

the early days of my hospitalization, I learned much later, since it wasn't known exactly where I was, some of my mail was returned as undeliverable. This must have been a source of considerable distress for everyone at home, but they never said much about it to me. Eventually, of course, I was well enough to write them, and my mail did get forwarded as well.

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## **XX. THE BEGINNING OF THE END**

It is impossible to complete this story using original sources that we have used in the *Newsletter*; there are no more. It was not long after the last transcribed Stimes letter that we have was written that I left the Company on my three-day R & R pass to the Nancy rest camp that ended up with my hospitalization for hepatitis. Thus I have no personal memories of what happened to the Company during the very eventful final weeks of combat—and of course Bud never got the opportunity to give us his impressions of that time. I have been able to unearth only one other on-the-spot recollection of what happened—and that never got in the *Newsletter*.

In 1995 I was able to meet with Hugh Gillin—once a sergeant in our third platoon—to discuss his proposed biography, that I would write using oral history tapes which he would provide. Hugh had made a quite dramatic mid-life career change to become a successful Hollywood actor, and I thought his story was worth telling. For a number of reasons the project didn't come to fruition, but I was able to get from the tapes, among other things, verbatim accounts of his experiences in the Company G action at Talheim up to the time he was wounded, plus some of his experiences after being wounded: in hospitals in Germany, England, and back home. Some of this material has been used in the *Newsletter*, most has not, and some of that is what follows:

“April the 12<sup>th</sup> Roosevelt died, when we were in Heilbronn, Germany on the Neckar River. We were on the safe side. I would guess the west bank, kind of reserve. Somebody got the town cleaned up and then we went across, on a pontoon bridge as I recall. Got into town and most of the fighting was done, moved through the town. We were advancing and we were heading toward the town of Talheim. (I know this now, didn't know it then, it's about 10 or 15 miles outa Heilbronn goin' southeast. I got some old maps.) We started to move in there. As we're advancing you could see the town up ahead of us maybe a

quarter of a mile, a little village, like. And there was a crossroads, and moving across the field, walking toward this town, we stopped.

"My squad leader had been hit earlier. They sent him back to the hospital and he got patched up, and he's back with the squad. We dropped in a shell hole—kind of a depression thing there—together. We were getting ready to move on this town, and I said, 'Hey, Sarge,' I said something about, 'Welcome back. Glad you're back, you're the squad leader now.' 'Yeah, well I don't know.' He was kind of bewildered. All I'm thinking about is he gets to lead the squad into town. I don't have to lead them in; he can do it. He looked at me and he said, 'Uh,' with a kind of vacant look on his face, 'I can't do it, I just can't do it.' I didn't smart him or wiseacre him; I knew what he meant. As I recall, he was married and had a couple of little kids, and he'd been hit once and now he's back. And I'm saying, 'Glad you're back, and now you can lead the squad into town. Maybe you'll get hit again.' I didn't say that, but he's kind of shrinking inside, like; he said, 'I just can't do it.' And, as I recall, I said, 'I understand.' Ha, ha, that was the end of my dream. So I got up and we just kept moving into town.

"We got near the town and they started shelling us. Siemasko was the lieutenant then, and he told me, 'Gillin, you take your squad up front on the left,' and I forget who he said go up on the right. 'And, Kelly,' (that was Vincent Kelly), 'you bring up your squad in the rear.' I thought, boy, lucky Kelly, he's back in the rear. Now 'in the rear' is like, what, 50 yards back? But anyway, he was the reserve squad. I'm on the left going into town; Goosey Steines is my scout. I said, 'Goosey, you're a scout, you get up in front.' 'I don't wanna get up in front.' Well, I said, 'Hell, you're a scout, they're payin' you to be a scout, you get up. God, Goosey, up front's only 20 feet in front of me. We gotta do this the way it's supposed to be done.' He said, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' He didn't like that.

"As we're moving in, they start shelling us with mortars. But they're going over and hitting behind us. There's the crossroads right behind us that they had zeroed in on. I remember going by the little crossroads, it was like a couple of dirt paths, and I went by that and right away. I know that's a good zero point for artillery and stuff, so I'm hopping on ahead of that thing. They started throwing mortars on it, and I hit the ditch, and guys were in the ditch. We had a couple of tanks with us, but hell, they were following us by about several hundred yards. They put the damned infantry up front to clear the town. They didn't want the damned tanks getting blown up by *Panzerfausts*, those rocket things, out of some basement, so they put the infantry up there in front.

"Anyway, the artillery comes in and somebody says, 'Let's get out of here. Pull back.' The Krauts are kinda yippin' and yellin' up in the town. They're acting like they're going to run out of town at us. Kind of scared everybody. So we pulled back. This was three or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We pulled back, past the crossroads, and we dug in. Couldn't get the tanks to come up with us. Finally they did, came up behind us by 30 or 40 yards. Sat there. Made you feel good, at least there was a tank there. That's when somebody said, 'Kelly got it. Kelly got it at the crossroads.' In that same action that guy from Arkansas got the Distinguished Service Cross, or some damned thing. [*Lonnie Jackson. Kelly was also awarded the DSC there.*]

"The next morning we moved into the town. In the meantime the Krauts had pulled out and into the hills behind it. I found a butcher shop there and somebody who could speak a little French and I could speak a little French, and first thing I asked him if he knew where any Germans were, and he said he did. He said, 'Follow me,' more or less. Delbert Steines, Goosey, my scout, and I and this Frenchman started over there into another part of town we hadn't taken yet. He pointed to a cellar there and I kicked the door open and said, '*Rausmit*, come on out of there.' Hell, a bunch of civilians, about 10 or 15 of them, came out of there, brushing by me.

"I'm standing there with my gun on them, Goosey behind me. I looked to my left all of a sudden as a Kraut walks around the corner down there and throws his hands up. So I grab him and put him up against the wall, and I'm frisking him. Got his hands up on the wall. I pull his shirtsleeve down and he's got a wristwatch on. Hot damn! I take that wristwatch off and put it in my pocket. Go through his pack; he's got a bunch of crap in there. So I said, 'We'll take him back to the command post, and then we'll go get some more.' So I took him back to the command post. We had to walk over a little wooden plank they'd put across a little stream there. They'd blown the bridge out and they put a plank in there so the Krauts could get out. I was over there where I had no damned business being.

"Anyway, this guy, on his uniform he had an artillery thing on there. I said, 'Artillery?' and he kinda nodded his head and, boy, I hit him right smack in the nose hard as I could. He just looked at me. Blood's coming out of his nose. I figured my reasoning was that he killed Kelly. The artillery or the mortars killed Kelly. So I was mad, and I hit him. You know, I whanged into him one way and I hit him again the other way. And he just stood there and looked at me. He wasn't looking mean, he wasn't looking daggers. He was looking at me like, 'What'd you do that for?' You know, 'I don't understand.' And I didn't either for a moment. Somebody said, 'Aw, leave him alone.' So we shoved him in the command post, and I said, 'Let's go get some more.'

"So we started out again, from the middle of that little town, to get some more prisoners. Seemed like a good idea. That's when I got hit. I'm walking along, and I was in the middle. Steines was on one side of me and the other scout on the other, and zzzzip! boy, it hit me. Took me right out of the middle. Didn't hit either one of them. Spun me around; I went down, I knew I was hit. I picked my rifle up. I was hit through the left arm and the left leg, and I got into a little house about ten feet away. The houses were right on the street. I sat down in there. I knew I was hit and I was kind of glad I was. I knew I was hit in the leg because I fell down. I pulled my pants up out of my boot and looked. There was a hole drilled right through my calf muscle. Didn't hit the bone. The blood's kind of running down my leg, and I remembered that you're supposed to take your first aid pack off and dress yourself up. So I did. I noticed I wasn't using my left hand very much. So I shoved my left sleeve up, and there was a hole through my left wrist.

"The funny part of this story is that the summer before I went in the Army, the summer of '43, I worked in the coal mines while I was going to college. I

made enough money I bought a Longines wristwatch, paid about 200 bucks for it. I was really proud of that watch, and I guess I had it for about a year or so. Now, you remember, I just took that watch off that Kraut about ten minutes before I got hit. Put it in my pocket. Some damned old Mickey Mouse thing, wasn't worth a damn. I'm sitting on the floor of that house and I looked down and, by God, my watch is gone. I thought, son of a bitch.

"About that time Sergeant Walters, who was across the street, said, 'Are you all right?' And I said, 'Yeah, you better stay there, don't be comin' in here.' In the meantime there's mortar rounds coming into town. The second story of this little house I'm in took a hit. I figured this damned house is going to be gone pretty soon. Here I sit. I'm wounded; I'm going to get the hell outta here. I'm going home if I can just get out of this house. Now they got small arms fire going up and down the street. Walters says, 'I'm coming over.' I said, 'Stay there.' I could see him, because I'm just lying there in the doorway. He comes across and he grabs his thigh about halfway across. Damned if he didn't get one right through his thigh. He came in and sat down. It was almost like a comedy. I said, 'Look out there and see if you can see a watch.' He looked and said, 'I don't see a watch, I see a strap.' That was the end of my Longines watch. I think it was like God said, 'Hey, you don't need two watches. You gonna steal that guy's watch?' 'Yeah.' 'You don't need two watches, so you gonna give yours up.'

"So we sat there for about ten minutes figuring out what the hell to do. We knew we were in trouble and we had to get out of there. I could see a muzzle of a tank up the road there, about a block up the street, and we kept yelling up there for that tank to come down. Hell, he wouldn't come down. Anyway, somebody got him to come down. He got in the street between us and the other side of the house. The street curved going up out of there, so if we could get out of our house to the other side of the street, we could follow that curve and we could get out. So finally, maybe 15 or 30 minutes later, he lumbered that tank down in there. Walters went first and I went last, and, boy, I tell you, I'm starting to get a little weak, I'm losing blood. I thought, oh boy, there's a gap between me and back of that tank of maybe four feet, and I thought that if I can just get across that sumbitch without getting hit I got her made. So I just bellied up, made a jump and a hop, and I got to it and I didn't get hit.

"I went ten or twenty yards up the side, hugging that wall and trying to get up that damned road out of the way there. Somebody came down and picked me up and took us in a house, laid me on a couch. Lady's living room and I'm bleeding all over the damned thing. Old Kraut lady, she brought me a pillow and put it under my head. Never will forget that. I carried that pillow all the way back to the hospital. Somebody moved out next to me one time and stole the son of a bitch.

"So they got me out of there. Loaded me on a Jeep with a couple of Kraut prisoners, wounded prisoners. We all went back and hit the hospital, and that night I was operated on in a tent. They cleaned up my wounds, and I lay there in that EVAC hospital, 174<sup>th</sup> I think it was, for two or three days. They put me on a C47 or C46 and flew me into England to a general hospital. A week later they closed my wounds, and they had me non-ambulatory, a litter patient. I got so I

could hobble around pretty good after three or four weeks. They'd call my name and I'd hobble up and I'd lie down on my litter. A guys says, 'You can walk.' And I said, 'Yeah, but that says litter patient on there.' So I said, 'You can carry me, Fred.' So I'd lie down and they'd pick me up and carry me where I was going to go next.

"From there I went on a train up to Glasgow, Scotland. From Glasgow they put us on an airplane and flew us back to an Air Corps base in Long Island, and on to Leonard General Hospital in Topeka, Kansas, where I recuperated. Then I finally went to Colorado Springs Convalescent Hospital, and got discharged that Fall of '45.

"I got a letter from Bill Remoir, 'Wild Bill.' He was from Washington, and he was a BAR man. In the letter he said, 'I got the son of a bitch that got you, and his buddy too.' There was a Kraut sniper in a church steeple, and he got me from behind, with a burp gun. He laid a stream out of there and took me out of the middle. Luckily. I mean if he'd a moved his line of sight over 3 or 4 inches it would have gone right up my back. But it didn't, it was to my left side, and it went through the back of my leg and the back of my left wrist, and blew my watch off. That's what got me, according to Remoir. And apparently the Kraut that did it paid a price for it, because Remoir says, 'I got the son of a bitch that shot you, and his buddy too.' I always felt a little bit sad about that. It might have been all right to get the guy that got me, but he didn't necessarily have to get his buddy too. But anyway, that's a long time ago.

"I got hit on April 14th, about 9 o'clock in the morning. I think it was a Saturday morning. Evacuation out of there was good. I got to the EVAC hospital; there were American nurses there. They had on uniforms and they had on lipstick. They cut my clothes off of me and they said, 'Sergeant, you're going to be OK, we'll take care of you.' And I said, 'Yeah, I know that.' I had some morphine, I guess. I wasn't hurting. I don't recall any pain. I remember the shock of getting hit, but I don't remember pain connected with it. Cut my clothes off me, and later on wheeled me in and put me on like a marble-topped table in a tent with a lantern hanging up there. A young doctor was there, he was a little bit blood-spattered. I won't make it too gory, but I could see some blood spots on him, and he had captain's bars. He said, 'Hi, I'm goin' to fix you up in a minute. I'm going to give you an injection here. Start counting and see how far you can get.' I got to about four and was gone. I remember him kind of smiling. He cleaned out my wounds. My left arm was fractured. There was no nerve injury in there, which was another miracle. The doctor would come through the hospital, 'Wiggle your fingers.' And I could wiggle 'em. Missed the bone, the tibia bone, in the leg, and just went through the muscle. If he'd been over there another inch it would have resectioned that tibia down there, taken a couple a inches out of that, and I'd have been walking with a thick shoe on one side, and nerve injury on the other. Missed both of those. Million-dollar wound: clean, clear, and clean through.

The *Newsletter* did use some of the next part of Hugh's oral history concerning his time in the hospital in England after he was wounded, where he was being treated and waiting to be shipped home:

"One day—I was still bedridden with a cast on my left arm and dressings on my leg—the T-5 came in and said, 'We're going to have an inspection tomorrow morning, and when the inspecting officer comes in and I yell ATTENTION! I want all you guys to stand at attention.' This one guy says, 'Well, I got a leg off, and it's going to be a little hard to do.' And I say, 'I don't get up either.' He said, 'Then you lie at attention.' There's a little humor in that one.

"So he came in the next day, and this guy says 'TENSUN!' The guys that could get up. I think the guy with the leg off kinda hung—wobbled—on the end of the bed. I lay real stiff in the bed, like I was at attention. This guy hadn't gone halfway around that damned ward when the giggles started breaking out. The god-darned place started laughing. He got furious and stomped out. Served him right!"

## **XXI. OCCUPATION**

It has been my regret that I was never able to get anyone's first-hand impression of what it was like to be on the front line on V-E Day. I have described my own observations from the window of the hospital in Nancy, but I have nothing else. I suspect this may be because nothing dramatic happened. It wasn't as though the