

Dog Company, 399th

by Scott Tidswell, 399-D

Reading the accounts of the 100th Division's actions in your pages helps to revive a lot of memories. Mine are episodic and personal. If they mean nothing to the publication, they at least freshen my memories to record them. This is not Christopher Isherwood, who wrote, "I am a Camera."

A lighting strike in our platoon area at Fort Bragg stunned "Whitey" Holm. Homer Hall had an attack of abdominal pain during dress order drill at Bragg. I carried him to a Jeep. It turned out to be just gas. On New Year's Day 1945, when the Germans got behind our lines near Bitche, Homer was sent by jeep to pick up the company's .50-cal machine gun. Homer was never found. When still in New York harbor a big cook called "Tiny" lay moaning on the deck of our troop ship, seasick before it even left the dock. We experienced a violent storm when crossing the Atlantic. The wind blew so hard my vomit blew clear across the deck and over the other side.

After passing through the Strait of Gibraltar, things got smoother. I recall seeing the white buildings of Oran on the African Coast. Dolphins accompanied our ship. I saw a shark. We passed a free-floating mine. One of the ship's crew brought a rifle on deck and took shots at the mine. No telling what damage it might have done to the ship's plates if he had set it off. As we headed north toward the French coast, one of the first landmarks I saw was what at first appeared to be a mountainside cliff. It was Notre Dame de la Garde—a church atop a hill at Marseilles. Later when on liberty, two other men and I walked or doubletimed up the 280 some steps to the church. There was a dog rail, which we thankfully rode back down.

Having been off our feed during the rough voyage, we regained our appetites. We were bivouacked north of the city. I had heard that if a person should put a snail on hot coals until it came oozing out of it's shell, it would be cooked. I was game to try it. In his Letters Home book, Art Knight refers to the practice by "some character," that was me. Nick Cigrand—who became a priest—brought me a loaf of bread beneath his jacket.

As we moved north of Marseilles to enter combat, taking a periodic break during our march, some guys rested on a bridge over a dry wash. One of the men sat on the low rail and his backpack made him do a back flip into the dry wash. He was a funny guy and about the time Paris was liberated, he disappeared. He was a likeable scamp and was not listed as AWOL. One day a copy of Stars and Stripes showed up with him on the front page with other GIs hoisting a drink in celebration of Paris liberation. When it suited him, he caught up with our company.

As we moved north and closer to combat, we camped in tents. On November 11, 1944, I had a tent mate who got hit by dysentery. The night I was with him, he had to get out of the tent—quickly—at least seven times. The malady stayed with him nearly through the rest of the war, but he survived for a good life and successful career. He ultimately became president of the 100th Division Association, Sam Resnick.

Just before firing our first shots, we bivouacked in an area near the lines. We moved in at night with out mishap. The next morning as the men began to move around, they began to step on shu mines. A lieutenant stepped on a shu mine and shattered his foot. He laid back to wait for medical help and his elbow hit another mine. A jeep hit a teller mine while bringing a hot breakfast.

Our outfit, the 399th Infantry Regiment, moved into the Vosges Mountains in Alsace-Lorraine near the German border. It was cold and snowy. Occasionally the Army would provide hot showers, but often if we wanted to bathe we melted snow in our helmet over a bonfire for hot water.

My assignment was to serve as an observer for our 81mm mortar platoon in Company D. For extended periods I would be on a ridge overlooking a wide area, which included the university town of Bitche and some elements of the Maginot Line. I had a great view of a duel between a hydraulic pillbox and a U.S. tank. Neither took out the other. I later wrote a letter about what I saw, which was printed in part in Smithsonian magazine.

Around midnight, December 31, our artillery planned a New Years' salvo at the Germans. The Germans had plans of their own and poured through a gap in our lines. We awoke on New Years' Day 1945 with the Germans firing from behind us. I remember being in our mortar pit, cleaning my .45-cal. pistol with my toothbrush, bullets whistling overhead. We grabbed our mortar tubes and bipods and headed for the rear. I stuck a can of corned beef hash under my shirt. That was my New Years' meal while on retreat.

We strengthened our lines and didn't advance for weeks. The Battle of the Bulge was north of our position and the Colmar Pocket was to the south. We didn't get many replacements so for a while mortar men had to serve as riflemen. A German mortar barrage got SSgt Anthony Pasquale, who was killed, and SSgt Chuck Stone, who took a lot of shrapnel but who survived. I saw Pasquale's body being taken away on the hood of a jeep, his feet protruding from a blanket, gently bobbing while being driven away.

During our winter stalemate, we were stretched out along the front line. Our platoon was in an area near Reiensviller Farm. We faced a wooded area. Grant Clough, who later became a minister, and I shared a foxhole. Taking turns standing guard, we had six or eight grenades laid out at the edge of the foxhole. One night I saw three white figures approaching from our front. I grabbed a grenade and had some trouble pulling the pin. When I raised my arm to throw, the three men were standing over me. They had been rigging up tripwire flares ahead of our line. I couldn't get the pin back in the grenade so I threw it. That night, so help me, three of those flares went off in front of our foxhole. I threw the rest of the grenades. The next day I was moved to a one-man foxhole near platoon headquarters. There was a bloody helmet with a bullet hole through it.

On April 12, 1945, news came that F.D.R. had died. My uncle's second cousin had become President of the United States. We still had to take care of business.

As we advanced, the battalion got into an area where the Germans had planted "bouncing Betties," which are activated by a trip wire. They would pop up and explode shrapnel. It cost our troops about nine infantrymen. There were trip wires across a road. I got careless and nearly walked into one when a man from our outfit hollered from his foxhole for me to watch my step. I tore my handkerchief into strips and tied them onto the three wires.

On another occasion I was part of a small reconnaissance team that surveyed the approach of a German town. There was a dead German soldier down on his knees and shoulders with his head laid open like a melon. We decided that the best approach route would be through a low-lying wooded area.

Apparently the Germans believed we would think that way. I think it was the Third Battalion just back from guard duty in Paris, which advanced through the area and were badly shot up by mortars and artillery.

We got into a town, I think was Waldorf. The mayor was a strong Nazi and ran a local jewelry store. one of our lieutenants had lectured our platoon about looting and sending home unauthorized souvenirs. The lieutenant then proceeded to loot the jewelry store. The burgermeister notified commanding officers and got his merchandise back. The lieutenant was promptly transferred to graves registration.

Morris Schiechel made an unusual capture. We were in a small village and he was relieving himself next to a building. Around a corner came two German soldiers, walking their way home. Morris grabbed his rifle and "captured" the enemy with his pants down.

The Germans formally surrendered to Allied forces perhaps on May 7, 1945. Winston Churchill declared that the following day would be VE Day. On the 8th I was on a train heading for Paris and London on a two-week leave. That night the sky was filled with tracer bullets, in celebration.

While waiting to start shipping troops home, we had various activities. When I shipped overseas, I had packed French, German and Russian textbooks in my barracks bag.

I was asked to organize a company school. We had classes for languages, bookkeeping, auto repair, welding and other things.

Captain Ed Hailman, whom I admired greatly, asked me to write a history of Company D in Europe. We had it printed in Heidelberg. Trips around Europe became available and I had several great experiences.

When our company broke up I was assigned to a combat engineers outfit, near Heidelberg. The chance came to attend the London School of Economics and from England I sailed for home. No storm at sea this time.

At Camp Kilmer one of the soldiers won \$1400 in a crap game. He had to brag to someone and laid out his winnings on my bunk. Then he walked out, I had to catch him to give him his money.

From Kilmer it was to Fort Leavenworth and then on to home in Colorado. The rest is history. What did I do in World War II? If asked, I can reply as the Abbe' Sieyes, when asked what he did during the French Revolution—I survived!

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