, we were told to stand by in the houses, ready to move at any time. Fires were built and the men began to clean their weapons, and then, finally lie on the floor to get a little rest. Many shaved their barbed-wire-like beards. The French houses were thoroughly searched for any German weapons that might have been left behind. Late in the afternoon, we were served another hot meal. The containers were well spread out on one side of the street. Snow flurries threw a blanket of white on Lemberg and the surrounding countryside. Higher command must have felt sorry for us as we remained there in town that night.

The next morning my company was given the assignment of establishing an outpost around the hill just ahead of Lemberg, so we plodded through about eight inches of snow that blanketed the hill to our front.

Upon arriving we had to cover a rather large area, so the foxholes were dug about 20 yards apart. Machine guns were set up by the newly-appointed section leader. Most of a machine-gun section had been captured two nights before. Digging in was difficult because the ground was frozen and had many rocks in the soil.

After we prepared our defense on the hill, hot chow was served and we began getting ready for the night. We were not too nervous that night with fear of the enemy attacking as we felt rather safe here. The 398th Infantry Regiment was to our front. We remained at this outpost until the next morning. After a delicious breakfast of K-rations, we were ordered to move out. We entered a small village north of Lemberg. This tiny metropolis was a typical French farmhouse community.

My platoon had dwindled down in size and was assigned a rather large house, but the structure was mainly a barn. There were two small damp rooms on one side of the ground floor. The hard floor was very filthy and not

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O. P. A. Form No. R-306		UNITED STATES OF AMERICA		Not Valid Before _____ Date _____	
Serial No. C 29635858		OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION			
		SUGAR PURCHASE CERTIFICATE		TRIPLICATE	
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:					
Name: <u>Bertie L. Harner</u>		Address: <u>718-31st Street SW</u>			
City: <u>Cedar Rapids</u>		County: <u>Linn</u>		State: <u>IOWA</u>	
is authorized to accept delivery of _____ (<u>41</u>) pounds of sugar					
pursuant to Rationing Order No. 3 (Sugar Rationing Regulations) of, and at a price not to exceed the maximum price established by, the Office of Price Administration.					
Local Rationing Board No. <u>57</u>		Date: <u>April 6, 1942</u>			
By: <u>Thos. E. McLaughlin</u>		Signature of issuing officer			
County: <u>Linn</u> State: <u>IOWA</u>		Title: <u>Chief Clerk</u>			
To Be Retained by Original Holder					

What was going on at home

very inviting, so we did not use them. The other half was a barn with overhead storage of hay.

Our newly-appointed first sergeant, Dan Downey, told us we were to be division reserve, probably for a couple of days. This news was certainly good to hear.

We all got busy heating water, shaving, and washing up in our very useful steel helmets. The warm sun was melting away the snow, making the area very slushy and muddy. The company jeep and trailer arrived with another hot meal. It was wonderful compared to those K-rations.

Mail was then distributed to the various platoons. There was the invariable "bull shooting" while a lot of the guys were opening their Christmas packages. There was not much left of the candy, cookies, and Italian delicacies by nightfall.

Some of us had not had time to write in a week or so and then we wrote letters to family and other loved ones. Hot chow was delivered in late afternoon, but our appetites had been slaked by the goodies in the mail. That night, everyone, except for one man who was on guard duty, was wrapped in the comfort and warmth of the hay in the loft—so much cozier than a foxhole.

The next morning a hasty rifle inspection was carried out, with no one receiving a gig [during an inspection, a soldier would get a "gig" if there was something wrong with his uniform or equipment]. These veteran infantrymen had learned long ago that his rifle had to be kept in good shape because his very life depended on it.

Sergeant Simmons left that morning for the rear echelon to receive a battlefield commission. He was supposed to have left a few days before but the battle situation had not warranted the time for his absence and because all units had been constantly on the move. I hated to see him leave as I was afraid he would be assigned as a platoon leader in some other outfit.

Our battalion commander was promoted to command of the 398th Regiment when their CO was wounded and our battalion executive officer took temporary command of our battalion. We were content to stay in the town, but early the following morning, 14 December, we made the long march between thick, towering, pine-covered hills to Reysersviller.

While Company L stayed there, two trailblazers and I went through the woods and up a tall hill to find out where Companies K and I were located. We were to man outposts with them. We located them and then journeyed back to our company, where we discovered that once again the plans had been changed.

My platoon and the 2nd Platoon were to set up an outpost along a bank outside the village while the other two platoons set up their outposts in the wooded area on the right flank. Company L and the platoon CP were in a large barn. Hot chow was sent to our outposts. Late in the evening one of our men stepped on a Schu mine, but was not too badly hurt. He was evacuated and we spent a quiet night in the hayloft.

The next morning we continued our march toward Bitche, the stronghold of the Maginot Line. Company L marched along the Lemberg-Bitche highway for some

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distance when the battalion commander ordered our captain to furnish Company I one platoon of men who would be attached to their company of 40 men for a while. Company I had lost many more men than either Companies K or L during the attack on Lemberg.

Of course it was my platoon that won the toss and I got my instructions about where to locate my troops. We dug in next to one of the Company I platoons. I was certain that when we were attached to another company that we would be getting all of the sorry details such as going on more patrols, but that did not happen.

It was now 15 December and there was not much to look forward to except spending Christmas in a foxhole. We had time to cut some trees down to cover our holes, but that didn't keep the rain out. It began to drip inside my home in a hole while I was trying to write a couple of letters to let my girl and parents know that I was still alive and OK.

Late that afternoon I was called to the CP. I thought sure it meant I was to take out a patrol, and it did. It was a reconnaissance patrol to an area about 500 yards to our immediate front to determine if any enemy were dug in where we were suppose to move to the next morning. The position was shown to me on the map. I returned to my unit, picked out four good men and gave them the information about the patrol.

We set out on the mission moving down the hill and through flat, wooded terrain very slowly and cautiously. We tried not making much noise, but it seemed like we were announcing to the world that we were on the way. We stopped every 20 yards to have a look around making sure we weren't being sucked into a trap or being ambushed from our flanks. We went about 300 yards and stopped.

The only thing to our front was a two-story house about 200 yards on our right front. Visibility was fading as the evening was drawing to a close. The house was on a high embankment on the far side of some tracks of the Lemberg-

Bitche railroad. There was no sign of anything moving, nor any sounds, so we returned and I took a deep breath once again as we got back to the company area.

I reported to the captain that there was no enemy dug in at the area we patrolled. There could possibly be an outpost at the house but there was no movement of any kind. Chow had been held for us but it had gotten cold. There is nothing more sorry than cold coffee, but *c'est la guerre*. Our artillery had been pounding the Maginot forts all day long. The 1st and 2nd Battalions were supposed to lead the attack into Bitche but the attack was canceled at the last minute.

It was quiet all night on the front and at dawn we were served powdered eggs and coffee. All was in readiness to move out. Our artillery began whining overhead and we moved out in a column of platoons with my platoon leading the way. Our advance was unbroken as we moved the 500 yards into our new defensive position. My platoon was on the right flank of Company I with our right boundary the railroad tracks. Two Company I platoons moved up to our left flank.

Company K's position was on our right flank. To our front lay a fairy-tale city with three big knolls protruding out of the valley. Two outside knolls were covered with trees with the center one supporting a gigantic stone fortress on top. Scattered around these tremendous knolls were small red roofed houses and rolling hills in the background, presenting a beautiful landscape. This scene was only about 1,000 yards away.

My platoon was now down to squad size (12 men) plus an aid man due to casualties. We were not under fire, so well-prepared foxholes were dug and covered. This took most of the day. The first assignment I gave was to investigate the house. Three men crawled up there, stormed into it ready to fire at anything, while we covered their advance. The house was unoccupied. We made sure no one was in

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the basement as we threw grenades down there. Apparently the house had been used by the German troops, possibly as a listening post at night. Two men were assigned there a defensive position while the remaining ten men set up two foxholes to the left of what must have been a railroad section building

Corps and division artillery had been brought up close to the front lines. Throughout that day everything from 240mm and eight-inch howitzers plastered the enemy fortresses. A direct hit eliminated Fort Freudenburg, but the four-foot thick concrete cupolas with seven-inch thick steel doors and gun turrets of Schiesseck ignored the shells. Forward observers, through high-powered field glasses, saw some very powerful 240mm and eight-inch shells just ricochet and explode in the air. Thunderbolt fighter planes flew over, dropping some 23 tons of 500-pound bombs, which had no more effect than the shelling did.

This town of Bitche, a natural stronghold, housed the four strongest forts on the Maginot Line: Simserhof, Ochiesseck, Otterbiel, and Grande Hohekirkel. Filling the gaps between the larger installations were several smaller forts including Freudenburg. Schiesseck consisted of 11 separate casements connected by underground tunnels. Three of these casements were of a disappearing-turret type, one of which housed twin-mounted 75mm guns.

The remainder of the pillboxes had cupolas and port-holes through which machine guns, mortars and anti-tank guns could be fired. All of them had tubes through which hand grenades could be rolled down on would-be attackers. This system of fortification had never before surrendered, even to the Germans. The French still held the Maginot Line when they surrendered to the Germans during World War II. This is what our 100th Division was up against.

That afternoon I received word from the captain that he wanted me to send a recon patrol down the Lemberg-

Bitche railroad on our right flank into the town of Bitche. Company K had reported a possible machine-gun outpost several hundred yards that way. Our mission was to verify that intelligence and try to find out how many men were manning the post. I picked a very good newly-appointed squad leader and he chose four men to go with him. One of the men had a bad cold and had to be replaced, since at any time a sneeze or cough might give your position away.

After dark the patrol moved out along the left side of the railroad tracks. It was so dark that they moved in a single file well away from the tracks because we thought the machine gun was set to fire down the tracks. After sneaking about 400 to 500 yards down the tracks, voices were heard just in front of them. The patrol froze there for nearly an hour. The noise was coming from one spot indicating that this was their only position.

The patrol then moved back toward our position where there was a small curve in the railroad. The GIs then got behind cover and fired a few shots, but the enemy did not return fire. They probably were afraid that they may give away their position, or hoped the patrol would come closer. The patrol returned with the information. The outpost must have been withdrawn during the night because it wasn't heard from again. Company K had sent a patrol into the town of Bitche the day before and they captured a German armed with a burp gun.

They interrogated him and he told them that they expected the Americans to attack on the 16th.

Not wanting to disappoint them, Company K, with five tanks, went to the edge of town and captured 16 more German soldiers in the hotel. They then returned to their positions overlooking Bitche. While on their return, some Company K men were fired on from the right flank, but continued on without a firefight. Patrols were active throughout the regiment that night.

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The 1st Battalion sent a five-man patrol that captured a house next to a strong pillbox. Another company of that battalion infiltrated into the *College de Bitche*. The *College* had been abandoned that morning by a patrol forcing its way into the large building. This position was occupied as a forward position. We now had portions of two companies billeted in Bitche. Around noon the next day, tanks formed on our lines facing the Citadel. Trees were cut down to gain fields of fire for the 75mm guns.

Antitank guns were brought up to help protect the Sherman tanks. One of them drove right into the center of my area. A tank nearby tends to make me feel a little more secure, but they also draw more artillery fire. The "tankers" can button up inside their rolling fortresses, but the infantry has to "weather out" the bursting artillery shells in their foxholes. The tank boys were real friendly, ate from our platoon rations. One of them swapped one of their Thompson submachine guns to one of my men for one of our greaseguns. Did he ever get gypped. I let my platoon take turns sleeping in the house on our right boundary.

We built a fire during the day and one by one the riflemen "soaked up" the heat. That house turned out to be a "recreation room" where letters were written by a portion of the platoon while the rest manned their foxholes. Fortunately we did not get much shellfire in our area as the Kraut artillery was concerned elsewhere. The sun came out for several days in a row and the Air Corps bombers were busy. They were on missions well behind the German lines, maybe even Berlin.

Separate chow was sent to each platoon. Several men from each platoon would go to the company CP where the chow was brought by a jeep and trailer, they would then carry the containers of food to the platoons' defensive area. My platoon ate in the railroad house, hoping to avoid the artillery.

A sergeant from Company K took a night patrol to *Camp de Bitche*. When they had nearly reached the camp, they ran into two well-camouflaged pillboxes. They were immediately pinned down by machine-gun fire. Several grenades fell and it was every man for himself. Two men broke away to our lines, and finally most of them sneaked back to our defensive area.

The company to which my men and I were attached, Company I, sent a patrol every night up to Bitche. Each time they all returned intact. The next morning tactics were changed and direct artillery support was to be attempted on the impregnable fortresses of Schiesseck.

Units of the 90mm tank destroyers and 155mm "long tom" artillery pieces were moved up to our defensive area to fire at point-blank range. Other artillery was also brought up to give better support. One of the "long toms" was brought up beside the house on the railroad tracks. Everyone was instructed to remain in his hole while the gun was in play because the powerful artillery weapon would certainly draw immediate German return fire in an attempt to knock out the "long tom" gun. The muzzle blasts of these guns made the loudest noise that I have ever heard. Fire seemed to shoot out of the gun from all sides. The bursting of the shells on the fortress up ahead was a sight to behold. Round after round, the "long toms" fired point-blank at the fortress.

Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion and the 398th Combat Team, who finally had their first opportunity in two days to advance, smashed at the fortress with everything they had. After charging to within 300 yards under cover of the artillery, the barrage lifted. They then had enough time to reach the fort before the enemy guns could resume firing. With the aid of our engineers, dynamite charges were placed at the doors of the pillboxes while mortar fire blasted away at the adjacent forts, forcing them to stay buttoned up. Flamethrowers were seen blazing away at Fort

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Freudenberg supported also by Sherman tanks. All attention was then directed toward the near doomed hill of Schiesseck.

On 18 December 1944 after several days of fierce fighting, the 398th Regiment continued their attack to the west of Bitche and assaulted the man-made citadel of Schiesseck. One by one, casemates fell due to the Centurymen dynamiting them while being covered by flamethrowers and men throwing grenades. This held the Nazis back from their gunports. All eleven forts were neutralized and taken.

The city of Bitche was surrounded by a horseshoe of 100th military units. We held up at this point to take a deep breath. A counter-intelligence officer sent French civilians into Bitche every night. Some never returned, but a lot of military information was gained by these spies.

One afternoon a Frenchman and his wife walked up the railroad tracks. One of my men spoke French and he talked with them. They were slipping out of Bitche fearing for their lives. They thought that we would take Bitche the next day. This information was relayed to the Battalion S-2.

The next day was 9 December and German Tiger tanks penetrated a hole in the American lines in Belgium. A large-scale counterattack by General von Runstedt had begun. General Patton's 3rd Army rolled north to help repel the enemy drive. This left a large gap on our Seventh Army's left flank. General Patch, the Seventh Army commander, ordered his Army to defensive positions in order to fan out and cover the area vacated by the 3rd Army.

Fort Schiesseck could not be used for defensive operations because the enemy held all adjacent forts. The 100th Division, therefore, was ordered to withdraw from Schiesseck. All that blood for nothing.

The 399th Infantry Regiment had to take over the entire front of a full division.

The 1st Battalion was the first one to move to the defensive positions. They dug into positions along the Lemberg-

Bitche Railroad to guard the division's right flank. The next morning we were sent out to our left front to investigate three farmhouses at about 400 yards. No enemy had been seen there since arriving in the Bitche woods, but the battalion commander wanted it thoroughly searched, and if the enemy was there, he wanted us to take the houses. We moved through the edge of the woods until we came to an open field with the houses to our front. Taking no chances, my men spread out very wide and moved quickly to a little bank about 100 yards from a red-topped house with the remainder of the platoon covering us. There were no German soldiers there, just a poor peasant man and his wife. We then searched the other two houses. The place was thoroughly searched for weapons. The French farmers said that some Germans had stayed there a few nights before, but they had returned to Bitche. We returned to our area just in time for early chow. We had been getting two hot meals a day since moving forward to the woods overlooking Bitche.

The next two days, life was very unpleasant due to the extreme cold. We were just not equipped for extreme cold weather living in foxholes. It was so cold on 21 December that not many slept that night. Our captured house came in good during the day but no fires could be built. The next day we alternated warming up in the house. It was somewhat warmer that it was outside. Some of the guys sat around a broken down table and joked about some of our experiences thus far. They were not so funny at the time it occurred though.

A few of us received Christmas presents that day. The best presents were the ones that contained home-cooked food in their travel-worn boxes. A good way to keep an enemy from penetrating very far into one's defensive area is to line up in depth. On 23 December, our regiment, the 399th, echeloned for the expected counterattack. The 1st

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Battalion held an outpost forming a horseshoe around Bitche with Fort Braley the only Schiesseck fort still in American hands.

The 2nd Battalion was to be relieved by the 117th Cavalry Recon Troop. We began moving back to Spitzberg Hill where we held the defensive position. Our battalion moved through the patches of woods and finally to the Lemberg-Bitche highway. We continued on the highway until our company reached a small open draw. At first my platoon was on the right side of the highway. Later in the day it was decided that we should cross the highway into the woods at the edge of the draw. We went up the draw to the left of the highway and into the woods on the edge of a firebreak. Then my platoon was assigned an exposed left flank position of Company I who was dug in on our right.

We began to dig foxholes forming an L-shaped defensive position to correspond with the shape of the woods we were in. To our front lay the wide-open firebreak that was about 75 yards wide, and to our left was 200 yards of open field with the Lemberg-Bitche highway on its farther side.

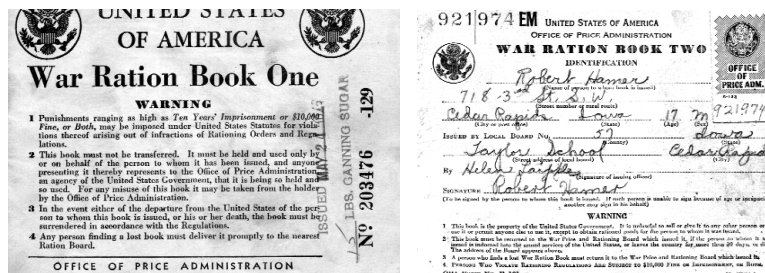
My platoon had the most vulnerable area to defend against tanks. There were several ancient holes already dug in our area, probably created during World War I. We examined the holes carefully for booby traps and then moved into them. Fearful that these underground holes might cave in, the men began to reinforce these ancient Maginot holes. A few new foxholes were begun. Our orders when we arrived at this location were that we would probably remain here for some time. The order of the day was to keep improving our positions. In the event of a German breakthrough, we must hold this position at all costs.

My CP was located about 50 yards to the rear of my circular line of defense in foxholes. It was an old French dugout which was about 8 feet square and about 6 feet deep. The foxhole was actually dry. Our very damp

bedrolls were brought up to us that afternoon. A blanket was placed at the doorway of the dugout to black them out at night and also to keep out a little of the cold air. Many of us had candles that were sent to us, and at night we would write letters while our foxhole buddy was on guard outside.

For my defensive setup, a bazooka man was placed in a hole at the corner edge of the woods; the bazooka aimed down the hill in the direction of the highway, which was the most likely avenue of approach for the enemy tanks. The remainder of the men except me now had BARs. I was armed with a carbine and a grease gun. We had plenty of firepower even though we were only a few in number.

Chow was brought up to us twice a day while in this position. We were fed in a rear area in a small covered draw. Half the men in the company would eat at a time and then relieve their foxhole buddies. Meanwhile, at home, the folks were having to use ration books to make a go of it.



From gasoline to foodstuffs, here are two War Ration Books. Book one was also used for 15 pounds of canning sugar.