

# Driving a Jeep Was Not Fun and Games

by Edward G. Wildanger, 397-HQ

I had some experiences, which might be of interest to our readers. As a driver of a Jeep I managed to cover a lot of ground, usually just behind the line.

When the Division went into the line, the Regimental Headquarters requested each battalion to supply a Jeep and a driver for the use of the Liaison Officers. This was a TDY assignment, which ultimately became permanent. I had been a part of Company H, Heavy Mortar Platoon, but was transferred to the Regiment HQ Company.

One incident took place at Mouterhaus. After the village had been cleared of the Krauts, Regimental HQ moved in and was set up in the local inn. I was Jeep driver for Lt. Essig the Second Battalion Liaison Officer. My Jeep was acting up and not running well. The motor pool had not set up in Mouterhaus so I had to figure out what was wrong and fix the problem. My buddy Bob Krudener helped and we solved the problem, so that it ran OK.

Meanwhile, the Germans were still up on the surrounding hills and would drop in mortar rounds and other shells from time to time. Well, things quieted down for a while, so Bob and I thought we should make certain that the Jeep was running satisfactorily by making a test run. We drove to the edge of the village, and all Hell broke loose. Rounds started dropping in the vicinity. We leaped from the Jeep and ran to a tank which was parked nearby and banged on it.

The tankers graciously opened up and invited us in. After some time things quieted down again so we thought we should make a run for it, so we left the tank, turned the Jeep and headed back to the HQ. Rounds started coming in again. This time the tank did not open up, so we crawled underneath it. The rounds kept coming closer and Bob and I were showered with dirt and gravel. At this point the tankers decided to leave so they started the engine and drove back into the village. We ran to the Jeep, started it and raced back into the village with rounds chasing us. We took refuge in a house. We finally made it back to the HQ after things quieted down again.

The HQ was in an inn that was named the "Gashauss zum Phlug." We remained there for two or three days, during which most of the roof tiles were blown off, but the building itself was relatively undamaged.

My wife and I visited Mouterhaus in the 1990's and found the inn is still there, but had been made into a vacation resort for elderly people. While looking the place over a man asked if he could be of help. I explained that I had been there as a soldier in 1944 and had been a "guest" at the inn. He became very excited and invited us in and introduced us to the people there. He had been in Mouterhaus during the battle and remembered it well.

He gave us the Grand Tour and then invited us to have a couple of drinks for old time's sake. All in all, this visit was much more pleasant than the previous one!!!

The article by Rufus Dalton, in the Holiday issue of the Newsletter, stated that his friend Keith Hadley, was perhaps the last man to leave Rimling. This brought another incident to mind.

According to the "Story of the Century:" "The withdrawal from Rimling began just after dark. It was managed so well that, about 20 minutes after the last unit had left town, the Germans launched a major Tank-Infantry attack to take Rimling, unaware that it was already empty." I think that perhaps Lt. Essig and I were the last out.

With respect to Rimling, I drove the Lt. there the night of 9 January 1944. We were to locate and visit the 2nd Battalion CP. While we were going into Rimling, we saw a lot of troops on either side of the road who were leaving Rimling. They let us know we were not welcome and yelled, "Get that damned Jeep out of here!" As we drove into the village, many local civilians were out in the street in great anguish and confusion. They told us that all the Americans had pulled out and that the Germans were coming back into town now. We heard the German troops and the sound of vehicles coming into the other side of the village. Well, we made a "u" turn and beat it out of there as fast as we could. That, to the best of my knowledge, is the way it happened, so I think we were the last ones out.

Vehicles had a tendency to draw fire, so we were not very popular, but we had to go where the command posts were. As I mentioned, each battalion had provided a Jeep and driver: three from the three Infantry Battalions, and one from each Artillery Battalion, a total of five. Of the five of us, three received Purple Hearts, from injuries caused by land mines and strafings. Two of us were fortunate and came through

unscathed. However, my Jeep had numerous holes in it from shrapnel. Most were a result of the dive bombing at Bining on December 30th.

December 30th was a beautiful day and the Colonel and staff were all outside the CP getting a breath of fresh air and sunshine—and watching two planes dive bomb Petit Rederching . . . I was outside with the group, and happened to look up, and saw two planes dive bombing us. I saw the bombs peel off and yelled. We all made a dash for cover, just as the bombs hit. One of the bombs hit a shed which housed a 6x6 loaded with ammo and high explosives, plus a couple of Jeeps—mine included. The shed was also burning.

We all ran over and started to pull off burning timbers and managed to get the vehicles out safely. My Jeep was damaged but driveable, so we went to an Ordnance unit's junk yard and managed to get enough parts to repair my Jeep. The bombs killed three men and wounded eight others. The CP was not hit, but the four bombs landed around the CP and missed by about 75 feet. So as you can tell, driving a Jeep wasn't fun and games, but it was exciting.

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