

LOVE COMPANY

THOUGHTS BEFORE THE BATTLE

The war was entering its final phase. The Ardennes Offensive in the North was a disaster for the Germans, even though several U.S. Infantry Divisions were badly shattered. Operation Nordwind on the Seventh Army front did not break through as Hitler expected. Overhead, we could often see flights of American bombers, B17 Flying Fortresses and B24 Liberators, headed for Germany. They flew over in greater numbers each time. Daylight flights of 1,000 planes at a time brought cheers from the GIs in foxholes below.

As one of those GIs, I looked up and thought how different it would have been if I was still in the Air Corps. I would have been a second lieutenant, navigator/bombardier, with the responsibility of bombing cities, factories, oil fields and many other enemy targets from thousands of feet up in the sky. When it was done, I would fly back to the home airfield, give my report and take a break at the local pub or the Officers' Club. I would sleep indoors, in a bed, take daily showers, wear a clean uniform, have hot meals, receive medals and strut about as a hero. I might even have a girlfriend to keep up my morale.

Of course, I could be shot down in flames, or I might land in enemy territory and be killed by enraged civilians or be taken in as a prisoner of war. That would not be very nice but I am sure it would be better than this hole in the ground that I now have. In a war, there are many ways to fight and die, but I think no one suffers more than the dogface.

Would I be bothered by the knowledge that I was bombing cities and killing civilians: men, women and children? I am sure I would be, but I do not know. Only by being in that situation and having that actual experience would I know. Many airmen are killed on those missions and I would feel bitter at the loss of a close buddy. Yet I think that it would not seem like fighting the enemy since I would not see him except for the anti-aircraft fire and the attack of his aircraft.

Though I had become hardened to the killing of enemy soldiers that I faced, I could not fire my rifle at any unarmed civilian, especially a woman or child. Probably, I would be considered a war criminal if I did. That was not true for the men of the Air Corps who were engaged in total warfare. However, it was different for me, as an infantryman. I wore the

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uniform of an Amie (the Germans called American soldiers “Amies”), which was for identification of the side I was on. This uniform gave my enemy every right to kill me. His uniform told me his identity and gave me the right to kill him also.

The infantry is sometimes called the “Queen of Battle,” which comes from the game of chess where the queen is the most powerful piece on the board. She may be maneuvered to strike in almost any direction. This may be a romantic way of portraying the infantry but we are still foot soldiers fighting foot soldiers. Furthermore, a uniform is not a suit of armor and there is very little glory in the infantry. There is only the sense of honor to serve with other brave men. Not everyone can do it for long. For that reason, some soldiers shed their uniforms to change their identity and hope to save their lives by deserting. If they are caught by the enemy, they could be shot as spies. If caught by their own army, the penalty may be a firing squad.

Regardless of these thoughts of mine, our side was winning, and the enemy was losing his will to carry on the war. Yet, realistically, we still were fighting the war on French soil and Germany had not yet unconditionally surrendered as our political leaders demanded.

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15 MARCH 1945 – SPRING OFFENSIVE

Love Company was being prepared with all the other units on the front to start a new offensive. We were brought up to almost full strength from a low of 75 privates on 3 January 1945 to 128 on 14 March 1945. Among the new replacements who arrived in late February, there were two young riflemen who were placed in a foxhole on the forward slope of our position. They were directly opposite the enemy front. Their platoon sergeant instructed them to quickly unload their sleeping bags and get down in their foxhole. One of them was taking his time and walking around unaware of any danger when a German sniper fired one shot and killed him. He was so new to the company that no one knew his name, not even the replacement who was with him. After his body was removed to the rear, the medic looked for his dogtags but could not find them. He was finally identified through the process of elimination. No one in the company ever had a chance to know him. Even fewer had even seen him. He was like a ghost. An enigma. A rumor.

For more than a week we were being prepared for the coming offensive. Weapons were cleaned and checked. Each rifleman was outfitted with two bandoliers that each held five clips of bullets, in addition to his cartridge belt with ten more clips of bullets. He had a rifle, 160 rounds of ammunition, two rifle or hand grenades and his bayonet. BAR men had extra magazines of ammunition and hand grenades. Some battle-hardened men carried a captured pistol or knife hidden in their jacket or boot.

At 0500 on 15 March, we climbed out of our foxholes and formed a long skirmish line to attack the German line. While we waited to receive the order to advance, we watched the shells of our artillery pound the enemy line. The barrage went on for a long half hour, and I thought they were taking a terrific beating. Then came the order to "Move forward!" and the long skirmish line moved slowly and steadily forward as our artillery laid down a continuous barrage of 105mm and 155mm shells that progressed up the slope ahead of us and beyond.

There was sparse enemy rifle and machine gun fire, but we were being hit by German artillery shells. We hit the ground as a shell sounded like it was coming in close to us. After it exploded nearby, we picked ourselves up and kept moving forward. Though some of our men were hit, the

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rest of us moved on toward the enemy line. We could not turn back, and we could not stop the enemy shelling. We had to move forward and hit the dirt when the shells came in close. Most men had a fatalistic attitude about enemy artillery. I felt that I had been living on borrowed time since the beginning. I had come so close to being killed so many times before that I did not let it worry me now. I thought of the doughboy in World War I who only worried about the piece of steel that had his name on it. It was like being in a grim hypnotic state.

The enemy had abandoned their positions and retreated but they left behind barbed wire and shoe mines that caused some casualties. We had broken through the enemy line, and the stalemate that lasted for almost two months was over. It ended so suddenly without a pitched battle that I was surprised and relieved that they had gone.

Now we had to look forward to taking Lemberg and Bitche, again, and then the forts on the Maginot Line. That would be the next stand the Germans would make. Would they fight or retreat? When was it going to end? Fortunately, the Germans did not make a stand at the Maginot Line, and we followed forward units of the division that had entered Bitche without meeting any enemy resistance. We marched out on foot, but when we found that the Germans had retreated into the Fatherland, our pursuit was made by truck.

Many other units were in motor convoys pursuing the Germans, and the Military Police were at all the crossroads directing traffic, which came in a flood of vehicles. All the roads were two lanes wide, very narrow and winding. At one point, we were delayed by a column of the Free French Army that had been on our right flank on the Seventh Army front. They apparently had been misdirected and were making a right turn in front of us. We patiently waited as they went by. Of course, we knew that the French Army did not fill their canteens with chlorinated water like the Americans. They preferred vin rouge or vin blanc – it probably did not matter which. However, as we watched them, we saw that they had young women in the trucks with them. The women were civilians because they were not in army uniforms and the poilus were having a good time laughing and singing. What a way to run an army! Unless we were in the hospital, we never saw an American woman.

I doubt that we could have maintained discipline and fighting efficiency if we had civilian women or even women soldiers with us at the front. It could have been exciting in the beginning but with my life on the line I would find it a liability. What woman would want to sleep in a hole

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in the ground in freezing temperatures, eat K rations, be filthy and probably sick, wounded or killed? There would be so many problems, such as digging a foxhole, marches, patrols, and fire fights, that I would rather be alone and just dream about a woman.

*Left Lambach Fr by foot 1500 Arrived at Reyersvillier Fr 1630
Distance traveled 3 1/4 miles.*

*16 Mar 45 Left Reyersvillier Fr 1830 by motor Arrived Bitche Fr
1900 distance traveled 3 1/2 miles.*

*18 Mar 45 Left Bitche Fr by motor 1615. Arrived at Hanviller Fr
1715. Distance motored 3 1/2 miles. Left Hanviller Fr 1815. Arrived
Bousseviller Fr 1915. Distance motored 1 1/4 miles.*

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ENTERING GERMANY

21 Mar 45 Left Bousseviller Fr at 0900 by truck. Arrived at Breidenbach Ger at 1100.

The vaunted Siegfried Line with its barrier of concrete “dragon’s teeth” lay ahead and was built to stop our tanks. There was also barbed wire to stop infantry. Behind it, we expected to meet strong and resolute German units defending “The Fatherland” against our invasion. Yet the Siegfried Line was not much of a deterrent as our artillery blasted huge holes in it and no enemy stopped our advance. Our tanks and trucks rolled through unhindered.

Crossing the border into Germany was a surprise, because the houses and streets were different in style and seemed more modern than those in France. From the upper window of almost every house, a white sheet was draped, or a white flag was displayed on a pole attached to the house. No one was in the street. No one appeared at the doors or windows of the houses. The people were there, looking at us as our trucks rolled by, but they did not want to be seen. They were terrified that we would harm them or destroy their homes. That was all Nazi propaganda.

There were great numbers of displaced persons on the road who were bewildered by their sudden freedom from German factories where they had been slave laborers. They were of many nationalities: French, Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Pole, and more. These displaced persons were taken from their homelands where their armies had been conquered by the Nazis and were transported to Germany to work in war factories, such as the Krupp Works and I.G. Farben Industries. Germany did not have enough people for both their military forces and their factories. Besides, these workers were not paid. Our Military Government people had to take care of them when the war was over and we had to run the country.

We still did not meet any strong enemy resistance. The powerful Wehrmacht that had overrun Europe seemed to have disappeared. The only remnants we saw were the streams of German prisoners that we passed along the road. They had thrown down their guns and surrendered to any American soldier they could find. There were thousands of German soldiers being guarded and marched back to makeshift prisoner-of-war camps by relatively few GIs. The war was in its final stage, but it was not

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over yet. There was a lot of Germany east of these border towns that had to be taken. We had to still cross the Rhine River. That was the next great obstacle.

22 Mar 45 Left Breidenbach Ger at 1200 by truck. Arrived at Neustadt Ger at 2000. Distance traveled 60 miles.

Traveling 60 miles in 8 hours did not set any speed record, but that was a lot of territory in wartime, when we often could not gain 60 yards in 18 hours. We enjoyed the feeling of riding, instead of walking. It was like being on a sightseeing tour of the countryside. There were towns that were almost completely destroyed by Allied air raids and artillery. Railroad cars and locomotives were lying on their sides in jumbled disarray beside twisted steel rails. Burned out trucks, cars, and Panzer tanks of the Wehrmacht that had blocked the roads after being hit were pushed off to the side of the road by our bulldozers. Most of them had been victims of our aerial superiority. The horse-drawn artillery of the German army was in shambles and deserted in their retreat. The dead horses lay on their sides with their legs projected straight out in a state of rigor mortis.

23 Mar 45 Left Neustadt Ger at 0930 by truck. Arrived at Mutterstadt Ger at 1215. Distance traveled 12 miles.

Left Mutterstadt Ger at 0915 on foot. Arrived at Rheingoheim Ger 1550. Distance marched 9 miles. (25 March 1945)

The 3rd Battalion of the 399th Infantry Regiment was the first unit of the division to reach the Rhine River south of Ludwigshafen at Altrip. Love Company rode the last leg of the trip on the backs of M1 Sherman tanks. As the tanks approached the river, we could see the shipyards of the city of Mannheim on the eastern shore. We were greeted by rifle fire from across the river, which caused the tank crews to immediately duck inside and pull down their hatches. Because of these noisy, cumbersome tanks that always attracted enemy fire, we had the dubious honor of being shot at while we rode on the outside. The German snipers were several hundred yards away and not very accurate, but one rifle shot went "ping" as it hit our tank. In checking where it hit, I found that Pvt. Junior P. Ogle, who was standing next to me, had a hole in the leg of his trousers. The bullet had passed through without hitting his leg.

At this point, we dismounted and proceeded the rest of the way on foot. We crossed a park-like area and reached an embankment at the river's edge. There we took cover behind it and looked across the river at the Mannheim shipyard. We could see that the firing had come from the cab of the huge crane that faced us. Although it was a really long shot, we

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opened fire on that crane and that silenced them. In the meantime, as acting squad leader, one of the men in my squad cracked from battle fatigue. He fell trembling to the ground and was wailing, "Get me out of here! I'm scared! I'm scared!" He was screaming and crying. Nothing I said could make him control his terror, even though we were relatively safe. The enemy sniper fire was not accurate and we were not in any great danger. Finally, I told the lieutenant who was my platoon leader that he had to be sent back to the rear, because he was unnerving all the other men. He left the company on 27 March 1945 and never returned.

We spent several days in Ludwigshafen while other division units passed through our position to attempt a crossing of the Rhine River. This was very fortunate for us, because we were billeted in local houses where the beds had down comforters and many of the luxuries of home. In the house I was assigned to occupy, there was a wine cellar filled with hundreds of bottles of every variety. Each of us appropriated a bottle to have with our meals and another to have without our meals. There were other items in the house, but hardly anyone took them. As combat infantrymen who walked everywhere, we had to carry anything we took, and we traveled as lightly as possible. We learned from the beginning to value only the essentials of life. The philosophy expressed by a worthy infantryman in polite terms was, "If you can't eat it or sleep with it, pee on it!"

Left Ludwigshafen Ger on foot at 1500 Arr at Maudach Ger at 1615 Distance traveled 2 1/2 miles. (27 March 1945)

31 Mar 45 Left Maudach Ger 1450 by motor. Arrived at Bruhl Ger 1610. Distance traveled 12 miles.

Easter Sunday was 1 April 1945, and I remember church services conducted in a bombed out church where the soldiers quietly prayed for peace and salvation. It was kind of eerie in the sanctuary with the hole in the roof letting in hazy streams of light over the scene. We laid our rifles on the floor and removed our helmets during the service. It was very peaceful and came like a sigh of relief.

2 Apr 45 Left Bruhl Ger 2030 by motor. Arr Seckenheim Ger 2200. Distance motored 7 miles.

It was on this date that Pfc. Fernando Erquiaga (Erky) returned to the company. He had been severely wounded on 8 December 1944 near Lemberg, France. It was good to see him again. He told us of his stay in the hospital where he was taken care of by the Army nurses. He recounted stories of the torrid romantic trysts he had had with the nurses while he was slowly mending. The stories sounded somewhat fanciful. However, he

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was a little older, in his early twenties, good looking, and had a way with words so that we could not challenge his stories. Besides, he helped divert our attention from our daily concentration on the war and that was a welcomed break.

5 Apr 45 Left Seckenheim Ger 2050 by motor arrived Mosbach Ger 2300 distance motored 35 miles.

As the morning reports of the previous 20 days show, we were moving constantly. We went from town to town, usually by truck and sometimes on foot. I do not have any clear recollection of that period. We stayed at abandoned Wehrmacht barracks on several occasions when we reached our destination.

During this period, we had crossed the Rhine on trucks over a pontoon bridge, passed through Mannheim, and continued southeast past Heidelberg. The Germans chose not to defend Heidelberg, which had been spared from bombing and artillery shells. It was a beautiful medieval town that we would have destroyed if we had to.

We proceeded to the vicinity of Heilbronn, where other units of the division were battling strong enemy forces. Our mission, as part of the 3rd Battalion of the 399th Regiment, was to maintain cover for the right flank of the division, which was exposed to possible enemy counterattack. German units in Heilbronn fought a determined defensive battle that cost many lives on both sides before the battle for the city was won by our division.

Thereafter, Love Company was assigned for a period of 15 days to the 35th Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) Brigade

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SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT

The company saw many towns in Germany that were heavily damaged before we passed by the outskirts of Pforzheim. This city appeared to be almost completely leveled from the intensive bombing of many Allied air raids. The Leica camera factory was located there, and some GIs went into the city and liberated highly prized cameras as souvenirs. I found a pair of German army binoculars that was of excellent quality. The binoculars gave powerful magnification and had five or six colored filters for any light condition. Though I wanted to keep it, I left it behind because it was too heavy and bulky. It was an unessential burden for a foot soldier. Some rear echelon soldier with a vehicle probably added it to his trove of liberated souvenirs.

In the second week of April, as acting sergeant, I and two of the men in my squad were given a special assignment to guard an Army Intelligence radio truck. That truck was equipped with a loop antenna on the roof and several radio receivers and transmitters inside. Four German-speaking GIs were tuning in to German Army transmissions. At this stage of the war, the enemy high command was in a desperate situation and did not bother to send radio commands in code to their Wehrmacht units. They were issuing orders on certain radio frequencies in plain language, which were being monitored by these American soldiers and forwarded to our Army commanders.

This 1½ ton Dodge truck was one of three that were situated on high grounds several miles apart. With their directional loop antennas, they each were searching to find the location of the headquarters of the enemy command post. With each truck tuned in to the same frequency at three different locations, they could each shoot an azimuth to find the direction from which the broadcast was being transmitted. By intersecting the azimuth that each truck reported they could find the exact location of the German radio transmitter. The next step was to blast that spot, which could be their headquarters, with our artillery. These four GIs in the truck were busy with the receiving and transmission of messages. They had spent much of their wartime service inside the truck and never had to do the boring Army routines or the dangerous fighting at the front line.

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The job of guarding them and their truck was quite routine. We had a Jeep and followed them everywhere. When they stopped, we parked nearby and watched for any activity. At night, we had our bedrolls and took turns of two hours off (asleep) and one hour on (guard duty). It was spring in Bavaria, and we enjoyed the weather and the absence of warfare. We traveled about the countryside without any enemy in sight.

Suddenly, in the middle of an afternoon, rifle shots rang out in our direction. Someone was firing at the truck! We guards hit the ground and looked in the direction of the shots. Inside the truck, the intelligence men were in a furor. "What the hell is going on?" "Are we being attacked?" "Where's my gun?" "How does this thing work?" "Where's my helmet?" They were scrambling around inside the truck looking under their seats for their weapons. What they found were dust-encrusted pieces of hardware that had never been fired and were badly in need of oil and cleaning. They may not have even been loaded.

Out of a wooded area some distance away, there appeared a young man in a uniform without a helmet waving a rifle over his head and yelling in a language that we could not understand. We yelled back at him to drop his rifle, but he kept shouting as he came toward us. We fired a shot over his head and told him to drop the rifle. Instead, he started running toward us and waving the rifle. A second shot was fired and hit him in the chest, and he fell to the ground. We ran to him and found him bleeding from the mouth. When his shirt was removed, we found that the bullet had passed through his body. A compress and sulfa were applied to the wounds and an ambulance was called to pick him up. I don't know who he was, what language he spoke, or what unit he was from. We guessed that he may have been from an Allied unit out of North Africa. It was an accident of war and another wasted life. My only consolation was that we had to protect the men we were assigned to guard. I hoped that the poor soul survived.

The intelligence crew headed south toward the Alps. We passed through beautiful mountain areas where the air was clear and refreshing. Traveling along the road into Garmisch-Partenkirchen, we came across a clear lake that reflected the snow-covered mountain on its surface just like a picture postcard. The town was like something out of Hansel and Gretel with chalets and gingerbread houses. There were no enemy soldiers anywhere and no signs of the wreckage of war. We continued on into Innsbruck, Austria, which was a small Alpine city untouched by the fighting.

This detail lasted almost until the end of April when we had to return to our unit. I had no idea what had happened at Love Company during

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our absence. It seemed that only some small units of die-hard SS troops would be resisting the inevitable end of the war. We did not think that we had missed too much. However, when we came back and were told about Beilstein, we were shocked and thankful that we had not been there. Nevertheless, I did feel guilty that I should have been there with my buddies and fought with them. It must have been that guardian angel that had looked down on me before had again placed me on that special assignment.

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BEILSTEIN, GERMANY

*17 Apr 45 left Mosbach Ger by truck. Arrived Unterheinrlet Ger
Distance traveled 50 miles.*

On 17 April 1945, Love Company, which had been brought up to full strength with replacements, now numbered five officers and 172 enlisted men present. It had assembled in an area near Unterheinrlet, preparing for an attack the next day on the high ground near the town of Beilstein. The 3rd Battalion was to be led in the attack by K and I Companies, and L Company was to follow in reserve. Everyone knew that the war would soon be over. The German Army was surrendering in droves. Wehrmacht units were disintegrating en masse. Only sporadic fire from small arms and artillery cannon were coming from last-ditch enemy soldiers.

So it came as a surprise to Tech. 4 Charles Brigandi, one of our cooks, when his friend S. Sgt. Nicholas Franzini handed his few personal belongings to him and said, "I'm not going to make it tomorrow." Charlie said, "You can't be serious. The war will be over soon and the Krauts are practically wiped out." "No. I just have this feeling about tomorrow. I have been in combat since the first day and never got wounded or sick. It will be the end for me, I feel sure about it."

Premonitions of impending death are often heard on the front lines, especially when the enemy is dug in and the battle is fierce. This time it was not like that. This was the end of the war.

Charlie told me that he did not question him, because soldiers often have feelings of doom and they usually are false alarms. Nick asked him to deliver a message to his wife: "Tell her that I love her and I was going to take up the lunch pail as she wanted." The message had a special meaning: that Nick was going to get a steady job, take care of her, and be a solid family man.

The 18 April 1945 Battle of Bielstein – as recorded in *The Story of the Century*:

"With Co .K in the van, the 3rd Battalion advanced slowly over difficult terrain until it reached a road junction near the edge of the woods. At 1000, Co. K paused to combine with Co. I in an attack against the high ground to the south. This high

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ground was a steep hill, covered by a patch-quilt of farmland, with pine woods near the crest. To reach the summit, the 3rd Battalion had to push through an exposed draw, and climb the hill under perfect observation from whatever enemy troops might be entrenched at the top.

“Co. K, on the left of Co. I, was the first to start across the clearing at the foot of the hill. Enemy 88mm and 120mm mortar shells were falling around them, but the Co. K men managed to make the first patch of woods and then continue across the short stretch of open ground to high ground beyond. They reached the woods at the crest of the hill with only two casualties. Co. I, following the lead of Co. K, also gained the shelter of the woods at the top of the hill with only a few casualties.

“Then, Cos. L and M moved into open ground. Leading elements were about halfway through the draw when seemingly every enemy 80mm and 120mm mortar on the Seventh Army front opened up on them.

“The ensuing attempt to climb that hill proved to be the costliest effort made by CT-399 [Combat Team - 399th Infantry Regiment] in 168 days of fighting. To the terrible mortar fire, the Krauts added artillery and small arms. Within a few minutes, hundreds of artillery and mortar shells fell on the slope and the tiny wooded area on the top of the hill. One veteran of Anzio contended after the shelling was over that the enemy barrage exceeded anything he had experienced in Italy. Our men hadn't even time to dig in. Smoke was employed extensively, but the Jerries covered almost every foot of ground with superbly directed fire.

“Fighting to reach the dubious cover of the hill, the 3rd Battalion men paid a heavy price for those few hundred yards of ground. Within less than two hours, the 3rd Battalion lost 17 men killed and 101 wounded. By 1445 hours, however, the battalion had clawed its way to the comparative shelter of the woods on the crest to the hill, and prepared to continue the attack southward to the town of Beilstein.

“But the enemy had ideas of his own. At 1500, following a severe artillery preparation, the Jerries launched a counterattack to drive us from the hill, with 60 elite OCS men and an estimated 20 in reserve. Climbing the hill from the south along a trail which wound through terraced vineyards to the summit, the Jerries came

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on, seemingly oblivious to our fire. Our men used every weapon they had, even resorting to pistols. Finally, at 1600 hours, the enemy attack was broken, leaving the 3rd Battalion clinging to the top of the hill.

“...On the information of the patrol(s), Co. I moved into Beilstein at 0830 hours (20 April 1945)”

A few pertinent items regarding the attack are as follows: At the foot of the hill, there was a narrow stream that had to be crossed. In trying to leap across the stream, Mo Cardozo (Sgt. Stanley T. Cardozo) broke his ankle and could not continue up the hill with the company. I remembered that day when we were leaving the pier at 42nd Street in New York on 6 October 1944, and Mo said, “I don’t expect to come back. I think it is a one way trip for me.” Instead, he got his million dollar wound that day and exchanged his one way ticket for a round trip ticket.

Love Company received the heaviest shelling because it was exposed on the side of the hill after K and I Companies had already reached the summit. During the bombardment, 34 men were wounded and nine were killed, including S. Sgt. Nick Franzini, whose premonition came true. The others were Pfc. Robert P. Ahlborn, Sgt. Glenn D. Fischer, Sgt. James R. Hawkins, Sgt. Lewis D. Leslie and Pfc. John P. Stuart, all of whom were original members of the company and had survived almost six months of combat. There were also Pvt. Freeman E. Buzzell and Pvt. Bert Fields who joined us on 18 February 1945. Cpl. Andrew B. Yurko was a tall, heavy-set blond who had been with the company only since 6 April 1945 – less than two weeks.

Love Company had sustained the heaviest loss it had ever taken in a single day. One quarter of the company had been wounded or killed. Yet Love Company continued on the attack with the battalion. For its valor in this drive, the entire battalion received the Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation. Several months later, when I learned that my name had been included among those who were awarded the citation, I protested to my platoon lieutenant, but he said, “It’s alright. Don’t worry about it.”

Probably the outstanding soldier that day was Tech. 4 George Demopolis, the medic attached to our company. He received the Silver Star medal for his heroic attention to the wounded in spite of the terrible shelling.

From Beilstein, the company moved southward on the 3rd Battalion flank along the Neckar River, passing through many small towns, in trucks and on foot, taking prisoners and clearing out enemy pockets of re-

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sistance. We had to keep up the pressure on the last retreating German units.

Many years later, at a division reunion, I spoke with Jimmy Adair (Pfc. James A. Adair), who told me about his wound that day. He was lying prone when shrapnel tore off a large part of his buttocks. He spent months in hospitals as they treated him in the hope that he could walk again. The long healing process was painful and difficult. However, he was eventually well enough to get around. When I met him, he seemed to be quite normal, and he explained that he jogged every day to strengthen his legs. He felt that he was very lucky to have survived.

In 1994, Bill Young (Pfc. William H. Young, Jr.) led a 100th Infantry Division tour of France and Germany. The group visited Beilstein. Since he had been wounded there, Bill remembered it very well. However, time and nature had obscured any record of the hundreds of shells that fell that fateful day. Nevertheless, that day was commemorated in a macabre way. The group stopped at the cemetery at Beilstein and found headstones for men in their fifties and sixties and for boys in their teens who had died on 18 April 1945. They had been part of a Volksturm group and a military school that had fired on the 3rd Battalion that day. The return fire of our forces took their lives as well.

The Morning Report of 22 April 1945 states that Capt. Travis V. Hopkins was sent to a hospital on 11 April 1945, as follows:

"Dy to Clrg Sta 619th Med Bn (NBC GSW left thigh accidentally self-inflicted) Trfd to DOP 7th A per Sec 1 Clr 33 (1945) Hq ETOUSA as of 11 Apr 45 Dy: 1542."

(Dy 1542 = Duty MOS 1542 - Company Commander)

The Morning Report also mentioned Pfc. William N. Alexander, as follows:

"Dy to Clrg Sta 619th Med Bn (NBC GSW right foot third toe accidentally self-inflicted) Trfd to DOP 7th A per Sec 1 Clr 33 (1945) Hq ETOUSA as of 11 Apr 45 Dy: 675"

Two not-battle-connected, self-inflicted wounds on the same day was quite unusual. However, there was only one bullet involved. When Hoppy was cleaning his gun, he accidentally shot himself in the thigh. The same bullet went on to strike Alexander in the foot. Though the record says Alexander had an accidental self-inflicted wound, he never fired a shot.

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There were ten cases of not-battle-connected, self-inflicted gunshot wounds, accidental or otherwise, listed in the Morning Reports of Love Company during our time in combat. Five of those men returned to the company, including Capt. Hopkins. During his absence, from 12 April 1945, 2nd Lt. Roy D. Simmons was the company commander. He was our 1st Sergeant and had received a battlefield commission. He was reduced to Executive Officer when Capt. Hopkins returned on 9 May 1945. That period included the disastrous day at Beilstein. By then, the war had ended. Roy Simmons, who was with the company from the beginning to the end, was not only a good soldier, but also a very fine and respected leader.