"EASY" MEMORIES: THE WAY IT WAS

by Harry S. Arnold

This book by Harry Arnold was never published, but it should have been as it tells the day by day trials and troubles of an infantry soldier; cold, hungry and scared. A soldier that is aware that each day may be his last but goes on and performs his duty not only out of patriotism but out of loyalty to his fellow soldiers.

Out of fifteen million that served in some capacity during World War II less than 5% ever saw the enemy. Harry saw the enemy up close and lived to tell about it.

Harry was a member of E. Company 393 Regiment 99th Division. His battalion was commanded by Lt. Col. E. C. Peters. It consisted of E. Co., F. Co., and G. & H. Co.; almost 1,000 men including battalion headquarters.

I corresponded with Harry by letter and phone before this book was completed. I was amazed by his recall and accused him of keeping a diary. He denied this but later told me he did write notes and put in his head liner. Also, that he wrote most of this soon after the war when it still was fresh. This is a great book. No one has ever written a better one about combat.

Sponsoring this book is the final project of the 99th Division Association.

This association was formed in 1950 by former members of the 99th Infantry Divison of World War II.

The membership was small at first but by 1980 it had grown to 4,000 members and attendance at reunions near 1200. This association has sponsored many projects such as monuments, books, films, collections of memorabilia and organizing a missing in action team (with great success). It's been a great association but age has finally caught up with us.

J. R. McIlroy

The past only exists insofar as it is recorded in the present.

John Wheeler, Physicist

This account is dedicated to those men who served in Co E, 393 Inf in WW 11. They endured and prevailed, often in appalling and near insurmountable conditions, bound by an honor not always equalled by their enemy.

For J. R. McElroy,
Co F, 393 Inf.
this may bring back a lot of
memories for you in F Company -
we fought alongside each other many times.
Harry S. Arnold

... all wars are bullshit. The smart ones lay back and get rich while the peasants go out and get creamed.

Jim Bowers

We learn to accept the unacceptable by making it familiar.

Author unknown.

Introduction

This account aspires to be nothing more than it is -- a personal remembrance of the actions and men of Easy Company, 393 Inf in WW 11, along with whatever memories and thoughts others so kindly agreed to contribute. Its scope is limited in that it reflects, for the most, a single viewpoint. I wish it could reflect the memories and viewpoints of each man who served in the company. Alas, I was only able to obtain such from a very few. Most of those who did contribute, understandably, were men from my own platoon. There is no intent to exclude others. Wherever memory and knowledge permits, those platoons and men are included. As a lowly rifleman concerned mainly with my own square yard of misery I find it impossible to describe the next square yard -- call it tunnel vision, myopia, or the worm's eye view. Any mistakes of identification, place, time, etc., and there may well be, are unintended.

The election to write the account in the first person is, I think, dictated by the fact that most of the information is from personal memory. I readily conceed, however, that ego may have unconsciously influenced the decision, though I can't imagine this account filling more than a few pages otherwise. Nor have I ever agreed with the academic community that suppression of the use of the first person in narrative is desirable. If such use shows ego, it also shows acceptance of responsibility for what is written.

I have little competence as a writer, though I would wish otherwise -- spelling, punctuation, construction, etc. is crude, and the typing worse.

No attempt was made to seek publication. ~~xxx xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Who, other than a few E Company survivors, would be interested? This is written, therefore, with that limited audience in mind. Since so few are likely to have an interest, it seemed sensible to have only a few copies made from the original. Should other copies be desired, those so desiring may have further copies made from those existing, so long as no commercial purpose is intended or obtained.* I, in fact, urge former members of the company to insert their own memories, notes, etc. within these pages, making each copy truly personal.

Once the decision was made to write the account, it was necessary to put aside many other projects until this was completed. Contacting survivors, searching through records and notes, scouring my memory, writing it all down and, finally, typing it in final form, all consumed the better part of a

* This applies exclusively to former E/393 members who allow personal copies to be made for other former E/393 members.

year. Any personal gain comes from memories long buried and recently dug up, and renewing contact with old comrades. Reaffirming that past has been fruitful, pleasurable, and priceless. It has also been saddening, frightening, angering...

In writing this, thinking deeply at some points about how I wanted to say this or tell that, the emotional response to thoughts sometimes caused tears to blur my vision. Farris Block's words about Jan 30 did it. Trying to describe Cpl Frank Fogg's reverence for our wounded (he was wounded, too) in the woods at Ginsterhahn, and his consideration of my feeling about Underwood's death -- that did it. The episode with Underwood and Floric in the woods near Born did it. Jim Bowers' words in a letter, "I remember you standing erect at the attack on the Krinkelter Wald and firing like mad at the woods from where we were receiving fire. That was heroic in my book. Most men were down in the snow." That did it. Those words almost made it all worthwhile. Jim was kind -- I was a very scared boy, so scared at times that I wondered that my consciousness could contain so much fear and terror.

Rarely does this account acknowledge home towns and states of individuals. Nor is information included concerning what individuals have been doing since the war. Those things are largely irrelevant to what is written here.

Throughout this account are scattered observations and opinions relevant to the material covered, which many may find extraneous. I hope I have kept such in context.

This is not about heroics, though there was much of that. Indeed, we all had our favorite heroes -- those who commanded our respect through their courage. Each of us saw and witnessed acts of extraordinary courage time and time again. But no one can convince me that those who performed such acts thought of themselves as heroic, and that applies to Farris Block, Cpl Frank Fogg, Sgt Hugh Underwood, Lt Eddy Orlando, Sgt Jim Bowers Whiting, Frank Dekker, Herman Allman, Sgt Hulda, Lt Donald Ross Sgt Lyell Thompson, Sgt Andy Bosetti, Raymond Hand, Sgt Donald Glisch, Red Magee, Richard Carey, Lt Eddy Mann, Capt Miller, Sgt Harbeck (later Lt), Elliot Glass, Ottis Williams, One Man Squad, Darrel Anderson, Sgt "Swede" Swanson, and so many many more... Courage is still not a very well understood property. Put in its most basic terms, it may well be little more than an ability to think and function effectively despite immediate danger of personal destruction or the threat of same to ones fellows. Nor was courage always a constant -- it sometimes varied in an individual from day to day, action to action. I have seen men exhibit towering courage one day and become ill with fear the next, then rebound fully the day following. Many heroic acts were dictated by circumstances in which the participants could not logically have performed otherwise. Acts of courage sometimes have to be catagorized and qualified -- there are, for instance, intelligent heroics and stupid heroic The one is admirable, the other tragic. Most of us who knew him would agree that for constancy of courageous acts Farris Block took the cake. The man was incredible.

Reference for corroboration of actions, places, dates, etc

wherever possible and needed was provided by Gen Walter E. Lauer's history of the 99th Div, "Battle Babies", the short pictorial history of the 393 Inf Regt, "393d Inf in Review", and two short personal histories of E Co provided by Jim Bowers and Farris Block, circa 1945.

I thank those individuals who answered my letter in the "Checkerboard" before this project got under way -- Andy Bosetti, Ottis Williams, and Albert Aguzzi. Ottis provided needed information about the opening of the Ginsterhahn fight, and corroborated memory of an incident near Born. Andy threw considerable light on the action east of Kurtscheid which was crucial to better understanding of that battle, and confirmed my memory of 1st Plt being on our (2nd Plt) left when the tanks drove a wedge in the company. Further, his information causes me to believe that Red Magee, before dying, launched the rocket that failed to explode against the turret of the lead panzer.

Farris Block took time out from a busy schedule (had to move some furniture, I guess) to provide notes on several engagements, which offered new slants and different viewpoints. He claims he didn't have time to type his notes up, so he sent them on to me. But I know the real reason -- he couldn't decipher his handwriting. As luck would have it, his hand was so similar to mine that I was able to unwind it all in only a couple of weeks. I couldn't help but notice that he is pretty adept at understating his own role in the events. So, except for material attributed directly to him, I wrote it the way I remember it. Farris was the first to put the seeds in my head to write the account, way back in the late forties when he was writing his "Company E Newsletter". I thought then, and I still think now, that he was the obvious choice to write the story of E Company. I don't know why I keep calling him Farris -- everybody back then called him "Fearless". Remember? So, I thank Fearless for his interest, encouragement, and information.

And now I come to Jim Bowers, that venerable old (why did I think of him as old?) Plt Sgt who was forced by circumstances to shoulder so much in so little time under such trying conditions. Necessity made him "Jack of all trades" -- Plt Sgt and Plt Leader combined, nursemaid and mother hen to everchanging faces in a battle worn platoon of infantry. Looking back, I have to say that he did it with competence and grace. Tough when he had to be, one of the guys when he needed to be, it was his job to take an organized mob with rifles and make them perform soldierly feats. Always resistant to authority, and he represented authority, I was overly critical of him -- a sort of "not being able to see the forest for the trees" type of thing. Now I can separate the two -- I was unjustly critical of the man, but I shall always be resistant to authority. It is my heritage.

Soon after re-establishing contact with Jim several years ago by letter, he, too, broached the subject of a history of the company, suggesting that Farris and me combine efforts in that direction -- but I can't do committee work. Considering the subject, I knew I hadn't information suitable for a history.

But I did have my personal notes from just after the war, and a vivid memory of events that directly affected me. I decided to have a go at it from that standpoint, along with whatever I could induce the other men to contribute. Jim made the project fly, providing encouragement, interest, and information -- all necessary to the effort. As with Block, I got different viewpoints and memories -- for instance, the Bn OP in front of Elsenborn -- Jim has a considerably different memory of that night. In that case, as with most others, I used my memory, it being more familiar to me, and because he acknowledged having pulled that duty only once, as did I -- and I know he was the leader the night I was out there. But again, these differences of memory and viewpoint do not appreciably change the whole, so the basic integrity of the account is not compromised The Ginsterhahn coverage relies heavily on Jim's contribution, and the Bavarian drive to the Austrian border depends entirely on him.

So this account is greatly indebted to Jim Bowers, and I thank him. More important and enjoyable to me individually, however, is the continuing exchange of opinions, memories, comments, and observations between us in letters. Jim is acutely aware of, and justifiably proud of his role in the success of E Company in combat in 1944-45. He recently told me that he saved my letters for his grandchildren. I consider that a warm gesture and high honor. At risk of being considered a user of abrupt language (I have never divested myself of the forceful terminology of combat soldiers), Jim's grandchildren should know this, and I paraphrase a Patton quote, Jim didn't spend the war shoveling shit in Louisiana -- he was there, where good men were needed.

As for the rest of you Doggies, I fall back on a little story that came out of the war. Eisenhower, while inspecting a bunch of Paratroopers, inquired of one little fellow if he liked to jump. "Nossir," came the reply. "But I like to be around guys that do!" Well, I liked being around a bunch of Dogfaces -- and you guys were as good as any.

It is tempting to label this as being about Co E, but that is misleading. "Co E" is a designation of differentiation, a necessary convenience. This is about those men who served unde that label. I make the distinction only to emphasize the importance of men as opposed to the sterile concept of unit desi nation.

In depth description of violence, pain, death, etc. is avoi ed except as necessary -- those who marched and fought their w from Belgium to Austria saw enough of that to last a lifetime.

Though this is not a history in the accepted sense, it is a honest attempt to recount what is inferred in the title, the w it was. If I have told it the way it was, subject to the conditions and limitations inherent in the task, then I have achi ed my hope -- and the purpose of this effort will be served if the men of Easy, as they read, are encouraged to trace in their minds their own special memories.

Rt 1, Box 745
Roper, N.C. 27970
March, 1985
Harry S. Arnold

AWARD OF SILVER STAR MEDAL:

Staff Sergeant Farris F. Block, 38417766, 393d Infantry, United States Army, for gallantry in action against the enemy on March 25, 1945, in Germany. In an advance, Staff Sergeant Block's company was cut into three elements by the enemy. Disregarding personal safety and amid a hail of sniper fire, he crawled about until he found part of the company. This group he quickly organized into a fighting team and attacked the enemy from the rear. Disposing of this threat, Staff Sergeant Block was able to join forces with another part of his company and under his direction and leadership, the combined force was able to contact the remainder of the surrounded men. This gallant act and superior leadership displayed by Staff Sergeant Block reflects great credit upon himself and the military service.

AWARD - POSTHUMOUSLY - OF SILVER STAR MEDAL

Technical Sergeant Walter J. Holda, 36368054, 393d Infantry United States Army, for gallantry in action against the enemy on 15 April 1945, in Germany. As his company approached an enemy town, it was met with intense fire from machine guns, flak guns, and small arms. With disregard for personal safety, Technical Sergeant Holda crept forward to an advantageous position from where he directed an effective barrage of mortar fire on the enemy positions. Not satisfied with the firing position of one of his machine guns, he brought the gun to his position and poured an effective fire on the enemy while he directed the mortar fire. As a result of this heroic act on the part of Technical Sergeant Holda, he completely disorganized the enemy and inflicted many casualties upon them and destroyed much of their equipment.

The actions described above were probably east of Kurtsche: and at Hegenscheid, respectively. Holda died later in action the Danube in an equally heroic act.

H.S.A.

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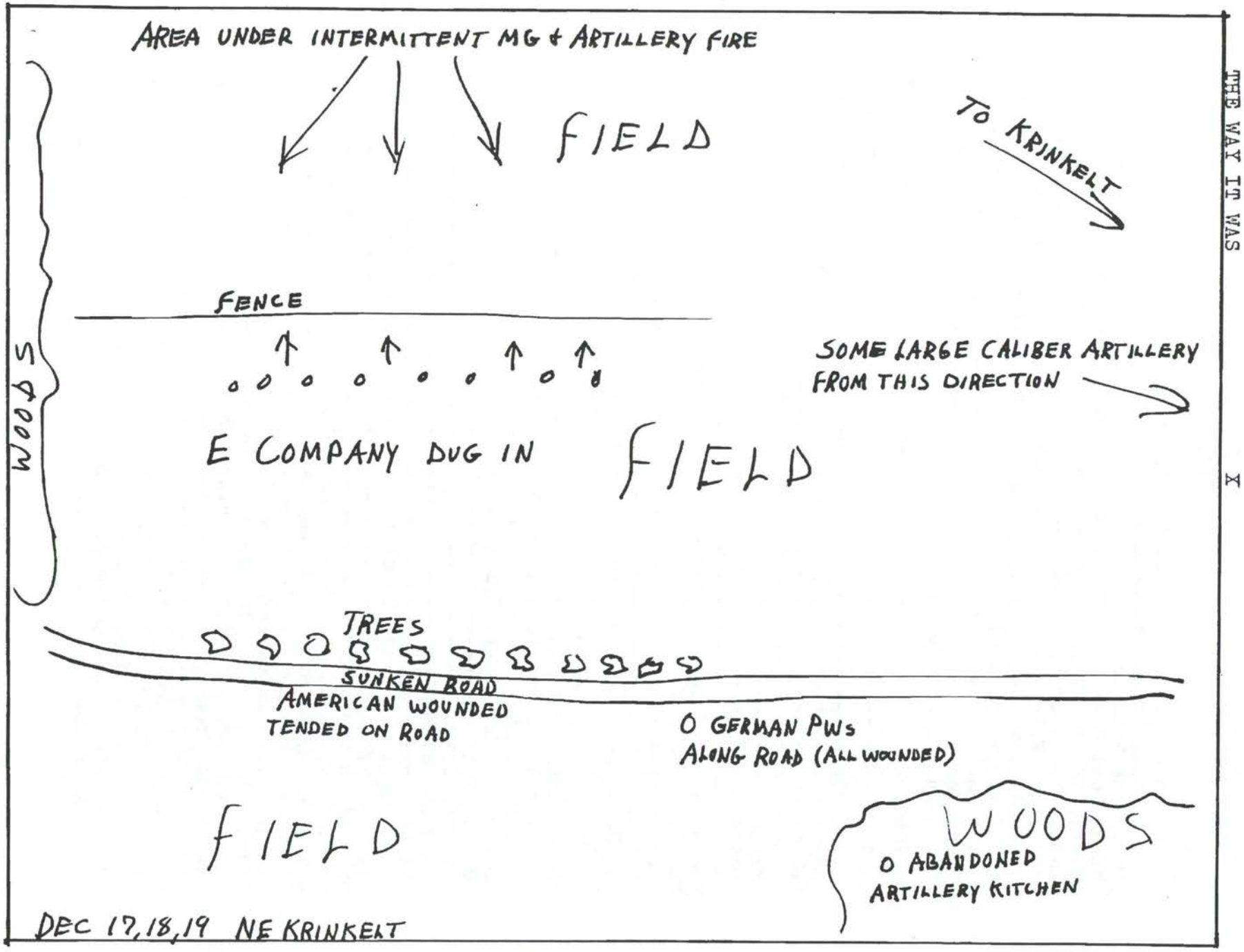
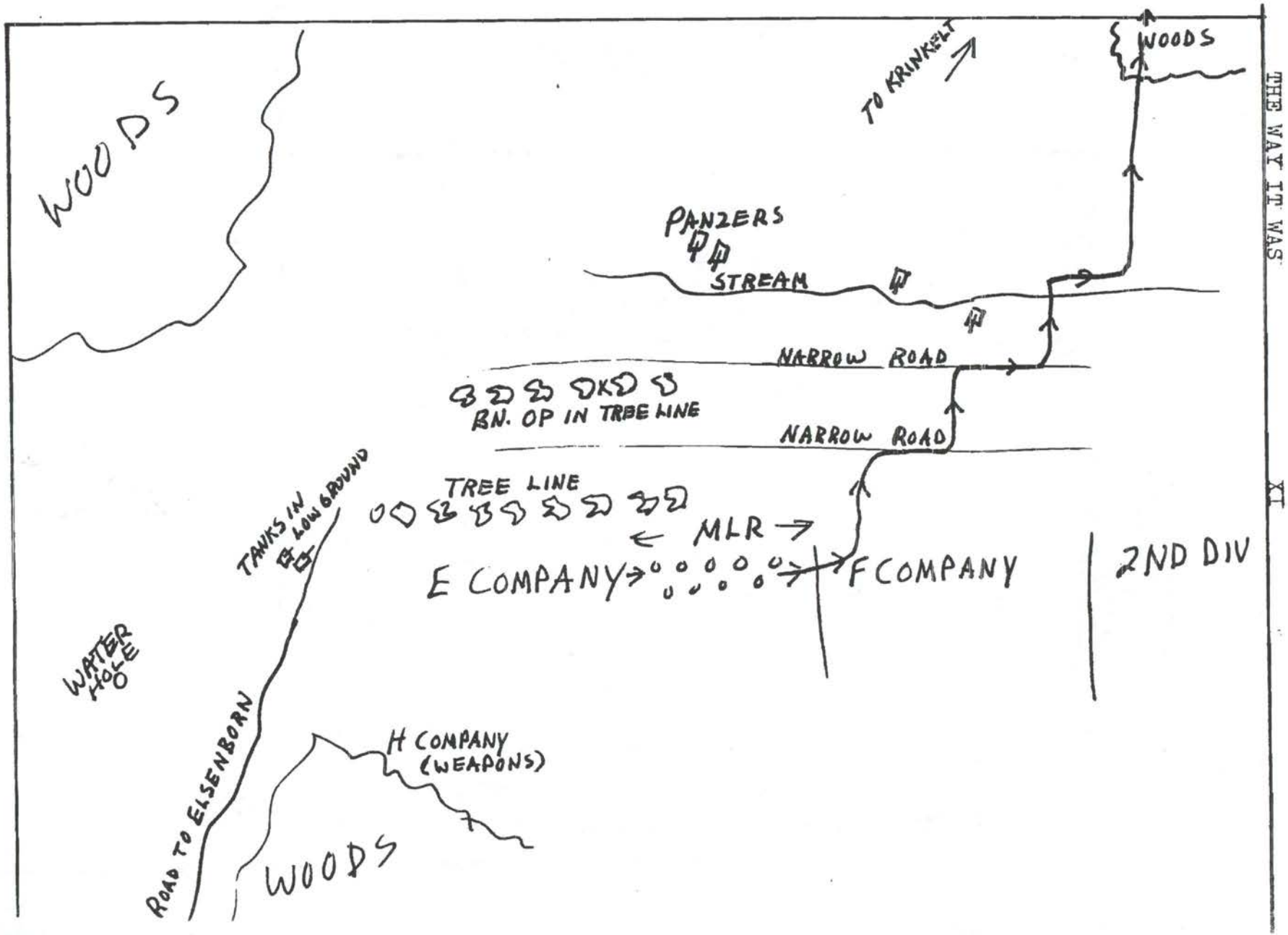
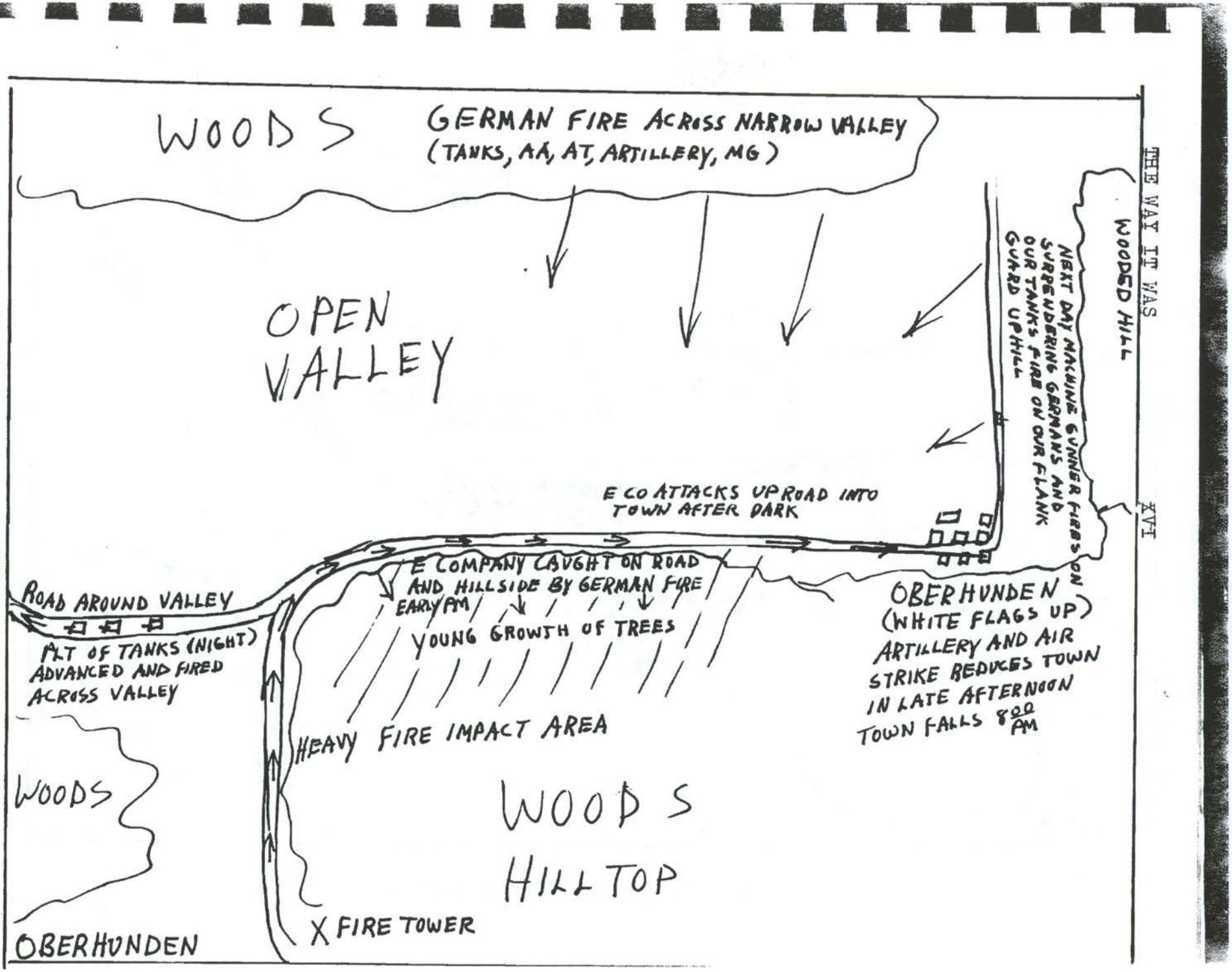
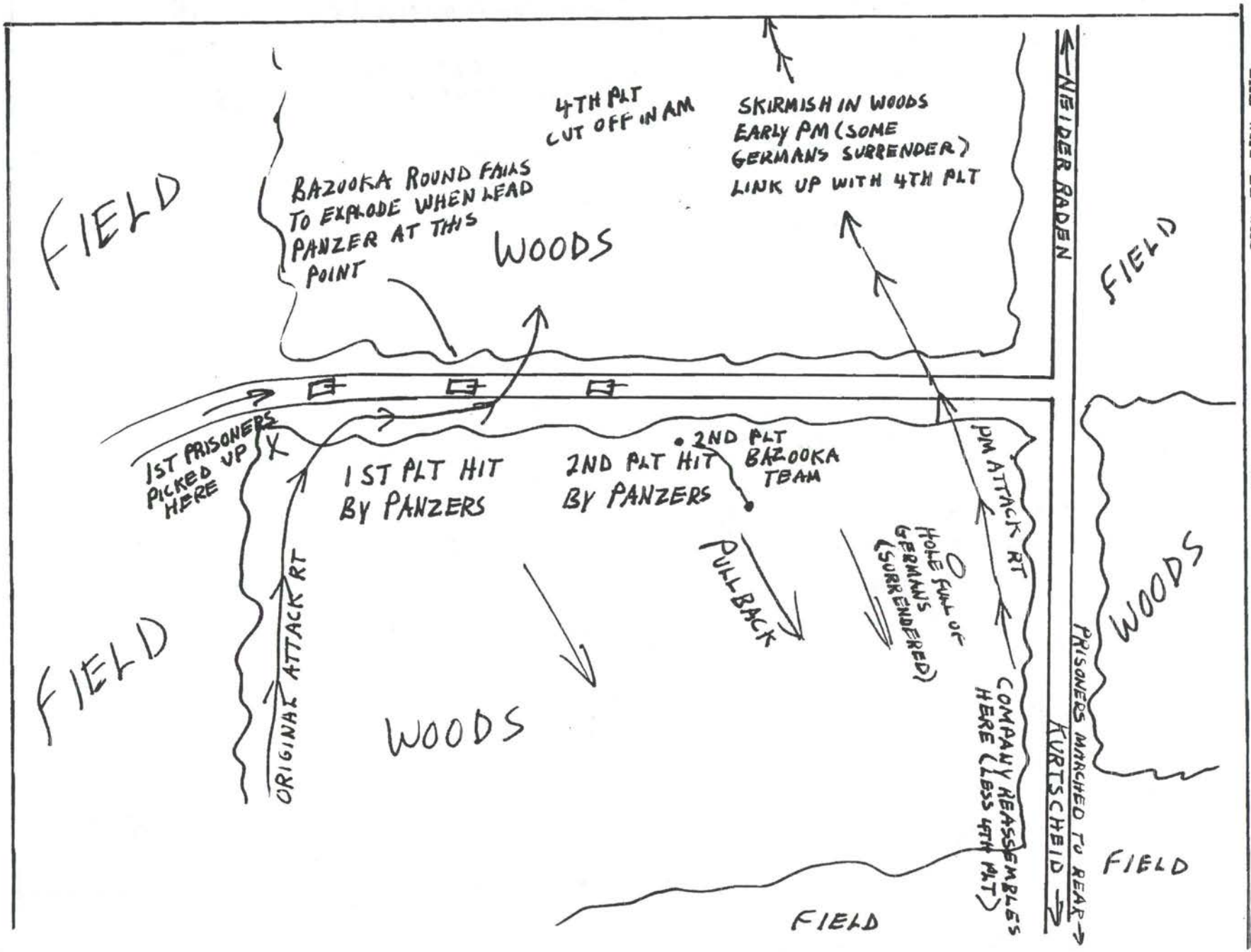


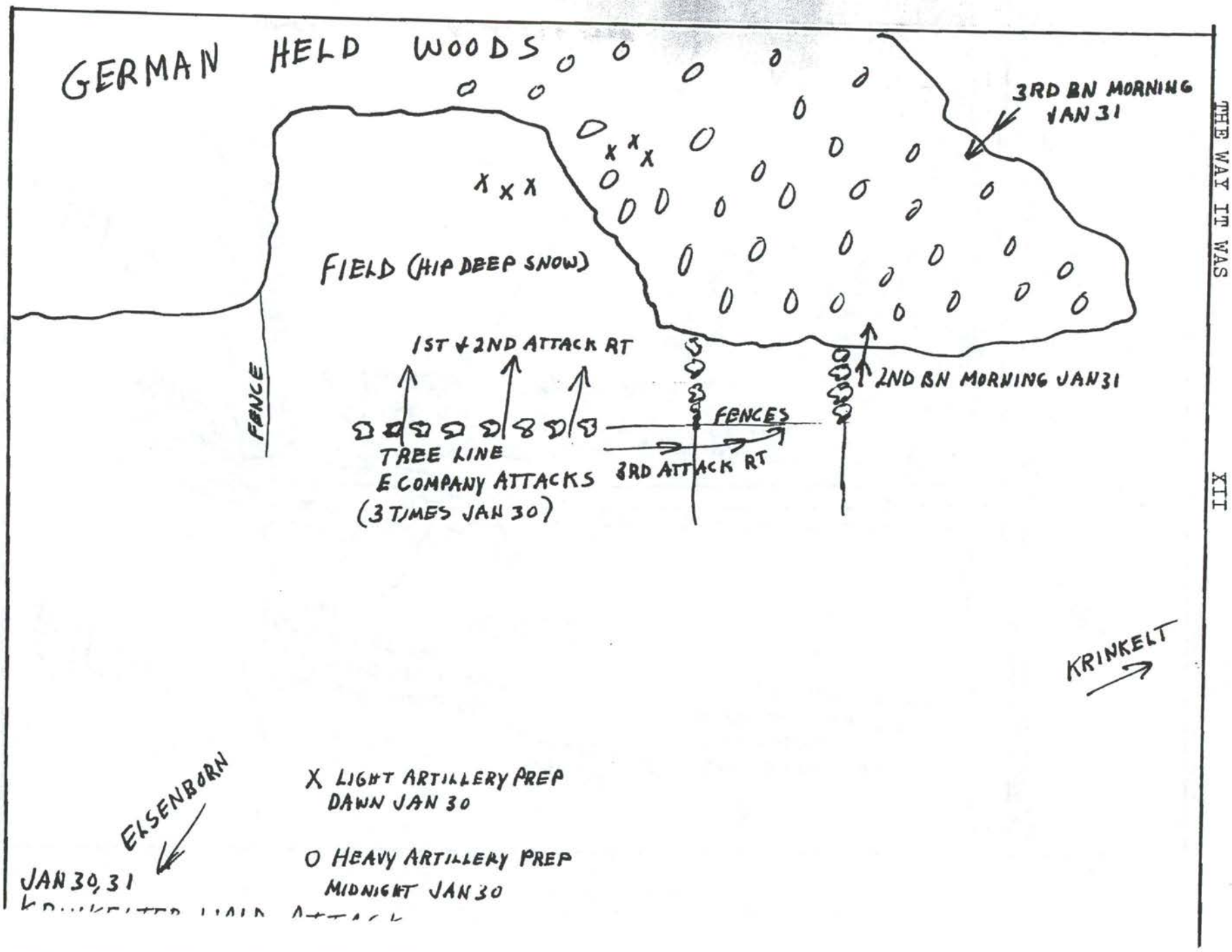
THE WAY IT WAS

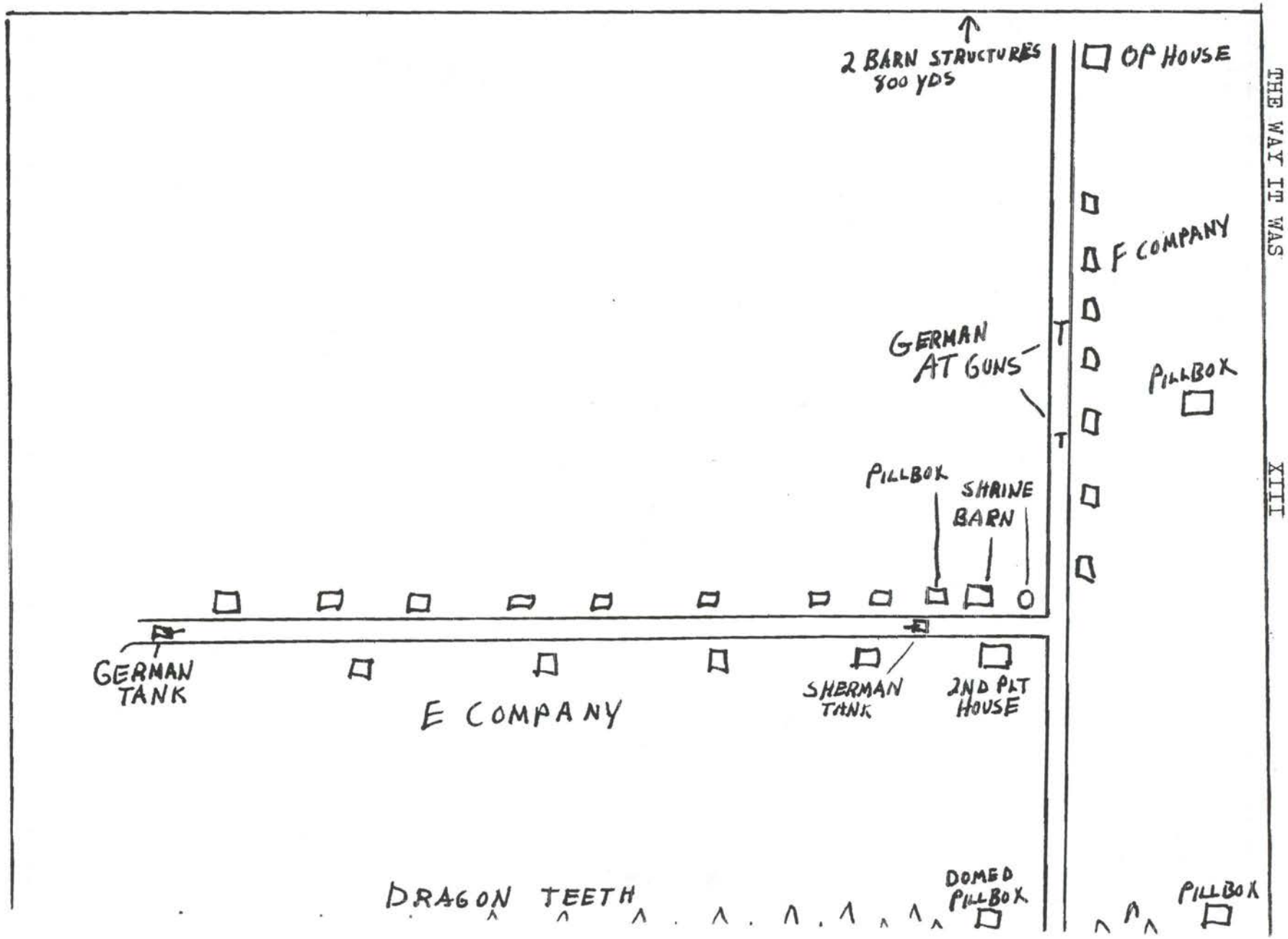
X

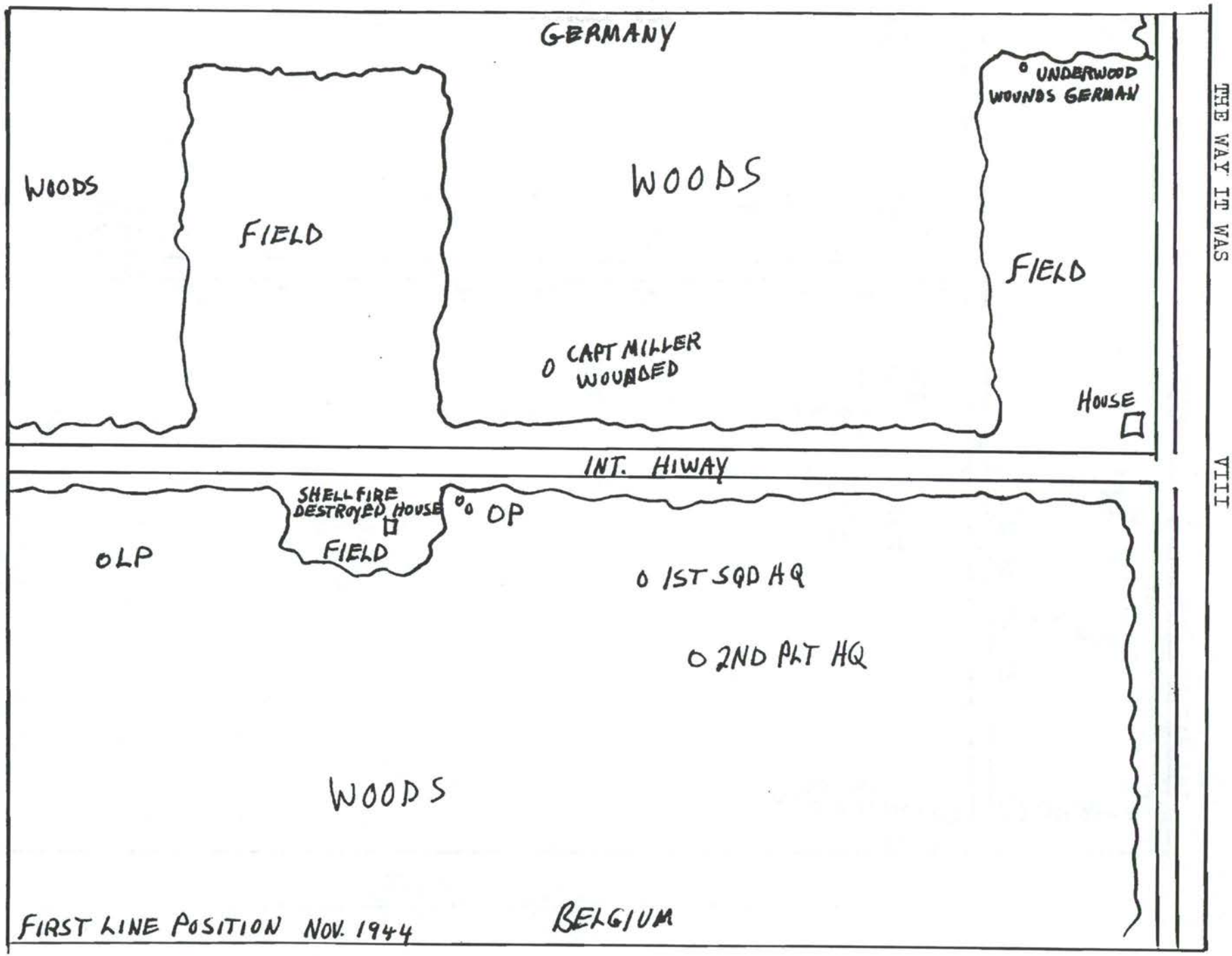

WOODS
TO KRINKELT
WOODS
PANZERS
STREAM
NARROW ROAD
BN. OP IN TREE LINE
NARROW ROAD
TREE LINE
TANKS IN LOW GROUND
MLR
E COMPANY
F COMPANY
2ND DIV
WATER HOLE
ROAD TO ELSENBORN
H COMPANY (WEAPONS)
WOODS
THE WAY IT WAS
XI

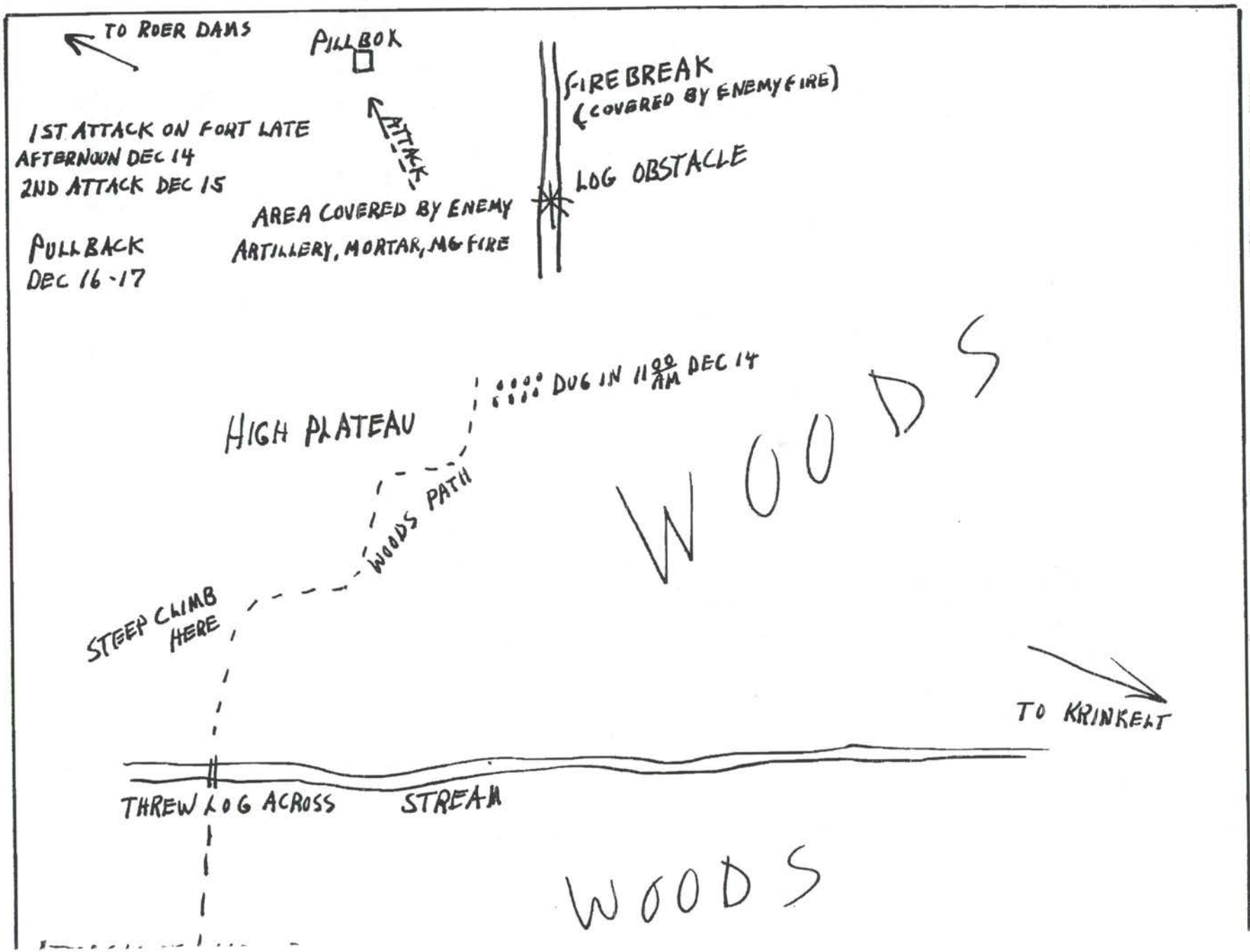

WOODS
GERMAN FIRE ACROSS NARROW VALLEY
(TANKS, AA, AT, ARTILLERY, MG)
OPEN
VALLEY
THE WAY IT WAS
WOODED HILL
NEXT DAY MACHINE GUNNER FIRES ON
SURRENDERING GERMANS AND
OUR TANKS FIRE ON OUR FLANK
GUARD UP HILL
XVI
E CO ATTACKS UP ROAD INTO
TOWN AFTER DARK
E COMPANY CAUGHT ON ROAD
AND HILLSIDE BY GERMAN FIRE
EARLY PM
YOUNG GROWTH OF TREES
ROAD AROUND VALLEY
PLT OF TANKS (NIGHT)
ADVANCED AND FIRED
ACROSS VALLEY
OBERHUNDEN
(WHITE FLAGS UP)
ARTILLERY AND AIR
STRIKE REDUCES TOWN
IN LATE AFTERNOON
TOWN FALLS 800 PM
HEAVY FIRE IMPACT AREA
WOODS
WOODS
HILLTOP
X FIRE TOWER
OBERHUNDEN

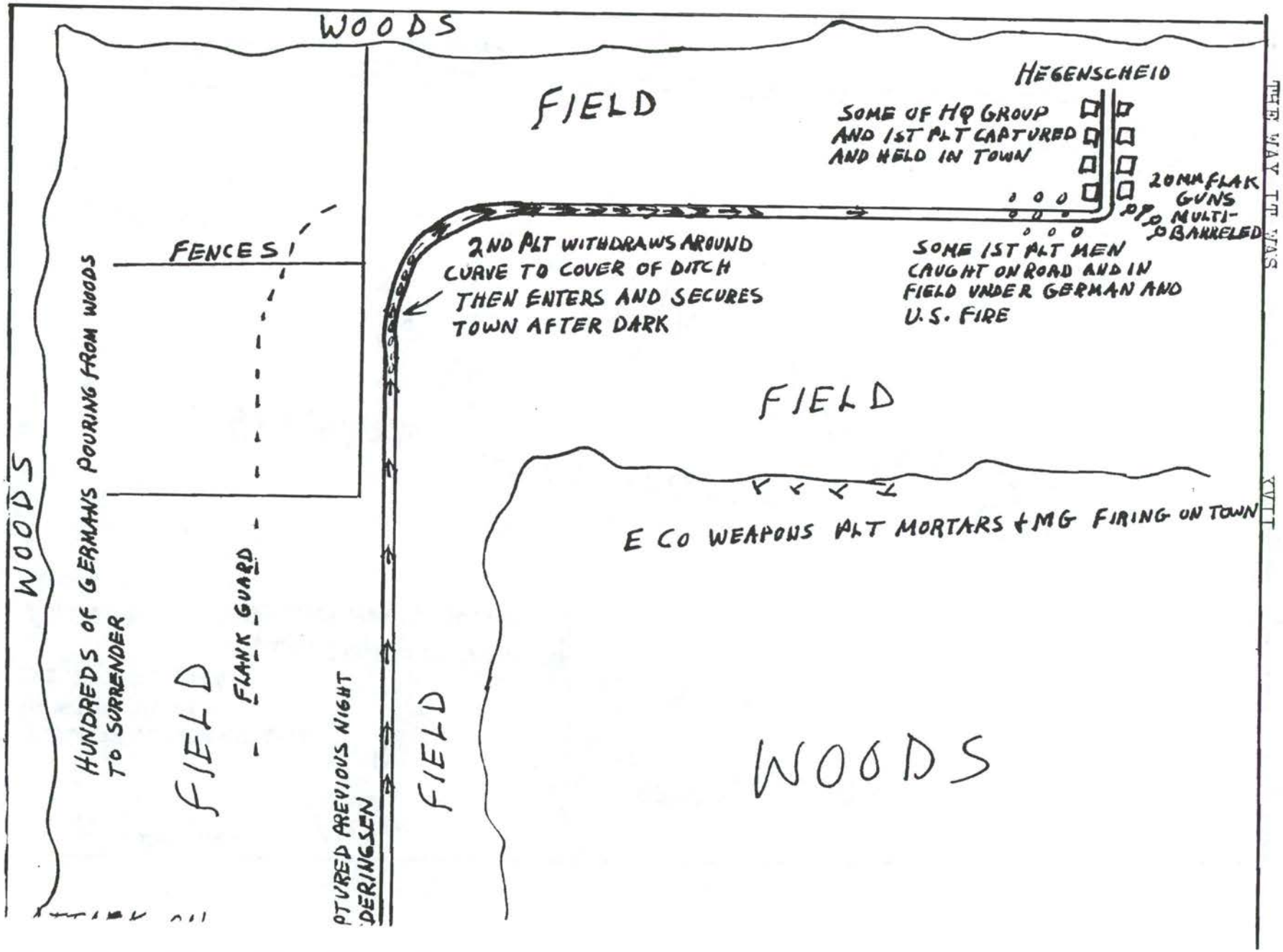

FIELD
BAZOOKA ROUND FAILS TO EXPLODE WHEN LEAD PANZER AT THIS POINT
4TH PLT CUT OFF IN AM
SKIRMISH IN WOODS EARLY PM (SOME GERMANS SURRENDER) LINK UP WITH 4TH PLT
WOODS
NEIDER RADEN
FIELD
1ST PRISONERS PICKED UP HERE
1ST PLT HIT BY PANZERS
2ND PLT HIT BY PANZERS
2ND PLT BAZOOKA TEAM
PM ATTACK RT
PULLBACK
HOLE FULL OF GERMANS (SURRENDERED)
COMPANY REASSEMBLES HERE (LESS 4TH PLT)
PRISONERS MARCHED TO REAR
KURTSCHEID
WOODS
FIELD
ORIGINAL ATTACK RT
FIELD
WOODS
FIELD


GERMAN HELD WOODS
3RD BN MORNING JAN 31
FIELD (HIP DEEP SNOW)
1ST & 2ND ATTACK RT
FENCE
2ND BN MORNING JAN 31
FENCES
TREE LINE
E COMPANY ATTACKS
(3 TIMES JAN 30)
3RD ATTACK RT
KRINKELT
EISENBORN
JAN 30, 31
X LIGHT ARTILLERY PREP
DAWN JAN 30
O HEAVY ARTILLERY PREP
MIDNIGHT JAN 30
THE WAY IT WAS
XII


2 BARN STRUCTURES
800 YDS
OP HOUSE
F COMPANY
GERMAN
AT GUNS
PILLBOX
PILLBOX
SHRINE
BARN
GERMAN
TANK
E COMPANY
SHERMAN
TANK
2ND PLT
HOUSE
DRAGON TEETH
DOMED
PILLBOX
PILLBOX
THE WAY IT WAS
XIII


GERMANY
WOODS
FIELD
WOODS
UNDERWOOD WOUNDS GERMAN
FIELD
CAPT MILLER WOUNDED
HOUSE
INT. HIWAY
SHELLFIRE DESTROYED HOUSE
OP
FIELD
LP
1ST SQD HQ
2ND PLT HQ
WOODS
FIRST LINE POSITION NOV. 1944
BELGIUM
THE WAY IT WAS
VIII A


TO ROER DAMS
PILLBOX
FIREBREAK
(COVERED BY ENEMY FIRE)
1ST ATTACK ON FORT LATE
AFTERNOON DEC 14
2ND ATTACK DEC 15
ATTACK
LOG OBSTACLE
AREA COVERED BY ENEMY
ARTILLERY, MORTAR, MG FIRE
PULL BACK
DEC 16-17
DUG IN 1100 AM DEC 14
HIGH PLATEAU
WOODS
WOODS PATH
STEEP CLIMB HERE
TO KRINKELT
THREW LOG ACROSS STREAM
WOODS


WOODS
FIELD
HEGENSCHEID
SOME OF HQ GROUP AND 1ST PLT CAPTURED AND HELD IN TOWN
20MM FLAK GUNS MULTI-BARRELED
FENCES
2ND PLT WITHDRAWS AROUND CURVE TO COVER OF DITCH THEN ENTERS AND SECURES TOWN AFTER DARK
SOME 1ST PLT MEN CAUGHT ON ROAD AND IN FIELD UNDER GERMAN AND U.S. FIRE
FIELD
E CO WEAPONS PLT MORTARS & MG FIRING ON TOWN
WOODS
HUNDREDS OF GERMANS POURING FROM WOODS TO SURRENDER
FIELD
FLANK GUARD
FIELD
WOODS

All the men have already gone to war.

Capt. Schwartz, CO, B Company, I&R training, Camp Blanding, Fla.

Camp Maxey, Texas: Full House

My first contact with E Company took place a few weeks before the outfit shipped out from Maxey. I had recently completed I&R training at Blanding, and had orders to report to 99 Division after a few days delay in route. Several of my I&R buddies were issued the same orders. I utilized my time off to the fullest, reporting in at Maxey at the last minute. To my dismay, I learned that all I&R units were full as of yesterday -- late arrivals were unwanted. Ah, but there were still a few openings in the rifle companies. I was sent to E. Batson, another late arrival, was sent to F. 2nd Battalion of 393rd Regiment was looking to fill its ranks.

I presented myself and my records forthwith to Sgt. Harbeck. He scanned my records quickly, stopped suddenly, and did an eyebrow lift and mustache twitch.

"You are I&R -- why did you come here?"

"I&R is filled to T.O., so they sent me here."

"Well, you'll just have to go back." He handed me the envelope of records, but seemed undecided. "You had weapons training -- M-1 Garand, M-1 Carbine?"

"Yes."

"Obstacle Course?"

"Yes."

"Infiltration Course?"

"Yes."

"Maybe we can use you." He was looking through my records again. "Town Fighting Course?"

"No."

He looked up at me standing before him. "Sure you have!"

"No."

Back to the records he went. "You have had the course!"

"No!"

His face was a scowl, moisture beaded at his hairline. It was a warm day. "Arnold, if you haven't had it you'll have to take it -- and this company has had it. You've had it!" He gave a little grin -- just the two of us, you know.

"I have not had Town Fighting," I insisted. It might be the difference between life and death later on.

"We will see," he said firmly. He assigned me to 1st Squad, 2nd Platoon, and showed me the barracks. He sighed and raised his eyes to the ceiling as I went out. I thought I had heard the last of my training omission.

I settled into the training routine in the squad and platoon without incident, met the men, and began to form relationships

and impressions. Plt. Sgt. Key ser, with his crewcut blond hair sticking straight up and his little eyes, was a huge possum. Whiting was a short, stocky bulldog. Sgt. Digialli 1st squad leader, was an amiable joker. Blake, the platoon clown, insisted he remembered me as a sergeant from other da I thereafter had the honorary title of Sgt. whenever he addr ed me.

The following week we marched out and fought our way thro the mock village, culminating our attack with an assault on town hall at the end of the street. Thus the outfit paid fo my training omission. Harbeck had seen to his duty.

In the squad combat formation I was assigned #8 rifle, ju behind #7 rifleman, Alfred Gernsbacher, on the right flank. As we moved through the town I somehow got ahead of him, wit the result that his M-1 was firing live ammunition a little close by my right ear. Gernsbacher was a small, frail boy w when viewed from the rear on marches, looked like a full fie pack with a helmet set atop, with a pair of GI shoes complet with leggins beneath. On the long, tiring training marches became my personal aiming stake -- I determined I would not fall out unless he did. I used to pray that he would, but h never did. I should have tripped him from behind.

We knew it wouldn't be long now -- already our TAT equip-ment was being boxed in preparation for a long move.

Some of you men will be dead in five months.

Unknown Major at Ft. Bragg induction center, confident that he would not be.

P.O.E.

We were moved by train to Camp Miles Standish, Mass. There we were prepped for our movement overseas. For security our new address was A.P.O. 449, and would be for the duration. We were given a final round of shots. Elliot Glass, as usual, fell unconscious at the prick of the needle. Some of us felt superior because we didn't. We were to learn later that fainting under the needle bore no relationship to courage in battle. A lot of new clothing and equipment was issued (I can still remember the heavy odor of new G.I. equipment).

Miles Standish provided a little more relaxation than the usual routine of training camp. Passes were adequate, food plentiful (even for chow hounds), and the air was crisp and invigorating. It was our last time to savor life in the good old U.S.A., for we knew our next move would be toward what our training was all about.

Twenty four hour KP duty in the large mess was an experience to remember. There was a mechanical potato peeler, a huge rotating affair that would handle bushels -- but you still had to cut the eyes out. The amount of food the KP could consume in a tour of duty was stupendous -- pounds of steak, ham, roast -- dozens of eggs, quarts of fresh milk, coffee, and tea. And included were such incidentals as puddings, cake, fruits, and other desert types. Our stomachs must have been lined with cast iron. And there were the usual shenanigans -- Albert Aguzzi, taking a nap at the mess hall, recieved a monumental and painful hotfoot, and never learned who administered it.

Just about everybody went on pass to Boston. "Swede"Swanson met a girl there and fell immediately in love. Gernsbacher and I went to Taunton, instead. At a U.S.O. with a private music room I spent hours at the phonograph listening to music of my favorite composers. In a music shop we purchased a couple of ocharinas. Glass had one, and we wanted to join him in serenading the Germans into submission. At the Herring Run Grill we drank six rum cokes each, ate Swordfish steaks, and watched the water wheel through the large underground plate glass window. At night, drunk as lords, we marched unsteadily down the center of the main drag and tooted our ocharinas with verve, forcing traffic to weave around us. Unfortunately, the cast iron lining of my stomach yielded to the rum cokes after I returned to camp in the wee hours of morning.

In the meantime, to keep idle hands busy, we were put to work moving rocks about from one place to another. The place was practically composed of rocks. I must add here, as a sort of postscript, that I was returned to Miles Standish exactly one year later. To keep idle hands busy, I was put to work moving rocks about from one place to another.

Before embarking we were read the Articles of War, and endured yet another short arm inspection.

Take a deep breath, let half of it out, and squeeze it off.

Rifle instruction.

North Atlantic in September

September traditionally is the worst month to traverse the North Atlantic, due to storms and rough water, but for most of us it was an opportunity we could not have afforded other wise, and we enjoyed it. There was some concern about subs attacking -- the U boats were still active and on the prowl. SS Argentina*, the flagship of the convoy, observed wartime night running regulations, as did the rest of the convoy. Despite the pitch black there were usually a few staunch souls on deck enjoying the air and phosphorescence through most of the nights. The convoy was the largest to cross the Atlantic to that time, though larger convoys were to cross later.

On our port flank a large oil tanker plowed through and under the rough seas, disappearing completely under the high crests. Closer on our starboard flank was a ship loaded wit nurses. To their right and a little ahead ran a Jeep carrie Ships of all descriptions stood off low on the horizon as far as we could see. Weaving a tapestry through all were the es cort DEs, narrow, sleek, fast.

We probably made the mental transition from America to England when the on deck loudspeakers first crackled, "This is London calling in the North American service of the BBC," and dispensed the news. This became a regular feature of life aboard ship for the rest of the voyage.

Porpoises romped alongside day after day, seeming gleeful at accompanying us. One fellow much larger than the rest usually ran on the port side. Though huge, he applied himself diligently. Often he would roll directly at the hull o the ship as if to bash his head, but always executed an outside loop just short of contact -- a daring fellow.

A shipboard PX dispensed a few minor supplies infrequentl if you had money and were prepared to fight the long lines. could think of nothing I desired that much. Supplies were s short that drawings were often held for the few items available. The resulting frustration caused some of the prospect ive customers to react like children. Lt. Mann's reaction t these childish complaints was, "I know many of you want Zipp lighters. I want a Zippo lighter. There just aren't enough Zippo lighters to go around, so some of us will have to do without Zippo lighters."

We were rationed to one quart of fresh water per man per day. You could use it as you chose, drink, wash, shave, or brush teeth. Sea water was available, but washing or shavin with it was an ordeal. My opportunity to go to the showers

* Al Gernsbacher reminds me that one of our number fell while climbing the gangplank, and did not make the trip.

was a memorable experience -- I only had a bar of Lava soap, and the gritty pumice defied all efforts to dissolve it in the salt water. The resulting shower was vigorous, to say the least.

We were quartered in the ship's lounge. Our hammocks were stacked from deck to deck with only enough room between to lay on your back with your head turned sideways to prevent your nose being crushed by the guy in the bunk above. With your rifle, helmet, two barracks bags, duffle bag, etc., etc. stored in the same space the situation was near impossible. The alternative was to spend as much time on deck as possible.

Sgt. Harbeck was the first man we saw to become seasick. It was unfortunate for him in many ways -- seasickness is pure misery, almost demeaning. Obviously he would have preferred to succumb to the malady after lesser personnel, if at all. Being regarded by some of the men as a bit effeminate in speech and manner didn't help. The result for him was combined misery and ridicule. He hung loosely over the rail like a wet, limp rag, unable to move in his own defence, a strong hand clutching the seat of his pants to prevent him flowing across the rail and into the sea. Fortunately, few of us became sick during the trip. I thought I was immune, only to learn different a year later.

As young men with insatiable appetites, perhaps our greatest concern was food. There was enough to sustain body, but not soul. We were forced to finagle, bribe, steal, deal -- anything to get a little more to eat. Each man had a small supply of K and C rations, but was forbidden to open them without authorization. Mine soon vanished during the long black nights on deck. I was later assigned to the garbage detail, which proved a bit of good fortune. We threw garbage over the fantail at night to prevent U boats tracing us, during the course of which we were within reasonable proximity to the officers mess. We found that the officers ate well and good, and we availed ourselves of same. It had the effect momentarily of offsetting the green, blue, and purple boiled eggs served in our mess.

One afternoon we were warned that U boats had been detected in or around the convoy. DEs sliced through the formation, one passing between us and the tanker to our left, soon lost to sight ahead. Rumor had it that a freighter carrying some of our TAT equipment had been torpedoed. We immediately began to worry about the possible loss of Mess Sgt. Sam Visintine's kitchen range.

Long before sighting land we began seeing small open fishing boats bobbing about, one to two men in each boat. You had to admire these fishermen. I remembered the winter and spring of 1942 when I lived on Roanoke Island. A certain fisherman worked out of Wanchese, on the southern end of the island. One fine day when he and his sons were fishing well offshore a U boat surfaced within hailing distance. The U boat commander, in good English, demanded to know what they were doing out here. The answer in good Wanchese was, "Fish-

ing for me living." "You go back to land, old man, and dc come back out again!" And he didn't. Few people seriousl believed the incident happened, and scoffed. I believed. those months, burning ships a few miles offshore, oil swar ed beaches, and the thump and vibration of exploding torpe oes were all too frequent. The U boat Captain meant what said. The fisherman didn't return to the open sea.

Finally, green land rose on our port horizon, new and a Ireland? England? Isle of Wight? Later, in the shipping channel leading in to Southampton, we saw great ships of v at anchor.

We were beginning to feel a part of momentous events.

There's the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way.

GI gripe.

England

At the Southampton docks we remained aboard and waited. Where the hell were the welcoming bands, the crowds? Down on the docks it was business as usual. Boredom set in as we waited to unload. Some fellow humorously filled a condom with air and let it drift down the side of the ship and onto the dock. An Englishman retrieved it, let the air out, and pocketed it. More condoms began to drift about, and more people arrived to claim them. Soon the air was filled with the white rubber globes, and everybody in the vicinity seemed to have a considered use for them, even the women on the docks. A shortage was apparent.

Once disembarked we were loaded aboard one of those dinky, minature, but very civilized English trains. The trip ended at a dreary army camp with the unromantic title of D-6, some six miles from Dorchester. We were assigned barracks shortly before nightfall. Rude wire double decker bunks and a pot bellied stove were the only furnishings. At the instant someone inquired about the lack of mattresses we were introduced to a small pile of straw that had been unceremoniously dumped on the ground a hundred yards away. The ubiquitous combined bread sack-body bag-mattress cover was to be stuffed with the straw -- only there was far too little straw. A chill filled the air, and rain began as we hurridly ran with our meager loads of wet straw. Darkness and our first night in camp had arrived.

The few chunks of coal provided for heating the building soon burned out, with no perceptible rise in temperature. We shivered through the night. Much effort was expended over the next days appropriating, by whatever means possible, a few lumps of coal in an unsuccessful attempt to temper the damp autumn chill of English nights.

Our first meal in England was C rations.

The following day we ate what most of us were convinced was horse -- a sticky, gluey hash. Sam's pancakes began to be a mainstay, as they were to prove to be later on the front.

We were not allowed to be idle for long. We were soon put to marching about the countryside regularly, rain or shine. The weather was exactly as we had understood it would be. A march of a few miles seldom failed to produce alternating rain and shine -- raincoats on, raincoats off, raincoats on... The marches were exhilarating, and often pleasurable, however. The country we marched through was even more beautiful than we had expected, with quaint, picturesque little towns and villages with such unlikely names as Piddletown, Puddletown, Piddlehinton, Piddletrenthyde, etc. -- as Jim Bowers observed, Thomas

Hardy country.

On the longest and last march before we left England I was appointed pacesetter -- supposedly an honor. I started out that morning at a brisk pace, taking mile eating and leg stretching strides. As the hours and miles fell behind I realized I had set a pace that was going to be pure hell to maintain, but the deed was done and I had to live with it I considered that those behind weren't fairing any better. I churned on, tiring by the minute, giving all I had to give At one point I cast a glance behind -- and horrors, distance between me and the column seemed to be narrowing. And there was no way to resign. Many blisters later we arrived at the bivouac area and began to dig in for the night. We were in low mountains or high hills, whichever is preferred -- the southern reaches of the Cotswolds, I imagine.

The brass dreamed up a competition which was intended to determine and honor the best squad. The competition was in close order drill, manual of arms, etc. The brass viewed competition in the various companies, selecting the best of each. 1st Sqd 2nd Plt won the E Co competition. We figured we were pretty good, but never dreamed that we could make it to the finals. When that happened it was no longer a lark -- it was serious business competing against the other remai ing squad. Now we were entertaining the possibility of comi in number one. Half through our final performance the chanc seemed remote. To that point we had executed with flawless precision. As we approached a sharp embankment, the commanc that should turn us inches from disaster failed to come. Sgt Digiallio drew a momentary blank, and we plowed on up the en bankment, spinning our feet and laughing in combined humor and embarrassment. Digiallio finally found his voice and ex tracted us from the situation, and we continued without comm itting further error -- but a mistake had already been made. Okay, second place then. But it didn't turn out that way. The brass huddled for a minute, then announced the winner. We had won despite our transgression. I remember thinking that being singled out here may well prove our undoing later Better to remain anonymous...

As in all units we had our share of rumors. We were to the main force in an invasion of Norway. Or -- we were not to be committed to combat, since the end was near, but woul form a constabulary force to take over and run the occupied areas, attired in white helmets and leggins. The former wa distinctly undesirable. Norway is rugged, cold country, an winter was just around the corner.

Passes to nearby towns were ample. Dorchester, the usua choice, was within walking distance, and offered a variety of interests in the form of cinemas, USO canteen, pubs, All Services canteen, etc. Puddletown (or was it Piddletown), virtually next door to D-6, boasted a quiet country pub whe a pint or two of stout could be enjoyed while the locals ig nored you. Some men drew passes to London, but that was ra

Thurston, 1st Sqd BAR man, with an IQ of 148, had come to Easy from electronics training. We went to Dorchester on 24 hour pass. An English Major of Artillery, wounded in the desert, was recuperating at the house where we rented our room. He spent most of his time staring morosely into the fireplace, which seldom showed more than a wisp of smoke. He said little and seemed barely aware of our presence, except when American soldiers infrequently passed the window on the street. Then he would exclaim, "Look at those Americans -- how tall they are. Every one so tall..." He would suck thoughtfully on his cold pipe and return to the fireplace and his personal thoughts.

Onthe street I asked an old duffer where I may get my hair cut. He peered at me for a moment in apparent contempt, as if deciding whether or not to address me. He looked a ludicrous figure --tweed cap, jacket, vest, and knicker pants, paunch, scruffy eyebrows and mustache.

"We aren't like you American chappies, working all the time for the dollar -- we work the 'alf day 'ere." He leaned back, thrusting his paunch forward, and tapped his cane on the pavement for emphasis.

"Maybe that's why we are over here bailing you people out," I suggested.

He gripped his cane tightly, snorted, turned red in the face and stalked off.

We enjoyed the English cinema houses -- smoking was allowed, and each seat was provided with an ash tray. I fired up my new lighter to light a fat Royal cigarette. The lighter was one of those cord pull affairs popular in England at the time. The thing burst into flame, lighting several rows of seats and searing my eyebrows. Behind me someone exclaimed, "Ah, a veritable flamethrower!"

Food being in short supply in England, decorum demanded we curb our appetites when visiting people or establishments. The USO and Allied Services canteens usually offered half sandwiches and, rarely, a drink approximating Pepsi or Coke. Again, decorum required that you accept only one of the half sandwiches. Thurston and I, ravenously hungry, thought we had a foolproof plan to overcome the problem. We would appear at the USO, wolf down our half sandwich, then march over to the Allied Services place and mingle with Czech, Polish, Indian, Norwegian, British, and Canadian soldiers, and partake of the fare being offered there. After the third or fourth circuit we were recognized by the girl dispensing sandwiches at the Allied Services canteen. "You guys hungry, or something?" she asked sweetly. Embarrassment curtailed that operation.

One morning I was dismissed from training and ordered to report to Co HQ. Captain Miller acknowledged my report and said he wanted to introduce me to someone. In walked my oldest brother, Wilbur, a Major in the Medical Corps. He had been in England for some time and had found out my location. Capt Miller agreed to exempt me from duty for the day. Wilbur had a Command car (the original Jeep -- the vehicle we knew

as the Jeep was first called the Peep) and driver at his disposal.

In minutes we were tearing down those curving one lane roa at perilous speed, and I clung desperately to the spartan inn ards of the thing. We invaded 395th HQ mess for lunch -- he knew one of the staff there. Afterward we rode around and en gaged in small talk before he hit me with what he was thinkir

"Doc," he said (everybody back home called me that), "I an aware that your outfit is soon going over. I see boys like you coming back every day -- those that can come back. There is no need for me to describe their condition, physically or mentally. Now, I have good reason to believe I can wrangle a transfer to the Med Corps for you, and you may spend the res of the war in England or, at least, be out of danger. If yo go over in this outfit I don't expect to see you alive again or in one piece. Think about it and let me know." There it was -- a spade is a spade is a spade.

I tried to consider the unconsiderable. As my brother, a in his position, he had to make the attempt. In a real sens he was "over a barrel" and he knew he was putting me in a ba position, too. Whatever the decision it would be crucial an a part of me for as long as I lived, or until... I had no choice, really -- it was painfully obvious. "I appreciate t offer and effort," I told him, "but I want to go on with the boys." I would have been better off had the offer not been made. In the coming days I was faced often with the knowlec that by saying the word I might have had out.

After returning to D-6 I didn't see him again for more th a year. From that day in England to his death in 1963 we ne once, either of us, mentioned the conversation of that day. don't think modesty or immodesty or bravado had any bearing the key was legitimacy. A valid reason would have had my i: stant approval and agreement. If, for instance, Eisenhower had sent me an order to take a post in the rear because he recognized my great capabilities of strategy, organization, leadership, etc., I would have accepted forthwith. If a do tor had notified me that a recent check of my medical recor showed I had a skull full of cow dung, and that I was unfit for my assigned duties, I would have acquiesced.

When I got back to camp I learned that Thurston had hurt his back in training and had been sent to hospital. It was the last we saw of him. Hugh Underwood and Carr joined us about this time -- Underwood from Paratroops, Carr from Rar

Near the end of our short stay in England we were ordere to wash and scrubb our clothes, pack, web equipment, etc. M web belt, cut precisely to my 29 inch waist, shrank beyond use when it dried. Every bird eyed officer seemed to notic the deficiency. "You are out of uniform, soldier -- get a web belt!" Supply Sgt Bullard said, "What the hell happen to your belt? You guys will have to learn to take care of your equipment. I haven't got a goddam web belt!" Meanwhi I was out of uniform, as every officer kept reminding me.

Remember, there are no new holes in France.

Capt. Miller, CO, E Company

France

We crossed the English Channel by LST, leaving Weymouth Oct 28 and arriving at Le Havre Oct 29. The trip was without incident. We envied the life of the crew, good bunks, good food, and an atmosphere of leisure. In early morning light we could see the French coast in the distance. While drinking in the view of the alien shore with our eyes, our minds were conjuring up notions of what may be beyond. I was in no particular hurry to get onto the Continent and mix it up with the Krauts -- indeed would have been pleased if the war ended with me unitiated -- never mind why I was here... Our recent arrivals, Underwood and Carr, in reverse of my timidity were impatient to get to the front and kill Krauts. Capt. Miller took a stern, no nonsense approach, "Be careful... don't take unnecessary chances... keep your eyes open for booby-traps." Tall, thin, and brittle, he seemed old for this young man's game.

The ruin of Le Havre was awesome to eyes unfamiliar with such contrived violence, the place crushed and gutted. Some buildings were cleaved apart with sections still standing, interiors exposed, with furniture, plumbing, and the usual trappings of civilized existence suspended over an abyss as though defying gravity -- a toy city fallen into disfavor with the angry child. In the harbor, on her side, was a once majestic ocean liner, the Paris, scuttled there by the Germans as part of the debris calculated to render the harbor unusable. From the shoreline moles of stone and concrete extended fingerlike into the harbor, bunkers with silent and dark embrasures adorning the outermost reaches. The city had suffered bombardment by the RN and RAF. I tried to envision the toil and effort and cost and time in human increments it would take to restore this one example of what a good part of the European continent must be like when the ravenous appetite of war was finally appeased.

We loaded aboard trucks, packed in until no more bodies could be accomodated. The drive seemed endless. Packed together tightly, it was impossible to change position of aching limbs, and the chill air added to the discomfort. The overwhelming desire to relieve distended bladders was ignored by the drivers until retention of body fluids became agony. In darkness we were finally dismounted and told to pitch tents for the night. We were near Reims, in an orchard, and it was raining. We unrolled our blanket rolls on wet, slippery, and spongy earth where the wet chill penetrated to our bones.

A semblance of order was contrived, though with considerable difficulty in the slippery dark, and the parings produced the abominations known as pup tents. Into these we crawled, to lie looking sightlessly into the black, contemplating our plight.

The words, first muffled, then louder, penetrated our ears and brought our sought after oblivion to sickning awareness. "Cow shit. Goddam cow shit. We're in the middle of a bunch of cow shit!" And so it was -- an apple orchard inhabited by cattle. We were forced to reflect on the lot of infantry. To die in an airplane, whirling, aflame, breaking apart thousand of feet above the earth is terrible -- to be incinerated or ripped apart in a tank is conclusively violent -- but to die amidst the slime of animal droppings seemed ignominously improper.

More long hours tightly packed in the cold misery of truck as the convoy resumed. An occasional French female would be greeted with obscene shouts and gestures as we passed. Villag with houses, walls, and fences pockmarked with rifle and MG bullets swept past. Here and there we passed destroyed and burned vehicles -- evidence that an angry, sharp exchange had taken place in the recent past. The land was flat, dismal, and inhospitable, the weather chill, damp, and gray. How lor before we tangled with the supermen? What chance of remainir alive until the madness ceased? Many of us were glum.

The second lieutenants will win the war, so what in the hell are we fighting for?

Words from GI song.

Belgium

One thing observably different when we crossed into Belgium was the warmth and friendliness of the people. Where the French exhibited little emotion as we passed, the Belgians were more demonstrative, cheering, waving, and giving the victory sign, and presenting us with bread, fruit, wine -- whatever they had to offer. Their obvious appreciation of our presence did much for our mood, which changed from morose to cheerful.

Passing Jayhawk cemetary gave us pause, white crosses lined the fields almost as far as we could see -- and more graves were being dug in readiness for the arrival of more dead, and we were acutely aware that most of them would be filled with infantrymen. Each of us, no doubt, wondered if we were soon to occupy one of them.

Our convoy made several short stops as we moved through the country. At one place many of us purchased something loosely akin to ice cream or sherbert, an obvious rarity. At night, in light rain, we parked on the side of a cobblestone street for a few minutes. A large beer wagon passed, pulled by a team of huge and powerful Belgians, their massive tufted hooves beating time on the glistening paving stones. Silver harness ornaments twinkled in the small amount of reflected light and tinkled discretely with movement. The driver walked alongside talking to them softly, "hey, hey -- hey, hey, hey". The tone was comradely but firm. I had never seen such magnificent animals.

At many stops small boys swarmed over the trucks to admire our weapons and discuss ammunition capacities, range, accuracy, etc. The children were lovable, intelligent, cheerful, well mannered, and gregarious. We always gave them whatever we had to give -- rations, candy, chewing gum, money. Before embarking at Weymouth many of us distributed our remaining English money to the kids about. Now we were doing the same thing. We wouldn't need it where we were going.

Our journey halted for a few days in a field near Aubel. We pitched our tents, and it began to snow. The snow ended before nightfall, and we saw an English Mosquito speeding eastward toward the front. Soon after dark we heard a plane approaching from the east. As it came into view we could see flame trailing behind and hear the engine sputtering as though in difficulty. As it passed nearby and low we realized it was no ordinary plane. We were seeing our first V-1 Buzz Bomb speeding mindlessly and blindly toward an unsuspecting target.

To prepare myself to stand guard at night in the snow I foolishly prepared a potent brew in my canteen cup, adding several tins of instant coffee from my rations and, for go measure, a tin of fruit concentrate powder. While standin guard later I was struck by stomach cramps that doubled m over, unable to stand erect. I considered my situation, f getting the spiked drink. Was my appendix acting up? Wha if I had to go to hospital? At best it may look suspiciou to the guys. Unable to bear the stomach pains further, I managed to stumble to our pup tent and alert Gernsbacher. found somebody to help and, together, they lifted me and w ed me to the aid station, which was in a nearby house. Th a Major considered my problem, poured a small amount of cl liquid into a glass, and had me drink it. In minutes I wa relieved. I had been introduced to Paragoric. The speedy change in my condition was dramatic and appreciated.

Packed into trucks again for more cold, stiff riding, I found myself wishing that the front was moving away from u at the same rate we were moving toward it. We sensed now we were soon to catch up.

It could be worse, you know.

Army palliative.

Where is the front?

We unloaded from the trucks at Krinkelt. Though two villages existed here, Krinkelt and Rocherath, we usually referred to them as Krinkelt. No civilians were to be seen, having been removed previously because of the proximity to the front. A handfull of men remained in the area to watch over the livestock, etc. The houses were solid and rugged -- veritable forts. The atmosphere of the place was somber and subdued, and we knew we weren't far from our destination. It was Nov.10, 1944.

We marched from Krinkelt up snow concealed roads through fields and into woods. The forest, heavy with fresh snow, was a childhood dream of a land of Christmas. We passed scattered groups of 9th Div troops as we moved through the woods. "Is that what the war department is using for soldiers?" Their attempts at humor was a bit like gallows humor to us. Laden with all the paraphernalia of the brand new soldier we, no doubt, were proper objects of derision. We would make our mistakes, as new soldiers do. The trick would be to survive the mistakes and profit from them.

1st Sqd was halted after a while, and in the usual Army fashion we stood awaiting the next developement. A 9th Sgt told me, Joe Jupko, and Johnson to follow him. Jupko was now our BAR man, and Johnson was his assistant gunner. The Sgt carried us to an opening in the forest which was about sixty feet across and extended indefinitely in either direction. There, by two open holes in the ground, we stopped. "How far are we from the front line?" I asked. "The line is back there where we just left from," he said. "This is your OP. That is the border between Belgium and Germany." He indicated the clearing ahead. "You just stay here in the holes and keep your eyes peeled and stay quiet. You will be relieved in a few hours by another crew. Not much happening here -- you seldom see a Jerry, but he's over there. If you go into the woods over there watch out for mines and booby traps. There is a BAR over there. Leave it alone -- it's booby trapped. The path we came up has been cleared of mines, but not the sides. That's about it."

I asked, "Can we smoke here?"

"Yeah, smoke -- just blow the smoke down in the hole." He left.

The border highway, which was the cleared space, was about 20 feet from the OP holes which were dug a few feet apart. A hundred feet to our left was a small field with a small shell torn structure in the center. Across the highway from this was a larger field ending in woods a few hundred yards back.

From our front to our right woods grew on both sides of the road as far as we could see.

If this was awfully quiet and inactive, my previous idea of how it would be when we relieved another outfit was just as unreal. I had pictured it many times in my mind -- I would have to crawl hundreds of yards under fire to relieve a man in a hole in ground churned up by constant artillery fire, and bodies would be all over the place. If I made it safely to my position I hoped I would have a few minutes to collect my wits before being ordered to attack or to repulse a German attack. My picture was far wrong. This, of course, was not the usual condition of war -- we were fortunate.

Jupko and Johnson occupied one hole and I sat in the other My first cigarette caused an altercation between me and Johnson in which we each threatened to shoot the other -- we both survived it and I continued to smoke.

After being relieved on outpost I found that I was foxhole buddy to Swede Swanson in the hole nearest to the OP. The hole was about three feet deep and wide and long enough to accomodate two men and their equipment. Logs had been put across the top and covered with earth, a piece of German camo flage stretched over all. Despite all, the whole mess was wet and porous and leaked constantly. We all learned early that every foxhole had at least one leak directly over your nose. Entry to the hole was from the rear and would accomodate one man. In an encanter with enemy coming from the border only one man would be able to fire from the hole, and only from the reverse end. Many of the holes in the area were as badly constructed. Obviously, nobody was considering a German attack. The arrangement seemed poor -- Plt HQ was some distance to the right rear, enough so that, to a rifleman, it was considered rear area. The other rifle Plts flanked us. In the forest I had no idea where our weapons platoon was located or, for that matter, where CO HQ was.

Swanson was thorough in his preparations for whatever he could imagine may happen. From his sleeping position in the hole he distributed his weaponry about in instantly useable positions. His rifle hung overhead, the muzzle pointed at the hole entrance. Grenades, trench knife, and bayonet were in place on the earthen wall. We spent hours constructing possible events in our minds and planning probable counters. I learned much from Swede, and employed many of his measures plus some of my own, such as extra ammo stored in the rifle butt cleaning equipment holes, and one round hidden in the hem of my jacket for the final decision. Who could say if I would be able to use it if the need arose? When Swede was on OP he covered the approaches with booby traps made from grenade canisters attached to trees, the grenade being slid into the open canister with the safety pin out and with a string tied to the grenade with the other end attached to a nearby tree. A little pressure on the string would pull the grenade from the canister and -- surprise! The old trick of the pebble laced ration cans strung on wires was also used.

The nights on OP were cold and miserable. We would sit in the holes and shiver quietly and listen to the winter moan of large caliber counterbattery artillery high overhead. There was the dull boom of the huge gun far to the rear, the moaning passage of the shell above, and the muffled crump when it hit after the end of the journey. Invariably would come the counter from the opposite direction. Boys playing with their powerful and deadly toys ... It was prudent to toss a grenade silently from the hole in the direction of suspicious sounds -- it was hard to determine where it came from in the dark. The flash from a muzzle could easily be seen. One fellow pulled the pin and prepared to toss a grenade, then was uncertain about what he had heard, and waited. When no further sound came he found that he had thrown the pin aside and was unable to find it. He spent the rest of the night holding the grenade anxiously.

Some of us were able to sleep soundly and still be able to differentiate between threatening and normal sounds. I was, fortunately, one of these. Others slept so soundly that an army marching past would not awaken them. Anthony Morelli was one of these. Still others were constantly aware of all sounds and reacted to all sounds with alarm, giving ominous connotation to each. Swede woke me several times each night with a firm hand clamped over my mouth, whispering, "Did you hear that -- there's somebody out there." I would listen quietly for a minute and then try to assure him that it was only snow falling from the tree branches. He stayed jumpy and nervous from nightfall till dawn, yet possessed the ability to fall asleep instantly. I saw him sleep many times while standing up, and even snore. He would fall over into the snow, climb back up and repeat the process.

One night Frenchy Labrueyere called me from blissful sleep to take my turn on OP. What followed is illustrative of what lengths the mind can go in deceiving itself, and it was near impossible to convince me of what I did, though logic points the obvious finger. Reality for me was that I pulled my tour of OP duty, returned to my hole and went back to sleep. But there was Frenchy by the foot of the hole pleading for me to climb out and go again. My sense of injustice at being so entrapped knew no bounds, and I let him know it. But still he persisted. We argued at length -- I finally gave in to the logic of his arguement and went on OP, still not totally convinced that I was not doing a rerun. The lesson was that I could not afford such a mental lapse again -- a keen sense of reality was necessary to survival.

Later we pulled in the OP at night and used a listening post in a hole along the Sqd line to our left where a long gap existed between us and the next friendlies. I usually pulled most of the LP duty alone since Swede, being assistant Sqd leader, felt obliged to "check on the boys" and did not find his way back in the long black nights. We continued to operate the OP in daylight hours.

Several incidents dramatized the reality of our situation. A few light artillery shells were directed at the structure

in the small field to the left of the OP, and an occasional mortar shell dropped in the squad area. Pfc James Moore of 2nd Plt was wounded, the first sustained in E Company, on Nov. 13. Some of our patrols engaged in short, but sharp, fire fights with the enemy out in the Dragon Teeth before the Siegfried forts. The opposing sides were reminding each other of their presence.

Capt. Miller and another officer visited our OP one morning and decided to check out the area. We gave them the information given to us by the 9th Sgt. They borrowed a trench knife from us and began probing for mines alongside the road, then crossed to the far side and probed some more. Satisfied they continued on into the woods, done with the precaution of probing the ground ahead. We at the OP waited alert for what may happen. A few minutes later a muffled explosion and a cr came from within the woods. We called back to the Sqd area t alert them, then ran across the road and into the woods. From somewhere to the right a German MG began chattering and the front began to come alive. We found Miller down in the snow, his face and side bloody and blackned from the blast of a mir or booby trap. We moved ahead and crouched in the snow with our rifles ready to protect the small group until Miller coul be removed from futher danger by stretcher bearers. When the stretcher arrived there was a discussion of how best to get Miller on it. "Lay the goddam thing down and I'll roll over on it," he grimaced.

The deep bark of Garand fire joined the chattering MG as Miller was moved back across the road. The rest of us began darting across as Harbeck, who had taken station on the othe side, beckoned us across one by one between MG bursts. In the woods I had fixed bayonet, and when I crossed the road I stumbled and launched rifle and bayonet directly at him. He stepped adroitly aside and gave me a sharp scowl, then said, "Have you done any town fighting recently, Arnold?" It had become a private joke.

After things quieted down somebody said Miller got his re quest to have his whiskey ration accompany him on the trip t Bn aid and was pretty well lit up when he arrived there. I never heard how he made out. We supposed he recovered and was put to work training new troops, emphasising the import- ance of watching out for mines and booby traps. During the little exchange Underwood got a German.

Warm food was seldom our lot. We ate mostly K and C rat: Even these were not in suitable supply. Rarely were the 10 rations available, and when they were they were broken down Plt and Sqd HQ and apportioned out from there. The men of squads were aware that some of the choicer bits failed to m it on down the line. Some good old GI bellyaching had a po ive result. Since individual rations usually contained a s packet of four cigarettes, and since some of the men were n smokers, smokers, by trade or gift, managed. Many consider quitting the habit for health reasons, but reconsidered wh contemplating other hazards of our line of work. Entertair

such thoughts could bring a sigh or wry grin. Giving up the habit was a foolish dream, the benefits being so uncertain.

A few hundred yards to our right the forest ended. On the German side of the road was a house, abandoned, of course. A road left the border highway and extended past the house and on into the Siegfried fort line. Though the house was, in effect, in no mans land, there were usually a bunch of Americans in the house. The Germans could see the activity at the house, but chose not to destroy it. Some of us went to the house simply to be able to write letters home with the legend "Somewhere in Germany" at the top. At the time Americans were on German territory in only a very few places. Most of the furnishings had been stripped from the place to provide better living in nearby foxholes. Swede found a metal bucket and some coal and made a heater for our hole. It was a smokey affair, but tempered the cold and gave a cheery glow at night. Whiting showed us how to protect our feet by stuffing GI goloshers with virgin wool found in the cellar. I threw my shoes away in favor of the new foot gear. A foot covered in a half dozen pairs of socks and stuffed into wool lined goloshers could stand for hours in snow with no discomfort. Already trench foot was the bane of the division. When the wool lost much of its insulating properties from frequent wettings and compression we found that formed strips cut from wool blankets worked as well. My foot wear consisted of this until we were issued the horrid shoe paks in late January.

The road by the house presented a defensive problem -- if Jerry moved armor down the road from the Siegfried there would be hell to pay -- I had seen no evidence of anti-tank preparation there.

Isay, what are you birds up to?

Lt Ross whenever observing loitering enliste personnel.

Our first relief period

In late November our position along the highway was taken over by another unit and we marched rearward to a position of relief or reserve -- the distinction was of little concern to us. We were in an area in woods just north of Krinkelt. We lived in small huts with log sides and canvas tops with crude wooden double-decker bunks. It was a welcome change to get away from the frigid K and C rations for awhile and enjoy some of Sam's ingenious preparations -- you still may be eating K and C, but Sam, with a little help from whatever he could lay hands on, could disguise the accursed beans, pork and eggs, cheese, etc and come up with something edible.

All troops will be provided with a turkey dinner for Thank giving, was the promise of the Army. The promise was kept, but the occasion was somewhat less than festive. The sky dumped buckets of water as we ate in the open chow line. Water ran in rivulets off our helmets and into our turkey laden mess tins and soaked us to the bone, but we made the most of it.

A particular delight was the showers we went to in Krinkelt. We were herded naked like cattle into a small room where we stood freezing under some steel pipes with small holes drilled a foot or so apart. Each man tried to position himself under one of the holes. At the order the water was turned on. Cold water dribbled from the holes and began to wet our heads. "Soap down," came the order, and the drip of water stopped. Moments later came the rinse cycle -- les than the previous amount. I swear that dampness never got to my waist, and I had to wipe soap from my head with vigor. It would have been an improvement if Thanksgiving dinner had been served under the pipe and the showers had been taken in the rain where we ate the dinners.

Guard duty and KP were still necessary parts of life back here. Gernsbacher and I stood guard together at midnight, and near the end of our tour I sent him to wake our relief. He didn't return so I knew he was lost. The result was tha I stood guard until after dawn. In the course of his rambling about he fell bodily into two holes and woke Sgt Harbe three times. My KP duty was as ill fated. Sam made some pudding, and I ate too much of it. In addition I found the cache of D ration bars and stuffed my jacket with a supply. During the day I slipped the Sqd a supply of pudding and D bars. Becoming dramatically sick at dark I attributed it t overeating, but when I returned to the Sqd I found most of

them sick as well, particularly Elliot Glass. It was a night of misery.

For Glass and I, insult was added to injury. Several of us built a fire on the ground and sat around it warming. There was a loud report, and something slammed against my rump. I saw Glass grab his thigh at the same time. The fire had heated a stray rifle round and exploded it. The bullet hit me and caused no damage other than a momentary sting, but part of the brass buried in Glass' thigh and caused some bleeding.

As he walked about the mess area Lt Ross stopped by Anderson and did a double take. "How in the hell do you expect to see the enemy through those glasses, soldier?" The glasses were indeed filthy. "Let's clean them up!" He then gave me the once over and said, "You're out of uniform soldier! Where is your web belt?" I tried to explain once more about my useless web belt and how I had made a leather belt from a German rifle sling. "Go to supply and get a web belt," he ordered. So, back to supply. Sgt Bullard growled, "Where in the hell is your web belt?" I explained the situation once more. "Well, he said, "you'll just have to do without -- I haven't got any!"

The web belt thing was to follow me through my entire army service -- through the war, through the months of occupation, and back in the States. While being discharged at Ft Bragg in spring of 1946, the supply people cheerfully gave me extras of everything I asked, shirts, pants, shoes -- you name it -- but not web belts. In a cold rage the supply Sgt there, after an arguement, agreed to give me one, but no extras. The day I was discharged I was finally "in uniform". I must have been chewed out a dozen times about the belt during the intervening period.

One morning Gernsbacher shook me awake. I wanted to sleep. "Time for chow," he said. "You coming?" "I'd rather sleep," I said, picturing the everpresent powdered eggs, oatmeal, or pancakes. He left with his mess kit. Half an hour later he woke me again. I gave up trying to sleep. "Guess what we had for breakfast?" "I can't imagine," I said dryily. "We had fresh eggs and bacon," he hooted. "Well, why in hell didn't you come back and wake me?" "You said you wanted to sleep." "Okay -- why did you wake me up when you came back?" "Wanted you to know what we had," he said simply. I could have hit him. Instead I just groaned, and was enveloped in a pall of dejection. I had been dreaming of fresh eggs and bacon for months.

Cuspiodora,
Don't spit on the floora.
Use the spittora,
That's what it's fora.

Elliot Glass singing to the tune of the Toreador song.

Back on line

After a couple or three days in the Krinkelt area Easy moved back on line again. This time we were in hilly terr in deep forest. 2nd Plt position was in a small wooded dr through which flowed a narrow crystal clear stream. Our O was a few hundred yards forward on the crest of a steep hi overlooking a planting of young trees. A little to the ri front of the OP the view extended across into Germany and rolling folds of land embedded with Siegfried forts. A pa had been cleared of mines up the hillside to the OP and ma ed with white tape. This OP was manned round the clock.

This was 2nd Plt's last move in which Lt Mann's massive bed roll came along. The thing required the effort and ti of two or three strong men to move about -- it quietly dis ed, and was replaced with one of the recent issue "fart sa types. These were wool lined, zippered, poplin covered a that offered some protection against the elements , and w light and easy to roll into a compact and easily transpor shape and form. One disadvantage was the slightly increa reaction time to danger -- you had to unzip and extract y self from the cocoon like shape. Rolling yourself in a b et and poncho was quicker in and out, but a little less c able. Each system had many devotees. Neither would do m than moderate foul weather.

This time Whiting and I were foxhole buddies. Our hol was closest by the stream. We immediately set to work fi noise making devices and generally improving the hole to liking. Once I became associated with Whiting for a shor period I began to appreciate his qualities as a soldier, and friend. His character was infinitely gentle, quiet, introspective. He was deeply religious, courageous, depe able and, in these conditions, remarkably resourceful. De our religious differences we were patient and respectful each other and got along well. Philosophical discussion a priority and often carried us long into the night. Af learning that my religious bent, or lack, prevented my p ing with him he asked if I would permit him including me his silent prayers. Thereafter I knew that my welfare w part of his concern every day. In my peculiar way of ev ing individual worth along the lines described, rather t from the usual success, accomplishment, fortune standpoi I have to judge Whiting as one of the best men I ever me

When I was chosen to go on my first patrol, while mos of the men who had already been initiated earlier joked

bantered harmlessly and goodnaturedly about what could happen to me, it was Whiting who quietly saw me off with a warm handshake and an ernest wish for "good hunting and safe return".

Ten or twelve of us led by Lt Mann moved out through our OP, turned left downslope, crossed a road in view of an iron gate, and penetrated deep into the woods ahead. In several places we came across fresh hobnailed boot prints in the new snow, and tension mounted. After some hours of quietly stalking through miles of forest with our fingers ready on triggers we returned to our lines none the worse. We had seen nothing more of the enemy than the ominous tracks and, as far as we knew, had not been seen by the enemy. About all we accomplished was to ascertain that the Germans were actively patrolling the area, and to gain some much needed experience ourselves.

On Dec.1 I reached my nineteenth year. Morelli, a kindhearted fellow, gave me a D ration bar in honor of the event. He often gave me a lot of his ration candy -- even some that he received in packages from home, explaining that I seemed to enjoy candy so much that he enjoyed watching me eat it as much as eating it himself. On that day I also received a letter from another brother, this one commanding a LCT in the Pacific. A photo showed him with two grass skirted beauties on his knees. That didn't bother me as much as knowing it was comfortably warm where the picture was taken.

Early one morning I decided to run up the outpost hill and back to get my circulation warmed up. A rushing sound came from behind me just as I reached the halfway point. I hit the ground and looked up -- a small plane, black, with no prop flashed low overhead toward Germany. I had seen my first jet. Later information revealed it to be a Heinkel pulse jet. It was probably doing recon work for the coming counter-offensive.

The OP atop the hill was manned by five men. The left rear hole was manned by a BAR man and assistant, the other hole by three riflemen. One morning I saw something stuck in the ground to the left front of the holes. Investigation showed it to be a perfectly carved wooden sword with an inscription in ink on the handle. The wood was freshly carved and bright, and the inscription referred to the Westwall -- probably an invitation for us to have a go at the Siegfried forts. After retrieving it with agingerly tied string, pulled from afar I kept the handle in my pocket until the ink blurred from wet and wear. The man who placed the sword there had humor and guts.

The usual quiet of the OP came to an end one afternoon. From the growth of small trees in front of our holes came a hail of small arms fire, several automatic weapons being operated simultaneously. The violence of sound had a dramatic effect on my psyche (it scared hell out of me). It was near impossible to generate enough courage (or foolhardiness) to raise your head enough to see out of the hole. Not to look out of the hole was equally foolhardy, and downright

cowardly. I forced my noggin up to look around. The fire was thick as hair on a dog's back, but the Germans were well concealed. In fact, they were concealed so well that their accuracy was terrible. From our hole I watched Farris Block emerge from the other hole, BAR in hand. He crawled forward on elbows and knees, taking advantage of tree trunks for protection and concealment when possible, never taking his eyes off the area where the fire was coming from. Whatever I felt about his brash action, I knew it took extraordinary courage to come alone out of that hole and crawl toward the firing.

From the trail behind us an Artillery FO (forward observer) and radioman crawled up behind us. Consulting his map he called coordinates to the gunners. The first 105mm shell tore overhead and slammed into the woods beyond, too far. He adjusted the range, and now the battery guns joined in. The fire mission ceased abruptly, and there was silence. Jerry learned from that: we would not be induced to return fire with small arms unless he showed himself, and retaliation by cannon would be forthcoming and accurate. Our lesson was important too: try to force the enemy to show himself before engaging in small arms action with him, lean on your support weapons, the Germans may execute feeling actions without any support weapons. As for Block, it was not the last time we were to see him take decisive and positive action when most of us were content to await developments.

A big problem on OP was insuring that one man in each hol was alert at all times. Many times when relinquishing my tour to my relief I observed that he was soon asleep, often sitting in the hole. Many times some of us were awake when we should have been resting for our next tour. Hitler's observation that American guards slept at night was probably based on hard evidence procured by German patrols.

The infantryman must learn early to carefully weigh and consider the ramifications of even the most innocent act. It may not insure survival, but the chances are enhanced. One night as I sat on the edge of the hole trying to stay alert I decided to take a leak and stretch a bit outside the hole to awaken my dulled senses. Low voices in the other hole assured me that I wasn't the only one awake. Then Almond's voice rang out loud and clear, "Don't shoot, goddamit -- it just ol' Arnold takin' a piss!" No survivor, unless a fool attributes his good fortune entirely to his own machination Time after time we survived because of what someone else di wittingly or otherwise. It's no big deal -- happens all th time. But the fact remains, certain and inescapable -- he saved my life and, in doing so, joined a procession of peop and events that contrived to that same end. Nobody can enu ate the hows and whys, nobody has the answers.

General Lauer, the division commander, made a brief visi to our neck of the woods one morning, stopping by our hole and saying a word or two to Whiting and me, then continuing on to Plt Hq for a short discussion with Lt Mann. He threa ned a five dollar fine to one man who didn't have his helme on. He left as quickly as he had come.

Since first coming on line Whiting had grown a magnificent blue-black beard and caused much commotion -- the brass said it must come off. Whiting refused. The feud continued for a week or more, backing all the way to Bn Hq before the problem was resolved. Whiting kept the beard. Thereafter many more men began sporting the scruffy beginnings of beards, but none ever rivaled the fine beard Whiting wore.

Already 2nd Plt was beginning to undergo many changes that were to change the face of the platoon forever. Blake had been put on permanent KP back at the company field kitchen. Gone from us were the constant stream of his bawdy jokes, songs, and assorted deviltry. Joe Jupko got an infection and left for treatment, but was soon back with us good as new. Digiallio and Underwood were both injured. Digiallio suffered the loss of fingers, and returned to the outfit only at the end of the war. Underwood, whose injury proved less grave, was returned in about a week. Little Frenchy was taken out by a stomach problem and never returned.

1st Plt leader Lt James Cavanaugh left the company under circumstances unfamiliar to me.

Some resentment was generated in 1st Sqd when Cpl Bowers was assigned to replace Digiallio as Sqd leader. Most of the Sqd felt that Swanson should get the nod, and that Glass be his replacement as assistant Sqd leader. The problems of resentment retreated as more pressing and immediate concerns took precedent. Bowers proved to be capable, tough, efficient, and courageous and, by his assertiveness, overcame the resentment of his having come from another Sqd. An unfortunate and foolish incident took place shortly before Frenchy left the Sqd, as we were marching toward Krinkelt for our second rest. Frenchy and I hatched a scheme to provide a little personal levity -- we scrambled up the marching column at a furious pace until we were far ahead of our usual place in the column, the object being to sit by the path until our place caught up with us. Of course, the expenditure of energy required to gain yardage essentially offset the minute or two of rest resulting. Whether Bowers understood our antics and just plain disapproved, I never learned. Suffice it to say that the picture of two men of his Sqd in relaxed splendor alongside the path of march raised his hackles considerably, and he proceeded to chew us out. I reacted angrily. The resulting confrontation was one which, obviously, a common soldier could not expect to win with a NCO. As the confrontation was about to enter a physical stage, Lt Mann stepped in and made us stop the nonsense, effecting an honorable termination which was far better than the alternative. But seeds of ill had been sown, not to be entirely overcome until thirty five years later by the catalyst of exchanged letters.

Until now the company had sustained few casualties due to enemy action, most of these from artillery and mortar. We were experiencing a rather high rate of trench foot, however. To help alleviate the situation a small drying hut was built

where soldiers in small groups were allowed to build a fire for drying footwear and other wet equipment. So far our problems stemmed from the wet condidions more than from any other source.

The men feasted on deer meat one day by dent of an errar artillery shell. It was a welcome change of diet for a ver short period.

The little stream, cold and clear, that meandered throug our position provided our water needs. Of course, we used the Halizone tablets provided us for disenfecting drinking water -- two tablets per canteen of water and a wait of hal an hour rendered the water potable. Upstream someone found the body of a German, his skin blanched white by the cold

You guys keep spred out, five yards interval -- one mortar shell would get you all...

Warning repeated time and again.

Krinkelt Again

Dec.10 found us again enjoying the flavor of rear area living in the woods north of Krinkelt. Overnight passes were issued to the villages. We checked out the downed ME-109 near the church, went to a movie at the Dead Horse Theater (so called because a sentry had shot a horse there when it failed to heed his challenge), slept a night in a house -- the first since leaving England. We found how miserably cold a GI cot can be in an unheated house in Belgium in mid December. At the church some men prayed, some just poked around, gawking at things alien. A Red Cross crew dispensed coffee and donuts from a truck in front of the church. Sam brought food into town for the Easy men, but some of us managed to garner an extra meal or two from other kitchens in town without being recognized as interlopers. We saw only three civilians in the place -- two were older men who took care of the livestock. The third man was in his late twenties and was seen often with some of our regimental Hq people. This man, Paul Drosch, had been an active member of the Underground during the German occupation, and now was working in cooperation with the American presence toward bringing an end to the conflagration that beset Europe.*

I was told that I was chosen to leave the company to attend radio school. The idea didn't appeal to me, and when I found I had a choice I went into my thank you but no thank you act. I was shocked -- I couldn't remember when I had been given a choice in anything involving the army.

Rumor had it that part of the division was going to launch an attack, and that Easy was to be part of the punch. We had been exposed to all sorts of rumors, and this one seemed to carry no more credence than any previous. Obvious, however, was the certain knowledge that we weren't here to forever sit on our butts and play soldier -- our phony war, as others, had to come to an end. Lt Mann verified the mission. Easy was to join an attack to the northeast. 2nd Bn, detached temporarily to a sister regiment, was to be part of 395RCT. Our objectives included a small town in the southern vicinity

*Paul Drosch and Will Cavanagh, an amateur historian, kindly placed a stone marker and inscription noting the Dec pullback route of 2nd Bn, 393Inf The stone was placed along that route almost forty years after the event.

of the Roer dams. We were given not a hint of the importance of the attack we would be joining -- that the key to an early end to the conflict absolutely depended on an advance to, and capture of, the Roer dams -- or that Germany would defend the vital area with every means at their disposal. Instead, the whole thing was played down. In a short briefing we were told that only token resistance was to be expected and that, should the Germans choose to make a show of a defense, they would probably surrender or retire after a brief exchange of fire. Our participation was expected to be little more than a formality -- a glorified exercise.

Reality was far more ominous: Hitler and OKW were keenly aware of the importance of the dams to allied strategy in the winter of 1944-45. Thus, the Germans must have been vexed and, finally, amused at the puny attacks launched by 1st Army at the greatest prize on the western front at that time. Already two American divisions had been badly mauled in fruitless small scale attacks toward that objective. A new effort was now to be launched by 2nd Inf Div along a corridor through 99th, the right flank of the attack being supported by 395 RCT. Armored support was to be provided by a Combat Command of newly arrived 9th Armored Div. The fact that the terrain over which the attack must move was unsuited to armor seems to have been discounted. We were on the eve of being sent against a hornet's nest.*

Richard Carey had not returned from a visit to another outfit when we moved out on the approach march, and our short notification allowed no time to search for him. Our line of march soon carried us off the road and into heavy forest and steep hills -- all uphill, as every infantryman knows. Some were so steep that we had to pull ourselves up tree trunk by tree trunk. This was time and energy consuming, and we were becoming strung out in disjointed sections, many men not being able to maintain the pace and falling back along the column and taking up with following groups. At some point Gernsbacher began to fall behind and was lost from our group.

Near dark, when it seemed we hadn't energy to go further, we attained a fairly level plateau on which we were halted for the night. We pitched tents, ate rations, and prepared for the night with a minimum expenditure of time and energy. Swanson, Whiting, and I combined together. Well after dark Father Hochaus moved through the company, assembling small groups of six to ten men with arms interlocked in a small circle for prayer.

*Over the years, when discussing the war in Europe, I am often asked, "then how did we win the war?" Being put thusly on the spot to explain what appeared a paradox I could only answer simply, but with some measure of confidence in my tongue in cheek theory, "Well, we didn't know what the hell we were doing and since we didn't it follows that the Germans couldn't do it for our purposes either. We kept them confused with our ineptness. They couldn't plan a counter to the unsupposed."

If you are hit, stay still and quiet -- if you don't the gunner will come back for you...

Instruction.

The Phony War Ends

I drew last guard of the night, and was made responsible for waking the company before dawn. Before going on guard I managed only an hour or so sleep. At the appointed time I began rousing everybody up.

While the company slept Sam and his kitchen force had been busy moving forward and setting up equipment to prepare a hot meal. In the dark we felt our way along a line to the dispensing point. We shoved our mess tins toward a few dark figures who retaliated by slapping some unidentifiable mush into the tins. As I left the chow line I bumped into Harbeck. "Have you taken that town yet, Arnold?" "Maybe today," I answered. I couldn't feel the levity I tried to inject into the words.

We were soon on the move again, 1st Plt leading until we reached a small stream. A tree trunk was dragged up and thrown across the stream, and 2nd Plt took the point there. As we moved to the fore I felt a bit conspicious, a part of some insane endeavor -- toward what? Incredibly, I was aware of a mild feeling of purpose and pride mixed with the feeling of concern for danger. Many times over the next months, as I'm sure did others, I was accosted by that unique feeling of pride of purpose and involvement coupled with a counter feeling of what in the hell am I doing here? What series of events conspired to put me at this point in space and time? Was it personal arrogance to suppose I had any control over my destiny -- or was I part of an inexorable and inalterable plan playing out to unchangeable finality?

As we moved on forward toward the unknown my left hand moved from its grip on the rifle below the front sling ferrule and advanced forward to grip the upper hand guard. There it felt comfortable. It is important that this bit of acknowledged superstition be stressed for, each of us in our own secret way, there was developed some idiosyncracy of imagined comfort. The unease of each impending action sought the small compensation of that clutch, an awkward position for some.

On beyond the stream we climbed a hillside to a narrow road cut in the hillside. The ascent above the road was very steep. One man scrambled up to check the area above before securing a rope to a tree trunk for the rest to use as an aid in the steep climb. One MG located on this high point could have caused us grevious damage, but there was no evidence of any enemy activity near the crest. As men reached the top they began bunching up as they waited for those following to come up, so we began to disperse and move forward to get a five

yard interval between men.

Everybody seemed to sense that we were drawing near the enemy now, and we became more alert and cautious as we went deeper into the forest. From the crest onward we were on relatively level ground and were generally moving along a little used trail. Some of us opened and ate K rations as we moved onward. We didn't want to die hungry so long as food was available. Shortly before noon we were ordered off the track to the right in a grove of young trees. It was not known how long we would be here, but those who had not opened rations earlier did so now. In view of the air of imminent danger a few men began digging. It seemed to be a good idea, so we were ordered to go ahead and dig in, but were warned to make as little noise as possible. A few inches below the surface we found the usual layer of fine rock that defied digging and had to be scraped out laboriously. The clatter of entrenching tools on rock seemed to magnify and become a din. Gernsbacher caught up with us and began to help me dig.

Someone said we had already taken our first objective, the stream some distance back.

A recon patrol was ordered out to scout conditions in the area ahead. Lt Mann led the patrol of a handful of mer among them were Block, Bowers, Underwood, and others. They moved off, a lonely looking group in a vast wilderness. We occupied the time by increasing the depth of our holes.

When the patrol returned, excitement began to mount. Unobserved, they had spotted one of the outer Siegfried forts As they crept nearer to the concrete pillbox they were able to observe a German chopping wood outside the box -- wood smoke curled lazily from the box, a peaceful picture. Lt Mann gave Block the order to shoot -- thus any possibility of attacking the fort in surprise was forfeit. Some felt the shot missed, others said the German was heard to excla "Ich bin gewoundet!" The German disappeared into the box a the patrol withdrew.*

A conference was held by the officers and, in late afte noon, it was decided we would move on the fort immediately

With a minimum of fuss we packed up and moved out towar the German position. As we drew near the box we were orde ed to drop our packs, it being felt that performance in th coming attack would be better served without their bulk an weight. From that point we moved in squad and platoon com bat formation, creeping silently over the snow carpeted forest floor. I felt a little ridiculous creeping through the trees, rifle at ready, finger on trigger -- the act seemed melodramatic and unreal. In the trees it was possible to see only some of the members of your own platoon in combat approach formation. I moved around Gernsbacher to gain a better view of the Sqd point, keying on them. We crossed a firebreak about fifty feet wide and kept it t

* Block confirms that the shot missed.

our right and we roughly paralled it as we advanced on the fort. In the firebreak was a tangled, huge pile of logs. A little beyond that the defenders spotted us and introduced us to the devastating blasts of MG at close range. In that murderous hail of spandau the violence of sound was spiteful and sharp -- guts recoiled and minds froze.

As I saw men to my left go to ground, so did I, willing myself pressed deep in the snow. The deep bark of Garand fire sounded, and shouts urged us forward. Here and there men jumped up and ran ahead a few paces, then hit the ground again. Numbly I emulated the process, surprised that legs and mind functioned together -- I was absolutely terrified, and marveled that one could still function in such fear. The high rate of fire reminded me of a foot pressed on the gas pedal of a twelve cylinder engine, revving it beyond prudence. Now the German light mortars came into action, raining among us in unbelievable numbers. Terror that seemed absolute made way for more. They didn't have to range them -- they had been zeroed in for weeks, and it seemed the supply was limitless. Memo to an infantryman: when attacking, keep close to the enemy so he can't bring his mortars and artillery into action without endangering himself -- else he will chew your asses up. Yeah -- well those MG 34's and 42's are going to chew us up if we moved in on them.

Just about everybody was frozen in position in more ways than one, the MG's and mortars prevented movement, and bodies pressed deep in snow were losing heat rapidly. Knees, hands, elbows, and faces were becoming chilled and numb. Fragments of torn limbs hurtled down from the many tree bursts, and mortar bomb explosions whipped the air with hot metal, dirt, snow, and rocks. Amidst this thousands of bullets snapped, crackled, and whined -- all searching for yielding flesh and fragile bone. The human body is hard put to compete with what is devised to destroy. The combined noise in the air was physical, almost a solid, and smothered the crys and shouts of men. To further complicate matters darkness was decending rapidly. Through the gathering gloom I could see Swede a few yards to my left, helmet pressed tightly against a tree trunk, feet digging as though trying to force his entire body into the confines of the helmet. I, being agnostic, found that I had an aptitude and facility for fervent prayer.

The fire began to decrease as darkness came on. The bastards had been going heavy on their ammo. Sporadic bursts still tore through the trees. Even in the intervals between bursts I was unable to hear anyone and could see only two or three men in my immediate area. Had the company moved on forward -- or back? In either case I didn't want to be alone. I called to Swede, and he carefully turned his head to look my way. "You okay?" "I reckon -- how about you?" "So far," I said.

From faraway a muffled voice called, "We're pulling back." I raised myself on elbows and could make out figures bent low and trotting rearward. "Let's go," said Swede. Proceeding rearward, we began to encounter other members of the squad.

After retrieving our packs the company began to settle in for the night to the left of the log obstacle in the fire break, and the sound of entrenching tools was soon evident amidst spaced bursts of MG fire. The mortaring had ceased. I made a big mistake -- I crawled into the crisscrossed logs of the obstacle for protection from any fire that may come during the night. Morelli came with me, followed by others. Soon we had so much company we were forced to reject newcomers. We tried our entrenching tools but it was useless to attempt digging between the logs in shale and tangled roots. Two medics and an infantryman mad the effort also, with the same results. The three were in bad state, one was frantic and weeping as he scratched at t unyielding earth, finally tearing at the root filled soil i anguish with frozen and bloody fingers. His terror served to demoralize the other two further.

It was obvious that we must get some sleep if we were tc be in shape to face the rigors of the next day. I called Eddy (Lt Mann. He had instructed that we call him Eddy to prevent the enemy from recognizing his official rank. Most officers and NCO had used various means to obscure insigni of rank.). When there was no answer I raised my voice high er, risking German fire. "I hear somebody calling me, but I can't understand," came the acknowledgement. "Are we to use our fart sacks tonight?" I shouted. "I am," was the r turn. Satisfied, I unrolled the sleeping bag and climbed inside, wedged between the comforting logs. Then it hit m -- since this pile of logs were placed here as an obstacle the whole mess was probably mined and booby-trapped to hel and gone. "Everybody be careful -- this place may be mine I announced without cheer.

"I'm not going to use the sack," Morelli said. "Might our last chance," I told him. I felt outside for my pack, extracted a K ration, and began munching. "You eating?" "Yeah." I could feel him considering. When I had finishe the ration I smoked a cigarette, hiding the light inside t sack. "You smoking?" "Yeah." After a few minutes I hea the rustle of a fart sack being readied, then the sound o eating, followed by the scratch of a match.

Through the night we were awakened periodically by the snapping of MG bullets raking the logs, and an occasional mortar bomb that sent fragments thunking harmlessly into laced timber. The obstacle was drawing fire, but it also was capable of absorbing impact solidly. Maybe it hadn't been such a bad idea after all. I still resolved to aban the place at first light.

Word whispered around had it that casualties from the and mortars was light. It would have seemed that, in suc a hail of fire, half the company would have died. One of the medics in our log retreat had a black eye and a bent on his helmet from a mortar fragment. The event seemed t indicate that, except for those unfortunate enough to be by them, light mortars, like dogs, had more bark than bit

Dawn revealed the overnight change of landscape where dark earth indicated dozens of foxholes in various stages of preparation. Morelli and I began digging a few yards from the log obstacle, but before we had excavated enough to hold a pack Morelli felt the need to socialize with a few friends, so off he went. Minutes later an 88 mm shell came screaming in and hit a couple of yards from our hole, forcing me to scrunch in a ball in the shallow depression with a third of my body still exposed above ground. A few more 88's dropped in the company area before quiet returned. Morelli came running back, certain that the first shell had got me. By noon I had gotten through the rock and shale, after that the digging went well -- but I was alone. Swede and Whiting had invited Morelli to move in with them in an already completed hole. Bowers was in a similar situation. Underwood had helped him dig under a log during the night, but then moved to Plt Hq hole with Lt Mann, as had been the custom since we first went on line. Some accomodation had been reached whereby he seemed to become an unofficial part of the Hq group. The aborted attack on the pillbox had an unsettling effect on Underwood. It would be a fair assessment to say that all had been deeply shaken, but most concealed it well.

The first day in front of the concrete fort was relatively quiet. The MG's fired warning bursts now and then to remind us that the surrender scenario was not unanimous. Our armed attempt here so far had about the same success as the broadcast surrender invitation and ultimatum had in Nov. when we were first on line -- zero. But plans were being laid now to handle the concrete monster. Engineers brought up some flame throwers and gave us a very short course in their operation, then left.

Next day, Dec.15, Lt Mann was ordered to assemble an assault force and go for the box. He picked his men, calling their names. My eyes faltered when he gazed at me, then moved on to others until he had selected about thirty. Some were eager to go -- some weren't. Bowers was pro, I was con.

When the attack took place, we in the company area could tell by the sound that it was a slam bang affair -- unfortunately it didn't succeed. They returned later with many casualties. Bowers took a group out to help bring the wounded in. Whiting gave me the V sign as he passed on a stretcher, his face was infinitely calm. Spandaus had ripped both legs. Sgt Keyser walked back on his own with blood streaming down his grinning face. A small hole was neatly drilled through his helmet in the center, but just a bit high... Lt Engelbretsen was not aware of his wounds until someone pointed out that the back of his field jacket was torn and bloody from mortar splinters. His wounds proved to be superficial cuts. One boy had a very close shave -- a mortar fragment ripped through the left side of his helmet, through the liner, through the wool knit cap, cut his hair almost to the skin, then passed on out the rear. Many more suffered wounds in varying degree. Pvt William Ward was killed by enemy fire.

Piecing together what we were told had happened at the pillbox, it became obvious that much had gone wrong. The covering force on the left failed to silence supporting fire from that direction -- an absolute prerequisite in successful attacks on strong points. Assaulting troops must be reasonably free to concentrate on their immediate objective without having to worry unduly about their flanks. Jupko's BAR was balky until he freed the bolt with a little loving attention. Then big Joe settled himself on one knee, pushed his arm out a couple of times in the manner of a man getting the cuff of a sleeve just right on his wrist, and proceeded to give the pillbox a taste of the hell it was so intent on giving out, forcing it to button up. The flame-throwers malfunctioned -- instead of fearful flame, they ejected a harmless stream of milky liquid which failed to impress the defenders. Whiting crawled under MG fire to the encircling defensive barbed wire. His job was to blow a passage through the wire with a coil of Prima Cord. He got the cord across the wire, but when he pulled the friction ig niter there was no reaction. He crawled back for another supply and returned to the wire for another try. Again the igniter was faulty. He was wounded badly in yet another try Cpl Frank Fogg, the quiet, friendly, unassuming, bespectacle fellow everybody always had a good word for -- Cpl Fogg push ed his glasses up on his nose and had a go at delivering the Prima Cord. He was called back when the assault was called off.

The men were glum and angry. They had a right to expect better of their support equipment. But the attitude was healthy. So okay, the pillbox wasn't going anywhere -- it would still be there, and a better way would be found.

The Jerries were smart, battlewise, and tricky. One of their favorites was to fire a tracer mix a bit high, which encouraged us to move under it. Another MG would then open up with sweeps just above ground level unmarked by tracer. The low fire was deadly. But Easy was learning -- and will-ing.

My voracious appetite coupled with my philosophy of eat it now had reduced my personal larder to one bullion cube, and now it was time to finish that off as well. As I stirre the cube in a canteen cup of water over a small flame in the bottom of my hole, Morelli walked by on the parapet and dis-lodged pebbles and dirt. Gravity and unerring aim completed the lusty brew. I gave him a cold eye without comment, and he directed his bumbling feet elsewhere. I stirred in the additional contents, fished out the pebbles, and drank the last food I had in the world -- willing the mineral content to be rich and healthy.

Someone said that God, providence, or fate would provide. A few K rations were distributed that evening.

A trip to the stream in our rear to fill a batch of cante gave me some insight. Back there they had received more she

fire than we had, as evidenced by the many dark blotches in the snow. At that early stage the men back there still viewed the line infantryman with a satisfying amount of awe -- as I passed through and back again I was watched as if I had just come from Mars.

It was decided to employ something simple and ruggedly dependable on the box -- a 57mm AT gun was snaked up the trail and made ready to fire in support of our next attempt.

Keep your goddam helmets on, boys -- mine saved my life!

Sgt Dave Keyser, on return from the attack on the pillbox at Jaghutte.

A Change of Plans

In early morning, from far to the south of us came sounds of artillery and distant engines. We felt relieved that an advance against the Germans was in progress there also. It could make our task here a little easier and quicker. But we misread the event. Instead of a supporting action down south, we learned that a German attack was in progress there This changed the complection of things, but we didn't think our intended action would be much delayed. The thought lean ed to the possibility that, in fact, emphasis may be placed on our advance as a means of endangering the Germans engaged in offensive action to our right. It was felt, in any event that the business down south should soon sort itself out and things would get back on track again. Meanwhile, we had a lot of ground to our credit up here, and we would concern ou selves here.

As the situation in the south developed further with more German successes, our own situation was a bit in limbo. The options seemed numerous: we could continue with our own litt war, we could sit tight and defend our present gains, markir time until the situation became more advantageous. Or, God forbid, would we sneak off under cover of darkness and leave this to the Germans without a fight in order to extricate ourselves from an unpleasantry?

Reality turned out to be more serious than conjecture hac allowed for. The Germans had, in fact, launched a major ef and were, at the moment, enjoying considerable success with deep penetrations that were becoming deeper by the hour. Two things became apparent: we must extricate ourselves to preserve unit integrity, and we must quickly provide assistanc to hard pressed units who were steadily being ground down o thrust aside. Once the decision was made for us our reacti was swift.

The order soon came: Prepare to pull back!

> We don't know what the situation is, or where our friends are. The Germans are everywhere. I don't know what to tell you except dig in around this house and be prepared to fight in all directions.
>
> Capt Driscoll, at the stone house north of Krinkelt.

So, Where Do We Go From Here?

Every man loaded up with everything he could carry -- extra bandoliers of ammo, extra grenades, everything we may need and that we wished to deny the Germans. We began pulling back in mid afternoon amidst a mild sense of urgency and a degree of mixed sadness and anger at leaving the gained territory without a fight. The one consolation, if any, was that much of the way back was downhill.

We made good progress without difficulty in the early stage of the withdrawal. We didn't know how soon the Germans would become cognizant of our departure, or how quickly and in what way they would react. In the event, we were less concerned by who may be following than by what me may encounter to our west and south. It was known that deep penetrations were in progress south of us, and we could assume that enemy units of up to Bn size may be fanning out in exploratory and encircling moves in the area we would have to traverse in order to extricate ourselves and be of use in retarding enemy flow west and north. If we could survive and slow the advance for a few days there would be time for reserves and counter strategy to be employed.

Heavy loads began to take a toll of energy, and least needed items began to appear along the route of march, extra shoes, gas masks -- Gernsbacher even divested himself of a package of goodies from home.

At one point we spilled out of a steep wooded slope onto a narrow road, and moved to the right around a curve where a bulldozier sat minus one track, lost to a mine on the road. Beyond there we pulled off the road and took a break on the upslope side, resting tired legs and feet and breaking out our smokes. We had barely settled down when we heard a commotion in the woods behind and above us, causing us to grab our weapons in alarm. Out of the woods tumbled a group of engineers. They were muddy and obviously agitated. "Get back, get back," they shouted, "the Germans are right behind us!" We went downslope quickly into a planting of young trees less than head high. Later, and somewhat further along in a similar growth of young trees we were halted. One of the officers ahead motioned and called softly, "Tanks, get down!" We ducked down and waited, listening to the grind of engines and tracks not far to the left front of our direction of march. Now we definitely were aware that Germans were ahead of us. I had ducked immediately

and hadn't seen the tanks. We remained hidden until the ta engines sound died away somewhere up ahead, then rose and c tinued silently on our way. We were wary now from the two close brushes with the enemy -- it would be best to avoid t Germans until we contacted friendly units. An armed clash these remote hills could very well undermine what we hoped accomplish. We must reach friendly territory, intact if at all possible, and establish contact and coherence on our fl

Near nightfall we slid and stumbled the last few feet of steep descent to a small stream at the foot of a hill. Som managed to time the last few feet and leap the stream. Othe were not so successful, and got wet. Before us was a fairly level field, to the right of which was a wire fence stretch alongside a woods. We crossed the fence and began digging for the night along the woods edge. Gernsbacher and I were making good headway on our hole, when I was called away to help dig a position for Co Hq. It was full dark when I returned, and all was quiet as I climbed tiredly into the hole In my absence Frazer had moved in with Gernsbacher, and both were asleep. The hole barely accomodated the width of two. Angrily reflecting on ineptitude or the fickle finger of fat I climbed in atop the sleeping men and accepted a night of and misery. The rattle of MG fire and distant thump of guns and shells soon escaped my awareness.

Well before dawn I was awaken by a commotion out in the field beyond the woods. It was impossible to see what was going on in the dark, but the sound was drawing nearer. Now a sound of voices came above the early morning sounds of war "Move along, move along there, you bastards," shouted a dist inctly American voice. Shapes of men loomed out of the dark some with hands over heads. Stringing wire, I thought -- bu no, not like that. Sgt Bogatay was herding a bunch of Jerri along, prodding with his rifle, and cussin' as he went.

Off this bunch I got my first war souvineer, a fountain pen. I examined my acquisition after daylight. Across the face of the point was stamped, "Made in U.S.A."

On the move again, in midmorning we climbed a small wooded hill that overlooked open fields. We began digging in along the crest where we could cover the field handily. Sgt Glisch, I think, dug up a bolt action military rifle from where someone had hidden it inches below the surface. We conjectured as to how it came to be hidden on the crest of this hill overlooking the fields -- a Belgian soldier in 194 A German deserter? A Belgian resistance member? The state of preservation indicated it had not been there very long.

Our digging there came to nought, since we were ordered to move before the holes were useable. Later we began digging in an open field, which proved far more exciting -- MG's were sweeping the field with Spandau as we dug. A cat and mouse game ensued in which the MG's would drive us into our shallow diggings until the firing let up. Then we would proceed with our tasks, whereupon the MG's would have another go at us. It was not entirely without humor.

Not without humor, nor without danger and tragedy. Gernsbacher went in search of straw for the bottom of the hole. I put the finishing touches on the digging while he was gone. When Gernsbacher returned with some straw he stood on the parapet to admire our handiwork, and I climbed up beside him to enjoy a stretch. Again the Spandaus raked the field, and again we jumped for the safety of the hole, but the game concluded for Gernsbacher there. A bullet caught him as he was in mid-jump, and he fell on the parapet. He gave a sharp cry, and I dragged him into the hole out of the line of fire. I shouted, "Medic!" He was holding his thigh near where it was joined to the body, so I knew where to look -- but I discovered how hard it is to find a bullet hole in fabric. The exit was easy enough to find, however, because all the bleeding was there. I had cut his pants leg away by the time two medics arrived. His pain was obvious, and morphine was jabbed into the thigh but had no effect, and he begged for more. Father Hockhaus arrived soon after and prayed over him. As he was born away on a stretcher I wondered what would happen to our wounded if we were cut off. A letter from him after the war seemed to confirm my belief -- the bullet damaged the sciatic nerve.

After Gernsbacher's departure Glass moved into the hole with me.

As dawn broke in the morning, the MG's resumed spraying us, but with greater intensity. During a lull in the firing Glass climbed from the hole and trotted some fifty feet to a fencerow directly in front of our hole. He carried with him a few of the leaflets which the Germans had distributed over the area which read, "American soldiers, lay down your arms... The flower of American manhood is dying on the battlefield..." As Glass dropped his pants a German gunner took him to task, clipping twigs and small branches from the sparse growth in the fencerow around him. I was forced to duck, being in the line of fire also. Seconds later Glass jumped in, unhurt. He made another attempt when the firing tapered off, but was sent back to the safety of the hole again. Yet again he returned to the fence-row, and again the gunner sought to discourage him. This time Glass would not be intimidated. The last I saw as I ducked out of the snapping bullets was Glass calmly crouched in the familiar position, his white rump exposed to the furious gaze of the gunner. When he didn't return to the hole I knew it was goodby, Glass! Curious, I took a quick peek above the hole -- he was buckling his belt with an air of cool deliberation.

We were now getting some incoming artillery, but most of it was falling in George company. Rumor had it that 2nd Div artillery was hitting us. All I know is that the shell bursts had that howl peculiar to our artillery, and there was too much of it to be classed as a few shorts.

A sunken road a couple of hundred feet behind us was being used as a collection point for wounded, though it offered so

little protection -- both artillery and small arms were fin ing the road all too frequently. Medics called for help, a Lt Mann sent Glass and me. A medic, Jordan, was working on soldier from G Co whose wounds included a badly shredded ar The wounded boy had lost a lot of blood and was in shock, s Jordan had me hold the plasma bottle as plasma dripped into a vein. Jordan and Glass worked over another fellow nearby The boy from G was shivering badly, and there was nothing t cover him with. Blankets were needed badly. Each shell ex plosion nearby set the shivering off even more. I fired up a cigarette and shared it with the fellow, and it seemed to help some. He kept saying, "Get me out of here. For God sakes, get me out of here -- its going to kill us all." He repeated it with each shell. "We will get you out," I told him. "We will get you to a warm hospital and get you fixed up, and you can go home." Another medic working on another man close by made a motion of finger to lips. "Don't ever tell them that," he hissed. "You are going to be okay, and be right back up here soon," he said to the boy. I didn't buy that reasoning but, evidentally, it was SOP. I couldn' help but notice that the idea of going home seemed awfully attractive to the wounded.

The badly wounded in shock were in trouble unless we wer able to find some blankets, so Glass and I went searching. During our pullback march we had passed several abandoned camps, and we hoped to find one of these. We walked up the road in the direction of a nearby woods, passing more than dozen wounded Germans huddled by the roadside under guard. As we passed, several pleaded for us to give them water, b water was scarce and we were in a hurry.

We were fortunate to run across an abandoned artillery kitchen a few hundred yards from the road, in the woods. W collected a supply of blankets, and then filled our pocket with canned and dried foods. While we were there another four or five men came up to check the place out. One of t men was a stocky bird Colonel with a bit of a paunch. He artillery, I think, and gave us a disapproving look, but s nothing. A bazooka, hanging from a tree limb by the strap attracted his eye, and he took it with him.

Jordan had been killed while we looked for blankets, so we left the blankets and some of the food with the other m along the road, and went back to 2nd Plt. We gave most of remainder of the food to the platoon, and told Lt Mann how had come by such a windfall. He immediately, and wisely, patched a group to retrieve more food from the abandoned c The food was a welcome change -- many of us had been satis ing our hunger by eating raw beets from the huge piles in fields about.

In late afternoon we were ordered on the move again. A we moved out, a jeep driver, unable to get his jeep to run, reached in the engine compartment and tore out a handful c wires to make sure it was disabled, and left on foot with Things were getting rough all over.

It was hard to define where we were going, or for what purpose. Our route transited woods felled by artillery as if by a giant indiscriminant buzz saw, other woods virtually untouched, snow covered roads, and roads that were quagmires. At one point, where a road teed off to the left from the one we were on, we came upon a Sherman tank. It sat like a silent sentinel at the junction. There was no sign of the crew, and the tank's paint showed it to be new and unused. We never learned whether it was broken down, out of fuel, or simply abandoned. Somewhere along a muddy road we fell out on the roadside to take a short rest. We were sweaty from exertion, but after a couple of minutes rest our sweat felt like ice. Marching in poor footing with a crushing weight on our backs caused many to appraise their loads with a view to eliminating excess weight. For most the answer was the bulky, heavy, water logged overcoat, and there were far fewer of them when we resumed the march. A few extra shoes (we had not yet been issued the new combat boots) and gas masks remained behind in the ditch or in the woods. Everybody disliked the overcoat, and few wore them. Conversely, the Germans were most often attired in greatcoats that almost dragged the ground. A joke common to us was, "If you see anybody wearing an overcoat, shoot him -- he ain't one of ours." The gas mask never was a popular item, as roadsides across Europe would attest. We would ditch them and quartermasters would come along and pick them up and reissue them, only to find them again a few miles further along. We had already been told that the things were useless against nerve gas, which the Germans had.

Just before dark we met a jeep sloshing along toward us from the direction in which we were headed. A Major stood up in the jeep and flapped his arms like a man gone berserk, and shouted, "Get back! Turn around and go back!" We halted as officers held a conference in the road, then we were turned and headed back. As dark fell we repassed the silent tank. There we turned up the road to the right. At least we would see some new territory in that direction.

On through the dark we stumbled and cursed, alternately running to catch up, or standing still waiting for the column to move on ahead -- the classic accordion effect that is imposed on a column whose lead elements are uncertain and having to pick their way. The result was that we were heated and chilled in turn. In the slippery dark we were constantly falling down. Those who fell on their backs flailed about like overturned beetles, their packs and equipment resisting all attempts to be turned upright. A helping hand would usually suffice or, barring that, you had to use your rifle like a pole, and climb up it. After slipping down eight times I quit counting in frustration.

One thing was certain, we weren't headed for the rear for, up ahead, the sounds of battle were returning, and we were heading for what sounded like the worst of it -- things seemed to have picked up since afternoon. It was as though the

Gods of war found our education deficient, and were determined to rectify the deficiency. "Come this way," they seemed to say, "we wish to introduce you to another facet of the Gem."

In the dark ahead we could see the glow of fires burning in Krinkelt and, nearer still, we were enveloped by the sights and sounds of contrived mayhem. The battle took on the aspects of a melee, a brawl peopled by madmen. Men shouted and cried in English and German. Tank engines roared and their high velocity rifles split the night with flash and ripping sound. MG and rifle fire mixed in crazy patterns. Artillery and Nebelwerfers (screaming memies) whooshed, howled, and shrieked. In the sky overhead V-1 robot bombs sputtered past, flying mindlessly toward a violent end. Most eerie of all was the wail of a siren on a Tiger tank setting the tone and exemplifying the whole cataclysmic mess. A Dante's Inferno unglued. Most of Krinkelt's past must have been peaceful, even idyllic -- in some future day this would be part of the town's past.

I was dismayed that we were heading into this grinder of men, yet, like a moth attracted to flame, there seemed to be a compulsion drawing us onward. Our lead elements collided with Germans who were either interested in moving up the road, or who intended to deny us entry to all the fun. MG fire lashed up the road, and we leaped to the sides. Low hanging communications wire tumbled us bow string fashion back on the road. Everybody immediately began deploying into the fields by the roadside, and in the milling around in the dark I lost contact with the company. Up ahead I recognised a familiar back, Swede Swanson, and followed him until I realised we were among some other outfit. I shouted at him above the noise of battle to tell him that we were lost. He continued on unmindful, turning off the road to the left behind a group of people. Then it became apparent that the guy just looked like Swede. The prospect of spending a night in hell without my friends in E Co was signally unappealing, so I got back on the road, ducking MG fire, until I managed to locate them beside a stone house on the opposite side of the road. Capt Driscoll was standing near the house, addressing the men, his face drawn and wan with worry and anxiety. He bade us dig in around the house in a circle, and be prepared to fight in all directions. It had come to this -- Driscoll's Last Stand.

2nd Plt began digging in along a hedge which bordered the house on the Krinkelt side. I dug well and deep, for we had little or no defence against the Panzers that were expected to come up the road. God only knew what would come from the other side. We were resigned to the role of martyred heroes.

Just as we got our positions prepared and were hoping to take turns getting a little sleep and rest before our martyrdom, word came that we were to pack up and move again. By now our confidence in the people running the show was wearing pretty thin. We realised that our situation was grave, but felt that we could and should be committed to something positive instead of all this errant rambling. We were pissed off enough to take on all comers.

Ah, we've got three towns burning tonight!

Observant GI, viewing the horizon as he stretched his back from digging with his helmet near Krinkelt-Rocherath 19th Dec.

False Withdrawal and Other Things

Though we were not aware of it at the time, our errant march of the afternoon and through most of the night was a result of what has been referred to later as a "false withdrawal". It is alleged that 395 RCT Hq received a radio communication ordering the withdrawal of the RCT to the new positions being built on Elsenborn and the Elsenborn Ridge complex. It is not clear whether 2nd Bn remained under the command of the RCT at this time, or whether it had, in fact, reverted to 393 Inf, the command from which it had been detached earlier. Be that as it may, the battalion was part of the false withdrawal. The word "alleged" is used because of controversy which developed almost immediately. 99 Div Hq disclaimed issuance of the order and communication, and ordered the immediate re-occupation of the positions. It has since been generally accepted that the message was perpentrated by German operatives seeking to disorganize the defence of the area. Curious, however, is the fact that the Germans were slow in taking advantage of a situation favorable to them which they had supposedly themselves created. Some fourteen hours had transpired between the withdrawal and re-occupation of the positions, completed before dawn of 19th. Some Germans were in the position on our return, but not in force, and were easily routed. This happy circumstance could have been otherwise -- an alert enemy should have exploited the opening to our disadvantage. As it turned out, little harm or damage was done -- the actual withdrawal to the Elsenborn line was accomplished the night of 19-20 Dec as scheduled.

It should be emphasized that we were not driven from the Krinkelt area -- the Germans did not take the area -- it was abandoned in favor of a better defence line, and resulted from a tactical decision. Little advantage accrued to the Germans in their occupation of the abandoned areas. Those who occupied the released ground would, over the coming days and weeks, pay a grim and terrible rent on the property. American artillery would collect the bill.

In those early days of the German counter-offensive which was already being referred to as "The Bulge", we received a considerable amount of our information through the grapevine.

Bearing in mind the unreliable source, we were still able to sift the rumors for a fair idea of what was happening. We were aware the first day of a German attack in progress to our right, having been told officially of this, though details were scant. Our own movement and actions gave good indication of the gravity of the situation. Additionally, we were hearing many stories of German brutality and atrocities committed on American prisoners and Belgian civilians. Most of these were attributed to the Waffen SS units involved in the attack, though the Wehrmacht was not exempt. Obviously, we were unable to determine the veracity of such stories, and we suspended judgement accordingly but, at the same time, suspected and feared the worst. Indeed, the news services soon verified the more notorious of these stories. But what of the lesser known and smaller incidents referred to in rumor? Many of these were never substantiated and will forever remain obscure, and some were rumors, and nothing more. These catagories apply, one or the other, to alleged events taking place in Krinkelt:

A 99th Lt surrendered himself and the remnants of his Plt in Krinkelt. The Germans lined the men against a wall and forced the Lt to give the firing order that sent his own men into oblivion, then shot him in turn. The Lt, wounded but alive, was refused treatment by American medics and allowed to die for his indiscretion.

Two Belgian women appeared in a second storey window, shooting and shouting vilifications at Americans in the street.

A Belgian boy was taking pot shots at Americans from the cover of a building.

A Belgian man was killed at his transmitter in a loft.

We had, at the onset, deemed it prudent to assume that a percentage of people in the border area may be pro German, particularly in view of much of the area having been German prior to WW 1.

Keep going, men -- there's hot coffee up ahead.

Engineer Major, standing along our route of march, and doing his bit in trying to keep up our morale -- by lying.

The Line Forms to the Rear

After a long, anxious, weary night we finally ended up at the same place we had started from the previous afternoon. We arrived just before dawn, and practically fell in our foxholes to get just enough sleep to increase the stupor of our senses. Some of the holes were occupied by sleeping Germans, and were quickly taken over by the former occupants. Fox company, on our flank, didn't completely clear their holes until after daylight. In that skirmish a German medic carrying a pistol was killed. It was considered a sort of retribution for Jordan's death -- the bullet that killed him had passed through the medical emblem on his helmet, and he carried no weapon.

We stayed put throughout the day, keeping the Germans at bay and enduring sporadic artillery and MG fire, but night saw us on the march again. A description of this march, except in detail, would pretty well parallel that of the night before.-- the slushy footing, the accordion effect on the column, the dark woods where we hung onto the pack of the man ahead to keep from being left behind, etc. After a pause in dark woods I heard Morelli far behind urging me to move out. When I yelled back for him to come on he discovered that he had been waiting for a tree to move. Again, at one point, we met the head of the column marching back by us. This time there were hoots, catcalls, and considerable anger and snickers. The column had taken a wrong turn, and was correcting. We had brought along the remainder of the canned food from the artillery kitchen. Morelli threw down a gallon can of pineapple because of the weight. Unknown to him, I picked the can up and kept it in my jacket until, miles later, Glass and I consumed most of the contents, playfully rejecting Morelli's plea for some, then relenting.

The glow of burning towns and villages dotted the skyline southward, and there was the usual artillery, V-1 rockets, and Nebelwerfers flying about. MG and rifle, or small arms fire, was receeding. We had not been told of the withdrawal scheme, but the receeding small arms fire gave pause to wonder if we were being pulled out of the line -- we dared not hope. We passed a Major of engineers urging us onward to hot coffee ahead -- but there was no coffee ahead, hot or otherwise.

Further evidence that we may be moving out of line was the marked decrease in black shellhole splotches in the snow. We passed a few men digging in along a line of trees. One, using his helmet as an entrenching tool, stood up and arched backward

to ease tired back muscles. He surveyed the distance ahead in mock surprise. "Ah," he observed, "we've got three towns burning tonight." His attitude contained a mixture of awe, bitterness, accomplishment, pride, and prophecy -- all cloaked in a sort of ironic humor.

After more cross country slipping and sliding we came to another road, this one pristine white with no shell scars. Rumor in the column had it that we had just passed through the division defense line, and were now in friendly country. We waited here for awhile before moving on. During the wait many of us curled up in the snow for some much needed sleep. We were getting good at catching short naps in appalling conditions.

We moved out again with a sense of better things to come and an unaccustomed vigor in our step. Our sense of well-being was justified, for we soon entered the town of Elsenborn, well behind the areas we had struggled for so recently. Our minds pictured sleeping the night in houses, on beds maybe -- and with boots off!

A traditional description of soldiers in war -- and I emphasize infantrymen here -- is that they undergo long periods of boredom punctuated by short periods of terror. In the past week we had had both in good measure. Our sense of wellbeing was accompanied with a sense of pride -- we had survived where lesser men would have crumbled.

Dreams of houses and beds were soon dispelled, for this was the province of the rear area soldier. We were led through the dark streets, between houses where, here and there from ill fitted blackout shades, shone slivvers of cheer. Then there were no more houses and no more slivvers of cheer -- only more snow covered frozen ground -- this was our province.

Some distance from the town we were halted on high ground that sloped gently toward a shallow valley ahead. With scant hours remaining before dawn, too tired and disgusted to bother with digging in, we scraped the snow from the ground and, combining blankets among small groups, slept as best we could in the freezing cold. My last thought before troubled sleep was, nobody back here gives a damn -- as long as they are safe and comfortable and warm, they don't care...

Before closing out this period, it is well to consider what effects we may have exerted on the battle in our area over the preceeding days of the German drive. Firstly, the Germans may have been deeply confused as to our numbers. By rambling to and fro over considerable territory and appearing in so many places, we certainly must have given the impression that the area was covered by far more troops than was the case. In which case German planning may have been inordinately colored by judgemental errors. One must remember also that we, in fact, comprised a formidable formation -- we had not suffered high casualties as had the battalions east of Krinkelt and, thus, were a force to be reckoned with. We were reasonably

intact and reasonably forewarned when we entered the defensive struggle. Our most severe deficiencies were in anti-tank weaponry and communications. Indeed, the Germans had their own problems as regards the area. Did they have enough panzers to spare for operations in the sector and, if so, did they feel that the ground would support heavy mechanized equipment? If not, then their alternative had to be massive infantry in attacks designed to encircle or roll us back. This capability they didn't have -- their infantry had already suffered high casualties in traversing the distance from the border to Krinkelt, and were now hard put to maintain pressure which had been within their power to exert a few days earlier. Such attacks, when mounted, would almost certainly result in grevious losses to them -- as had been the case, and would be in future.

In talking about attacks and defenses, one must talk about perspective as well. It is easy and common for the mind's eye to envision combatants slugging it out face to face and toe to toe -- a Hollywood sweep of thousands grappling on camera. Truth is not so inventive -- the great panaramic scene is falsehood. Truth is a small group of men in a corner of the view, almost isolated from the whole. They are infrequently able to see their comrades further along, or even the enemy across the way. Psychological isolation is even more dramatic than physical isolation. The small group perceives itself alone, is concerned with the few square yards surrounding it. The individual is beset by questions forced by his isolation: Where the hell are the other platoons? Our mortars and MG's -- where are they? And our artillery support? Has everybody gone the hell home? He thinks of the planes and tanks and guns churned out by the hundreds of thousands, and wonders why he can't see some of that stuff when some Kraut bastard is chewing at his tail with a hot MG. Let me tell you about poverty -- true poverty is to know all that stuff exists, and that you need some of it right now -- and you haven't got it...

Forget the panarama.

Battles are fought by small groups of desperate men against other small groups equally desperate.

An infantry company (except in dreams) is always operating short handed, due to that hot MG they ran across yesterday, or that bunch of 88's that caught them in open ground this morning, or the patrol that came in short last night -- besides, they never got replacements for the men they lost taking Hundheim last week. Let's be generous, and say they are operating about 75% of TO strength on average. That's 135 Dogfaces. Most of the casualties were in the rifle platoons, and you've got 21 left per platoon. 3rd Plt is furnishing patrols tonight, and 1st Plt was the last one to get hit bad -- so you will hit Hundheim11 early in the morning with 2nd Plt with 1st Sqd on point. You want the objective cleared by 0630, so you're going to hit 'em hard -- walk those 7 right in and gut the place! If it gets sticky, maybe you can get a fire mission, and bring in the other 14 men of the Plt. You suspect the poor bastards you plan to hit are in the same shape. Cut! Too small for wide angle lens!

I hate the Germans. They are the reason I'm not home with my family right now.

Lt Mann, rationalizing why we shouldn't be fainthearted in killing Germans.

A Short Respite

Dawn of Dec. 20 brought back real danger even though we were within friendly lines. We were on open ground in view of German observation. Also, with the withdrawal from the Krinkelt-Rocherath area to the Elsenborn area, Elsenborn became the new German focal point. There were few questions in our minds as to what that meant.

The beginning of the new day was less than heroic -- the blankets of one group had been fouled during the night, and the men were angry and disgusted. Then it was learned that the company mess had no food. By mid morning Sam Visintine had scraped together enough D ration chocolate bars which, mixed with water and heated in cookers, came to a half cup of hot chocolate per man. In mid afternoon enough C rations had become available for one per man. These were heated in boiling water in the same cookers by throwing the unopened cans in cold and fishing them out hot.

2nd Plt was moved down the gentle slope and began digging in at the point where the reverse slope began. Here, the platoon would be a little less vulnerable to incoming shells than the other platoons located on the facing slope. The first German attacks on the new Elsenborn line were already in progress and, as we dug, we kept our eyes peeled for any Germans or tanks who may break through the defense line and head our way, though what we would have done if panzers had reached us is a moot question -- no anti-tank guns were in evidence. Though we could not see our MLR or the enemy, we were told that the attacks had been repulsed with heavy loss to enemy infantry by our artillery. Infantry had not been able to move through the artillery fire, but a few panzers and SP guns came close to making a narrow penetration. These were finally turned back, several remaining out of action in the void between armies known as no mans land.

Jim Bowers and I dug together, and as we dug it began snowing. By the time we had the hole ready there was a fresh new carpet of snow four inches deep. I wasn't overly pleased at having to share a foxhole with him, since we had banged noggins earlier, and I wasn't sure whether he was still a bit incensed about the clash. I didn't find him to be an ogre -- a bit reserved, perhaps -- but that was my nature too. The result was that we communicated what was necessary, but little beyond that.

Next morning the 88's ranging on us became more frequent,

keeping us near our holes and limiting outside activity. A rare incident about mid morning impressed us with the capricious nature of war. One of the 88's directed at us tore over our heads and hit near the foot of the slope occupied by 1st Plt, but failed to explode. It ripped clots of earth from beneath the snow, bounced into the air, hit ground again, then settled into a series of skips and jumps as it traveled upslope directly toward a group of men who were standing about. That moment is frozen in memory, like stop action on film. The pause of memory sees the shell, gages the angle of travel, the distance to be traveled, and sees the first reaction of the group of men ahead. They have determined that the shell is coming directly at them, and the group is split down the center -- one portion in the act of moving right, the other left. The film of memory resumes speed, the men are moving, the shell is clumping along inexorably. One man cannot avoid the metal monster -- man and shell cannot occupy the same point in space and time. The question becomes -- will the thing explode at the moment of contact with human form? There is a scream. The man is down, holding his ankle -- broken. The shell has not exploded. It is a dud. Who will believe the ridiculous story the man will tell years later?

Except for incoming artillery, and the near constant spluttering of Buzz Bombs overhead, our short stay here was relatively uneventful. On the morning of Dec. 22 we moved back into line, relieving King company of 3rd Bn, 393 Inf.

Arnold, I don't mind dying -- I just hate being dead so damn long...

Crabb, 38 year old replacement to 2nd Plt, later transferred to Bn Hq SP guard.

Elsenborn: The Static Front

As we moved into our new position in the Elsenborn line, German artillery gave us a taste of what we would endure in the following weeks, several times each day and night. It was a kind of welcome, really, for German observers could see that we were effecting a relief of the unit already in place there. Every gun within range of the position cut loose at the same time. Our periods of boredom were to be short, while our moments of terror became strung together like beads in a necklass. As the shells came screaming in we tore for the nearest holes and dived in. The holes we dived in became the holes we set up housekeeping in, and whoever dived in with you became your foxhole buddy automatically. A fellow from Henderson or Hendersonville, N.C. jumped in with me. I refer to him as Henderson, since I don't remember his name.

The terrific barrage pounded us brutally for some time, and all we could do was hang on by our fingernails and hope to survive. When the artillery finally died down we were able to take stock of our situation. We were on a forward slope facing directly on Krinkelt, which we could see well ahead, now held by Germans. In the distance to our right front we could see rooftops of a couple of more villages. Our left front was obscured by near forest. To our immediate front a line of trees paralelled our furthermost holes at the foot of the slope. In the folds of land between us and Krinkelt whole armies could be hidden from our sight. The land on our left fell gradually. At the low point three Sherman tanks sat on, I presume, the road from Elsenborn. Roads and such were obscured by heavy snowfall, and were unrecognizable at moderate distances. The tanks were some 500 yds away and covered with netting to confuse identity. Throughout the bitter, often sub zero winter, fires burned under the tanks to keep tracks and engines from freezing up. Each day the engines were started and run to keep them ready. To my knowledge they never fired a shot while there, not even when we were catching pure hell.from German tanks firing flat trajectory, high velocity shells.

For Henderson and me the barrage came very near being our last. Two shells exploded on the right edge of the hole, in line with each other, a yard apart -- the edge of both shell holes being less than a foot from the edge of the foxhole. The gunner had fired the two shots from the same adjustment

before elevating to walk the fire upslope or traversing right or left -- excellent gunnery in anybody's book.

Our hole was a compromise in that the lower half was uncovered, providing ample space for the two occupants to fire from, but leaving much to be desired in protection against direct hit by shellfire. The feature permitted snow and rain to fall on our lower bodies, and kept temperatures in the hole far lower than in covered holes. Each night the extreme temperature froze moisture out from the sides of the hole in hundreds of miniature horizontal ice stalactites. Depending on the temperature and moisture, the ice points would extend out for up to several inches. It was often necessary to break the ice off with our arms and elbows before we could sit upright after very cold nights. We often slept with our canteens tucked between our legs in the sleeping bags, otherwise the water was solid ice by morning. During the week or more of using the hole we threw our empty ration cans in the rearmost shell hole by the side of our hole. In one of the many shellings one shell hit the old shell hole and scattered pieces of ration cans in an arc around the back of our hole, chewing up low scrub that grew there. One of the reasons we had decided to remain in this hole was the theory that lightning never strikes twice in the same place. So much for that theory.

The hole five yards to our right remained under construction constantly, to the point that we feared the occupants were planning to desert. Dirt flew from the hole all through daylight hours. Rarely, a pair of eyes under a low fitting helmet would peer hurridly from the hole at the ever expanding mound of excavated dirt. The place must have been cavernous.

Two men using a hole seven yards to our right rear went to fill their supply can with water at the water hole one morning. Minutes after they left, a shell made a direct hit in the hole and destroyed all their equipment. They didn't trust the lightning theory, and moved to a new location.

A hole five yards rearward of our hole was unoccupied, and served as a latrine during periods when it was unsafe above ground, which was all too often. On a quiet, cold morning before anyone was about, I exposed my tender rear about seven yards from our hole, to our right front where there was no hole. By now we had heard thousands of shells coming in, and were able to identify those heading in our immediate direction. This I heard now, and there wasn't time to pull up my pants. I ran, holding my pants half up, and dived headfirst in the open end of our hole, just as the shell exploded. Now there was a hole seven yards to our right front, precisely at the spot where I had squatted. Good shooting -- or coincidence?

The hole three yards to our left was used for the battalion switchboard, and was an open top hole. The immediate area around the switchboard hole was inordinately hot, being a prime target for German artillery attempting to disrupt our communications net, so choosing to live in a nearby hole was unwise, as had been the choice of the log obstacle in the

firebreak at Jaghutt. A direct hit on the switchboard a few days after Christmas killed several of the occupants and badly wounded others. One of the wounded and two stretcher men were killed on the way to the aid station by another shell. Sgt Menzie and I heard about it at Sourbrodt, where we were spending a very fortunate 24 hour pass at Sam's kitchen.

An awful number of direct hits were made on foxholes all around our positions, guided by a macabre law of averages. Some holes suffered near hits in which caveins were caused, resulting in suffocation of the men in these holes. Most of the open top holes, of which there were few, and semi-open holes like ours, had shell fragments and splinters to enter quite frequently. Covered holes were better, of course, but even these were vunerable to fragments entering the entreway, many casualties being caused in this fashion. My pack and mess kit were riddled one night. At another time the tip of the bore of my M-1 was pinched closed, rendering it useless, and I didn't know when it happened. Fortunate for me I didn' fire the rifle before I discovered the damage -- pressure in the chamber would certainly have blown the reciever group all over the place. I had to get another rifle.

Distributing rations around the perimeter was another task which nobody wanted, for you were exposed to the artillery too long -- the German gunners had no better sport than to follow a single man around with a battery of 88's. That was soon shelved for a better way in which individuals, at their choosing, dashed to the hole containing the days rations, then returned to his own hole when the opportunity afforded, between shell blasts.

Hardly a square yard of the area remained untouched by the sizzeling and ripping 88's, but the almost nightly snows kept the moonscape under a deceptively placid blanket. If the dee snow was a curse, there also were benefits. Snow has a good dampning effect on blast and fragments, absorbing both like a friendly sponge. It was possible to avoid injury from a shell strike one yard away by lying prone in deep snow, as most of us could attest. We learned that a snow covered hole is an insulated hole. Melted snow provided water when none other was available. Frigid temperatures, like snow, was neither all good, nor all bad. The same cold that killed unattended wounded by freezing, and froze weapons, noses, ears, hands, and feet, could also mercifully slow blood loss and reduce perception of pain for the wounded. We all saw men unaware of minor wounds because of extreme cold. But unremitting snow and deep cold, first of all, is misery for the soldier trying to survive in the open. Some problems are irresolvable for infantry -- which to deplore most, rain, snow, blow, or heat -- which to fear most, small arms fire, or shell fire? In that winter before Elsenborn it was, indeed, hard to determine which condition was most brutal -- weather conditions, or German artillery. We had no choice, being blessed with the worst of both. As for the other conditions, it usually depended on which we were undergoing at the time.

A great danger which could not be avoided and which, I'm

sure, caused many casualties was the freezing and howling wind and our attempts to mitigate it. Wind noise masked the sound of incoming artillery shells and, thus, slowed reaction time. To prevent frostbite we employed scarves or strips of blanket wrapped around our heads, muffling sound further and compounding the problem.

To reach our water supply we had to walk several hundred yards to our left rear to the road from Elsenborn, and a couple of hundred yards more beyond that. There a small stream emerged from under the snow, spilled downward a few inches into a small gully about two feet in diameter, then vanished under the snow once more. Every man who made the trip there for a supply of water, and that includes just about everybody, was made aware that German gunners didn't intend for him to live through the trip. The gunners reveled in their shooting sport, and sharpened their skills by tracking each man the distance to and from the water hole, often expending a half dozen or more shells. The economics involved was terrible, even if a lucky shot got a man now and then the cost was prohibitive. Yet they persisted -- there definitely was no shortage of shells among the enemy units opposing us. Description of one trip of many is sufficient.

Glass and I carried a jerrycan to fill, and the trip was uneventful until we reached the road. A jeep was parked there and, since things were quiet, we stopped to talk with two or three men who were unloading the cargo. At that moment the shells of a battery of 88's came tearing in. I ducked half under the jeep, with Glass beside me. The others took off somewhere. The stuff was right on the road and awfully close, and the battery kept firing for several minutes, then all was quiet again. Badly shaken, for we should have been dead, we stood up by the jeep. It was one of those times when you are thankful for your good fortune, but can in no way account for it. The unloading crew appeared from somewhere -- they had abandoned the jeep -- and well they might, for they told us the cargo was a load of mortar bombs. It doesn't take much imagination to wonder what would have become of us had that stuff gone up -- only a large hole in the ground would have marked the spot of our recent demise. But infantrymen learn to take such in stride -- no big deal, close ones were a dime a dozen. So we continued on to the water hole. As I bent to fill the can I heard it coming, one shell, and dead on target. I sprawled in the shallow gully with Glass on top. Wham! Dirt, water, and snow covered us -- but we were still unhurt. The shell blew in the right side of the gully bank. Halfway back, the gun picked us up again, and down we went in the soft snow. Wham! Right beside us, then two more as fast as loaders could slam the shells into the breech. Then quiet again -- except for an ominous gurgle. The jerrycan was holed six inches from the top by a fragment that could have taken an arm off. We were proud of our can -- something of Mauldin's "them what's been shot at".

The point need not be made that each man had similar close ones, dozens of times.

Once, when returning from the water hole, I was able to view the enemy under favorable conditions. The superman, master of the new order, sat on the rear seat of a jeep on the Elsenborn road. He had been brought in by a patrol. I stopped and got a good look at him. He was powerfully built, well fed, healthy, and arrogant. He still wore his helmet, as well as a camouflage smock. A stubble of beard was the only indication of possible privation. His cold eyes locked on mine, and we stared at each other for a moment, careful not to display any facial expression. It being Christmas, I said to him in mild derision, "Santa Klaus," and walked on. His face and eyes gave not a flicker.

Some of our records and mail had been lost at Krinkelt in those hectic days, but some of our more recent mail was now catching up with us. Packages of candy, cake, cookies, etc, were most valued. Our rural mailman who served my home insisted that he could not accept packages addressed to me unless he could be shown a letter from me requesting specific items. In each of my letters home I included such requests to make sure plenty were always available. He dutifully crossed out each request as it was filled. Edibles were shared around the squad, each in turn. Henderson and I received packages from home this particular day, and we eagerly tore wrapping away from the contents. Suddenly he swore and threw the package from the hole -- it contained a civilian tie, hair tonic, and similar items of doubtful usefulness. Later he received a box of frozen cornbread and, being a southern country boy, was greatly pleased.

Little fuel was available for heating canned rations, and we often ate the frozen C rations as best we could. The K rations were packed in a heavily waxed paper box which was, in turn, covered by another paper container. By burning the containers enough heat was provided to heat the contents reasonably. Usually the K variety was favored over the C, but both were rather unappetizing after weeks of much the same. Raw replacements were prone to apply too much heat too quickly without first puncturing a vent in the can, resulting in deformed and exploding cans. Sadly, the rations seldom provided enough bulk to satisfy the great maw of our stomachs.

A trickle of replacements were beginning to come in to help expand depleted ranks. The Army officially, but euphemistically, now referred to them as reinforcements -- a sad attempt to ignore the obvious and to color morale.

Our life of forced privation, of traveling light, had a positive side -- there was a certain exhiliration of freedom from encumbrance, extra baggage, hindering accutrements, unneeded accumulations and attachments. A philosophy disdaining property was forming -- a man needed to be free to move on impulse. There was a feeling of resolve that, should we survive the war, we would not again shackle ourselves so. But the old ways of wants and desires are deeply imbedded.

For some time we had been observing vapor trails that appeared from deep within Germany and that climbed rapidly in the high cold air at a steep angle, finally vanishing at great height. The trails probed upward like thin, misty fingers, then became zig-zag or curved as upper air currents played with them. What were the bastards up to now? The wraiths seemed ominous. We had not yet been told of the V-2 rockets that were bombarding Antwerp and London. Meanwhile, the V-1 Buzz Bombs were passing overhead day and night. It was not uncommon to see three, four, or five in the air at one time. At night our sleeping minds gave but little recognition to the eerie sputtering engines. But when the sputtering stopped suddenly we knew the thing was going in, and we would await the tremendous explosion that always followed. Whether these were intentionally sent into our area, or were simple miscues, we never learned. We had none to drop in the immediate area, though a few went down in the area from Elsenborn to Liege or Verviers. It was a new manner of warfare in its infancy. Few people realize forty years after the fact that the V bombs and rockets in those few months killed more civilians in England than died in the whole of the air raids and conventional bombing previous.

On clear days air activity picked up over the front. P-47 Thunderbolt Fighter-Bombers frequently plastered German sites in the Krinkelter Wald, and Typhoons worked the areas further north. The 47's employed a vertical attack, while the English planes used less severe angles, probably because the 47's had stout wings that could handle the heavy G forces of pullup from steep angles. German flak seemed singularly ineffective against the straffing and bombing. One of our L-5 artillery spotter planes became overconfident one morning and flew too far toward Krinkelt. The blast of 88 flak by his tail convinced him to apply hard right rudder, with the stick in his stomach, and get the hell out of there. On such clear days huge bomber formations flew high into Germany, the boxes of stepped flights reaching from horizon to horizon, the sky traced with thousands of contrails, and the air vibrating to the growl of the big radial engines. Far beyond the German positions we could see the flak working the formations. Here and there B-17's smoked and rolled from formation or began to break apart. Parachutes blossomed from some, none from others. Meanwhile the thousands moved inexorably onward, ignoring the losses.

Awakening early one morning to the whine of aircraft nearby, I looked up to see silver fighters sweeping the area. I thought they were P-51 Mustangs until the wink of cannon and MG and flash of black crosses showed them to be Me109's. They flew at very low level and came in at us from all angles as they raked us with their fire. We bounced from side to side in our holes, depending on what direction the fire was coming from at the moment. This was new to us, and we didn't like it. After expending their ammunition on us, they left.

They probably caused more fear than destruction. One of the Luftwaffe pilots was forced to bail out over a sector near u when his plane was damaged by ground fire. He elected to co down shooting. He didn't make it.

On a bright sunny morning, a flight of fifteen B-17's dro ed toward the frontier on a line that would intersect the li well south of Krinkelt. As they approached the line they be gan a turn to left that would take them directly over Krinke We watched, mystified -- surely their intention was not to h Krinkelt. What target of value to heavy bombers could be th Our feelings were mixed as we watched the bombs raining down on the village. The place was obscured for many minutes by shroud of smoke, dust, and debris -- the air barely stirred wind. The thunderclaps of explosions, an extended caruummph rolled across to us as the flight wheeled right in a turn ba toward our rear. After many minutes the pall began to drift away and clear. The town, looking somewhat more dusty, tire and shabby, was still there. The church steeple, holed by shell fire earlier, still stood, as did many house roofs.

A rotation system was begun which allowed a few men each day to spend 24 hours in the woods at Sourbrodt, back of Els born. Though far to our rear, it wasn't entirely risk free as enemy counter battery fire ranged the area with big guns. On my lucky day we started out walking to Elsenborn, but got a ride on a weapons carrier after a mile or so. My spirits rose in proportion to the distance put behind. I can't express how new, fresh, and wonderful it was to feel relatively danger free. In Elsenborn snow was banked high beside th active streets, piled there by snow moving equipment to keep the roadways useable. A bewildering mass of communications wires hung heavily alongside the streets, almost touching th piled snow beneath. Men walked about freely and easily, fac devoid of that gaunt, strained look common to the front. Th was alien country, a land beyond imagination. There were a reminders however, we saw 4.2 chemical mortars, 155 mm howi ers, 8 inch howitzers -- the guns that provided our long ra support.

We met at a house where we were to await transport to So brodt. Coffee was constantly being brewed, and conversatio and comradship filled the small room -- and the room was -- warm! In a moment of humor Sgt Menzie put on a Chaplain's helmet and offered to take our TS slips under consideration The Chaplain, bareheaded, offered prayer and a quiet talk.

We loaded aboard open trucks for the journey to Sourbrod where Sam had his kitchen tent set up. We passed many of t guns that helped make our line east of Elsenborn virtually impervious to German assault. On reaching the camp we were assigned bunk space on fence wire beds in dugouts near Sam' kitchen. Sam trotted out hot food for us, and we made pigs of ourselves, eating everything in sight. The opportunity to clean up weeks of accumulated grime was met with child-like exhuberance. I shaved off my beard, but kept the must ache another week. In the mirror I saw an unfamiliar face

and couldn't decide whether it was an improvement, or not.

The opportunity to exchange filthy clothing for clean was, in my case, somewhat marred -- I was issued size 38 pants to cover a 28 frame, a wool knit cap half the size of my head, a combat jacket 4 sizes roomy, and what in the hell happened to your web belt? Being a sly and resourceful infantryman (weren't we all) I accepted the lot. The pants were manageable when pulled over the two pairs of OD's I was already wearing, plus two pairs of long johns -- I meant not to freeze. My 130 pounds looked more like 160 due to my accumulated insulation. That the whole mess was profoundly sealed with the sweat of many weeks I considered a plus to my envelope of insulation. One chooses one's priorities -- I had elected comfort over cleanliness, and considered myself a realist. My German rifle sling-belt served admirably in holding the stuff together.

Near the field kitchen stood a tree with short, narrow pièces of plank nailed to it to form a crude ladder. Hatchet marks scarred the tree bark alongside the ladder each few inches to a height of thirty feet. This was the Blake tree. The chaplain chopped a notch in the tree for each lie, half-truth, or smutty story that Blake told in his presence.

Few of us slept that night -- it was foolish to sleep through such civilized pleasure, comfort, and freedom from fear. At 2 AM we went to raid the kitchen tent. Sam was dozing on a cot in the tent -- about the only sleep he ever got, and that in fits and snatches. No man was more dedicated in his concern for the men. People drifted in at all hours, and Sam always climbed from the cot voluntarily to whip up something for them to eat. Mess Sgt's are noted for vile tempers, since they get so little sleep, but Sam was always mild mannered and friendly. Before daylight in the bitter cold, and after night in the evenings, he loaded food filled urns on his jeep and made the hazardous dash down to the company line position. German artillery always made his trips memorable ones, but he never gave in to his fears. E company often got warm food when the other companies were eating cold rations. It was one thing for us to be in foxholes with some insulation from cold and screaming shell, but quite another to be in a moving, open jeep plowing through the worst the Germans and the weather could offer. That Sam survived a few such trips stirs the imagination. That he survived the war is truly miraculous.

When we entered the tent we hoped to scrounge a few bites without disturbing Sam, but he would have none of it. He insisted on cooking pancakes and making coffee. Sixteen pancakes, more than a pint of syrup, almost a pint of marmalade, slabs of butter, and two canteen cups of coffee later I stumbled my way back to my bunk, with the dawn of another day near. I salute Sam Visintine, that compassionate, gentle man who cared so much... He was a rarity.

In the morning we were trucked back to Elsenborn, where we walked on up the road a mile or so before being picked up by

a jeep carrying supplies. Within minutes I was back at my foxhole. The switchboard hole was shattered and sad and empty -- it was impossible not to remember the times I had traded conversation and jokes with the men on duty at the switchboard.

It is important to the enemy to destroy or disrupt your communications net. Aside from attacking nerve centers, such as the switchboard hole, varying degrees of disruption was achieved by general shelling over a wide area. The constant shelling made it necessary for line crews to roam the area day and night repairing breaks. One sneaky, but effective, method to foul the net was for patrols to search out phone lines and short them out by pressing pins through the insulation. It was time consuming to search out and repair these. Some of the linemen solved the problem of having to climb out of the sack at all hours of night to search out line breaks. They simply split the light sleeping bags from foot to near center, and sewed in legs and added arms of the material. The outfits were comical looking, but effective. Like snails, they covered their routes without leaving bed behind.

It was intended that every soldier have a Christmas dinner of turkey, and considerable effort was expended to that end. Though the dinner was cold when it reached us, it was something different, and appreciated. I catagorically deny that we became tired of, and fed up with, Spam. Spam was, of course, one of the war's enduring jokes. It seems that outfits in the theaters of operation were fed the stuff constantly, but we seldom saw any, and more of it would have been most welcome. The constant in our diet was the pancake, not to be confused with the hotcake, since they were most often well on the way to being frozen when they reached us. Sam's efforts and the heavy insulated food urns couldn't compete with time and the bitter cold.

Our casualties in this period included Capt Driscoll, who was wounded by shellfire. Lt Roy Engelbretsen, the company Exec, now took over as CO of the company. E company was using up commanders at an alarming rate.

The terrible artillery bombardments continued, but we had no choice but to endure. To abandon the position because it was too hot was unthinkable. Our misery was mitigated by the massive attacks our own artillery mounted against our enemy ahead. We often sat on the rim of our holes and watched the barrages in progress. The rumble of the big guns behind us seemed to go on for hours sometimes as we watched thousands shells arching overhead and pouring into the German position at Krinkelt and the woods behind, as well as north of the to A quick, keen eye could see and follow shells in flight to t impact point. Some of us could feel a twinge of empathy for the poor bastards on the receiving end of that hail of steel HE, and WP (high explosive and white phosphorus). Large sca

artillery attacks that continue for long periods of time can be utterly demoralizing, but there is another type that is worse, though quickly over -- TOT. A Time On Target barrage simply means that every gun within a specified target's range is trained on that one target. The firing of individual guns along the line is timed so that every shell from all guns will impact the target at the same instant. The muttering of far-away guns begins first, followed by the nearer guns adding their voices. The phalanx of shells of many caliber sweeps speedily toward the chosen target. The sight and sound of their arrival on target is unforgetable and devastating. In an instant there is the flash and smoke and violence and hell of the combined explosives, and a wall of sound rolls across the intervening land to smash at your ears. It is impressive to the viewer, uncomprehendingly violent to the receipient.

The German artillerymen employed every method possible on us, area shelling, TOT, marching fire, single guns, batteries, and combined batteries. Most of these methods are self explanatory. Marching fire, as applied to artillery use versus the infantry application, is quite dramatic, and was used on us many, many times. The guns would start on the lower slope, and begin to walk the shells upslope and beyond, covering everything as it moved ahead, like some wrathful God stamping remorselessly onward in supreme vindication. TOT, as employed by the Germans, would consist of a shower of shells that would scream in and erupt all over the slope in one huge angry attempt to obliterate all life there. Believers, agnostics, athiests -- all prayed alike for preservation.

Our compassion and pride and awe extended to the airmen on their missions deep into Germany through the FW 190, Me 109, and flak attacks. We understood their peril -- the winter air at 25 thousand feet can freeze a man into a popsicle or deprive him of lifegiving oxygen, wind whipped high octane fuel fed flame can reduce human bodies to cinders, the high G forces in a doomed and gyrating bomber make escape improbable. But there was envy, too. All infantry envy those divorced from the cold and mud and stink of the battlefield. Most of all they envied the airmen the hot food, the clean sheets, the little English towns with their cinemas, women, and other accoutrements of civilized life -- for, to survive a mission meant returning to that. Reward is a yardstick which measures justification for one's acts and efforts. For infantry, little reward existed, and his battles, relentless, were not punctuated with encounters with civilization daily. For an infantryman to see a bit of civilization he, most often, rode a stretcher to it. The "million dollar wound" meant exactly that. After surviving several weeks of combat, the infantryman finds it hard to justify his future chances by what is implied by the "law of averages" -- he knows he has become part of an inexorable "process of elimination" -- there are two paths out for him, to be wounded or to die.

Sombody or something managed to convince S-2 that a gas

attack was imminent one night. New gas masks were hurridly distributed -- tossed into each hole as the carriers searched us out in the night and determined the number of men in each hole. The masks came pre-frozen, the material so stiff that it was impossible to put the things on, much less to be able to make it comply to the contours of the face to prevent gas seepage. The old standby came to the rescue -- we stuffed the masks in our pants between our legs. After an hour they were soft and compliant and ready for use. Fortunately, the need never arose. I dreamed that night of gray ash falling on us from the sky and suffocating us...

Some time during those early days in front of Elsenborn Carey returned to the company. After being left behind at Krinkelt when we moved out for our attack toward the Roer dams, he had attached himself to a 2nd Div unit and remained with them until the Elsenborn front stabilized. It was our understanding that his family assumed him MIA during that period. Now, of course, he was returned to active status.

The end of Dec, 1944 came, and we were sitting rather comfortably in our defensive position before Elsenborn. German attempts to roll over us had failed, due largely to our heavy artillery concentrations on their attacking columns. Some of the attacking formations were turned back by the fierce shelling before their lead elements could cross the space between opposing forces enough to initiate close infantry action. This happy circumstance did not exempt us from the continuing and punishing artillery, though the intensity and frequency of the shelling moderated over the coming weeks. We were able to note the increase of dud shells falling among us, though a shell that comes tearing in, followed by silence, has a certain effect on nerves. Engineers, using mine detectors, sought out the duds one by one and exploded them harmlessly, warning everyone to stay down with the cry, "Fire in the hole!" Hundreds of the things most certainly were never found and rendered impotent.

Much of the enemy force that had made numerous attempts to dislodge us were withdrawn from our front and shifted southwest where deep penetrations justified their use in exploitation attempts. It seemed that the time and setting was favorable for us to launch attacks south and southeast to cut into the base of the penetrations with the view of isolating the spearheads further west. Unaccountably, this was not done. General Montgomery, who had been assigned control of our unit north of the penetrations, seemed content to sit tight, creating, to my mind, a missed opportunity. It is probable that many of us are alive today because of this sit tight decision for we would have encountered some rather fierce fighting in terrible conditions in such a drive into the base of the "Bul

> My friends -- and you are my friends. I stand behind you, because I cannot stand in front of you. I hate war. My wife, Eleanor, hates war. Falla hates war. So I am sending you to war, so you can hate war, also.
>
> Arnold, mimicking President Roosevelt.

Active Again

Easy was ordered to take up new positions a couple of hundred yards further right. We just picked up and moved, and that was that. Henderson and I were the cow's tail, arriving at the new position after everybody else. Only two holes remained when we arrived. Both were located some distance forward of the rest of the platoon, so we took over the one closest the platoon. The remaining hole, a few yards to the left front of our hole, became the platoon OP. A voice powered phone was strung to the OP hole from Co Hq. Unlike the half covered hole we had just left, our new hole was fully covered, including the L shaped entry-grenade basket. It had the usual failing -- the entry was only large enough for one man to fight from. We set about converting the new hole to our own requirements. With blankets being in ample supply now, we lined the damp floor and walls with them, and hung another in the entrance to keep in light and keep out cold and wind and snow.

If we thought we had been exposed to the worst of winter in Belgium, January brought in the real thing. Blizzards began sweeping over us almost nightly, driving snow into our holes, filling entryways, and covering the protective line of concertina wire to our front. Each morning we took turns digging through the snow that filled the entry, a half hour task. Then Bowers would have us pulling the concertina wire from the snow, and resetting it. Though our hole was well constructed, covered, and tight, many nights were so cold that we could only shiver through to the dawn. Two foxhole stoves didn't moderate the sub freezing conditions in the hole significantly. One of these consisted of a C ration can half filled with gasoline saturated dirt. The other was a small neck bottle of gasoline with a cloth wick. These provided a little light and an exaggerated sense of comfort, but mostly they provided enough soot to make us look like Africans, and coated our nasal passages and mucous linings black. I spent a particularly cold and miserable night in the hole alone when Henderson stayed the night with a friend in George company.

The distance from our new hole to the water hole was a couple of hundred yards longer than from our old position, and Jerry still liked to spend a few rounds of 88 mm when you made the trip. Just the sight of a single man basking

on the rim of his hole was enough to cause Jerry to test his shootin' iron. On our way back from the water hole one day, we observed How company men picking up K rations from a stac of them. We sauntered over to the stack of wooden crates as if we owned the lot, and hoisted a crate each to our shoulde No one noticed as we walked confidently away with our loot. We learned later that a search was underway for stolen ratic What to do? The answer was too simple to work, but it was t only idea we could come up with -- we stored both crates in the entryway of our hole, placing them as steps. We smudged them enough that they looked well worn. Lt Mann checked all the holes in the platoon. When he checked ours, he stood o the boxes and swept his flashlight around the dark hole, an declared us not guilty. I didn't agonize about the deceptic After all, hadn't Capt Miller warned us that he would not tolerate stealing in his company, but that he recognized th from another company in the interest of his men as legitima I remembered the little grin and the twinkle in his eyes th accompanied his admonition. So be it -- our deception was honorable.

One other deception of ours was less honorable, and was fair to Lt Mann. Col Pete (Peters) chewed us out one day b cause of our filthy rifles, and promised to report us to ou platoon leader. Our plan was immediately set in motion -- we quickly field stripped and cleaned one rifle, and had ju reassembled it when Lt Mann arrived. "Pass out your rifles for inspection," he called. The clean rifle was passed out to him, and I watched as he checked it thoroughly to his sa faction. "Now the other one!" I handed the clean rifle in the hole, and Henderson made rummaging sounds before passin the same rifle back out. Mann checked it again, thoroughly "I can see nothing wrong with these rifles," he declared, " I'm going to tell the Colonel so." I would have liked to h seen the confrontation with Peters.

Two men manned the OP, and the 24 hour duty wasn't too b just boring. The field phone, tied in with Co Hq and the t other platoon OP holes, provided enough chatter to reduce t monotony during daylight and early evening hours, but in th wee hours it was often impossible to raise anybody. You ma whistle, scream, or shout into the mouthpiece, but the only sound in the earpiece would be complacent snoring. In some of the night blizzards, a German division could walk by wi in a foot of where you stood in the hole, and you could ne see nor hear them -- so you would duck in and out of the h to keep from freezing. On the worst night of all, Sgt Har called. "You boys got your heads out of that hole?" "Yea Holding mouthpiece up into wind. "You hear that wind, don you?" "Okay, you guys keep your eyes open. If I were the Germans I'd attack on a night like this!" "I reckon you w at that." "What?" "Aw, nothing -- we're watching." "Okay and be sure to check in every half hour." But when you tr to check in, there was only the sound of snores. Under th tanks far to our left the fires burned, and I wondered if

had guards out in the blizzard, even though the fires would not be visible from three feet away. Then I wondered if, all along the line, everybody was hoping somebody else had guards out.

A battalion OP was established a few hundred yards ahead of our MLR (main line of resistance) in a shallow depression, probably a road, but impossible to tell because of the deep snow that covered and hid everything. The chance that a man would pull duty there more than once was rare -- but once was enough. When our turn came, Bowers led us out -- there were four of us. It must have taken near an hour struggling in the deep snow before we reached the site. There was a large hole, but we preferred to stand. If we were hit we would have more chance of escaping this way, than from the hole. We were not here to fight a pitched battle -- we were to report any attack suspicions, and get the hell out. Of course, the chances of a remote OP surviving a determined attack was remote. Essentially, the demise of such an OP, along with the noise attending that demise, would serve to warn those along the line. In the black night we talked little, and only in low voices. We spent most of the time stamping our feet, slapping our toes together, and frapping our arms about our bodies to keep some circulation going. A field phone serving the OP went dead, as determined by fate, leaving us voiceless and totally isolated in hostile ground, with a blizzard beginning to blow.

At about 2100 hours we heard sounds of men and crunching snow behind us. We trained our rifles as a patrol of white clad men appeared. Our challenge brought the proper response, and the patrol of ten men and one dog joined us for a few exchanges of conversation, before moving on along their intended route. The patrol was from G Co, and they would not be returning our way -- they were to return through Fox company. The dog, happy to be along, could cause problems, so we kept him with us when the patrol left.

Things were uneventful until about midnight, then several burp guns screamed out a few yards ahead of us. We fell to the ground and remained silent, waiting for the Germans to show themselves. Return fire was probably what the Germans hoped for, so they could pinpoint our position. They were possibly aware of an American OP in the area, and wished to find and eliminate it -- or they were doing a hell of a job convincing their superiors to the rear that they were doing a bang up job. When no response was forthcoming, they moved on to our right, pausing now and then to blast away with their burp guns. It seemed normal procedure for roving patrols to parallel our lines, firing now and then as they traversed our front. Whatever the reason, it seemed ineffective. They seldom caused damage or return fire. The Germans were willing to expend large amounts of ammo for little gain.

As the night wore on, the blizzard increased to full force with high wind driving the heavy snow. It was obvious that our relief could never find us, even should they choose to make the attempt. Obvious also was the fact that we could

serve no useful purpose by remaining here in blizzard conditions. Yet we stayed and waited for our relief, stamping our feet and beating our hands against our shoulders and ribs. The time for our relief long past, we still peered into the driving snow in utter futility, growing colder and colder.

With communications gone, and no hope of relief venturing out, and with dawn approaching, we finally set out to find our lines. My sense of direction, or lack of it, warned that we were probably marching about behind German positions. Our facial muscles were frozen as we stumbled along, maintaining physical contact by holding on to each other -- it was not possible to see the back of the man ahead of you. Frost rimmed our nostrils, mouths, and eyes. Eyelids, half closed against the driving snow, seemed to freeze in position. After an interminable length of time (God, would the Germans be surprised when dawn came and found that we had penetrated halfway to Berlin!) one of the men fell into a hole. Climbing back out, he announced the impossible -- he had fallen into the E Co Hq hole. From there we knew the general bearings to our individual holes. Having expected something like this, I had driven a stake by the intrance to our hole. I didn't find the stake, but I fell in the entrance to the hole. Next morning I found the top of the stake below the surface of the snow. More good luck -- the dog decided to spend the rest of the morning with us. With the warmth of the dog radiating between us we fell quickly asleep. When we awoke in mid morning the dog had left. A three dog night had been made tolerable by only one.

Batson, a fellow inmate of Blanding I&R, was in Fox Co to our right. I hadn't seen him in months, so I walked over to Fox and looked him up. He told me of a Lt porporting to be from Div Hq checking out the morale and supply situation of the line troops, asking about food, ammo, and equipment etc. After talking for a few minutes, he wanted to visit their OP. After talking to the OP crew, he wandered out ahead, getting the lay of the land. When he went beyond the point the OP crew deemed fairly safe, they called to warn him, at which point he leaped a nearby fence row to lower ground ahead, and vanished from sight. One of Skorzeny's finest, no doubt.

Lt Donald Ross, Weapons Plt leader, led a patrol out one night. When they located a German MG position, Ross had a phone spooled out to him, waited till dawn through the cold night, and called his mortars down on the position. The E Co mortar section (we called them our E Co artillery) fired their 60mm bombs at the target. The men of the patrol swear that the first bomb hit the gunner square on his helmet. End of MG and crew.

Lt Mann was scheduled to lead a reinforced 2nd Plt combat patrol to Krinkelt to draw enemy attention from a 7th Corps attack south of us. Our assigned task, to shoot up Germans, vehicles, and equipment in the Krinkelt environs, was more suited to a battalion or regimental effort. But we were game.

One round, hell! Dammit, you've got four guns back there -- give me all of them. Hell, they're shooting at us.

Cannon Company FO, on Krinkelt patrol.

Krinkelt Patrol

To aid us on our ambitious patrol we had snow capes of white cloth which had been provided by the Belgians, pack charges of explosives, and some of the new rifle mortar shells. Our medic was not available, so a gutsy little fellow from F Co was provided to accompany us.

We moved out early in the morning through F Co. Some distance from our lines we crossed a narrow road flanked by hedging, then another further along. We moved right a few hundred yards along the second road, and then struck out eastward from the road in the direction of Krinkelt. The ground here was lower, and we were unable to see the village. East of the road a small stream flowed through a shallow valley, and near the stream were two or three dead panzers and a few fuel drums. Across the stream the ground sloped upward to a bare skyline except for a copse of woods further right. Many tracks in the snow around the stream indicated that the Germans frequented the stream and probably obtained their water there. We moved right along the stream until we were below the copse of woods, and then went upslope into the woods after our scouts entered and motioned us to follow. Glass and Henderson, 1st Sqd scouts, were serving as the patrol scouts.

Inside the woods the patrol halted for a few minutes, and many smoked what they considered may be their last. Just as we prepared to move on through and out of the woods, the SCR 300 radio began receiving a transmission. At my distance, the transmission was garbled and unintelligable -- those at closer vantage points claim to have heard clearly, and that the message stated that all 7th Corps objectives had been reached, and that our mission was scrubbed. There was an air of momentary relief among us, until Lt Mann decided to move on. The scouts were sent forward again, and we began to follow. Where the woods ended at the top of the rise, the scouts halted a few seconds, then moved forward. At that moment a single shot rang out up ahead. Everybody crouched, rifles ready. Lt Mann came back down the line of men, his face showing pain, and with one hand pressed to his upper chest or shoulder. At that moment he decided to pull the patrol back.

In good order, covering our rear, we moved back through the woods and out into the open downslope. Once in the open we leapfrogged by squads, each squad being covered by the others as it moved back, then it, in turn, would assume the

covering role while the following squad leapfrogged. We wer tense, but ready for a fight -- but the bare skyline reveale no enemy in pursuit, and no shots were fired. We figured th action would begin when we recrossed the little stream but, again, there was nothing to warrant our concern, and we move across and onto the near road. It seemed the Germans were content to have prevented our movement toward them from the copse of woods. Lt Mann stopped us on the road and ordered fire along the skyline -- a little calling card -- a challen flung, if you will. The deep, throaty bark of our Garands i spired us, for we had not had recent opportunity to fire our weapons. My rifle, which replaced the one with the bent bor performed satisfactorily, and I derived pleasure at pumping personal steel at those who had recently sent so much my way The rifle had not been zeroed since it came into my hands, s I was concerned about lack of pinpoint accuracy, though I wa confident that my shots were impacting chosen targets reason well. After spacing a couple of clips along the skyline, I wasted a couple more on the panzers and fuel drums, just for the hell of it.

Satisfied, Lt Mann ordered cease fire and continued along our escape route. We skirted along the west side of the roa taking advantage of the sparse growth that lined the roadsid Our overconfidence at that point was magnificently stupid -- we were no longer using the leapfrog and cover method of mov ment, just marching brazenly along with our rifles slung. A the moment when we were most vulnerable, due to our own fool ish choice of movement, the Germans accepted our challenge c a few minutes previous. Withering MG fire swept our line an drove us to ground -- we were ripe for picking. The sonic, reedcracking snaps (our physics didn't cover this phenomena yet)of near bullets filled our ears -- the most spiteful sou I know.

Nearby, the Cannon company FO was on his knees by the SCR 300 urgently calling the little infantry 105mm howitzer bat Over the receiver crackled, "One round on the way!" The sh sizzled overhead and exploded somewhere beyond the skyline. "One round, hell!" the FO shouted above the noise of MG fir "Dammit, you've got four guns back there -- give me all of them. Hell, they're shooting at us." The little guns dutifully complied, showering shells beyond our line of sight. The FO adjusted the range, walking the stuff back toward us until the shells were erupting about two hundred yards to o front, by my judgement. "Bring it in two hundred," yelled FO. Good God, I thought, the man is going to blow us all t hell. But he knew what he was doing, the next shells falli satisfyingly near. At that range he ordered smoke, but the Germans already had us pinpointed, and continued to punish line severely. In retrospect, we would have been better of if the HE had been continued on the skyline and along the e of the copse of woods. But you, hopefully, live and learn.

We had a choice to remain here under the busy MG's and d or to die trying to get out. We attempted the latter, and gan crawling along the roadside toward a low hedgerow which

ran perpendicular from the road and connected to the next road. Our immediate objective was a small break in that hedge where it connected to the road. Once through the break, we would turn left and crawl along the far side to the next road. Alas, the MG's were concentrating most on that very point, the gunners being canny enough to see it as our obvious route out. Bullets churned the snow at the small gap where we would make our turn. That point was virtually unshielded from the gunner's view. I crawled into the gap, with Morelli next in line behind me. In the gap I looked back in time to see snow fly from the back of Morelli's snow cape. He fell face down in the snow with a grunt. I crawled back to him and saw that he was alive, and began looking for the wound. I couldn't find it, so I used my pocket knife to cut through his bandoleers, cape , and a half dozen various collars -- finally exposing the skin. A small blueish abraision marked his spine at the base of his neck, a scant centimeter from finality.

"You're okay, it didn't break the skin," I told him. "It felt like a ton of bricks hit me," he said. He resumed crawling. Now I saw the impact and heard the strike of a bullet on Farris Block's friend*a couple of men back down the line from me. In a pained voice he began calling Block, using the appellation imposed on Block earlier -- "Fearless, Fearless..." I crawled to him to see if I could help, but had trouble finding the wound through the heavy clothing. I called, "Medic, medic", but the little guy from Fox was already busy on more wounded. In frustration, I sought help from the nearest man, but he kept his face buried in the snow, and when I jerked his face up I recognized a recent replacement. This was his first time under fire, and I knew what he was feeling, but my frustration caused me to thrust his face back into the snow. I couldn't find my knife to cut through the clothing, and realized it was back where Morelli had been hit. Crawling back, I couldn't find the thing -- it was lost in the snow. It was just as well, for the medic had reached the wounded man. I resumed the crawl toward safety.

Bullets were as thick as bees at the hedge gap, and progress was awfully slow in the deep snow. Looking back to check my progress, I saw that the wounded man had crawled up behind me, but was in pain, weak, and out of breath. I offered a foot for him to hang on to as I crawled, but he rejected it. I continued my snail pace. At that point I actually felt several bullets zip by the right side of my face. Then I heard footsteps behind me, and turned to see what idiot was up walking through such fire. It was the wounded man. Like an injured football player safely leaving the action on the field, he seemed to feel exempt to further hits. In future I was to see this in many of our wounded. He walked on ahead of me, holding one hand over his wound.

Up ahead, beside the next road, stood Harbeck. He had come from the company area to help us, waving to us and shouting, "Come on. Get up and run to me -- you can make it!" If he could stand in the fire and urge us along, and the wounded

* I am uncertain who this man was. I thought it may be Sidney Lemarie but, Block, in a recent letter, remembers Lemarie as having been wounded at the pillbox at Jaghutte.

man could do it, so could I. Others began to see possibility and hope, and did likewise.

It was heartwarming to learn that much of the battalion, having heard the volume of fire, had done what they could in our aid. How company had fired their heavy 81mm mortars in our support. I heard later that one man was wounded by a short, but never verified it. Some men from George came out to help bring our wounded in. The tally was six wounded plus Lt Mann. We were fortunate that we had no KIA.

When I got back to our hole I was out of water and very thirsty, probably from excitement and fear. Some of the men had not returned yet, having tarried in F Co to rehash the experience. I figured the others may be as thirsty, so I set off for the water hole with the jerrycan. When I returned I saw Glass, but not Henderson, and asked where he was. "He wa hit in the leg," Glass told me.

Glass moved in as my foxhole buddy. "Your turn now," he said. I knew what he meant. I was getting a reputation as bad luck for foxhole buddies -- Whiting, Gernsbacher, Henderson -- and Morelli had come awfully close. 1st Sqd was wearing thin -- Thurston, Labruere, Whiting, Gernsbacher, Johnson Henderson, all gone. With so many out, and Underwood now in Plt Hq, we were less than 50% effective. But in the next few days we got a couple of replacements , Gray and Benjamin Harv Replacements were paired with older men, thus Glass moved out and Gray moved in. Small world dept.: Gray was from Kinston, N.C., about sixty miles from my home, and knew two girls I ha dated at college who were from Kinston. Gray was eager to learn, and I set about trying to bring him along. Everybody knew that we would soon be on the attack to drive the Germans in the area back into the Siegfried.

The Jan. snows and blizzards continued in ernest, snow pack ed holes and entrances every night, and considerable effort and time was spent digging out each morning. For those who broke through early in the morning a marvelous and humorous sight awaited. I broke out early many times, and would sit on the edge of the hole and view the solid expanse of snow -- nobody was in sight, and nothing moved -- no evidence of life whatever. After some time, snow would fly into the air here and there, and a soot covered figure would pop from the white blanket and look around, like some oversized gopher. Then another in another direction would pop up, and then another. In the next half hour -- pop,pop, pop pop pop, pop pop -- like a deranged garden sprouting mushrooms -- until, finally, the whole area blossomed with the dark blotches. Now the men would begin scurrying about from place to place, hole to hole, checking on friends or starting conversations. Jerry, in his anger, would throw in some artillery, and those near the shell would vanish beneath the white blanket, only to reappear when the last shell blew. The game would continue -- the artillery would try to intimidate, but the inmates of our slope would pop back in view in seconds, totally unimpressed by the violence visited on them. We enjoyed frustrating the gunners.

One morning on the Plt OP phone I listened as one of the other OP's called Harbeck at Co Hq. "Sarge, send somebody down here to help us dig out -- we've been digging for almost an hour, and the air is getting stuffy in here." "Just keep digging," Harbeck said. "You'll make it." It had been a night of particularly heavy snowfall, and we had only managed to dig our OP out after more than an hour of shoveling. A half hour later the other OP called Harbeck again. "Sarge, did you send anybody down to help us dig out? We haven't got much air left -- a match won't even burn in here!" The clamor went on for some time until Harbeck finally relented and sent some men to help with the digging, afraid it just possibly may not be a joke.

For those from the south the depth and frequency of snow here was unimaginable, the temperatures brutal. Clothes often froze stiff after a few minutes outside the hole. A trip outside to accomodate the demand of nature had to be completed in haste, or lowered pants would freeze in position, and you had to waddle back to your hole and try to slide in. The frozen tail of your combat jacket would then hang on the edge of the hole and leave your feet dangling inches from the bottom of the foxhole.

Actions viewed from considerable distance, such as the B-17 bombing of Krinkelt and the TOT artillery strikes, seemed to have an unreal atmosphere and seemed to unfurl in a sort of slowed motion. Watching embattled troops some distance away (a comparatively rare experience for infantry) had much the same quality. One could conclude that empathy is diluted in proportion to distance. The artilleryman fires on a remote target, the bombardier sees his bombs strike in miniature far below -- there is a certain detachement. For the infantryman, most action is near enough to negate the feeling of remoteness, and it becomes personal -- the cushion of unreality is overwhelmed by stark presence.

The makeup of the outfit continued to change. Lts Neidermeyer, Mannion, and Orlando were assigned to Easy. Lt Eddy Orlando replaced Lt Eddy Mann as 2nd Plt leader. Sgts Lins and Harbeck were given "battlefield commissions", as were Keyser, Bresset, and others. Most enlisted personnel who accepted battlefield commissions were assigned to other units, though there were exceptions.

The new replacements were coming along well, being exposed to a fair amount of hardship and fire -- they would be as ready as could be expected when the going got rough later. A shell that exploded two yards from our hole near midnight gave Gray a sense of near shellfire. Later, both of us were caught in the open by a half hour barrage, with no nearby holes to jump in. Veteran and rookie alike, we were forced to resolve a hot issue -- whether to lay still and take it, or have a run for a safer place. There never is an easy answer, even for the veteran. In this case we chanced to run for a hole, and made it. A little MG fire was provided early each night when

the platoon gathered for the distribution of food from Sam's large urns, which had been lugged from the Elsenborn road. A German MG would always fire a few bursts, but the stuff was always high.

Most of us had not had a hair cut since leaving England three months ago. Long hair helped in the cold, but when it hung over my jacket collar it was too much. Glass had a sma pair of scissors, so we agreed to have a go at each other. The job may have been creditable had the scissors not been s dull. The hair would slide from the blades with each snip, and we had to hold the hair with one hand to prevent this, while knawing away with the dull blades. The results were a bit scalloped, but everybody agreed that Glass got the bette of it. I sensed the same when he kept saying "Oops" with ea snip.

Tomorrow may be the most important day of your lives. For some of you it will be the last...

Lt Orlando, preparing us for the attack.

The Last Day

Shortly after Lt Orlando took over 2nd Plt we learned that we were to be committed to the attack. We had been expecting it for some time. Most of the bulge in American lines had been reduced, and the time was approaching when we would be expected to clear the area from Elsenborn to the Siegfried. I was content that it had taken this long, and would have been glad to extend it. My motto was, always put off until tomorrow what you don't have to do today.

Orlando was, himself, a battlefield commissioned officer of recent vintage, and we were fortunate to get him instead of a shavetail or ninety day wonder. There is a rapport between the ranks and a leader who has been there that is seldom achieved otherwise. I have never, am not now, nor will I ever be, a supporter of the leadership principle theory that fails to incorporate a strong apprenticeship method. This has application to political, economic, or military, equally. Otherwise, disaster awaits, and the results are expensive, illogical, and dangerous -- to solve a problem one must define it, to define it one must have knowledge of it.

The day before our attack was to go in, Orlando assembled the platoon for a short briefing. "Tomorrow may be the most important day of your lives," he said. "For some of you it will be the last. I hope each of you will make the most of it. Put your training to good use -- don't bunch up, stay as close to the enemy as possible, use marching fire, keep going so the medics can handle the wounded -- remember your basics." Simple and sweet, short and to the point -- the message was etched in the granite of our minds.

We were to move out on our approach march at 0230, so we began our preparations early -- rifles to be cleaned, ammo to be checked, equipment to be packed, last letters to be written. Suddenly there was no more time. We were arrowing toward that "most important day". I hoped fervently that E Co would be in a support role for a change. My innermost thoughts weighed the possibilities -- of the three rifle companies one would lead, of the three rifle platoons in the lead company one would lead, of the three squads in the lead platoon one would lead, of that lead squad the two scouts would lead. It wasn't comforting, but the chances seemed reasonable. That's all one could ask.

For the coming action we had recently been issued thick English wool socks, and wool lined poplin covered mittens with separate trigger fingers and cuffs that reached nearly to the

elbow, with draw straps to tighten the cuffs against the snow and cold. Each man was provided with a quarter pound TNT block with which he could disable a vehicle or blow a shallow hole in frozen ground for fast cover from fire. Two friction fuzes (the type that had failed in the pillbox attacks) came with each TNT block. Little, premeasured morphine Syrettes were issued also. These would prove of great value later when many of our medics, themselves, became casualties, and we had to provide first aid for many of our wounded. We still had the thermite, WP, and fragmentation grenades we had carried on the Krinkelt combat patrol. Fresh rifle ammo was distributed. As usual, I made sure all my clips were loaded with black tip AP (armor piercing) rounds. Most of the men disagreed with my choice, but I intended that no bastard hiding behind a tree, wall, or light vehicle would be impervious. Granted that the normal ball ammo rounds did more damage to muscle, nerve, and bone, but they had far less penetrating ability than AP. If AP left a small neat hole through all rather than more serious wounds, I felt assured that, once drilled, most men would not come back for more. Yeah, but -- my critics would say -- AP wears hell out of the rifle bore. So, grab a rifle from one of the wounded, and you're back in business.

Issued to each man, also, was that abomination, the shoe pak -- few men liked them. They were clumsy, wet, and heavy. The previous day I had received a new pair of zippered rubber goloshers from my brother in England. I had not yet lined them with blanket wool, since I was now wearing the new footwear and was still undecided which to use. The problem was resolved for me by a fire that destroyed much of my equipment in the hole four hours before we moved out for the attack.

Gray and I had almost finished packing our equipment for the coming attack. The gasoline burned out of the ration can stove, but our bottle lamp was still burning. Gray began filling the ration can stove from a supply can containing a half gallon or more fuel. "Hold the light so I can see," he said. I picked up the bottle lamp and moved it so the light fell on the job at hand. "A little closer." I moved the flame closer. Flame, fumes, and fuel combined instantly in a glare, and Gray reacted by tossing the supply can down, spilling the fuel down his front and between us. All air in the hole was consumed by the resulting flames -- gasping for air only achieved inhalation of fumes and fire. Gray fell in front of the L entrance, effectively blocking it. He was a torch, and his efforts to slap out the flames only spred it. I rolled him over and literally shoved him in and through the entrance, and rolled him in the snow until the flame was out. We seemed to be none the worse at the moment -- the whole thing had happened in seconds. I managed to retrieve our rifles and ammo stored in the entry, but little else. The hole was burning fiercely, feeding on blankets, sleeping bags, and my new goloshers, not to mention the new mittens. The mittens were to prove the greatest loss.

My face and hands began to heat uncomfortably. Knowing that Gray must be in pain, I insisted on getting him to Co Hq to a medic, against his wishes. At Hq a medic smeared some

sort of concoction on our faces and hands. After checking us over, the medic announced that I could return to the platoon, but that Gray must go to hospital. Gray pleaded to be allowed to remain with the company until after the attack. It was obvious, however, that his burns were beginning to generate considerable pain.

We wished one another good luck, and I returned to the hole. It was still smouldering, and I didn't dare go in -- a hot grenade could make it unwise. As for the mild burns on my face and hands, I anticipated no problems -- I was much concerned about the loss of the mittens. No more were to be had. And other equipment -- it was certain I would be traveling light.

Gentlemen -- good luck, and good hunting.

Col Ernest Peters, CO 2nd Bn, speaking to Co officers launching the Krinkelter Wald attac

The Day

We moved out pretty well on schedule, threading our way i column through and across the snowy fields, shallow valleys, and gentle rises. The column paused now and then while thos up front considered direction and route. With my poor sense of direction I was soon confused, but convinced our target was Krinkelt. In those pauses some of the men leaned over t muzzles of their rifles, their packs balanced on their shoul ers to relieve strain, and slept standing there. Some even snored -- some toppled over in the snow and woke themselves. Swede snored and toppled several times during the course of the night march.

At one point we passed two or three German tanks, silent, brooding, sinister -- but unoccupied. Maybe they were the panzers we had seen on the Krinkelt patrol. It was hard to tell in the black night. Later, and further along, a dist- ant MG hammered tentatively in our direction. Tracers flit like angry hornets, but the aim was a little high. Our pre ence was known, or suspected.

The column halted again, and a conference was held by a huddled group of officers. Agreement seemed to be reached, and the group broke up. The voice of Col Peters, clear and chill, said,"Gentlemen -- good luck, and good hunting!" The words seemed staged, melodramatic, overtly heroic -- yet ap to the circumstance, serious, hopeful, and compassionate. Someone said, "E company, take the lead." So, we were to be it...

Lt Englebretson, now E Co CO, ordered 2nd Plt to the fro Sgt Bowers said, "1st squad on point -- Glass, 1st scout -- Arnold, 2nd scout. Move out!" My fickle finger of fate ha dealt me the ultimate probe.

With an air of condemned, but proud men, we moved silent to the front. Glass moved boldly forward, and I took up my position a few yards to his right rear to assure that we we not in line. In the dark I could only see Glass ahead, and a few dark figures to my rear. I had confidence in Glass and knew he would do whatever he had to do. Some men were easy to read, others less so.

As we moved fatefully forward I was aware of a feeling men in grave danger often feel. Some have described it as feeling like an impositor, others a separation of awareness I can only describe it as one part of me, the judgemental a critical self, somewhat detached and aloof, observing the

active me with a cynical and ironic humor. That part asked wryly, who in the hell I thought I was and what in the hell I thought I was doing with a rifle in my hands stamping along through deep snow on a cold winter's night and heading for a showdown with the Wehrmacht -- the Wehrmacht, indeed -- why you presumptious little snit, this is really going to be interesting. And I answered back, you can have your nasty little joke about my enterprise and predicament, you surly bastard, but just remember we are tied together irrevocably and where I go you go and if I don't come back it's the end of the line for you too. But that part of myself never let up in times of danger -- he was always there, observing my antics, making imperious judgements, and commenting in his snide and foul tone. Frivolous shit! But, which one was the realist?

After a short distance Glass slowed his pace, then dropped to one knee. Looking beyond him, I could barely make out the dark shape of trees. No shots were forthcoming, so I moved up and dropped to a knee beside him. Orlando came up and looked the situation over, then said, "Move on up slowly." Glass rose and proceeded on, and I followed. When he reached the trees he stopped again, and I came up beside him. The trees were part of a sparse single line that stretched across our line of march. Orlando came up to us again, and we all peered into the gloom ahead. Barely perceptable in the distance was more trees. Orlando told us to remain where we were, and he returned rearward. Glass and I curled up in the snow, and were getting cold and stiff when he returned some minutes later, We were to wait here for our artillery preparation, and follow it in. I felt that we should approach the woods in dark while the preparation was occupying the Germans, and Orlando agreed, but we would execute as planned. We waited as time seemed to drag and speed concurrently. I catnapped, curled in the fetal position, and Orlando was concerned that I might freeze.

Traces of dawn began showing the woods ahead in more detail. Directly ahead the forest formed a cul-de-sac or horseshoe of the field. Straight ahead the woods was some 500 yds away. To left and right the woods extended further out toward us -- more so on the right, where it was joined to our line of trees by a fence line growth a hundred or more yards away. On the left the woods extended out somewhat less. It too was joined to the line of trees by a fence, this one a greater distance away, and with very little growth along it. If we attacked straight ahead we would be moving into the horse shoe, and long before we could reach the woods we could come under fire from both sides, as well as from the front -- something no attacking force should contemplate.

Daylight increased steadily, ending al l chance of concealment of our approach. With the better light came a handful of 105mm shells from our rear. The first of these went into the woods to our right front, some distance back from the edge of the woods. The next volley corrected left some, but hit ineffectively in the open field. So, the edge of the woods,

where the defenses would be dug in, was effectively brackets to the right front -- now the FO could easily adjust to bri fire on the defensive positions along the woods edge at that point, then track left to continue fire along the woods edge toward center and left front. That would leave the woods, s the positions there, unhit on the horse shoe sides. Logical the guns could bring these positions under fire as we moved toward the center, after working the edge of the woods to le front, center, and right front. We settled down to watch th fireworks. But no more came. That was it. We were utterly flabbergasted. Without proper followup, the few shells used ranging the enemy positions were of no benefit to our attack Indeed, if anything, they had served nothing more than to wa any defenders who may have been still sleeping. For unbelie ing minutes we awaited resumption of firing by our support g In full light now, aware that the guns were to offer no furt aid, we were ordered to fix bayonets and advance -- straight ahead into the horse shoe shaped cul-de-sac. If the bitter cold of early morning Jan. 30 was mind numbing, most mind nu ing of all was the enormity of what we were to attempt, and conditions under which the attempt would be made. The plan not offer hope -- a necessary ingredient to attacking troops it offered certain destruction of good troops. All tactical sense learned at Ft Benning, or wherever, by aspiring Infant officers, was ignored or forgotten, as if brains had solidif in the cold and reverted to mere childish wishful thinking. Most private soldiers view that morning was more astute than those commanding. Easy began its own death march. It may b charged that the preceeding benefits from hindsight or Monda morning quarterbacking, but I distinctly remember having muc the same thoughts that morning. Nothing is so graphically disturbing to my memories as is that day.

"Okay, move out," Orlando said quietly. Glass moved out from the line of trees, and I again took a staggered positio to his right rear. Just out from the tree line we walked in to very deep snow, some of it hip deep -- all of it thigh de To move forward in it required much effort, and progress was slow. Our energy would be seriously sapped before we could reach the woods -- in that unlikely event. And the MG's be- gan their chatter.

The German defenders, for their part, committed an error which they were to demonstrate many times in future -- they opened up with their defensive fire far to early, when only a few of the platoon had cleared the tree line. Their great- est opportunity lay in allowing our main body to advance wel into the horse shoe before commencing fire. There, under in- tense fire from three sides, we would have been completely at the mercy of their guns, unable to move forward or backwa

With the opening fire, the scouts were supposed to restra advance to allow the squad to build up on them. Then, ideal they would move forward in one of three ways. One: as a bod firing from the hip as they move toward the enemy. This is called "marching fire" and is calculated to sweep the enemy ahead, neutralize their fire, and cause them to duck down to

avoid incoming fire, thus losing their defensive advantage. Two: involves a leapfrogging procedure in which forward movement alternates from group to group, one group remaining in position and providing covering fire while the other group moves forward. The groups alternate in this way until the objective is reached. Three: each individual in the squad employs an abreviated up and down method of movement in which he jumps from a prone position and runs forward for a three to five second period, hits the ground, rolls over to avoid fire directed at him, and repeats the process as the enemy traverse fire toward other squad members who are up and running. This method tends to force enemy gunners to constantly shift aim.

We were to employ marching fire. First, the deep snow prevented adequate movement to be developed in either of the attack methods. Second, Glass, instead of restraining his forward movement to allow the squad to build up, broke into a loping run forward, the gait being one peculiar to a man running in very deep snow. The result was a strung out squad deprived of combined firepower. The heroism of his one man attack was, indeed, remarkable -- but heroics must be tempered by prudence.

My delimma was whether to continue to match his advance so he wouldn't be totally alone, or whether to leave him to his own devices and wait for the squad to build on me. At first I felt bound to him as if by a string, and tried to match his advance. I was firing from the hip as I went, spacing shots in a wide arc from right to left at the most likely spots for hidden MG positions -- for we were unable to see the well concealed Germans. Glass was widening the gap between us, and I was drawing further ahead of the squad, most of who had wisely gone to ground, for we were already taking casualties at an alarming rate. Glass seemed to have reached ground where the snow was less deep -- possibly uphill, though the swept expanse of deep snow gave the impression of flat ground beneath.

The Germans had not used tracers since that first burst before daylight, but the sonic snaps and minute spurts of snow testified to the volume and accuracy of the fire sweeping us. Being unable to locate the enemy guns was frustrating our attempts to neutralize them. Compounding the problem was the fact that so few of our men were firing their weapons. We simply were failing to generate enough fire to hamper the enemy gunners. They were raking us with a high degree of impunity. In sheer frustration, I was shouting to the men behind to move forward, and to Glass ahead to stop or slow his advance. There remained small hope of restoring order and coherence to our attack. Glass ignored all but his own personal war, and continued on. That he was still unhit in his advanced position was probably due to the Germans figuring he was theirs any time they wanted him, so they concentrated fire on those further back.

I continued to shout, struggle forward, and fire -- the

whole thing becoming more senseless and ludicrous by the moment. Finally, I refused to be his puppet on a string any further, and plopped down in the snow, but continued to shout at Glass to stop and come back. "Go on, you goddam sonovabitch," I yelled in frustration, "Go on and win the goddam war by your goddam self!"

Bowers and Orlando were working gamely at moving the men forward, but with limited success. Those who moved beyond the tree line were being laced mercilessly by withering MG fire. Dead and wounded dotted the snow -- by omission and comission, and a dozen other factors, E company was beginning to die, bleeding and freezing to death in two feet of snow in a remote field in an inconcequential action that would not rate mention on page three of a weekly newspaper. And the long day had just begun...

I had to give up calling to Glass -- my throat was dry and scratchy from shouting at the top of my voice already. I couldn't generate more than a minor croak. Swede Swanson was nearest to me, and he represented authority. Maybe he could prevail on Glass to quit his idiocy, so I got him to try. He crawled up beside me and looked out at the figure of Glass far ahead, now gone to ground. "That Glass?" "Yeah, tell him to come back." Swede raised himself on his elbows and cupped his hands to his mouth. "Get down, dammit, I said. "Glass," he called, "come on back!" He fell face down beside me, a bullet through his helmet. As I turned his big body around to drag him rearward, he sang something in a soft mumble and began playing in the snow with his hands like an overgrown child. I called for someone to help drag him to the tree line, and Underwood responded. We dragged Swede between us. Stopping to rest a moment before going on, I thought I saw another bullet strike Swede in the back, but was never able to verify it. A small hole appeared in Underwood's helmet near the top, and I called his attention to it. He whipped the helmet off and stared at it, his face draining of blood.

After getting Swede behind the tree line I returned to my former position where I had hollowed out a depression in the snow, and resumed firing clip after clip into the woods, some times putting a whole clip in a suspicious looking place, and sometimes spacing the shots of a clip across the whole front. My bare hands were numb and almost useless, and I had to extract each clip from my bandoleers using my teeth, then force the clip into the receiver with the heel of my right hand. After slamming the bolt home with the heel of the hand I fire the rifle with the back of my extended thumb -- the fingers weren't working anymore. The rifle began jamming badly. Inspection revealed the shortcoming -- snow getting into the hole behind the bolt had been pounded into hard ice by the rearward slam of the bolt with each shot. I was soon forced to pick up one of many rifles left unused by dead and wounded.

Meanwhile, Glass had second thoughts about his enterprise. He was attempting to return to us. Running toward us, he suddenly tumbled and lay still. But he was playing possum.

When the guns tracked away from him he was up running again, but staying up too long, allowing the guns time to track back. He tumbled again, and was still.

Some distance on our left, one man had crawled persistently forward to a point far ahead of his squad. Like Glass, he had gone too far and had effectively separated himself from his companions. Now he was hit and unable to crawl back. Attempts to reach him were futile, being met each time by concentrated MG fire. He had strength enough to lift himself on one elbow and call rearward for help, and that was our only indication that he was still alive.

To our right, valiant attempts to move forward against the heavy fire was evidenced by silent bodies suspended in life-like postures by deep snow and freezing cold, like statues carved to depict living action.

I don't recall that anyone gave the order to draw back to the tree line, but it had to be done. Forward movement was impossible, and to remain in the open under the guns could accomplish nothing more than more casualties. Frozen weapons and frozen hands needed attention, but getting our wounded behind the tree line had priority. As we pulled the wounded to minimum safety, we performed what first aid we could -- many of our medics were, themselves, dead or wounded. Block remembers exhausting his supply of morphine to alleviate pain, and holding a dying Sgt in his arms. As I worked on one man, I kept him talking to divert his attention, and learned that he was from Rocky Mount, N.C., and that he had attended high school there with my brother, Russell. As I worked on bandaging a body wound, he referred to his frozen right leg. My suspicion was confirmed when I checked the leg -- a bullet had drilled the shin bone.

Back out to drag in more wounded, I noticed that Glass had changed position and was closer in. Even as I looked, he began crawling again, dragging one leg behind. I crawled out to meet him, but when I reached him he scowled, "Leave me alone!" Seeing the reaction in my eyes to his angry tone, he added, "I can make it -- go help somebody that can't." So I turned away and went to help others.

The wounded man far out to the left was still alive, but still unable to crawl. He was a rather short, fat boy who had come in as a replacement only days ago. All efforts to retrieve him by those behind him had failed, so a couple of us further to his right decided to have a go. The Germans reacted immediately, and drove us back. It was strange -- they had allowed us to approach some of the nearer wounded, but seemed adamant that this man must remain.

All canteens were frozen, and we needed water badly to go with the sulfa wound tablets, for we had been warned that a quart of water should be taken with the tablets to prevent organ damage. We obtained some water by picking through the ice in the necks of canteens to get at the small amount of liquid water in the center. Our wounded were further endangered by some fire still coming in through the tree line, and by the extreme cold. Quick transport to aid stations was

needed, but shortages of medics and stretchers prevented this. Volunteers were asked to go to the rear and bring sleds back for the wounded.

Benjamin Harvey, a recent replacement, accompanied me to the rear in search of the sleds. We didn't even know how far or where to look -- nobody seemed to have planned for such eventualities with any degree of competence or enthusiasm. About half way back to the panzers we had passed before dawn, in a slight draw below the stray fire that reached here, we came by a Major, probably the battalion exec., standing in a deep hole with a very worried and drawn expression on his face. He seemed shaken and tentative as he asked how it was going (up front). "Easy has taken high casualties and we are stalled," I told him. My mood prevented the addition of Sir. More questions were forthcoming, but I parried them by explaining our immediate mission, and asked where the sleds were located. He had no idea where they were and, I suspected, if they even existed. Feeling more than a little angry and antagonistic, I suppressed a desire to direct him to the battle area if he wanted to find out what the hell was happening. Everything was going wrong, the whole situation was sour, and nobody back here seemed to have more than a passing knowledge of why in the hell he was here.

We found the forward aid station when we reached the panzers. A section of canvas was stretched between poles on the lee side of one of the tanks. There were no sides to this affair to keep out cold wind or snow. Two or three men stood nonchalantly about. When asked about sleds for our wounded, they told us to keep going toward Elsenborn and we should run across them somewhere back there. I was amazed to find how right they were. We found the sleds, in fact, not far from Elsenborn. My anger increased further still -- hadn't anybody the forsight to see that the most elemental necessities were planned for and executed properly? It wasn't as if this operation had been planned only last night. Ample time had been available for responsible men to do their utmost. Obviously, the attitude back here leaned to the "not to worry, things will work out" school of thought. A diabolical plan sprung to mind which envisioned the rear area bastards alternating duties with the line troops, share and share alike. Forty years later I still dream of responsible people acting responsibly, but I see little sign of such wonderous things.

The sleds were crude but serviceable affairs, hammered together from rough lumber. We hooked onto two or three each and began our trip back -- better a few in time than many too late. You couldn't expect some of these people standing around back here to help, could you? We chose a straight line path back to save time, even though it took us across some high ground where slowing bullets zipped about. The elevation, coupled with our distance back, afforded us good perspective. To our right front we could see Krinkelt. Little forms of men walked through the snowy fields between the town and us. Though there was considerable distance between them and their

apparent destination -- more woods -- they seemed unhurried. They were not under fire, for none dropped. I envied them their, so far, unopposed walk, and glumly contemplated our lot and what the next hours would bring. We passed scattered German dead partially covered with snow, skin gray and frozen, mouths, nostrils, and ears filled with snow. They had fallen in the December attacks, and I wondered that their comrades had not retrieved their bodies.

When we drew near our destination, we met a medic pulling a blanket covered figure on a sled. "Who is that?" I asked. "Hello, Harry," Glass' voice rang out cheerfully. He flung the blanket back to reveal a grinning face. "You happy bastard -- get well and hurry back," I told him. It was the last time I saw him. I have waited all these years with one question for him -- what was he trying to prove with that one man attack? I think I know the answer -- he knew he was going to die, and just wanted to get it over with. Surprised that the Germans didn't do the job, he decided to see if he could make it back alive, and did. He fainted whenever he had to face a needle -- but one thing was certain -- when the chips were down he was all guts! You wouldn't expect such courage for a boy who played third cello in the Oklahoma Symphony.

Back at the tree line I learned that Lt Engelbretson was dead, and that Orlando was temporary commander. Sgt Glisch came walking by me, heading rearward. There was a hole in his helmet and blood running down his face -- a face that was covered with a boyish grin. That million dollar wound! Joe Jupko had his BAR shot out of his hands, and was wounded in the process. Giving vent to his feelings, he cried, "Hoorah, I'm hit -- I'm going back!" That million dollar wound! I felt left out, and wished I had a bullet through an arm or a leg -- but I suspected worse things were in store for me. On the trip back with the sleds, I came across Batson, my friend in Fox. His front was bloody and bandaged, but he was heading back to his company. "A couple of bullets skipped across my ribs," he said quietly. "They taped me up and gave me some aspirin and sent me back up." Cheated of the million dollar wound!

Out there beyond the tree line were our dead, frozen as they died -- some on their knees and elbows as if ready to rise and take up the fight again.

The fellow far out in the field to the left raised himself weakly on an elbow, turning his head enough to look back at us along the tree line. Above the raising wind came a faint cry. I wish to God I could have reached him.

Some of the men were busy trying to dig in, but it was slow going -- beneath the snow, the soil was like iron. The friction igniters were as useless as those in front of the barbed wire at the pillbox. The men were using matches to

light the short fuzes. But even the TNT failed to crack the frozen crust. Success was obtained by first picking a small hole down in the crust, and then exploding the charge there. The explosion cracked the crust enough that an entrenching tool could begin to be of use. As the digging proceeded, the MG was curtailed. Some men dug from ground level, but others ignored the danger and worked from the upright position. A rifle round would snap into or between the trees now and then, but these were largely ignored -- they seemed relatively harmless in comparison to the fire recently experienced. Everyone had chosen digging partners and had holes in progress when we returned from our sled expedition. Harvey and I set to wor I did the honors with TNT and a lighted cigarette, after first picking a small hole for the explosive.

Ours not to reason why -- ours but to do or die...

Remembered lines from High School reading.

If At First You Don't Succeed

Our hole was barely started when Orlando, hands in pockets and carbine slung on shoulder, came walking along the line of trees in his unhurried manner. "Be ready to attack again in twenty minutes," he said.

The prospect of facing the MG's again in that open field was extremely disheartening. Few believed in any chance of success this second time. We were far fewer in number now, brittle with cold, saddened by the previous slaughter, and with half our weapons inoperable. To walk thus out from the line of trees, leaving our wounded to freeze and die, to walk thus among our frozen and silent dead beyond the trees, to do this against dug in and concealed MG 34's and 42's* and knowing what the outcome must be is a thing brutal beyond the comprehension of those never so favored -- a thing heroic beyond imagination -- stout hearts, brave men, fueled by utter despair and the numb dumb necessity to die -- an unsung epic to be the silent epitaph for that inappropriate word, Easy.

As Jim Bowers noted, many German officers and noncoms had field glasses -- we had none. A pair of them may have been invaluable in locating the murderous guns that ringed the positions we were attacking.

Fortunately, the Germans had not thrown any artillery at us so far, and only a handful of mortar bombs had come in -- these on our far right flank. But where was our artillery, our mortars, our MG's? With these, Easy could survive, and prevail. The enemy objective, keeping us at bay, was being accomplished handily by the MG's, without expending artillery.

As the remaining scout of 1st Sqd I resumed my lead position as we moved wearily back onto the field ahead. Farris Block, 1st scout of 3rd Sqd, was one of the few remaining effectives in that squad. On our flank he advanced at the head of that handful. I don't know who the scouts were in 2nd Sqd, or if they still survived. 3rd Plt, I think, extended our line to the right. Most of the men cleared the tree line, then the Spandaus began their spiteful crackling. Most of those who had not joined in returning fire on the first attack, joined now, and the deep bark of Garand fire was heartning.

* The MG 42 is recognized by military hardware experts the world over to be the best and most versatile infantry MG of the war. It is still the mainstay of many armies the world over. Its rate of fire was double that of our MG, and the gunner could change a hot barrel in three seconds.

I began banging away at the likely MG positions as before -- a clip here, a clip there -- and then a sweep of the woods, interspersing single shots around the full arc ahead, then repeating the process again and again. In between the two attacks I had managed to thaw my hands reasonably well, and had obtained a bloody pair of gloves. Through my mind went a refrain -- my brain is thinking a thought which may be terminated before it is finished -- the organ that produced the thought will then produce no more -- the organ that is aware of itself will lose awareness of itself and its universe ...

This time, as our casualties mounted, we went to ground more readily. Attempts to crawl forward continued for a while, then ceased. We simply wallowed depressions in the snow and continued firing from these safer positions. I was aware that somebody behind me was firing awfully close by my right ear. I turned to look behind. Bowers, slightly to my right rear, was banging away at the woods. He paused momentarily to meet my gaze, his face a crooked grin, his glasses partially frosted. "Atta boy, Arnold," he shouted, "give 'em hell!" The guy to my immediate rear stopped firing when I looked at him -- I don't know who he was. "Move over some, goddammit," I shouted at him. He flopped a pace further right, and we all got back to the business at hand. I distinctly remember wishing dear old Capt Schwartz was here -- he of "all the men have already gone to war". He was probably still at Blanding, in the mild Florida weather, still spouting that crap.

Though this second attack was, as the first, doomed to failure, courage there was in full measure. Checking to our right to see how that platoon was doing, I watched as one man with a BAR jumped up and shouted to those behind him, "Come on, boys -- follow me -- let's get 'em." He ran forward in the deep snow, lifting his knees high to propel himself, the big rifle bucking in his hands. Two or three men rose to follow, almost in line with him. Being bunched close together and so in line, one burst caught them all. As one, they slumped tiredly into the snow and remained, unmoving.

During the second attack the increasing wind began whipping stinging snow, freezing us and fouling more of our rifles. I used four different rifles during the day and, in a letter forty years later, Jim Bowers spoke of the same experience. Some of our wounded from the first attack were still above ground behind the tree line, not enough holes being available yet for all. These were in a particularly bad way -- the cold and wind and driving snow, and much of the fire directed at our second attack, all conspired to take a dreadful toll. It is certain that some died of exposure, others from further hits This concequence will remain hard and bitter in our memories forever. It is one thing to accept that war is not childs play, and that its very nature requires hardship and loss of life -- the soldier must take this in stride -- but to be human requires nonacceptance of the stupid and needless.

This attack died much as the first. Men began pulling back

to the tree line, having given their best and seeing no point in continuing to expose themselves in such hopeless effort. The handful who remained on in the field to fight were forced by dwindling support to do likewise. There is, at times, such a thing as too much courage. Had all been as doggedly determined as the few, all would certainly have perished. Even in the soldier a keen sense of self preservation is necessary -- those armies who insist on dying for the Emperor or God or glory or whatever are usually obliged. A prudent and necessary lesson that the brave must learn, soldiers and commanders alike, is that the dead cannot return to fight tomorrow.

Our efforts turned again to providing cover for ourselves and the wounded. Some dug in the unyielding soil and some helped patch up wounds. All did some of both. The wounded fellow in the field to our left front was still in the same position, alive, but weakning. Attempts to raise himself on an elbow were fewer and less vigorous, and his faint voice, flung into the wind, was barely perceptable. The anguished cry may as well have come to us from a thousand miles away. All attempts to reach him were still rebuffed by the guns. A message sent to the forward aid station explaining his situation finally brought a tall gangling medic. I pointed out the form in the field, still visible through the blowing snow, and explained our futile attempts to reach him. The medic stood in the tree line and sized up the problem. "I'll get him," he said simply. His confidence was palpable, and restored our hope that the man would be saved. He checked, adjusted, and wiped his red cross insignia on his armbands and helmet to make sure they were easily visible. Then he stalked upright onto the field with a deliberate pace and stride, giving the Germans ample chance to determine his occupation, errand, and intention. He was alone and, as such, posed no threat to the Germans. Fifty feet out on the field his helmet flew from his head, but the bullet missed his head just barely. He stopped and retrieved the helmet and placed it back securily on his head and, very deliberately, placed his hands on his hips and stood, legs braced apart, glaring at the woods ahead. Just as deliberately, he turned and jogged back to our tree line. He didn't say anything -- his demeanor was eloquent. The Germans, by their action, had established that they would allow no one, for whatever reason, to move beyond the tree line.

The fate of the wounded man was sealed. While he remained alive into mid afternoon, his movements were less frequent. The tragedy of that boy who died so senselessy and so alone, within sight of our eyes, has haunted me over the years more than anything else. It is hard to determine which feeling has remained uppermost -- the feeling of guilt and failure, or the feeling of hatred engendered by the German denial.

The exertion of preparing foxholes was a blessing to cold bodies. My bloody fingers, once feeling began to return, were oddly sensitive in the finger print area. Tissue at the tips of fingers, toes, nose, and ears had little sensation

for several years after. Discovered also in my self assess ment was a bullet hole through the left waist of my combat jacket. Sorry, folks -- no hole in the helmet! Unbelievab by the end of this day almost as many living had holes in their helmets as did the dead. The difference between life and death, many times over, was a fraction of an inch.

Soon after the second attack ended, the snow and wind ro to full blizzard conditions and the open holes began fillin quickly with snow. We had our hands full trying to attach shelter halves and blankets across the holes against the fo of the howling wind. Even that sound could not completely mask the crack of rifle fire coming in through the tree lin

The wind lessened somewhat toward late afternoon, and wi it came the order to attack a third time. Like drowning me reaching for straws, we had begun to hope that we may yet survive the day, but the new attack order changed that. Li zombies, we sullenly prepared ourselves for another try.

Orlando laid it on the line. "We have orders to attack again -- the bastards in the rear insist on it, so we've go to try. You know what happened on the other attacks. I do want that to happen on this one. Now, I'm not asking you t go out there and get your asses shot off. We are going to move out in good order -- everybody. When the MG's open up I want every man to hit the ground -- we don't want people hurt, so stay down. If we can't make it I'll give the orde to withdraw. When I give the order to withdraw I want ever man to turn around and crawl back here. Any man gets hit is a rotten egg!" It was the nearest he ever came to deliverin an impassioned speech, but it was eloquent in its simplicity The man was a born leader. Despite the mauling we had taken throughout the day, he managed to outline hope in our hearts and confidence that he would not throw our lives away. In his handling of this third attack he possibly prevented the final destruction of Easy. We had accepted that we were goi to die, and that is a terrible and hopeless state of mind in a battle unit.

Even the route of our third attack of the day showed logi and consideration. Rather than advancing again into the fir of the horse shoe, we moved along our right flank across som fence lines, much of our movement being concealed by moderat growth along the fence lines, between us and the woods. Fir we got, but it came from only one direction, and that was an improvement. We stayed low under the fire and managed to cover considerable ground, but the flank would not be turned We needed the cover of darkness to aid our approach and some decent artillery to shake the defenders. This attack, too, came to naught. We were still angered and puzzled at the absence of needed support,

Where was that support, and why was it not employed? In this and some other aspects of the battle I can only repeat rumors that purported to generate a little light, and cannot

vouch for their veracity: Our regimental commander, in planning the attack, had rejected the use of artillery bombardment and support, saying, "my men can take it (the German held Krinkelter Wald) without artillery." Some facts must be considered; Ample artillery did exist, for we had witnessed its use time after time, and were to (thankfully) witness it again at midnight tonight. And some suppositions made: If you launch an attack in which you reject artillery support and preparation, it seems that you don't contemplate the need. Given that, then you must anticipate success and rapid movement. If your infantry enjoys rapid movement, then you damn well better have your artillery on the road ready to move forward to cover possible needs further down the road. The fly in the ointment is this -- if the anticipated rapid success and movement doesn't come off and your artillery is sitting on the road not prepared to fire, what do you do? Well, I suppose you let your infantry have another go or two at it, hoping your plans will finally work out and you won't have to be embarassed by having your guns go all through setting back up right where they just pulled up from. Of course, only an idiot would let himself get caught in such a position. And, God knows, we didn't have any idiots around,-did we? But, just suppose you did make that mistake, and your infantry is getting the shit kicked out of them -- whut mus' us do? Why, dammit, you get that artillery turned around and set back up and give the boys a fire mission! And, drat it all, that may mean that you will be relieved of command of the regiment and assigned to command a division. Stranger things have happened. A legitimate question would be, what occasioned ample artillery to become available in the middle of the night?

Rumor: Col Pete resisted orders to continue the unsupported attacks, giving the reason, "My men are not licked -- they have no support, they are freezing and many of their weapons are frozen." The information source further observed that Peters had tears in his eyes as he pled the battalion's case. No doubt the tears were freezing. I like to believe the conversation took place as reported. Peters was overruled, of course -- and the brutal and fateful attacks went in. Each successive Hq up the chain of command required results from the Hq below. After all, they have their problems too, know what they want, and are convinced they know best how to obtain it. I am convinced, however, that the man on the spot should be allowed more input toward solution of problems.*

* Sadly, this lesson has not been learned. In talking with veterans of the Vietnam fiasco I learn that the reverse is true -- local commanders and troops were forbidden to act, or worse, to react, without first consulting higher Hq and receiving specific orders concerning whether and how to act or react to local problems. The arrogance of command seems boundless -- and frightful in its implications. One has but to open one's eyes to see the same application in American business and industry. Unless this trend is reversed we may handicap ourselves to our national sorrow. The appetite of administrative types to control all must be curbed, or we shallnot survive to compete successfully.

The return from our flanking advance was tiring. We were forced to crawl the entire distance back under MG fire. To press your body deep in snow while crawling under fire is an exhausting method of travel. Orlando had succeeded in leading us in and bringing us back out with few, if any, casualties -- so we viewed that action as, at least, semi-successful. One man was yards behind us when we crossed the last fence on our return. He was completely exhausted, and his arms and legs refused to further react to the commands of his brain. We called and encouraged him to continue the few remaining yards. Inch by agonizing ince he moved under the MG fire, tears of frustration wetting his cheeks. Finally, Lt Orlando draped his body over the sagging fence, stretched himself full length, and grabbed a handfull of jacket and hauled the man across. One of our MG's from our Weapons Plt had set up in the tree line on the right flank while we were attacking. As we returned I stopped by the gun and enjoyed the satisfaction of watching it in action against those who had handled us so roughly.

The blizzard hit with renewed vigor after our return from the attack. At least one of the wounded left behind when we attacked was dead on our return. Again, I suspect exposure and freezing as the cause of death. It may be redundant but, again, I must return to the inefficient and callous handling of our wounded, many of who remained untended and unremoved from the line of trees for several hours. If medical people were in short supply there certainly was no shortage of other personnel who could have been given the short task of carrying wounded away from extreme cold and danger. An illustration of the gap, more of perception than of physical distance, that existed between the infantrymen at the tree line and the service troops immediately behind us was provided at 2nd Bn Hq Co at Goldbach after the war when a Hq man expressed disbelief tha t the two scouts in the preliminary attack survived, one wounded and one not -- he thought the whole company died there!

The little time remaining before dark saw our remaining wounded finally carried to the rear. We utilized the time melting snow in our foxholes to provide drinking water -- we had been una ble to quench our thirst throughout most of the day. Frozen K rations provided the evening meal.

Orlando had been prophetic. For most of us it had truly been the most important day of our lives. And for far too many it had been the last day. Sad to say, if many men found unknown and unsuspected resources of courage and grit to carry them through the demands on their spirits and bodies that day, there were a few who managed to avoid some of the rigors endured by their fellows. Three men remained hidden in holes throughout the third attack, allowing blowing snow to cover them while remaining still. Looking back on the trials encountered in those hours, it is remarkable that so few attempted to take that course.

Well after nightfall Orlando formed and led a recon patrol out from the line of trees.

Several hours after dark we heard a tank engine growling above the wind. My fight or flight mechanism was leaning to the latter, and I jumped from the hole. The tank was coming from the left along the far side of the tree line, and when it drew near we could see that it was one of ours, being led by a GI walking ahead. It continued along the tree line to the right and disappeared. I assumed it was packing a track for supply vehicles, and hoped that none of our dead were in its path.

At midnight the howl of artillery shells passing overhead from our rear heralded an extensive barrage on the woods to our right front. We watched and cheered from our tree line. "Give 'em hell, artillery!" With the artillery came confidence that now we could take the woods positions, particularly if we could move in under the curtain of exploding shells.

2nd Plt, on your feet. Saddle up -- we're moving out!

Sgt Jim Bowers, time after time.

And The Day After

A couple of hours after midnight we were on the move again, groggy from lack of sleep. This time, too, we moved to the right for some distance before turning left along a hedgerow leading to the woods. We knew by now that another company was spearheading this time and we were follow-up. Up ahead the sounds of battle were negligible -- artillery had done the job well, and little resistance was encountered. Many of the defenders who had survived the artillery had escaped with their wounded in tow. At our entry point into the woods we passed a lone gunner dead at his MG 34, his cheek across the breech and his left arm draped almost lovingly across the barrel. We entered the woods quickly and fanned out in the dark. Here, even in the dark, we could see the destruction wrought by the artillery -- the forest was literally harvested. The woods came to a point here, and widened as we moved deeper. This point, and the positions there, had fallen to attack from two sides -- 3rd Bn had moved into position on the far side under cover of darkness, and had hit the woods from there when 2nd Bn went in on our side.

When dawn broke, we were astride the area overlooking our attack route of the previous day. The place was pretty well mauled by artillery, and several German dead were scattered about, both in holes and on the surface. I was curious to view the field over which we had attacked. Out there was the bleak field and the thin tree line. The gunners had had us exactly as they wanted us. For a moment I imagined seeing us coming this way from the tree line. The hunter in man could not suppress the need to, momentarily, see himself as the hunted. A little back from here was a dead German officer, a handsome fellow. Lt Ross went through his pockets and found a nice 7.65mm pistol. The dugout behind him was the most elaborate we had seen.

Further along we came to a wide road through the forest. An American jeep and ambulance sat on the side of the road. They had been there since mid Dec in the early days of the Bulge. Further up the road we came across a hulking Royal Tiger with its 24 foot high velocity rifle staring sightlessly in the direction from which we had come. I'm sure that those few rounds with the spectacular sizzle that slammed into our position in front of Elsenborn came from this monster. There was no sign of it having died violently, so it had probably broke down or given out of fuel. What does an infantryman do with one of these things, I wondered. Even a bazooka would

probably only make it angry. A little beyond the panzer a MG 42 hung by a strap from a tree. It looked as if the pull-back by the Germans was in some haste.

At about this point 1st Bn took over the advance, and 2nd Bn settled in for some rest, sleep, food, and replenishment. We took over some of the German defensive holes overlooking the horse shoe.

Intending to travel light on the early morning attack, I had left some of my equipment at the tree line. Telling the men where I was going, I walked back to the tree line. I passed some of our dead who were unfamiliar to me, but when I reached the 2nd Plt position a lump grew in my throat. I forced myself to approach those I knew -- I wished to honor them in some way, but didn't know how. All were still frozen in their positions of yesterday -- lanky Herman Almond who saved my life one night on OP two months before, little Daniel Anderson with the murky glasses, slight of build Richard Carey who had been lost and then found, and now lost... I thought of the telegram his family must endure. And there were so many more it was obscene.

I take the liberty to include a paragraph from a Farris Block letter. "Probably, the worst day of the war took place on January 30 for Company E. That was the day we attempted an attack across a wide open, snow covered area on the edge of the Monschau Forest. We were decimated by the German fire from the wooded area and lost about half of the company, killed, or wounded. My squad in 2nd Plt was practically wiped out. I will never forget the sight of poor old Herman Allman half-standing in deep snow, prevented from falling by his BAR which was stuck upright in the frozen snow. His body looked like a statue. Probably killed by the German's first volley, he continued as a target for the Germans who fired repeatedly at him for the remainder of the day. Our CO, Lt Engelbretson, was killed that day. He was joined by too many others. I recall using all of the morphine syringes that I had trying to reduce the pain of the wounded. One of our sergeants died in my arms, his guts spilled out on the ground beside him. I remember a big Swede by the name of Anderson, who had the front part of his forehead blown away. Delirious, he was singing softly, out of his mind when the medics carried him away. I often wondered if he lived." *

Some dead medics (the Germans had made no effort to spare them) were in a pile off to the side where someone had thoughtfully stacked them. There in the field was the boy nobody could reach yesterday. Today was too late. At our extreme left flank, back from the tree line, were three dead Germans. They had been shot at close range by a large caliber weapon, probably .45 cal., one precisely between the eyes. Their pockets were turned out, as I was to see hundreds of enemy dead

* Almond and Allman indicate the same man, whichever is correct. The "big Swede" is probably Swede Swanson, but I may be wrong.

before this thing was finally through and done.

Food had been brought up to the company while I was away, and Harvey had filled and saved a mess kit and canteen cup for me. On my way back to the company I passed a group of about a dozen German prisoners being escorted to the rear. It has been a long time ago and memory may fail me, but I think a couple of them were women.

We spent the time till night resting and trading stories. With nightfall we settled in for some much needed sleep -- we had slept little for two days. It occurred to me as I drifted off to sleep that I was the only one left from the squad that left Camp Maxey eons ago. Morelli was out, but would return. Underwood, still present and accounted for, had joined the squad in England, though he had spent most of the time with Plt Hq. A handful of replacements came to the platoon about this time, but not enough to build up all three squads, so Orlando and Bowers decided to build two squads from what was available. The remains of 1st Sqd were put in the common pool to build 2nd and 3rd Sqds. So, 1st Sqd didn't exist for a time.

Early at night it began to rain, so we covered our holes with shelter halves and returned to sleep. Just as we got back to sleep we were ordered to pack up and be ready to go. We packed our equipment and stood in the rain waiting for the order to move out. Finally, already soaked, and still with no order to move out, I climbed back in the hole and went to sleep in four inches of water, using my helmet to keep my head out of the water. Harvey agreed to wake me when the order came to move. When we did get the order to move I was so stiff I could barely wiggle. After a few minutes of walking I was okay again.

It was a nightmare of a march. The rain had stopped, and we marched single file through deep snow in the forest. The track packed by those ahead was narrow, slippery, and hard to stay on. We marched thus throughout the night, the column stopping several times for periods up to a half hour. I curled in the snow on the track and slept during these pauses. It was agony to get the cold joints back in operation each time, but I was accumulating much needed sleep albeit in fits and starts. Sleep for the soldier is a most valuable asset.

Cold dawn filtering through the trees revealed that the forest was liberally laced with mines and booby traps -- mostly the little egg shaped concussion grenades wired craftily between trees and on fallen logs. We were amazed that we had not set off hundreds of the things during the night. We were thankful that the Germans were retiring toward the Siegfried without a series of those deadly little delaying actions at which they were so adept, and in which they bleed you a little here and a little there, retiring each time with little damage to themselves. Much has been argued about the respective qualities of our enemies, the Germans and the Japs. For me the Germans were more adaptable and versatile and, thus, more dangerous. He was no simpleton who would oblige you by dying today.

Tomorrow he would be behind another building or around another curve in the road, behind another MG or Pak 75, and give you another few minutes of terror. The modern soldier must be willing and capable of breaking off action at a select moment to avoid grevious damage, and be selective about the time and manner for the next engagement. Our defense in the early days of the Bulge was essentially of that pattern, and was successful. Had we drawn a line at that point and time and said they shall not pass, we would have been mauled and possibly rendered incapable of further action. Put simply, the successful commander ceases to react to the enemy and creates situations which force the enemy to react to him. Our Jan 30 attacks harked back to the WW 1 infantry attacks that either succeeded or were destroyed. The military mind, alas, seems prone to committing and freezing itself to courses from which it is reluctant to depart. Easy was committed to such a course, and was almost destroyed. The saving factors were: The natural instincts for survival, the late decision to forgo the blind attacks into the horseshoe and try alternative methods, Orlando's well ordered handling of the subsequent efforts, the arrival finally of artillery support, and the use of 3rd Bn on the far side of the point of the woods to compliment our efforts on the western side which put the defenders in an untenable position.

Jim Bowers, in a recent letter, quite rightly attributed much of our failure that day to our inability to maneuver in the deep snow. I must reiterate and insist here that statements that we were attacking through hip deep snow beyond the tree line (that is as far as we got, except for the scouts) are absolutely correct -- not a pipe dream. In a letter to Will Cavanagh I expressed my opinion that, even given the terrible conditions of that morning, with intelligent use of available men and weapons (without artillery) we could have carried the woods, but it still would have been at considerable cost.

The convergence of 394 Regt from our left and 2nd Div from our right ended our mission to drive the Germans from Belgium in our area. Once again we concentrated on recuperation. Harvey and I were sent on an expedition to locate some supplies overdue to 2nd Bn. Our effort took several hours walking through woods, hills, valleys, and fields -- deep snow hindering our progress. We located a Wesel carrying some of the needed supplies, and decided to follow in the Wesel's track for easier walking, only to find that snow which supported the vehicle would not hold the weight of a man. The Wesel outdistanced us, and we returned much the same way we had come. We crossed a treeless valley and the far steep slope. Woods began halfway upslope. We found the body of a 99th medic a few yards inside the peaceful woods. No scars of a fight was in evidence in the area. The lone man had been gut shot. He had obviously come upslope and entered the woods, only to have his life brutally and stupidly extinguished by some sonovabitch with a bizarre sense of greeting. How many 99th men were needlessly slaughtered in this fashion in those confused early days of the Bulge will never be known.

What do you do in the infantry? You march, you march, you march...

Infantry song.

Col Pete's Lost Battalion

Our immediate mission accomplished, the battalion was assembled for the march back to the Elsenborn area. Col Pete, in his compassion for his tired and worn battalion, announced that he would take us cross country and save miles and time and energy. Cheerfully and hopefully, but with a measure of missgiving, we set off in mid afternoon. For a second time I allowed myself to think of a warm house and a bed and warm food -- maybe a rest area.

The column threaded its way through mine strewn woods and fields, single file to lessen the danger. Those in the lead had to be especially careful and wary. The column, when one came astride a high point, could be seen winding across hills and through valleys for miles. We were making good time. Perhaps by dark, or a little after... But the darkness found the column uncertain, and the well known accordion effect set in with a vengeance. Near the tail of the column, with only a handful of men behind me, I found myself trying to maintain contact both fore and aft and, in the dark, doing so by shouts alone. Well into the night those behind me were so far behind that our shouts could barely be heard. For an hour I tried to prevail on the column ahead to slow the pace so contact could be maintained -- the serpent wound mindlessly on, unhearing, uncaring. Suddenly there came a muffled explosion and crys of pain from across the distance behind. The column struggled on like automatons, unmindful of all but the purpose of destination. I was obliged to follow the robot migration.*

It became obvious that our shortcut had become a lost cause. Exhausted, hungry, sleepy, and in half stupor, we stopped atop some bare high ground. Some F Co Sgt expounded his theory as to where we were while many of us, pissed off, tried to get a nap. A small party was sent off to locate Elsenborn. Some time later they returned with enough trucks to begin shuttling us in. My vision of warm houses, etc. returned. It seemed like hours before my group finally boarded a truck. We pulled into Elsenborn and continued on, and I realized we were to be returned to the wet cold holes we left three days before.

* In early summer many of the wounded were returning to their former outfits. Some served a while in our little MG (Military Government) unit at Bn Hq, giving weakened bodies more time to strengthen. Such was the case of a thin, tall boy named Jim Bell, wounded by the mine that night. He was a fresh replacement when wounded. Wood, wounded at Ginsterhahn, and Maertens, wounded God knows where, were among those from Easy who joined our little group that summer.

That was it. Arnold wasn't playing the game tonight. I intended to sleep in a house tonight! I climbed over the men in the rear and rolled over the tailgate onto the packed snow of the street. The truck roared on. A quick survey revealed a gleam of light at the edge of a blackout shade on the best looking house in view. I walked boldly to the door and entered. The place was a beehive of well fed, healthy, happy men enjoying a near normal existence. But what I wanted was sleep, dry, warm sleep. Ahead was a staircase. Nobody noticed yet another GI. I went up the stairs and entered a pitch dark room at the head of the stairs, my feet trampling cursing men. In the center of the room I wedged my body between others, and was asleep in seconds.

A voice woke me, inquiring about my problem. I looked up at a soldier standing over me, a medic. It was day, and no-one else was in the room. "Feet," I said, not being entirely off course there. "Come on," the soldier said. I followed him downstairs and into the front room at the left of the stairs. A Capt or Major bade me pull off my shoe pacs and proceeded to turn my feet one way and another for a minute. "Walk on 'em -- get some circulation going," he said. "You'll be okay." I left the house and joined a chow line in progress in the back yard. After a hot meal I went to pick up my Garand leaning on a wall with several other weapons. My hand went unerringly to a nice carbine. I was still feeling rebellious. Me and my new carbine walked on out of town. A jeep picked me up, and I was soon back with the platoon.

Perhaps I had not been missed by the powers that be, so I wanted to return unobtrusively, but the minute one of the men saw me somebody called, "There's 'cl Arnold -- Arnold's back!" Orlando gave me an odd look, but said nothing. Okay, so Jim Bowers would do the talking. But he only looked at me and my new carbine and said, "You'll need a M-1 -- better trade the carbine." I was off the hook. I never learned if they were aware that I had been missing overnight, or whether they simply ignored my little indiscretion. Whatever -- it had done me a world of good. Morelli was there, but gave no indication that he suspected anything -- maybe he had just come back. Underwood had known, because he welcomed me back.

The weather had warmed some, and with the rain that had fa llen had melted much of the snow. The place was hardly recognizable. Some time during the day I looked toward Krinkelt, and felt a sadness -- the place looked lonely and dead, like a playground after the last day of school. For nearly a month and a half the Germans had been over there and we had been here, and something was going on all the time. Now the bastards were gone, and we had it all to ourselves -- nothing was doing. It was time to move on.

We were allowed to have fires and dry our equipment, which was good since our holes had several inches of water in them. I checked my burned out hole, but there was nothing worth keeping.

We sat around the fire long into the night until most of

the men went to their pup tents to sleep. Only Morelli and I remained. "You going to bed?" Morelli asked. "Man. I'm going to enjoy this. Don't know when we'll have another fire." Morelli agreed, so we sat across from each other, looking at the flame, soaking in the warmth, and talking the hours away. Suddenly there was a loud roar of an aircraft engine revved to max RPM, accompanied immediately by bullets thudding in the ground around us and in the fire. Bed Check Charlie had arrived. We flipped backwards from the fire as the form of a Stuka swept low overhead. Two small bombs exploded. Anti-aircraft .50 Cal MG's peppered the sky from upslope near Regt Hq and drove the plane away. Old Bed Check was smart -- he had done this routine before. He had seen our fire from a distance and had cut his engine to glide in quietly. At just the right moment he had revved the throttle and hit the gun switches simultaneously. I heard later that one of the bombs caused a casualty in F Co. That stupid fire!

A check revealed that nobody in the platoon was hit, but considerable consternation was caused -- most of the men had been sleeping above ground, and had dived into nearby wet holes. Johnny Long, a chubby recent replacement, had jammed a shoe on one foot and his helmet on the other.

...where you're going is better than where you've been.

Lt Harbeck

We Hang Our Washing On The Siegfried Line

A quartering party left the company for our next location to check and make arrangements for our arrival. When they returned they were forbidden to tell anybody where we were going or what the circumstances would be. Harbeck was now a brand new Lieutenant and had been with the quartering gig. "Come on, give us a clue," I said. With a grin and a twinkle in his eye, he said, "All I can tell you is that where you're going is better than where you've been." It was rest period -- it had to be!

We loaded aboard trucks and were carried to within a mile or two of our destination, a section of the Siegfried Line at a small German town named Udenbreth. We were to go in at night and relieve 82nd AB troops who had taken the place a couple of days before. We spent the rest of the day and the first hours of night in woods back from the town. Some rest area!

We built a small fire in the woods to warm by and make a batch of coffee. We should have known better -- our luck with fires was missing something. First the fire that had set off the cartridge that hit Glass and me way back when. Then the fire that attracted the Stuka. Now, as we stood around this little fire another cartridge exploded and drove small pieces up Underwood's nose. His nose was bleeding, but he managed to dig out a couple of the small pieces of brass, and the bleeding soon stopped. Sam's kitchen was set up, and we had hot chow after dark, but a miserable cold rain detracted from the enjoyment. We stood around in the dark under the dripping trees waiting to march up the road to the German town, and by the time we marched we were thoroughly wet.

As we marched up the slippery road to Udenbreth a column of 82nd AB marched out. I didn't know it at the time, but in that column was a boy whose home was less than ten miles from mine. Marching through the rain in the Siegfried Line, I reflected on the fact that Father Hockhaus had come to pray with us before dark, and that the last time he had done so we had run into some pretty rough going.

Part of my hope was realized. 2nd Plt was quartered in a house. Any house is better than a wet hole in the ground, even a wet shell torn house, which is what this one was. The rear wall was blown out and the huge hole was covered with

blankets against wind and cold. The roof was destroyed, and water dripped constantly from ceilings in the living areas and on down into the large cellar beneath. The departing troopers agreed to leave their blankets in place on the wall when we provided replacements. "We are sure as hell glad to see that somebody finally came up here to take this place off our hands -- we been here three days already," said one of the troopers with an arrogant sneer. "Well, we figured you boys needed some help up here, what with all the trouble you were having. So, after eighty four days on line north of here we managed to tear ourselves away and come down and let you boys off for a rest," we answered. "We appreciate it," they said. "Think nothing of it," we said, "we'll take over now." They departed and we settled in, each satisfied with the exchange of good natured barbs. We had seen enough in the dark to know they had caught hell taking the place -- tomorrow's daylight would tell the tale further.

We were like kids in a candy shop next day, poking into and investigating the whole area -- never mind that the town was a wreck, it was still a town... German mortars peppering the area all day did little to slow our enthusiastic rambling. The stench of dead flesh, explosives, and burned material pervaded all. The warmer weather and drizzle of rain made matters worse. Two dead Americans were in the yard near the base of the house where a shell had slammed into the stonework. Around the corner of the house was a German caught in nature's call, his pants down to his knees. A hundred feet back of the house were belts of concrete dragons teeth. Across the street a bit to the right stood a small religious shrine at an intersection. Two American gunners and their MG lay beside the shrine. Across in front of our house was a partially burned barn with an American Lt and his wire handled carbine just inside the door. Between the barn and the next house was a large concrete pillbox, most of which was under ground -- the business part being above ground. On the street almost in front of the box was a knocked out Sherman tank, its crew raw beef inside. Down the street to the left was a dead German tank. Down the street that ran past the shrine and on out of town into Germany was a Pak-75 AT gun, and further along, a Pak-88 AT. The ammo stacked nearby to serve the 88mm looked almost as long as a door. The gun was capable of slamming AP rounds through the armor of American tanks like an ice pick through a paper bag. To round out this scene of carnage was a generous sprinkling of dead animals, horses, cattle, chickens, goats... The action here had been grim and deadly, to say the least.

A new batch of replacements came in, and first squad was reconstituted with Underwood as Sq Ldr and me as Asst Sqd Ldr. Some names are not available, but among those who joined the squad about this time were Walter Williams, Ottis Williams, Raymond Hand, and Douglas Emerson. The first order of business was to get our heads together and assign tasks. Hand was assigned 1st scout because of his quiet, calm, and serious disposition. Ottis Williams drew the BAR. A certain

* A recent letter from Emerson confirms that he, instead, joined 2nd Sq

amount of guilt can be felt in assigning these positions. Both positions are inherently dangerous, and the BAR is a heavy weapon aside from the extra ammo that must be lugged around by the gunners. Concequently, most would rather avoid the dubious joys of scouting or the BAR. Ottis Williams was chosen for the BAR because of his admitted familiarity with the operation and innards of the beast. Emerson was a tall, powerfully built man of a gentle disposition who could play most musical instruments we were likely to come across and, as such, was regarded as the squad musician. Walter Williams was a lanky taciturn type. These, with Harvey, Morelli, Underwood, and me, formed the new squad. Other squads were similarly refurbished. Most notable in my memory was a replacement in another squad who soon earned the name One Man Squad -- I never knew him by any other name. A mountaineer type, he had long black oily hair that forever hung in his eyes. Within hours he had assembled a personal arsenal that could outgun the whole platoon -- MG's from the dead tanks and other battlefield debris. Most of this he mounted to fire from a window on the second floor. Day and night he hammered away from his redoubt, irritating the Germans and drawing fire our way. We soon exiled him to a place down street where he could cause less damage to us.

The booty acquired with the house included a hand crank Grammaphone. We petitioned rear area for something to play on the outfit. They went through their collection and came up with the one record they couldn't abide. Day and night for the next week our senses were assaulted by a rather ordinary voice braying, "Many long years ago, fella named Robin Hood..." My rejection never allowed my mind to register beyond the first eight words.*

We received quite a variety of incoming stuff at Udenbreth -- mortars, 88's, 150's, and a few rounds each day from a big railway gun estimated variously from 270mm to 370mm. I prefer the latter. The first shell fired at us from this monster literally tried to scare the ---- out of me. The sanitation problems created by bloated bodies had everybody fighting severe diarrhea, and I was on just such an errand in the dragons teeth. The only sounds at the moment were my grunts and the coughs of a How Co 81mm mortar firing nearby. This peaceful scene was interrupted by a new sound coming from Krautland, a sound approximating what a railway boxcar would sound like if hurled through the air end over end. I gave my pants a quick hitch and trundled myself to the foundation of the house and awaited developements. After an interminably long time of listening to the sinister sound growing nearer, the shell hit in soft earth a hundred yards to the right rear of the house, erupting a plume of earth a hundred feet or more straight up and leaving an enormous cavity in the ground. The soft earth had swallowed the shell deep before it blew, forcing the frogments to be contained in a narrow arc. It was dangerous only if you were very near the impact area, but imagination could

* I have searched for the damn thing for years -- nostalgia, you know.

fortell what the result would be if the thing hit an occupied house or a hard surface.

The mortars and 88's, on balance, were far more dangerous. Though they blew shallow holes in the soil, the fragments of the exploding shells could easily cut a man down a hundred or more feet away. Still, those 370's sounded like hell.

The Germans employed a smart trick with their mortars there. Since a mortar is a high trajectory, short range weapon, we could hear the cough when the bomb left the tube and began its high arc toward us, and we could hit the ground for whatever safety afforded. However, the incoming mortar bomb makes very little noise. The result, if you didn't hear the tube fire the bomb, was that you could have one in your hip pocket before you knew it -- and that is a no-no. So, they would fire a mortar and we would hit the ground until after the bomb exploded. By timing the flight to explosion they knew when our ears would be filled with the sound and, at that moment, they would stuff every mortar tube they had. The subsequent arrival of these, of course, was unheralded. If you survive that arrival you are on the look out next time.

Graves registration people picked up the American dead and carried them away, but we had to bury the Germans. One, too long to fit in the hole designed for him, had to be punched down securily with a stout pole -- you aren't meticulous when incoming shells are trying to add you to the pile.

Being one of three chosen to first man our OP at Udenbreth provided an interesting and chilling experience. The last house in town on the road leading on into Germany served as the OP. A Fox Co Sgt traversed the route with us before dark to familiarize us. We avoided streets and climbed through windows and shell battered walls until we came in sight of the house on the right side of the road. The rest of the way was through a yard and garden to a picket fence that surrounded the house. We waited till dark before we crossed that. The Sgt advised us to remain on the path to avoid mines. In dark we set out with me in the lead. I think Harvey and Glisch were the others.* We stumbled along through the yard and garden as quietly as possible, but the gate through the fence was a squeeky affair. Once through the gate we approached the back of the house warily, least infiltrating Germans waited. At the door I wished for a Grease Gun, having to open the door with one hand and my Garand with the other. The door scrubbed badly, masking other sounds as I stepped into utter blackness. Once inside the doorway I stopped to listen -- and froze. A step or two to my right there was a hideous gurgling such as a man might make with a bayonet driven through his throat or lungs. I had to force myself forward, feeling as I moved. There was a doorway, and the sound was just beyond that. I felt my way through the doorway, and something clanged loudly under my foot. Testing with my foot, I determined that the clang had come from a thin sheet of metal on the floor.

* Glisch's head wound had been minor.

The unholy gurgling continued. With one hand holding my rifle and the other feeling ahead I stepped quickly through the doorway, and something puffed against the left side of my face. I whirled to face whatever -- and saw that I was looking down a hallway to the front of the house where faint light and a stiff wind was coming through a missing window. The gurgling, now to my back, sounded like my blood felt in my veins. Feeling toward the gurgling with my left hand I felt something slippery, cold, and wet. Suppressing the urge to recoil I moved the hand along the object -- and recognized a wash basin. The basin was full of cold water which was cascading over the edge to the floor. I located the faucet above and turned the handle, but the thing didn't work. A steady stream of water poured from the faucet into the plugged basin and onto the floor. With a nervous giggle I invited the others in.

Two of us stood guard looking into black Germany, while the third explored the house. There was a cellar with a brick arch roofed ceiling through which water dribbled. The floor of the cellar was a foot deep in water in which, at the center, was straw piled a foot above water line. A plank extended from the cellar stairs to the piled straw. There was room enough on the straw for a man to curl up and sleep, so we took turns watching and sleeping.

Dawn revealed two barnlike structures several hundred yards ahead, one large and another rather small. A mile or two back from these and a little left was a large and sumptious looking chateau type structure. Further back a woodline marched across the horizon. Rolling country in between was denuded and treeless. On the road beside the house we were in was a broken down truck facing toward Germany. It seemed to plead for strength to continue the journey into Der Vaterland. This being smack dab in the middle of the Siegfried Line, it was well to suspect the two crude barns of hiding concrete forts or powerful AT guns. Assuming that, one could suspect that secrecy would be maintained until the moment necessity required the installations to come into action. The wide denuded area spoke for itself -- woe to any who tried to reach the forested skyline beyond. Just one hitch -- prepared positions were near obsolete in 1945. This does not mean that prepared defenses won't inflict grevious losses on an attacker who employs frontal assault.

Shortly after dawn German soldiers emerged from the barns and walked about between. A Garand could pick some of them off at the distance presented, but we would surely get mortars and artillery on our OP house in concequence. Instead, we notified artillery by field phone, and they threw in some HE and WP. The little figures vanished quickly into the barns, but re-emerged a minute or two after the artillery quit. So much for attempts to neutralize whatever was hidden in them.

We kept back from the windows to keep from drawing fire, and finished our tour of OP duty without further event. We were relieved after twenty four hours by Martin, another new man in the platoon, and two others.

Martin, by our standards, was an aging man who hadn't the disposition or physique for infantry. One man was later hit by shell fragment at the window of the OP, but I never learned if it was Martin. Besides the arrival of the new men, a few other changes took place in the company. Lt Neidermeyer had joined the company, but would leave with an injury in mid Feb. Capt Don Southerland took command of the company and became perhaps themost liked and respected of the seven CO's who commanded the company (more than in any other company in the regiment). Lt Harbeck began his new career as an officer commanding a platoon in F Co. Bresset was pulled out to aid in Bond rallies and campaigns. Comm. Sgt Lawson was furloughed home. In what seemed the most odd of all, one of our new replacements of a few days was returned home, having completed his overseas duty stint. He had spent most of his tour in Iceland. Yes, Virginia -- there is a Santa!

E Co had a support role in the positions at Udenbreth, providing patrols and OP's, etc. F and G were engaged in neutralizing some worrisome pillboxes that remained in a bulge in our line. Orlando led several of our patrols through the belt of pillboxes at night, and even scouted a couple of the small villages behind the pillboxes. He was nonchalant, unflappable, never rattled -- the most capable officer I saw. I could almost swear that I saw his pursed lips whistling a tune as he walked, hands in pockets, along the line of trees Jan 30 while bullets zinged about. One night he climbed one of the massive boxes from the rear, walked across to the front, and stood a moment looking down at the protruding guns below. He probably had his carbine slung and his hands in his pockets as he leaned over to peer downward.

One of the pillboxes fell to an early morning assault and the prisoners were marched to the rear. Later, a German Col walked into the pillbox with his mess equipment in his hands, looking for breakfast. He was unaware that the box had fallen. One such attack was being held up by fire from the small shack or barn to our front. A 57mm AT gun was brought up to fire on the shack. The first round, a ranging tracer, zipped low across the ground and into the shack and, just as quickly, zipped straight out of the top, having met slanted metal or concrete inside. The little AT gun was firing from an open doorway, the snout of the gun barely visible outside the door. Dust settling on the crew from overhead caused them to look up. There, over the door mantle, was a neat hole drilled through the brickwork by an AP round from a hidden 75 or 88mm -- probably from the larger barn cover.

In part of our support role, 2nd Plt was ordered to occupy an exposed house at the other end of town to draw fire and attention from a George assault group. We hoped to slip in unnoticed, but the Germans picked us up and brought Spandau fire to bear, driving us into a ditch near the house. One by one, starting with Orlando, we ran twenty feet along a wall spattered by bullets, in order to duck into a doorway. We were congratulating ourselves on each of us making it safely through the fire, when we discovered that several of the

group were missing. Sgt Bowers, who had become Plt Sgt prior to the Krinkelter Wald action, scooted back along the wall through the hail of bullets and found the men, recent replacements, clinging to the ditch. With his urging and some choice wording he managed to get them all around the wall and into the house without misshap. Running through direct MG fire is not pleasant -- we were always amazed and giggly whenever we pulled it off, like winning a little game. But, for new men the experience is numbing. The hell of it is that you seldom have a choice, and it has to be done. G Co took the box and a batch of prisoners. A Colonel from 69th Div, the outfit that was to relieve us a few days later, had come down to see how it was done (it would be their first time on line). The Colonel was a big fellow with the makings of a paunch. He borrowed a Garand complete with fixed bayonet, and marched one of the prisoners, a little scared fellow, down the street ahead of him, prodding with the bayonet, and saying, "Get along there, you sonovabitch -- get along there!" A gallant sight, that.

The pillboxes were massive things of concrete and steel several feet thick and impervious to most weapons. Pack charges and flame throwers were the usual weapons that opened them up, though a 240mm firing pointblank would sometimes do the trick. The huge shells wouldn't penetrate the thick walls, of course, but the concussion transmitted to the inside was spectacular and usually enough to convince the defenders to throw in the towel. Contained below ground were the living quarters providing bunk space for eighty or more men. The structure above ground level was bermed heavily with earth for more protection and, when overgrown with weeds, grass, etc., was hard for the eye to detect from a distance. Some were provided with heavy steel domes on top, complete with periscope. These monsters, if not sufficiently destroyed while being taken, were blown from charges set inside by our engineers to prevent their reuse if retaken. I watched as one was blown back of our house. The muffled explosion cracked some of the wall and lifted the steel dome a foot or so and dropped it back in place. Like houses turned to rubble, they still could be formidable defensive features.

A bunch of thirteen Germans waving banners came marching toward town one morning, but the banners turned out to be Red Cross medical banners instead of surrender flags. They asked for, and received, safe conduct to the rear, purportably to discuss medical problems. If they were allowed to return to their lines after the discussions they must have returned via another route, for we never saw them again. Germans were beginning to surrender singly and in small groups now. One of our patrols ran into a bunch one night who began shouting, "Nicht scheezen -- Polski!" Many used that as safe passage to PW cages, but we didn't believe for a minute that half the Wehrmacht had suddenly turned Pole. A German Sgt came in on his own and offered to take all the boxes in the area with a minimum of casualties if we would provide him with a company of American infantry. He was turned down.

One morning a batch of prisoners were to be interrogated in a pillbox being used for the purpose, and I was assigned to guard them outside as they were taken inside one at a time. Mixed snow and rain was falling and chill was in my bones. Some artillery and mortars were falling about, but none close enough to cause us concern. The time came when only one PW remained, and I would soon be able to get back to the house and warm up a bit. The Jerry and I stood hunched over, flipping our feet like penguins to keep warm (every soldier knows that dance). He was in his early thirties, perhaps 6'3". He looked at me and grinned craftily. "Canada," he said, pointing to himself. "Nein. We will give you to the French -- Franzosen," I said. He paled visibly and said no more. At that moment incoming artillery shifted nearby and began sending fragments buzzing and humming uncomfortably close. We each involuntarily ducked our heads, watching each other and waiting to see who would go to ground first. I tried to look stoic, as did he -- silly business. But neither went to ground. Finally, he was taken inside, and I took off through the shelling to the comparative warmth of the house and the interminable "Robin Hood".

The influx of prisoners continued to increase -- more and more Poles slipped into town. Early one morning a couple of fresh recruits with new uniforms, packs, etc. walked in. They had been instructed to report to a certain pillbox, but simply bypassed it and continued on until taken prisoner. Both were seventeen. Their war was measured in minutes -- the time it took to walk from their lines to ours. It always struck me that a certain amount of courage was necessary to come in and surrender -- there is a certain unknown element involved -- will they take me, or shoot me?

We were advised that we were to be relieved and that the division, after 96 days contact with the enemy, would go to rest area. Assured also that we would be able to mail souvineers home from rest area, we probed the area for likely items, of which there was no shortage. Emerson and I braved falling snow and shells to collect German helmets, daggers, rifles, and such. After lugging the extra weight for days and tagging each item as directed, not one item reached my home, then or in subsequent mailings. All was swallowed up by the heroic minions to our rear. A sad fact: A man with a house full of war souvineers is not an infantryman -- he can lug only so much, an infantryman, and his opportunity to post same are almost nil. Non combat personnel are the most successful collectors of war trophies.other than death, dismemberment, and injury.

On the night of Feb 14 we marched out of line down the road we had come up on Feb 5. The battalion had cleared all forts and resistance from the bulge in the line it had inherited, and had suffered a minimum of casualties.

> You are expert infantrymen, and you have been fighting under adverse conditions. You will soon be on the offensive...
>
> Gen Walter Lauer, CO 99th Inf Div.

Come And Visit, But Don't Stay

We spent the rest of the night in the woods back from the line. It began raining, as if to correct any previous oversight. A night of misery was had by all. Men sprawled on the wet ground in the pelting rain, wrapped in raincoats, blankets, shelterhalves, ponchos -- all prescaked. I put my pack on the ground against a four inch sapling, climbed on the pack by assuming a Z position, and draped a blanket over all. By partially wrapping my body around the small tree I kept a precarious balance for the night.

Chow call came well before dawn, and we felt our way in the rain to the chow line, accepted and ate whatever was put in our kits, and wondered the while what it was -- in the rain the food could not be identified by texture or taste.

Some time after dawn a few open trucks arrived to begin ferrying us by a shuttle system to the rear, which meant that some walked and some rode. We were eventually dumped in a woods alongside a road near Born, where we were to spend the next four days in our pup tents under the trees. Two panzers, a Panther and a Tiger, were upside down in the roadside ditch. 2nd Plt pitched tents in the woods across the ditch from the panzers. There was just enough room between the turret hatches and the bottom of the ditch for a man to crawl up into the tanks. A couple of men obtained pistols from the dead crews. A mile or two back up the road sat a knocked out Sherman.

Ottis Williams and I scouted deep into the woods to see what we could find. Though there were foxholes and opened ration tins, boxes, and the like indicating past use by some American troops, there was little evidence of large scale fighting having taken place in the woods. We found a dead American with a large wound in his lower stomach, as if made by a tank AP round -- but no tank or any other large caliber gun had been in the woods. I surmised that only two weapons could logically have made such a wound -- either would have to be fired at very short range -- a panzerfaust, or a whole clip from a burp gun. Another atrocity murder? We reported the body, and graves registration people took it away next day.

More replacements joined us here. To 1st Sqd came Frank Dekker, a tall, slim, darkhaired boy, and Cpl Floric, a shorter light haired fellow from anti-aircraft. Both were from California. Floric produced a bottle of Scotch from his pack,

saying that we would all drink it together when the war was over. Underwood prevailed on him, after much persuasion, to open the bottle now so we could drink a toast "to those of us who don't make it". We had been cheerful until that moment, but the rendering of the toast brought on a somber mood of reflection. More somber still was his next proposal, that after the war was over the survivors, whenever taking a drink, would drink a toast "to those who didn't make it". I seldom take a drink now, and I often forget to drink a toast to Hugh Underwood -- I hope I am forgiven that fault.

We loaded aboard trucks one morning to go to Verviers for showers -- perhaps our fondest desire, for the collection of months of grime and sweat was in untold layers on skin and on clothes. God! To be clean again -- the prospect was delicious! I rode shotgun on the cab mounted .50 cal. MG, having trained on the beast at Blanding (we had to take the gun apart and re-assemble it while blindfolded, in three minutes, in the hot Florida sun, and while Afrika Korps PW's drank beer and laughed at us from railway cars nearby). Belgians along the way waved happily and noisely and showered us with whatever they had to give -- the Germans had left them so very little. Many of the men still had urgent and frequent attacks of that demeaning malady referred to by soldiers as the GI's. Supplications to the drivers to stop the trucks for relief periods were ignored, and the serio-comic convoy charged along roads and through towns with dozens of bare behinds hanging over side rails and tail-gates. So much for the dignity of war.

Through the streets of Verviers came the trucks loaded with dirty, grimy,bearded heroes of the front. Walking the sidewalks and crossing the streets were the garrison soldiers, resplendent of uniform (freshly cleaned and pressed), upright certain strides, heroic of countenance -- hell, these people looked like soldiers! And they scarcely noticed our passing. Some regarded us stonily and, I could almost swear, damn near shook with revulsion. We were keenly aware of our rude looks -- frayed uniforms, unkempt hair, holed helmets, hollow eyed... As this reception sans compassion or cheer began to sink into the marrow of our souls we were accorded a further indignity -- we could not use the shower facilities. Today was the shower day for the garrison troops! Never mind that they had showered three days before and you had showered three months ago!

This rebuke -- it was that for me -- shall always remain in my memory as one of the most callus and unpalatable of my life. Yet, our officers apparently gave no thought to argueing the point. I am totally sincere when I say that, had I been the officer in charge of our group, we would have been in the showers within the hour by employing whatever means necessary and at whatever cost to my personal career. Moreover, the Verviers garrison that day would have been left fully cognizant that they existed for one reason, and one reason only -- to support the line troops one hundred percent. Possibly they would even have been left with an overwhelming desire to squeeze out an

extra percentage point or two. It takes some time for the infantryman to realize that he is a breed apart and that, as such, he may have more in common with enemy infantry across the way than with the army to his rear. Maybe more would have been achieved had we each reversed directions and attacked to the rear -- the German fighting man could have liberated his own country, and we could have revised some attitudes. What I am saying, of course, is that infantrymen understand infantrymen -- apparently no one else does. Most armies tend to hold them in low esteem unless danger for themselves is imminent.

We were a glum bunch as we returned to our sanctuary in the woods. But we had our pride -- we had joined an exclusive bunch, described by Mauldin as "them what's been shot at". We still hoped that someone somewhere was working on providing us with a few days decent lodging. We were painfully aware that our time in the rear was running like sand through our fingers.

Any thoughts that we might be idle were dispelled. The army tradition of keeping idle hands busy was alive and well. If you had some wild idea that rest areas were for resting -- forget it. Throughout our stay in the Born area we were used as labor in repairing the local road net, cutting, hauling, and placing logs to form cordoroy road sections in places impassable with mud. Suddenly the motor pool vehicles were "our" vehicles, and we spent a day washing and cleaning them -- we had never seen most of them before. And, of course, there were the never ending inspections in which, despite the lack of facilities for improving our abominable condition, we were expected to stand to and look sharp. One such ended in tragedy. At the command "Order Arms", bolts snapped smartly shut, and a single shot rang out. A man in the third rank, unfamiliar with the fixed firing pin in the M3 Grease Gun he was carrying, fired off a round of .45 cal. which passed the second rank and hit a veteran Sgt in the hip in the first rank. A .45 at such close range exerts more than 1400 ft lbs of energy on impact (about ¼ of what Hollywood would depict). It failed to knock the Sgt down -- a medic took him down with a tackle and began to administer first aid. Compounding the tragedy was the fact that the Sgt was of the few remaining personnel who had come over with the outfit and had managed to avoid everything the Germans could throw at him to date, only to be taken out in this manner. One of my greatest concerns in the war was that I might die stupidly -- I'm sure others had similar concerns.*

After four or five days in the woods near Born we marched

* American forces defending Malmedy were bombed three days in succession by American bombers who apparently felt that Peiper needed air support. In the course of the war we were, at one time or another, subjected to fire from just about every type of weapon in the U.S. arsenal, mortars, artillery, MG's, rifle, bombers. Luckily the navy couldn't make it up the Rhine to bombard us. For that I'm thankful.

out on Feb 19 to Malmedy, where we waited for trucks to begin shuttling us to the Aubel area. Thus we again alternated between walking and riding. Again, many men weakened by the GI's fell by the wayside to rest. Undoubtedly some Goldbricks took this course, but others simply could not go the distance and were forced to pay after we arrived at Aubel by being marched about the countryside every night. We again passed the massive cemetary where fresh graves were being dug in wait for new tenants. We offered a fresh approach to the war whereby we would relieve the gravediggers from their task, thus freeing them to go to the front and chase Germans. Unfortunately no one saw the brilliance of our plan. We were to continue chasing the Germans, and the gravediggers would doggedly excavate graves.

At Aubel 2nd Plt was quartered in a hay loft. Between the hay and moderating weather we were reasonably warm and dry -- we had gone to an infantryman's heaven. Those who had fallen out on the march were gathered each night and led out to march. To their credit, compassion, and sense of justice, the men of the platoon surrounded Morelli and others one night and refused to turn them over to the officer who came to march them off. The air was tense for a few minutes -- rebellion was a distinct possibility. The officer wisely returned to Co Hq. In the morning these men were required to go to Hq, where they were kept for a few minutes -- nobody knew what transpired there, but the night marches ended.

More disgruntlement developed over the lack of sufficient and timely passes to nearby towns -- it looked as if we were to be kept in our hay barn like monkeys in a zoo, isolated from the populace and the rear area commandos. Aware that we would soon be back on the front, some of us slipped away to Verviers without passes. Next morning a meeting was held with the NCO's at Co Hq. Among other subjects covered was the insubordination issue of people going to town without authorization. Still without passes, a bunch of us went to town that night. Next morning in chow line Bowers informed me that I was replaced by Floric as asst. Sqd leader. To go into all the possible ramifications affecting the decision would be unproductive -- for I was not given a reason. For my part, I was more of the individual lone wolf type and probably was considered unsuitable for a minor leadership role. In fact, Floric was a good man, already held the rank of corporal, but was from anti-aircraft -- his lack of infantry experience being his only detraction. Underwood, the Sqd ldr, was wary of this facet of the new arrangement, and insisted privately that I continue the role in fact, if not in perception, particularly in combat situations. Thus, I was compromised to an uncomfortable degree, and would rather have had out.

More replacements arrived, pretty well restoring our T.O. strength. Irvin Shapiro, one of those to come to 1st Sqd, was short, rotund, florid of face, a natural clown, and became the unofficial squad jester. His well honed sense of

humor gave the squad a needed perspective to counter a fugitive sense. Weeks later he confided to me that he was totally dismayed to see what a dirty, cruddy bunch he was joining -- now he knew why. Lt Orlando was transferred, possibly to his company of origin. We heard later that he was wounded in the Remagen bridgehead operation. Lt Harbeck returned to Easy and took over lead of 2nd Plt. To aid in incorporating the recent replacements, many with little infantry training, we spent some time in nearby fields training in basic squad and platoon combat formations. We were also given a brief course on operating with tanks, something entirely new to us. Treated to a ride in a Sherman tank, we learned how very little the crew can see when traveling buttoned up. It was probable that we would be working in conjunction with armor when we resumed the offensive.

A big to do was organized to provide Gen Lauer opportunity to review, inspect, and address the troops. A day was spent preparing, cleaning equipment, clothes, and weapons. Each man was issued a new pair of socks and instructed to pull them on over the shoes before the march to the parade ground, in order to have clean shoes for the inspection. Some of us fudged and put the fresh socks where they were needed, on our feet. Many line infantrymen had still not been issued CIB (Combat Infantry Badge)*, so badges were borrowed from support people to make up the deficit. I went through the usual hassle about my leather belt, there still being no web belts in supply.

The main event, of course, was the personal inspection by Lauer. He moved along the ranks peering and prodding, asking a question here and there. He paused in front of a man nearby and studied the bullet hole in the man's helmet. "Soldier," he asked, "did you put that hole in your helmet?" "No sir!" "Get a new helmet," said Lauer. But the man didn't want a new helmet. He, like so many others, was proud of the talisman. The hole had been put there Dec 15 in front of the pillbox at Jaghutt. The inference had been rude and unfeeling. We all knew of the cases where a man shot his foot or another shot a finger off, but we knew that these were rare, indeed.

The inspection didn't end there. Peters, displeased, later inspected the battalion, and found Southerland's ribbons a bit askew. We were sympathetic with Southerland, and more than a little pissed with Peters.

Shortly before our rest period ended we were entertained by the division band. We enjoyed the humorous sketches, the jokes, and the pop music -- but something was missing. No music was played that remotely affirmed our condition -- we were, after all, soldiers. One inspiring march to allude to that condition would have been in order. I have never seen a combat infantryman who wasn't proud of the fact -- instead, we were usually, in the public mind, cast in the bouncy "bugle wugle bugle boy from Company B" identifying role. The casting was artificial and shallow.

* The Combat Infantry Badge was valued among line infantry over all other awards.

Toward the end of February we learned that 104 Div was across the Roer. The flood gates were opening, the drive of the fighting divisions toward the Rhine was beginning. We wouldn't be sitting in our hay loft much longer -- the rest had been good in that we weren't being shot at and we were warm and had full bellies. But a feeling of unease pervaded our sense of belonging. We felt somehow denied, shunted aside as if an embarrassment to this rear area army, a little out of place, a bit unwanted. Our kind of people were in a great struggle at the Roer. Though we dreaded facing the Spandaus, 88's, mortars, and panzers our gut feeling told us that we belonged up there somewhere east of the Roer, going to hell on worn out feet...

* Throughout the war our returning wounded felt the same thing back at the hospitals and Repple Depples (Replacement Depots) -- unwanted back here, and an uneasy need to return to the front and their own kind. Provoked by the non-fighting army, they, almost to a man, heeded the desperate call of their own.

Did you ever get the feeling you wanted to go --
and then get the feeling you wanted to stay?

Irvin Shapiro, quoting Jimmy Duranty.

Go East, Young Men...

On March 1 we moved by truck to the front which had pushed to the west of the Erft Canal, passing on the way the crumbled cities of Aachen and Duren. I would have liked to spend a day in Arnoldsweiler, NE of Duren, but this wasn't that kind of tour. We pulled off the road in a flat field in the vicinity of Elsdorf to dig in for the night. A Sherman tank passing up the road blew up a couple of hundred feet ahead of us just before dark. The crew bailed out. As smoke rolled from the open turret hatch, one of the crew ran back and attempted to retrieve something from inside, but was forced off when small arms ammo began crackling inside. As the fire heated up, the 75mm stuff began popping off, each shell blowing a perfect ring of smoke high above the turret. Finally the heavy rear plate of the tank blew off and hurtled end for end over our heads and hit ground a few feet from one of our foxholes.

The tank was still brewing flame and smoke long after dark. Now we were honored with a visit by the Luftwaffe. The lead planes dropped flares and lit the area as bright as daylight, and the bombers bored in to drop their HE eggs. AA guns put up a lacework of fire that seemed to deny safe airspace even to mosquitos, but the planes continued to weave through, bombing and straffing. Among casualties caused by the bombing were several men killed when a bomb hit Regt Hq. Next morning we were treated to a rather frenetic display of flying. An artillery spotter plane was attacked by a ME 109 over us. The small plane dived sharply and pulled out with his wheels almost touching ground. The Messerschmidt almost plowed into the ground, but was wary enough to pull out just in time. As he began to climb out, three P-38 Lightnings appeared from the west and gave chase. The German levelled out and headed for the Rhine, leaving the Lightnings behind.

We were treated to another rare display as we watched infantry attacking ahead and to the left of us. Again the whole thing looked innocouous and in slow motion from our distant vantage point. As we approached the canal we could see a few tanks milling about over a crestline beyond the canal. German prisoners heading west met us as we crossed.

The next few days consisted of a series of leapfrogging stabs at small towns and villages, the days and actions blending in inseperable memory. East of the canal we paused to consolidate. Some of the shops still had some candy left, and we

cleaned them out. Through the day we engaged ourselves in minor mopping up operations in several farm villages. After nightfall we dug in. In the black, Harvey and I dug at the base of a hedge, comforted by the sound of voices on the other side. Shortly after drifting off to sleep a loud bang shook us awake, and we discovered that our hole was directly beneath the muzzle of a 90mm TD gun, the crew having chose that moment to blast away. Our problem of what to do now -- we didn't care to dig another hole, but staying under the muzzle of that gun wasn't appealing either -- was solved by our being chosen for a patrol.

1st Sqd was charged with locating, if any, friendly forces well to our flank. We strung out down a narrow road with Hand and Walter Williams shortly ahead as scouts. Underwood and I followed close behind, keeping the scouts in sight. The rest of the squad followed, with Floric bringing up the rear. We made good progress up the road, intending to get the thing over so we could return and get some sleep. Out of the dark ahead came the clack of a bolt drawn back in preparation to fire, and an American voice quietly called the password, to which we immediately responded. We were led into a woods to the CO of the outfit, where we exchanged position reports, then took off for home and sleep. The platoon had been spaced around a munitions factory on the town's edge during our absence, and we were inserted in the guard line and cautioned not to sleep. To insure that we remained awake, Harbeck circled the plant continously, speaking to each man as he went. We timed his walks so we could be alert at the approach of his steps, and napped as his steps proceeded on past.

A couple of hours before dawn Harbeck withdrew Floric and me and placed us as guards at a gate to a house somewhere on the far side of town. In order to get some sleep, something we had had very little of, we took turns standing at the gate. I stood the first hour while Floric slept at the door of the house. When I woke him I decided to go inside out of the cold. A small vestibule behind the entry door served access to the entire house, but all doors leading off from this were locked. Stairs to the left led to the upper floor. Too sleepy and tired to explore further, I curled at the foot of the stairs -- the only floor space available in the confined area. I was asleep in seconds, having decided I was in Bn Hq. Shortly before dawn somebody came down the stairs and stumbled over me, cursed, and went outside. At dawn, Floric roused me up, and we returned to the platoon. Another day was starting.

Up ahead was the outline of a small village through the morning mist, the first house turreted like a miniature castle. We crossed a wire fence, with 1st Sqd leading, then broke into a run at Harbeck's order. Further along a small canal blocked our way, but our running jumps carried us across -- everybody but Harbeck, who splashed down a foot or more short. At the edge of town was a small bridge which we had to cross. I made a quick check for explosives, and we went on. We stopped at

the turreted house just beyond the little bridge and hammered rifle butts against the stout oval topped door. There were bustling sounds inside as we readied grenades, then the door opened tentatively a few degrees. The place was full of children being looked over by a couple of women. Though surrender sheets hung from many of the houses, we advanced along the single street in readiness, one squad on the left and another on the right, each squad eyeing the windows and doors on the far side for mutual protection. I tore off a piece of sheet to replace my long soiled handkerchief.

Meeting no opposition, we moved from the town and headed for the next one, visible a few miles away. We heard later that troops following behind picked up three German soldiers hiding in the town. The next town, though larger, was undefended as well, and we quickly advanced through, then halted on the far side. Two haystacks stood in a field at the town's edge and, since it had begun to rain, Dekker and I climbed inside one and settled back in comfort. Some of the men later found a German soldier asleep in the other stack.

After a couple of hours we were on the march again through driving wind and rain. The poncho proved once again to be a valuable piece of equipment, being large enough to cover us and our readied rifles as we marched. During periods when it was necessary to march or stand in rain without rifles ready for firing, a waxed K ration carton or spent .50 cal. shell provided good bore protection. Another method was simply to sling the weapon upside down.

Considerable territory was covered in the drive that day. No one unit was kept on point. Squads and platoons, as well as companies, alternated in the lead. For the most, little resistance was met -- a few rounds of artillery or mortar here, a few short bursts of MG there, and a rare wham of a passing AT shell. German defences were overrun, reeling, disorganized, or non-existant -- we were moving fast enough to prevent enemy buildup. Around each corner and curve were abandoned AT guns hung with limbs and such to throw off the searching eye. I didn't blame the gunners for taking off -- they were left behind the retreating formations to slow our advance, always without support. They could only slam a couple of rounds out before they paid with their lives, often causing no damage in the process. Rear guard postings with no support or hope are seldom useful or successful, and commanders who employ such devices are almost criminally negligent in throwing away lives.

In late afternoon, after having another unit take up the lead, we marched back a couple of miles to the last village we had overrun. We would spend the night there and gain some needed rest and sleep. Our recent successes had made us proud and cocky. The platoon chose a house with a small courtyard enclosed by a masonry wall. Satisfied with ourselves and the day, we were settling in nicely when Harbeck ordered the platoon to form up in the courtyard. He brought us to attention and walked along the ranks checking equipment and rifles with an air of total disdain. Walking back to our front, he wheeled to face us, his hands braced on his hips and his eyes glaring.

We could sense that a tirade was coming, but we were unprepared for the vehemence of it.

"You're the sorriest goddam bunch of sadsacks and misfits I have ever had to work with -- I have never seen worse," Harbeck raged. "You goddam people are going to shape up, and you're going to start right now! Look at yourselves. Look at your uniforms. Look at your equipment. Look at those damn rifles. There's not a man or a rifle among you that I would trust my life to! Now, when this formation breaks up you goddam assholes are going to get busy on that equipment, particularly those goddam filthy rifles. And they are going to be right when you finish, if it takes all night to do it. Every one of those rifles are going to be the kind I would defend my life with. Remember this -- any bastard that doesn't straighten up I'll ride until I break his goddam back!" He stood staring at us for a long moment, then turned to Bowers. "Sergeant," he said, and walked away without looking back. Bowers stood before us in silence for a moment before speaking. "All right, you heard what the man said," he said quietly, "Let's get at it. Fall out!" So much for our misguided pride.

We slept in beds that night. To hell with pride -- beds were a rare treat! But we brought those rifles up to snuff before we slept. We cleaned the rifles, knowing it wasn't all about rifles -- Harbeck had established his position and authority -- something every leader worth his salt must do sooner or later. Even the good Joes know that, the ones who succeed.

Early in the morning we were on the march again through the same type of terrain -- towns, artillery scarred roads, the occasional scream of a burp gun up ahead, cold wet wind, Panzerfausts, rifles, AT and AA guns and other enemy equipment left alongside roads or in ditches, and (shades of WW 1) grids of deep trenches freshly dug and unused. In yet another town we stopped for the night. This time we dug in on the edge of town near a burning barn. As we dug it began snowing and the temperature dropped. Taking a risk in the light of the fire, I leaned on a fence near the barn and soaked in the heat -- and fell asleep. The sound of a shot woke me, and I hit the ground, unhurt. A look around told me that nobody else had heard the shot, and I was puzzled. Oddly, to the numb tips of my fingers, toes, nose, and ears, two other additions were to remain with me for years following the war. Whenever I fell asleep on my back I was jolted awake by a shot that did'nt exist -- and each time I stepped from a hard surface onto a lawn or field I was cautioned to watch out for mines. These were mild conditions that lasted for only a few years. I know old infantrymen with quirks far more dramatic -- most of them won't tell anybody but another infantryman, not even their families or close friends.

In our columns now were an assortment of civilian vehicles which had been picked up along the way. Stolen? We felt they were ours by right of conquest. We began to envision ourselves as motorized assault troops. Hell, we could move on enemy posi-

tions in minutes and not be worn out when we got there. But the brass soon put an end to our plans to mechanize -- we were not to confiscate civilian vehicles. I wonder what the Germans would have done in such a situation.

Finally there remained one more town on our march to the Rhine. Norf was a rail center back from the river across from Dusseldorf. Bowers gave the usual order that set tired feet to action. "2nd Plt, on your feet. Saddle up -- we're moving out!" We moved out, fuming under our shirts as usual -- the bandy legged little bastard seemed to take perverse pleasure in egging us on, but there was that usual little impish be-whiskered grin of ironic humor on his face. I could never determine whether the grin revealed compassion or glee, or a mixture of both. He, as we, was an instrument disigned for, and assigned to, a certain task -- as he would say, that's just the way it was. Make no mistake, Jim Bowers was an exceptional soldier and platoon sergeant. I don't want to expand hatbands, and I hope Farris Block will forgive this inclusion of a quote from his letter of Dec.20, 1984: "Jim Bowers probably can tell you more about what went on than anyone else. He was with the unit the entire time. In my estimation he was the best damn soldier in Company E and should be the central figure in your account."*

It was a dirty, tired, hollow eyed bunch of men who marched into Norf at noon March 5, but when we saw civilians peering from behind curtains we assumed a more jaunty stride. The town looked a bit more civilized than the smaller farm villages we had encountered crossing the Cologne plains -- paved streets and sidewalks, stout buildings. To our right, as we marched, was a neat house and lawn enclosed by a wrought iron fence. The next building was an impressive masonry cathedral. In a split second we were viewing the house through the iron fence from street lever -- a battery across the river was giving us a warm welcome to the Rhine. The exploding shells were far more dangerous on flat pavement than on soft earth, and the gunners were good -- they were right on top of us at just the right moment -- ample proof that an observer was watching us from nearby and directing the fire. Beyond the iron fence the neat lawn was being plowed. Gouts of black earth spewed skyward. On the street fragments whined and sang. It was the hottest little barrage we had been under since the days at Elsenborn. We endured and rattled off our spontaneous prayers, the stuff showing no sign of letup. Again the agonizing decision had to be made, whether to weather the storm here, or to attempt a dash for a house. When you are caught in a situation where no alternative is possible, you have to accept and endure, but where an alternative is possible through decision you are haunted by the knowledge that your choice may

* There are those who thought you were pretty special too, Farris. Jim, you better wipe off that steam accumulating on your glasses.

very well be your undoing. Being the cause of your own undoing is the bitterest pill of all. The shelling continued. To hell with this -- we don't have much chance if we stay here. Better to have a run for it... Most chose the cathedral. A priest flung the door open for us before we reached it, and we raced inside without loss of momentum. I didn't feel comfortable in such an atmosphere, so I tore across the street and into a home, Shapiro hot on my heels. We broke out rations and ate as the banging continued outside in the street.

When the shelling lifted we went on through the town checking and clearing houses until we were satisfied that no German soldiers remained. In the till at the Bahnhoff we found coins amounting to millions of pre 1923 Marks -- worthless now. We took over a house on the corner across from the railway station. The cellar was a large one, but windows near the ceiling facing toward the river made it vulnerable to shellfire from across the river, and during our stay there we got many close ones.

In the afternoon we dug foxholes in the railway embankment at the edge of town, some men manning them through the night. The next day we set up an OP in a German foxhole at the highway Y leading to Dusseldorf and, I believe, Munchen-Gladbach. Two men manned the OP in alternating shifts of eight hours. Coming off shift after dawn, Floric and I investigated a big house behind a high wall near the OP. The wall was covered with crude splash painted Nazi slogans so evident in Germany at the time. Beyond the wall was a large courtyard with stock pens and stables incorporated in the wall. Across from the stables was the house. A woman of about sixty, and her pretty young Polish Maid, were the only inhabitants. The woman viewed us with thinly concealed distaste. The girl was cordial and, since Floric spoke Polish, carried on an animated conversation as she led us about the house and grounds. When we left, Floric told me the girl was going to cook for us and we were to return at noon.

The maid took us over completely when we returned, the older woman judiciously remaining in the background except for brief appearances to make sure we weren't making off with the silver or making out with the maid. We were served drinks and led to a spacious dining hall on the second floor, where we were seated at a four by sixteen foot table, Floric at one end and me at the other. We were served course after course and dish after dish, most of which were unfamiliar to me except the steak and frys. Floric translated some of the conversation with the girl as we ate. She told of beatings and being made to help dig the trenches to the west. Many of the slaves became sick and were beaten -- some died from the beatings, some starved. The list of maltreatments seemed endless and repetitious -- a recitation of insupportable beastiality, cruelty, and fury.

Lt Ross came in as we ate, and quickly surveyed our fortunate and congenial situation, then continued his own excursion.

Fifteen minutes later he was back in triumph -- he had scouted the cellar -- something we had failed to do. "Christ, did you birds see that arsenal in the cellar," he asked. Oh God, I thought, why didn't we check the cellar first! He showed us a beautiful long snouted Mauser with auto fire selector, graduated leaf sight, and combination holster-carbine stock. We acted properly blase, but scrambled for the cellar when he had gone. No pistols remained. Ross had pocketed them all. The remaining weapons consisted of MG's, rifles, an American bazooka and M3 Grease Gun, several Panzerfausts, a Schmeisser MP (machine pistol), and a huge Panzerschrekt (the German bazooka, much larger than the American version). German thoroughness had improved the American weapons -- for instance, the ridge welded around the M3 clip release preventing the habit the weapon had of ejecting the clip at unfortunate moments. I took the Schmeisser, having a specific employment in mind for it -- it would be just the thing to have at night on OP. If anybody came walking up that road in front of us, I could spray hell out of them. It was a bad choice -- almost costing me my life, and played a role in my capture as a PW.

The route to and from our OP took us through F company. In the black of night Dekker and me were returning to our cellar from OP duty when we were challenged, as usual, by a Fox guard who demanded the password. We responded with the word Harbeck had given us. "Wrong answer!" said the voice ahead of us. It sounded like a bad joke, but we were in trouble. We were lucky he didn't shoot us down on the spot, and we did some mighty fast talking to keep him from it. The Schmeisser in my hands didn't seem to improve our chances either. We managed to persuade him to take us to his company Hq, where we learned how shitty Americans can be to a couple of misplaced Landsers. We stood for hours with our hands clasped over our heads while being completely ignored. They let us know that they had far better things to do than concern themselves with a couple of Krauts, and refused to contact E company to verify our claim. Let 'em sweat, was their attitude. Shortly before dawn Harbeck sauntered in and gave us a cursory glance. "Yep, they are my boys," he admitted. "Arnold, you better get rid of that damn MP!" Not a word of acknowledgement about giving us the wrong password. At least we weren't PW's anymore. Another night's sleep ruined!

We scouted about the town to see what we could turn up, but mostly we were looking for the best bedding to drag back to out cellar. We came across one building housing a huge concrete pit filled with processing sourkraut -- everybody came to marvel at that at least once. As for our selection of bedding -- a stream of hausfraus soon appeared at our cellar pleading for the return of enough bedding to see them through the cold nights.

Addressing some of the men, Hockhaus charged that 2nd Bn was increasing the long list of firsts chalked up -- first to attack the enemy (forts at Jaghutt), first to attack to drive the enemy back to the Siegfried (Krinkelter Wald), first to attack and destroy Siegfried forts (Udenbreth), first to reach

the Rhine (Norf, etc.) -- and now, first in rape, murder, drunkenness, and venereal disease...

We weren't all bad, however. Many German civilians saw with an unerring eye that we treated them less badly than the retreating Wehrmacht and SS. The ugly aspects of war mentioned above were visited on many German towns along the withdrawal routes before the defenders pulled out and, while we were often able to enter towns without the use of shelling the Germans often shelled hell out of them as a matter of welcome to our entry.

One Man Squad, who had been missing since our move from Aubel, finally showed up at Norf driving his own liberated automobile. He had been living it up in some Belgian town when we pulled out for the drive to the Rhine. Finding that the entire division had gone AWOL when he returned, he struck out to track us down, joining whatever outfit available in his subsequent meanderings. He was hauled up before Southerland, who had the good sense to chew him out and impose a minor restriction or two without making a mountain out of a mole hill.

Most nights we could hear the wail of air raid sirenes in Dusseldorf heralding the approach of RAF planes, and see the stabbing and weaving searchlights reflect off high clouds to impale planes like distant moths. In the previous war many pilots were disoriented by the powerful lights and, having no instrumentation or attitude aids, carried the moth analogy to a grim and final conclusion.

A few of the men walked on down to the Rhine to officially complete the journey, stand on the bank, and touch the fabled river. "Come on, Arnold -- we're going to walk down to the Rhine," Bowers invited. He and our latest medic, James McIntosh set out to consummate the final leg of the trip. I declined, not wishing to tempt fate -- some Kraut bastard might get lucky with a mortar.

One fine morning I walked out from the OP up the Dusseldorf road looking at the varied equipment the retreating Germans had thrown by the roadside. In the ditch on the right was an enormous piece of ordinance that left me in awe and wonderment. It looked like a hybrid -- neither shell, bomb, nor rocket, and was in the 800mm caliber range. Years later I learned of the several huge bombardment mortars employed by the Germans on bothersome strongpoints. I am of the opinion that the monster in the ditch was a round for one of those earthshakers.

As a sleepyhead, Morelli had me beat. I slept by choice and intent -- he couldn't help it... He seldom slept intentionally. I had learned early that it was pointless to try to keep him awake -- that was why on a particularly black night I was covering the front of the OP slit trench and Morelli was posted at the rear. He was snoring so loud I was sure listening equipment across the river could home in on us. When our relief came marching up from the rear, out of a ground shaking snore Morelli shouted, "Halt!" I couldn't figure that one out.

The honey is sweet, but the bee has a sting.

Ben Franklin

Remagen Bridgehead, And A Town Called Ginsterhahn

We had it pretty good at Norf -- incoming stuff was relatively mild, and OP duty wasn't demanding. We rested and replenished our energy, and caught up on our sleeping, bitching, and grousing. But in the back of our minds was the coming assault crossing of the Rhine. While we awaited our role in the crossing, good news arrived. An armored infantry battalion of 9th Armored Division had lucked up and captured a bridge south of Bonn at Remagen. They were hanging on down there, but needed help badly before German reaction built to a critical point. Bradley, Army Group CO, informed Eisenhower, SHAEF CO, that he had a bridge and a toe across down there, and 99th Div sitting on their hands up at Dusseldorf -- whut mus us do? Why, Brad ol' man, get 'em the hell across!

Overnight we were hurried by truck convoy south to the jump-off area, arriving at Werthoven before dawn March 10. The truck carrying most of 2nd Plt rammed a building during the night, but managed to continue on without further incident. In typical army fashion (hurry up and wait) we were forced to wait until before dawn next morning before moving on the bridge. We spent the day and night in a barn, being lifted intermittently off the floor by booming 155mm Long Toms nearby. The weather was typically north European, cold and wet. In early morning of March 11 we marched.

Sometime after dawn we topped the last high ground overlooking the river. I shall never forget the view. Before us was the town of Remagen on the west bank, with the bridge a thin line connecting with the Erpeler Ley, a promontory above the east bank. A mile downriver to our left (north) was the setting for Wagner's Rheingold. Alas! No Rhine maidens were splashing about. From our position all seemed deceptively calm and peaceful below. Even in war the view was breath-taking.

The street leading to the bridge (Ludendorf Railway Bridge) came under artillery fire as we moved along it, and as we drew near where the street curved to the bridge the German gunners stepped up the ante. Dead Americans were on and beside the street in growing numbers. The artillery was fierce -- the gunners were having good shooting as the long double column of men and vehicles moved slowly along. They were looking right down our throats, and it was like shooting fish in a barrel -- great sport, I suppose. We paused here and there to extract K rations and D bars from the packs of the dead -- the combat soldier who survives is, first of all, a realist. There was nothing callous in the act. Combat infantrymen

have a reverence for the dead unequaled and unspoken, for death and the dead are constant companions. This reverence is little akin to the mouthings of solace at formal funerals -- it is far deeper, but most of all it is starkly realistic. It may even be more civilized.

The dead were in the street simply because some of those who would remove them would certainly join them. There was no other way possible to reach the bridge -- only down that fire raked street. Nor was it possible to hurry or try to avoid the fire. You took your chances, maintaining your position in the column, at the pace of the column. At the long curving approach to the bridge itself it was possible to walk the distance without your feet touching anything but human flesh. Plating and planking had been thrown across the steel tracks and holes created by explosives and artillery. More recent holes were as yet uncovered, and jumping these gaps with the load of your equipment required blind hope and the utmost effort. Our height above the rushing river seemed an interminable distance. Shells rained on the steel girders and into the river below. The bridge was about 1200 feet across and carried a constant stream of men and vehicles. Our own artillery on the west bank and beyond were sending shells screaming overhead and across the Erpeler Lay, and AA guns of all description on the west bank were erupting a curtain of fire upward in an effort to keep the Luftwaffe at a discreet distance.

Despite the density of fire encountered in the approach and crossing we sustained remarkably few casualties. One man from 1st Sqd was hit by the shell fire, and he was riding the Hq jeep -- Loesch was an elderly (by our standards) recent replacement to the squad, but traveled with the Hq group most of the time. We had taken a liking to each other immediately. His wound proved superficial however, and he was soon back with us. A big man, craggy of feature, Loesch had that rare quality among men of radiating confidence and assurance. It was impossible to be around him and not feel that, somehow, everything would turn out all right.

Once across the bridge we turned right off the railroad, which bored into the cliff of the Lay. The road ran for a distance along the east bank of the river and was protected somewhat from incoming fire by the imposing cliff. Further on the road was more exposed, and could have proved difficult, but the German fire was concentrating on the bridge area. We were able to move on down the road and turn inland to the town of Linz. The town was undergoing moderate mortaring, so we moved into houses. The platoon occupied a large house set on a sharply rising hill to the rear. Light mortars pecked at the hill throughout our stay there.

The owner, a slight man of about seventy, was still there. The cellar boasted more and better spirits than most ABC stores back home, and some of the men drank to excess from the goodies. My feeling was that drinking and combat was a worse mixture than drinking and driving, so I only sampled the stuff. A

room on the third floor was well stocked with African game trophies, guns, and African shields, art, etc. The owner was upper crust and, despite his nervousness and concern about his property, an accomplished pianist and snack builder -- we kept him busy preparing snacks and playing requests. Moonlight sonata, Prelude in C#sharp minor, Liebestraum, and others came out reasonably well, as did his preparations combining what he had on the premises with K and C rations. I really believe he enjoyed it once he became convinced that we posed no overt threat. Emerson joined in on the piano with some of the latest Stateside favorites -- we supplied our own lyrics to "Don't Fence Me In". Luckily, he was supremely unaware of "Robin Hood". I persuaded him to play Chopin's Funeral March. Thereafter it became ritual for me to request and him to play this morbid selection whenever we took a town that yielded up just about any kind of musical instrument. He never commented on my repetitive requests for the piece other than to give me a questioning grin as he launched into the music. I have little idea why I started or continued the ritual -- a shaky attempt at gallows humor, I suppose. And in bad taste at that...

When we pulled out of Linz in the afternoon heading east, some of the men were staggering from excessive drinking. At the edge of town the column halted for a few minutes, and I sat down on some steps and leaned against an entry door. The door opened, giving me a mild start. Standing in the doorway was a kind faced, middle aged woman holding a hand full of sardine tins. She smiled and silently forced the tins into my hands. I thanked her as she closed the door and retreated within the house. I kept a tin and distributed the rest among the squad.

After we moved out again it was discovered that the replacement BAR man from another squad had not returned from a house across the street which he had entered while we waited. The column halted to allow some men to go back and get him. The man appeared, dragging a screaming woman through the doorway. He tried to fight off the men who had come to get him, but the two were separated, and he was led back up to his place in the column, mouthing obscenely and trying drunkenly to tear away. Back in the column he continued his childish and abusive tirade as he staggered along. My anger was too much to contain, and I confronted him with equally foul language concerning his performance and inability to perform suitably with his BAR. The lives of any or many of us could very well depend on the action of the weapon in the coming hours. The words needed to be said. He was still abusive when Capt Southerland calmly tried to quieten him. Southerland, rather than get in a shouting contest or be forced to discipline the man, dropped the matter and returned to the head of the column. The same man created another incident later when Dufresne was CO, even threatening Dufresne and another officer with a knife. Again the matter was dropped. The courage of the man was never in question, as will be seen later -- but there is much more to soldiering than courage.

Near dark we stopped in the edge of woods in rolling country to dig in for the night. I was paired with Underwood, and began digging with my entrenching tool after selecting a good position covering our front. Underwood stopped me. "Harry, do you mind if we don't dig in? It's not worth it -- we can sleep on top of the ground with the blankets we've got." I thought of the possibility of mortars and artillery in the night, but agreed to his plan. Finally, by way of explanation, he said, "I don't think I'm going to make it tomorrow, anyway." I gave the usual protest about how we all felt that way often, then dropped the subject.

In early morning we moved east again, stopping in an open space surrounded by woods on three sides. The infantryman's sense of foreboding was heavy, and we all sat or crouched as we awaited the signal to move on into the woods ahead. The officers conferred for a few moments, then Harbeck came over to where we were resting. "I want a patrol of volunteers -- you, you, you, you..." His eyes locked on mine before sweeping onward --"you, you, and you." Lyell Thompson was chosen to lead the patrol. We were to move left through the hilly, wooded terrain and try to make contact with friendly forces on our left flank who should be moving eastward as flank protection to our drive. I didn't like it, preferring to remain with the company and the comparative safety of numbers. I was to learn before the day was ended how wrong this assumption could be. With luck we should be gone no more than an hour.

We left the company in the field and moved into the woods on our left front. For some time we continued through wooded and hilly terrain, now insulated from war except for distant sounds of artillery and MG. Coming out into an open valley, we moved between wooded hills to either side for a few hundred yards. A thousand yards straight ahead a handful of farm buildings perched atop a treeless hill.* A German MG started chattering, and we prudently turned and moved upslope into woods on the hill to our left. A couple of hundred yards into the woods the hill crested and sloped gently downward again to an open field in a small, narrow valley, beyond which lay another woods. Just as we were to proceed across the narrow valley we saw movement in the edge of the woods across the way, and so remained concealed several yards within our woods to see what developed.

* Here one of those freaks of memory occurs where one cannot determine satisfactorily whether memory or enhanced fancy is upperhand after the passing years. I, therefore, cannot vouch for the validity of the following, nor have I been able to compare notes with other members of the patrol: Hunched beside one of the buildings was a squat Tiger, and downslope two Shermans, one slightly ahead of and to the side of the other, were climbing the open slope toward the buildings. One of the Shermans opened fire, bouncing a shell off the Tiger's armor. The long snout of the 88 slammed a shell into the lead Sherman, which shuddered and trailed a wisp of smoke. The other Sherman turned to escape. Once more the 88 spoke, slamming a shell into the thin side of the turning Sherman. Whether or not -- the incident has little bearing on this narrative.

One man walked boldly out from the woods, followed by a second a few yards behind. When they had advanced twenty or so yards out from the woods, several more left the woods and followed. We could see now that they were Americans. A sparse growth of scrub lay off center toward our side of the little valley, and the scouts keyed on that. As they neared this bit of growth MG fire rattled, and they broke into a trot. The lead man made it to the scrub, but the second man crumbled a few yards behind. The first man ran back to the fallen man, bent over to check him, then turned and scrambled toward our woods. The main body vanished back in the woods on the other side, but a minute later we could see that they were following the woods around where it connected to our woods further back. We moved down to intercept the scout, and on further to meet the main body. They were a patrol from 60th Inf on a similar mission, sent to make contact on their right. After quickly comparing notes and positions, we parted to return to our respective units.

We took a return course to intercept Easy if they had moved out in our absence, but found no sign of them, so we backtracked to where we had left them in the open earlier. They were not there either. We then turned and moved along a course calculated to be the one taken by the company. On along that line we moved into early afternoon, where we finally ran into a mixed bunch from Easy being herded along by Lt Ross. They were lost too. Nontheless, we attached ourselves to that group and proceeded on along with them. On the crest of a heavily wooded hill we were suddenly hit by a full fledged barrage of big stuff, probably 150mm. We hit the ground and tried to hang on, but it kept coming, seeming never to end. I was scrunched up and trying to protect my eyes with my hands, and praying a mile a minute. I chanced to peer between my fingers, and saw Ross a few feet away, his lips going like mad, his eyes closed tightly. I wasn't the only one doing some pretty rapid praying. Oddly, such incidents are often funny after the fact, but terrible at the time.

After our nerves had just about turned to jelly, the shelling finally subsided, and we stood up and checked ourselves. One boy was crying and holding his right shoulder, but there was no wound. Then it came again, this time with even more fury, forcing us to ground again. I think all of us reasoned about the same time that we had to make a run for it -- the stuff was falling only where we were. Downhill we ran to a deep ravine where no shells had fallen -- and the damn stuff followed. It was obvious we were under direct observation. I huddled with my legs drawn up under my knees and with my back pressed against the steep side of the ravine. One of the big shells exploded in the tree overhead, sending a hand sized shard into the ground a fraction of an inch from my right knee, where my right leg would have been were it not tucked beneath.

And then it stopped. By now we were pretty badly shaken and wanted no more of it, so we got the hell out in a hurry.

We rambled about the forest until late afternoon, when we came across more men from Easy beside a small woods trail. Almost all of them were wounded. Nearby was a group of about a dozen German prisoners, also wounded. A few soft moans broke the stillness, and we talked in reverent low tones, trying to sort out what had happened. Cpl Fogg, though wounded and bandaged, did his best to fill me in.

The company had pushed on through the woods soon after we left on patrol. When they reached the far edge of the woods they saw a German held town across a field, and were ordered to take it. All hell broke loose, MG's, mortars, artillery -- Germans in trenches before the town, Germans in the town, and wire fences in the field to be crossed. Underwood was stopped at a fence, trying to cut the wire or shoot the strands apart, and was killed there. Many more were killed and wounded. But they took the positions and the town, using marching fire. The Germans in the trenches had ducked down to avoid the fire, and the platoon walked and fired up to and across the trenches and into the town.*

Underwood's death was a shock to me -- as survivors of 1st Sqd we had grown rather close in the past month.

Among the wounded on the ground was a fellow whose head was almost covered in bandages, and who seemed unconscious. But from the bandages came a voice, "Is that you, Harry?" Unable to recognize the muffled voice I turned to Fogg. "It's Floric," he said quietly, "shot through the jaw." Fogg seemed more hurt by the pain of the others than from his own wounds. His compassion was magnificent.

It was obvious that Floric shouldn't try to talk, and they all needed immediate medical attention. It was quickly decided that our patrol must get our wounded to medical aid, and get the PW's to the rear also. Meanwhile, Ross and his group would rejoin the company, where they were sorely needed -- many were MG and mortarmen.

We used poles and blankets to construct makeshift stretchers to augment the stretchers available. We couldn't ignore the Germans, many of them were in a bad way, too. Those who could not walk went on stretchers, carried by we who were not hurt and those walking wounded who were able to spare a hand. This included the Germans. At least two of them should not be forced to walk, but there simply weren't enough able bodied available for them to do otherwise.

We struggled rearward through rough terrain, changing jobs frequently to relieve aching and tired muscles. It soon became obvious that all manpower must be utilized to the fullest, so we elected to unload all rifles except those considered necessary -- the unloaded rifles and some other bulky equipment was

* Jim Bowers, in a letter about 1980, declared the platoon's action "perhaps our finest moment". He later agreed, since I had not been there, to write an account of the action as remembered. This, and some comments by others, is included elsewhere in this account.

loaded on the less severely wounded Germans. A twofold purpose was served by this -- more hands and strength became available in carrying the badly wounded, and the loaded Germans were duly encumbered. Floric kept protesting that I keep a sharp eye on the Germans, "Harry, watch those SOB's or they'll kill us all!" I tried to reassure him that I was watching and prepared, but he was not to be placated, particularly after darkness clamped down in the forest and reduced visibility to scant feet. He must have warned me more than a dozen times that night.

I had to admire our wounded. Those who could walk and help carry the badly wounded, did so in grim silence without complaint. I can't recall how many of our wounded there were in our group, or even who they were other than the ones named, though it is known that Don Glisch, Ottis Williams, Frank Fogg, Floric, Malin, and Jewell were among those wounded in the fight at the town, Ginsterhahn. Nor can I recall who were members of our patrol, other than Lyell Thompson. The Germans were all wounded, and I think all walked. One was shot through the groin, but struggled through the night in silence trying to keep up, and did. Another, a fellow of about twenty, was shot through the chest, and was unable to keep up and was the slow link in our chain. I helped him along through most of the long walk, literally dragging him on. He had to rest frequently, but I could only allow a few moments each time in order to keep up with the others. At each rest he would clasp a tree and refuse to go on, and I was forced to tear him away. Though I knew no German, I could understand that he was imploring me to leave him behind. Finally, leaning back against a tree trunk where he had slid to a sitting position, he pointed to my rifle and to himself, his eyes pleading. I shook my head and hauled him up. Thus the group continued on through the night, a knot of humanity in agony. I can't tell you the thoughts I had that night about the human condition -- how or why such was necessary or allowed... God, wouldn't we ever find an aid station, a road, a few passing Americans?

Near midnight we came out of the woods onto a meadow that sloped up steeply. A thin gleam of light showed from the edge of a window in a house on the crest. One man went ahead to investigate while the rest remained hidden in the woods. He soon returned -- we were in luck. The house was being used as an aid station by another division. No one came to help us the final distance, and when we arrived I was angered at the seeming reluctance to treat our men. Hell, they were even uncertain about accepting them, and adamently refused the Germans. At the moment they had no transportation, and our wounded lay about virtually untended. Finally a jeep came up the road to the house, and our worst wounded were loaded aboard. At the pace these people employed it would be daylight before all of our wounded were transported rearward. As for the Germans, we would have to walk them to Linz. Under protest, we left the two badly wounded there, and struck out for Linz. We needed to get back to the company, but no one would take the PW's.

We set out marching the Germans down the road to Linz, and were able to maintain a good pace. We felt better now that our wounded could get some medical attention. Even the wounded Germans spirits lifted as they sensed that their worst part of the ordeal may soon end. Despite painful wounds they marched briskly and silently, hobnails clacking on night pavement. We probably reached Linz around one in the morning, and found a PW cage for our charges.

The decision was made to wait until morning before trying to locate the company, so we picked out a house for the next few hours of night. No one was in the house, and there was very little food. Ravenously hungry, we consumed what there was before going to sleep. There were not enough beds for all -- yesterday's drunken BAR man curled up in a childs crib, and I inserted my body between the fiber rug and the floor planks and shivered away the hours until dawn.

Two or three women came in at dawn, not suspecting our presence. They were an angry bunch -- it seems we had eaten all the food they had for their children. Not a scrap was left. It's a tough war, Mam -- and we weren't even invited... With the dawn came the Luftwaffe, still after the bridge. We stayed inside while the bombs and AA bumped and chattered about the town. After the planes made their runs we left the house. In the street nearby was a knocked out truck and 40mm AA gun. We slipped in somebody's chow line for a quick hot breakfast, and were soon on our way.

We came out of the woods at Ginsterhahn shortly past midmorning. The place was taking a pasting. We didn't know it then, but the Germans had launched a counterattack, and it was tailing off now after being repulsed. We had to dodge mortars, artillery, and MG fire to reach the town. We crossed a railroad that somebody said was under fire from a Sherman tank with a German crew. It must have withdrawn, because we made it across okay. We ran across a field to a draw near the edge of town. The draw was a mess -- it had been hit by mortars or shellfire, and a couple of mortarmen were lying half covered with dirt beside their overturned mortar. On the edge of the draw crouched a number of black soldiers, obviously shaken.*

Southerland appeared out of some scrub growth at the rear of the draw, and recognized us. He ran over to us. "My God, I thought all you boys were dead!" He hugged each one of us, tears on his cheeks and a happy smile on his face. We took a moment to explain what had happened to us, and he told us where we could locate 2nd Plt.

The fireworks was letting up as we made our way across town to where the platoon was occupying the last house on the east edge. Most of the houses there were burning, having been set

* Their first time under fire, they had just arrived as the 4th platoon of E Co. All volunteers from Comm Z, they had been drawn from a helmet in a lottery. With the extra platoon, E Co was now the most powerful company in the battalion. Most of us were glad to get them. They were led by a white officer, Lt Brown, and a white Plt Sgt. They proved their worth in subsequent actions.

fire by the panzers who had led the counterattack in. We had been gone little more than twenty four hours, but it was like a homecoming in 2nd Plt. In bits and pieces we began to get a fragmented picture of the platoon's successful attack and the unsuccessful German counterattack just ended, adding to and confirming Fogg's information.

2nd Plt, as in the Jan 30 attack, had spearheaded, overrunning the German positions before the town, and driving the Germans from the town. All praised the marching fire method employed -- the defenders were driven to the bottom of their trench to escape the fire and were unaware that the attackers were moving behind the fire. When the platoon reached the trench, the Germans were surprised to see them... Few, if any, American casualties occurred during the marching fire phase of the attack, but casualties were heavy in the moments preceeding. Among the many casualties in the platoon there were two dead, Underwood and Moore. The outfit had been in action long enough now that some men were being wounded the second time, as was Glisch.

In the counterattack that came in next morning the men on the OP's were hit hard. Shapiro and Walter Williams were in one of the OP holes when the attack came in -- Shapiro ran back to the house to alert the platoon of the approach of panzers and infantry. Meanwhile the panzers, six or seven of them, opened fire with their cannon. Of three men in one hole, two were killed by direct shellfire, part of one being blown from the hole and left hanging on an overhead limb. The third man was blown from the hole by the blast, but suffered no more physical and visible damage than a few scratches. He got up and walked to the house, where he collapsed. Regaining consciousness minutes later he was unable to remember the incident. As the tanks drew near, German infantry riding the vehicles pig-a-back dismounted and began advancing on foot, firing as they came. Williams urged a man in the hole with him to accompany him in a dash for the house, but the man was afraid to chance it, so Williams went it alone. One of the Germans jumped from a tank with a MG in his hands, and began spraying from the hip. Williams turned in his flight to the house and, in that instant, got off a shot that dropped the gunner, but not before the gunner killed the man left behind. As Williams ran on to the house a tank shell exploded behind him and sent small shell splinters into his rump. The wounds were superficial, and he was not evacuated.

Most of the platoon was in the cellar when the tanks arrived. Bowers ran up the steps to a window on the ground floor, and peered into the muzzle of a tank 88. The tank was close enough that he could almost see the grooves in the bore. In the cellar, somebody shouted something to another across the room, but his voice was drowned by the din of battle. The second man, seeing Shapiro about half way the room, shouted, "What did he say?" "He said, 'Hot chow for dinner!'" Shapiro shouted back. Indomitable wit and humor in the midst of hell.

The tanks came on in the village, shooting up the place -- their guns starting fires in many of the houses. Finally,

deprived of much of their infantry support, and receiving bazooka and artillery fire, the panzers withdrew.

Among 2nd Plt casualties, Harboy, Heffner, and Maynard were killed. Including these, the company lost 10 dead and 5 wounded. One Man Squad was wounded going after a MG single-handedly the day before.

We of the returned patrol were put to use manning the OP holes outside the house, for another German attack was expected to come in and the men of the platoon needed some time to rest and recover a bit. A M10 TD with a 90mm gun clanked up to a position side of the house to offer some protection if the panzers came again. Our artillery FO was working from the open top turret. Some time later a mortar bomb exploded on the rim of the turret and wounded the FO.*

The fighting at Ginsterhahn had played havoc with the livestock -- a couple of cows were lying a few yards from our OP holes. Some of the men cut some steaks from one of the cows, and Doc (McIntosh, the medic -- our favorite blister specialist) put them on to fry on the range. We waited in anticipation, licking our chops like hungry wolves.

Word was passed down to us that air support was going to soften up the next town -- we could see the tops of the houses a couple of miles to our front. Air support! Think of it -- we were really beginning to rate... We were in the house getting ready to eat when we heard the big P 47 radials revving up in their dive. "Give 'em hell, Air Corps," we chorused. Then came the stutter of .50 cal and the thud of bombs. "The goddam SOB's are hitting us!" somebody yelled. We took to the cellar to ride it out. The house shook from the rake of MG and bombs. Wrong day, wrong town -- back to the drawing board! This town yesterday would have been helpful -- that town over there today would be nice. But no, they had to hit this town today. Even the TD had managed to be present at the wrong time. We were beginning to feel that, with the kind of friends we had, we could do without the Germans. We needed help. We got hindrance.

The air attack cost us, along with other casualties, a very good CO -- Southerland was hit. Loaded on a jeep for transport to the rear, he was hit again -- this time by an 88. To add insult to injury, our steaks were ruined, covered up by falling plaster from the ceiling. And to think those bastards were getting credit for another mission... Now it was back to K rations!

On OP in pitch black that night I heard a snuffling and grunting sound somewhere ahead. A cow out there wasn't dead -- could it be the one cut up for steaks? I wasn't about to go out there to find out or administer the coup de grace. The terrible sound continued until shortly before daylight.

More personnel changes came about, mostly due to the fight

* I saw the FO in the bus station at Ft Bragg during the winter of 1945-46. He told me Southerland was at FT Bragg, too -- but I never saw him.

at Ginsterhahn. Lt Ross took over command of the company. Block, at some point along the way, had become communications Sgt, and was thus now part of Hq group -- he was the kind of guy who wanted to be where the action was, to see what was going on. The result was that he was usually to be found with the point of whatever platoon happened to be spearheading at a given moment. He was attracted to action like a moth to flame, yet his personal demeanor was one of gentleness. He was probably the most levelheaded and capable man in the company, and could have best served himself and the company by accepting a battlefield commission and becoming company commander. Even so, and though he turned down offers of commission, in his capacity as comm. Sgt he exerted considerable influence on the planning and conduct of operations.

Once again 1st Sqd didn't exist, its remnants being split among the other two squads. It would rise again Phoenix like when fresh replacements arrived. I have no memory of which squad I was attached to. With Underwood dead and Morelli gone the squad had gone full circle except for one man -- me. I remember the replacements before the Jan 30 attacks calling me Pop, less than two months after my nineteenth birthday. Now, a month and a half later I was feeling the part. This was not a great exception however, many squads in the company were down to a man or two of the original members. We old hands had seen our fellows go, to be replaced by new men who in turn became casualties to be replaced by new men who... Indeed, the rule seemed ironclad that the only way out was on a stretcher or in a bread sack. We were becoming fatalistic in our outlook -- we had no hope of surviving... I must condem an unfeeling system which cannot, or will not, mitigate such concequence -- hell, a switch of these longtime survivors with some rear area commando types would seem reasonable.

I shall always have mixed feelings about the action at Ginsterhahn -- wishing I had been there, and glad I wasn't.

Viewpoints And Memories

I am impressed by the fact that most of the former E Co members I have contacted in my search for information reveal that their source basically relies on personal notes made after the war -- an indication that they were aware of and proud of their participation in events beyond the pale of the ordinary. Probably none have seen fit to make notes of any other period in their lives. In using such material in this account I have for the most part intentionally preserved the gist of their memories though they may conflict with mine or others. Who is to say who is right? I am due my memories, Jim Bowers is due his memories, Farris Block is due his memories, and you are due your memories. That is what this is all about. I have found, however, that where conflicts of memory or viewpoint do occur the basic integrity of what happened overall does not suffer. We are all human, and conflicts of viewpoint and interest, as well as memory, exist in fact and are expected. Jim Bowers kindly insisted that I make whatever changes I felt necessary in the material he provided. No way! The whole thing becomes valid only when individual memories and viewpoints are preserved. In Jim's account of Ginsterhahn I have deleted only that which I felt was already sufficiently covered, or which seemed superfluous to the overriding events. Finally, I have retained these conflicts of memory to demonstrate that differences do occur, especially after many years.

Incidental to all this, as I re-read Jim's account my mind latches onto the two Sherman tanks his patrol ran across -- could these be the props that lend validity to my faulty memory of our own patrol, like bones that give form to otherwise shapeless flesh?

The following is excerpted from Jim Bowers' account of the Ginsterhahn actions.

On March 13, 1945 the New York Times printed a small but detailed map of the area of the Rhine River encompassing the Remagen Bridgehead established a few days earlier by the U.S. First Army. The map showed the U.S. forces as having pushed out of the initial crossing point and up into the small towns of Hargarten and Ginsterhahn, two specks that lay in the way to the famed superhighway or Autobahn. The gaining of this massive doubled laned roadway would open up the Westerwald, a picturesque plateau peopled with the beautiful and historic cities of Wetzlar, Giessen, and Marburg, to the First Army's tank and infantry divisions. The Times' caption to its map stated that the Americans had advanced through Hargarten to Noll and had overrun Ginsterhahn. This brief comment disposed in a succinct manner an engagement that cost the 2nd Plt of Easy Company, 393rd Inf five lives and an equal number of wounded. In number of men killed, the firefight for Ginsterhahn equalled the platoon's losses in the ill fated attack on Jan 30, 1945 when 2nd Bn, 393rd attempted to drive the Germans out of woods surrounding the village of Krinkelt, Belgium. That battle raged an entire day and was not successful in its objective until the following day. The taking of Ginsterhahn required less than thirty minutes once the opposing sides were aware of each other. The aftereffects consumed the better part of two days.

The village of Ginsterhahn nestles on the side of a sharp ridge less than ten miles from the Rhine. To reach it cross country, one must traverse the steep and rugged range of hills that line the eastern bank of the Rhine. The ground in the area is wild, with deep ravines and dense woods. Elevations range from three hundred to four hundred meters: Ginsterhahn is almost four hundred. It is the kind of terrain that only infantry can handle.

After nightfall March 11 Easy sent out a patrol led by Sgts Glisch and Underwood to make contact with troops on the left and to map the approach march to be taken by the company the next morning. The patrol returned after several hours, its mission accomplished and all members safe. Night patrolling was not a welcome assignment to the infantryman because it cut into his resting time. It was like working overtime, and it was always hazardous.

Dawn found the company moving along a trail toward the Bn objective, which appeared on the map as two small dots and a name. The air was cold and damp and many of the men marched along eating biscuits and candy from their rations. The route followed ravines and streams, making the going tough for the men with their heavy battle gear. Coming at last out of the woods the company moved past a small factory of some sort located on a road. After a short break in which the factory was examined, the company headed once more into the hills instead of following the road. The 1st Plt veered to the left of the route to make contact with a unit in that direction while the

2nd Plt, led by Lt Harbeck, headed the company.

When the company halted at about ten o'clock, the CO ordered Harbeck to send a patrol ahead to search out the enemy, as he believed he was close to making contact. A six man group led by Sgt Bowers advanced more than a half mile to a crest of a large hill on which it found a substantial amount of German equipment scattered about and several dead Germans. On examination it was found that these casualties were the result of artillery fire and that the obvious other members of the unit had fled during the barrage, abandoning their equipment. Crossing an open field on the crest of the hill, the patrol reached a narrow dirt road on which sat two American tanks. These were part of the tank battalion normally attached to the 99th. They had run off their maps at this point and were uncertain where to proceed next. Unable to help the tankers with their uncertainty, the patrol returned across the field and into the woods to await the company, which was laboriously climbing the ravines and hills. Six men can move much faster than a company with all its assorted troops and equipment, thus the patrol was able to accomplish its mission and still have to wait for the larger body to catch up.

When the company caught up with the patrol, a brief conference was held by Southerland, Harbeck, and Bowers. It was decided that still another patrol should be sent out to the left to seek out the 1st Plt, which had not been heard from since it left the main body. This patrol, too, was provided by 2nd Plt and was led by Sgt Thompson: he was given half a squad. The rest of the company, consisting of 2nd Plt less half a squad, 3rd Plt, Weapons Plt, and Co Hq, began to climb the next ridgeline, the ridge upon which the village of Ginsterhahn squatted. The company moved alone as nothing had been seen of the other elements of the battalion. Radio contact, however, had been constant with Bn Hq throughout the morning.

The approach to Ginsterhahn was as difficult as the previous movement over the hills and depressions of the Westerwald, the men labored and sweated up the steep slope. After about thirty minutes the scouts of 1st Sqd, 2nd Plt, which continued to lead the advance, reached the edge of the wooded area and saw before them a short strip of open ground thick with brush. Beyond the strip lay a large pasture which tilted up to the summit of the hill. The pasture was enclosed on its sides by more brush and light woods, but directly ahead on its upper boundary the tops of a large farmhouse and barn could be seen. This was the edge of Ginsterhahn, a drab farm community.

The lead scout, Walter Williams, quietly crawled to the edge of the woods, from which vantage point he could discern the field gray of German uniforms. He could make out several soldiers loitering unsuspectingly around the ground before the house. Signalling to their rear, the scouts called for the Plt leader to come forward. Harbeck, Bowers, and Underwood joined the scouts in their concealed position. Unfortunately, while the three were discussing the situation with the scouts, one of the scouts in his nervousness fired his rifle at the

enemy. This mishap removed the element of surprise and undoubtedly caused the village to fall to us more dearly than it otherwise might have.

Harbeck sent for the artillery FO and, while German MG's barked and the trees cracked with the impact of their bullets, the FO plotted the coordinates and called for fire on the town. Meanwhile, Bowers had moved the rest of 2nd Plt into a line along the edge of the woods. The men dropped their bulky packs preparatory to attacking across the pasture. Underwood's 1st Sqd, which had built up its position before the other squads, began to lay down a steady fire on the German positions.

The pasture was enclosed by a barbed wire fence of several strands, and at intervals of about ten yards two parallel runs of wire fencing cut the pasture in segments. The platoon must deal with, not one fence, but four in all in order to cross the field and close with the Germans. Thinking that the first line of fencing should be eliminated if possible, Underwood crawled forward to cut it. In so doing, he was fatally wounded. The men who had followed Underwood were pinned down by enemy fire and forced to lie in the brush while bullets whipped above them. Soon thereafter, Sgt Floric, Assistant Squad Leader of 1st Sqd, was shot through the jaw, and Cpl Frank Fogg was hit in the shoulder. Sgt Donald Glisch, the Plt Guide who sustained a head wound Jan 30, was again hit in the head. Thus he was the only two-time holder of the Purple Heart in 2nd Plt.

While the wounded were being attended, Harbeck shouted for Bowers to get the platoon into the attack. At this command, Bowers and Sgt Johnny Long, 3rd Sqd leader, jumped up and ran to the first wire, firing their rifles from the hip and yelling for the other men to follow them. When Bowers and Long reached the wire fence they rolled under the bottom strand and resumed their race across the pasture. The remainder of the platoon rose as one and began firing at the Germans and rolling under the fence and then resumed their fire and their advance. Since some were firing while others were diving under the wire, the effect was to keep a steady fire on the Germans, who in the face of the concentrated fire on their position, had crouched out of sight in what turned out to be a long trench just a few yards before the house and barn that dominated the pasture.

Bowers remembers that he glanced to his left to see which of his men were there and saw Pvt Bernard Howe running and firing beside him. When the forward rank of the platoon reached the Germans in the trench, the Germans rose up with their hands above their heads. The men of the 2nd disarmed the Germans of their weapons, especially their sidearms. Bowers took a hefty Belgian Browning 9mm automatic pistol from the leader of the Germans and then ordered several of the men to get the prisoners moving to rear. After this was done Bowers, with Howe beside him, led the platoon, which by then was getting rather thin in numbers, around the house and down a cobblestone street lined with big, sturdy houses. As they approached the first house, which was on Howe's side of the street, Bowers

shouted for Howe to toss a grenade into the first open window. The grenade went off with a muffled whump, but there was no reaction from inside the house. A man in civilian clothes broke from a house on Bowers' right and ran down the street. Bowers shouted for him to halt and snapped a round off in warning, but the man continued and disappeared around the corner of another house. Bowers led the men down the steeply sloping street, the men keeping to the sides of the street for mutual cover. After a few blocks they reached a cross street lined with houses, beyond which could be seen what looked like an orchard -- the outer limit of the village. Examination of the area turned up no sign of the enemy.

The last house on the street was selected for the platoon, and OP's were posted in the orchard in back. The rest of Easy was in town now, and Weapons Plt set up a MG emplacement about fifty yards to the left of the house and in the orchard. The MG's of the platoon had provided good flank coverage when the men of 2nd Plt charged across the pasture, pinning down any enemy in the woods that bordered the pasture. The men of 2nd Plt not designated for security gathered in the house and excitedly compared notes on the recent firefight -- after an engagement in which casualties are taken, the survivors experience a sort of high at having come through unscathed. It was here that Bowers learned that several more men had become casualties, though it was not clear whether they had fallen at the first fence, or later along. Harbeck came down from Co Hq to confer with Bowers, and asked that Bowers go back over the ground to check the fallen and get their names.

Bowers came under fire at the first cross street on his trek back but, since the fire was a bit high, ducked under it and went on without further hindrance. Beyond the fence he found the bodies of Sgt Underwood and Pvts Johnny Moore and John Harboy, Jr. Making sure that there were no others, he skirted the field to the left and entered the woods to avoid possible enemy fire. A short way in the woods he found a wounded German soldier lying on the ground. He approached cautiously and on guard for possible trickery. The man was middle aged and showed no obvious signs of wounds, though he was unable to rise. He said something in German which Bowers couldn't understand, and Bowers told him in English that he would send help. On the return trip he again came under fire at the crossing, but this too was high. On his return Bowers reported his findings to Harbeck, who said he would arrange for the German to be picked up. Meanwhile, the men were gleefully popping away at jars of food from the cellar with their captured pistols.

A wounded cow was was reported standing in a nearby yard, and Bowers summoned Thompson, a farm boy, to determine if the animal must be destroyed. Some civilians were nearby when the animal was put down, and Bowers made certain that the platoon got a share of the meat. As the cooking proceeded, other troops began showing up for a cut of the spoils. A TD chugged down the sloping street to park beside the house, and began firing

its gun, shaking plaster onto the cooking meat. The crew said they were firing at some German tanks on the opposite hill.

In late afternoon a platoon member ran in to announce that an OP had taken a direct hit, killing both occupants. The bodies were badly mangled, some limbs having to be removed from nearby trees where they hung from branches. The dead were Pvts Maynard and Heffner. The fire had evidentally come from the area the TD had been firing at. The OP positions were relocated and AT mines strewn ahead in case of an attack by tanks known to be somewhere on the opposite hill, a distance of roughly 2,000 yds. The men were warned to be ready for a counterattack -- the Germans apparently were not through for the day. No attack was made in 2nd Plt area, but it was rumored that an attack was made further along the line, but was beaten back.

The counterattack came in next day shortly after daybreak, in the form of tanks and infantry. Heavy small arms fire swept the area, coming from the back of the house. Bowers ran to a back room and saw tracers coming through the top of a window. Peering out the bottom of the window, he came face to face with the muzzle of a tank gun. Hoping the crew hadn't spotted him, he raced back through the house shouting for the men to get the hell out. There was a mad scramble to collect gear and a footrace for the door. He saw a number of men already assembled in the rear of a house set on a street running perpendicular to the street he was on, and ordered his men to make for this group, expecting a tank to come around the house just vacated at any moment. That no tank followed them was fortunate -- the TD crew had seen fit to pull back earlier, and no one seemed to know where any rockets were for the bazooka. He set the men at the corners of the house so they could fire with a little protection.

Walter Williams, who had been on OP, came striding in from some wooded cover a few yards away and, with a big grin, told how the Germans appeared out of the mist so quickly that the OP had to flee. This was why no warning had been given by the OP's. Williams said he ran for some dense undergrowth and then crawled along a ditch until he thought he was clear. He then got up and ran for the second street of houses and there found the platoon.

Oddly, the Germans seemed reluctant to press the attack, and remained in the orchard. This was not true of the Germans further down the boundary of the village. Here tanks tried to break through, but were repulsed. Another oddity was a lone member of the Weapons Plt sitting hunched over his MG about fifty yards to the left of the orchard. Though the men called for him to get the hell out of there, he remained at the gun, possibly not wanting to draw attention to himself -- the Germans still had a reputation for trading a shell for one man. Where the other members of the gun crew were is a mystery. The gunner was lucky in that he was apparently never seen by the Germans -- they slowly withdrew, and his luck held.

When the area was clear the platoon reoccupied its original

quarters, now some worse off because of the fire from the lead German tank. This was of small concern to the men, as within the hour word came down from Harbeck to have the platoon ready to move out. Shortly thereafter the 2nd Plt marched out of Ginsterhahn with the other units of the company, only now the somewhat battered platoon was not in the lead.

The small, by WW 11 standards, fight for this unimportant spot on the First Army map produced some pluses and a minus for the American effort against the Germans in the west. One, it achieved its objective on time. Two, it led to the removal of approximately twenty Germans from the Nazi war effort. Three, it proved that 2nd Plt, which had to be heavily reconstituted after its losses of Jan 30, was once more a viable military unit. This greatly enhanced the morale of the veterans of the platoon as well as the new replacements: unit pride is important to a platoon if it is to function well. Fourth, it demonstrated that the textbook concept of "marching fire" could and did work, to pin down an enemy force and permit the attackers to close with it. On the minus side, the platoon took five battle deaths and several wounded. That these losses, which were not important enough to make the New York Times caption to its map, will not go unnoticed and unremembered is the purpose of this account.

This account was begun almost thirty years ago but remained unfinished until Harry Arnold, one of the survivors of the 2nd Platoon's war, prevailed upon me to complete it. Thanks, Harry! If this account contains any errors of fact, it is because the passage of time has veiled many small details; but the big picture remains with me after almost forty years.

James S. Bowers
October 7, 1984

And from notes Farris Block supplied in a Dec,1984 letter.

The action at Ginsterhahn took place on 12-13 March, according to my records. A number of unusual events coincided with this fight. Capt Sutherland, our company commander, had received the word that a platoon of all-black soldiers had been assigned to the 393 Regiment (actually the platoon was led by a white officer, Lt Brown, and a white platoon Sergeant (?), who was later killed in action while closing out the Rose Pocket. Brown later was able to connive with Capt Dufresne to become the unneeded company executive officer). It was determined that the Second Battalion would get the Black platoon and that the company commanders would "draw straws" to determine who would get the added rifle platoon. Capt Sutherland, in his estimation lost, when he drew the "short straw". A Mississippian and in many ways the best company commander that we had, Capt Sutherland was not happy about the "dubious honor" of commanding a platoon of Black soldiers. He possessed all the hang-ups of a red-neck southerner on this one matter. Fate intervened for him. He never had to command this group of volunteers. In the initial action to take Ginsterhahn, he was wounded and evacuated.

We lost several dead and wounded on this day, but not a result of enemy fire. For some unknown reason, we received close air support during this action. The tankers attached to us had placed on the ground the required panels that would inform the pilots of our location. Evidentally, the panels were not seen and a trio of P-47's began to strafe and bomb the area. The third pilot must have finally sighted the panels, because he pulled out of a dive without dropping a bomb. The damage, however, had already been done.

After taking Ginsterhahn, we established a perimeter defense around the edge, and company headquarters set up shop in a large house in the center of the small village. It was relatively calm that night for most of us. The next day the Germans counter-attacked. Those of us in the building were cut off from much of the action that was taking place on the edge of the village. The sound and volume of fire indicated a major undertaking by the Germans,

The sound moved closer to our location. It was decided that we would order our own artillery to drop shells on our position -- the Germans were that close. Word began to trickle in that our men were holding their own against the Germans and we soon learned that the attack had been repulsed.

This was an instance where the initiative, the will, and the determination of the riflemen on the spot made the difference. They received little command help from Co Hq: Bowers and his boys, and the other platoons performed their jobs well.

This action also marked the baptism of fire for our new Black platoon.

From a Don Glisch letter of Dec, 1980

...you were right about the wound in Jan '45. Couple inches lower and it would have been between the eyes and I'd be over there yet.

It was minor though and they patched me up and sent me back up to the line. Then when we crossed the Rhine I was hit again near a town called Ginsterhahn. Don't know if you remember a guy by the name of Hugh Underwood, from Temple, Texas, but he was next to me on the line and he was killed. We think it was schrapnel and I still have a couple of small pieces in my head which they said wouldn't bother me and so far it hasn't.

That time I was in a hospital in Liege, Belgium for six wks. and then they sent me back up to the line again till the end. I remember you as a messenger or runner.

Naw, Don -- I told you twice already, I was a rifleman -- but you might o' seen me running lotsa times...

Harry

•

About five years ago I received a letter from Ottis Williams which I seem to have misplaced, but I remember most of what he wrote about Ginsterhahn: They saw German soldiers walking around at the edge of town, and Underwood asked Ottis if he thought he could get them with his BAR. He opened up with the big rifle, then he remembered falling and seeing the rifle in the air over him. He lay there until two soldiers found him late that afternoon. They stayed with him for two days, but they didn't have any water for him to drink. Finally some medics took him to an aid station.

I suspect Ottis was in shock, and I think he was one of the wounded our patrol carried to the aid station that night along with Floric, Fogg, et al. If I remember correctly, he was hit in the head and hip, or leg. He was of the opinion that a shell took him and Underwood out.

Note: The foregoing proves the old saw about everybody seeing and remembering a given event differently. Differences of viewpoint and memory should not be judged negatively, for each is a part of history.

You boys are the best goddam platoon in the whole goddam U.S. Army... I'm proud of you!

Lt Harbeck, to the remnants of 2nd Plt minutes after taking Ginsterhahn -- tears ran down his cheeks.

Reserve And March to the Weid

Easy fought its way into Ginster hahn on March 12, and march-out again on the 15th, this time to the rear in reserve classification in woods near Linz. Even here we were still under fire -- AA guns ringing the bridge crossings threw up a hail of stuff, mostly 40mm, at each Luftwaffe sortie seeking to destroy the bridges (four pontoon plus the Ludendorf railroad bridge). A lot of this stuff fell across our area and became the new source of our immediate concerns. For ten days the Germans mounted every effort possible to knock out the bridges before a small success rewarded their efforts. Mortars, artillery, and the Luftwaffe hammered incessantly at the sites. Less conventional were the attempts made by frogmen, V-2 rockets, and a massive 800mm mortar. The railroad bridge had been hit time after time, but swarms of engineers valiantly patched and repaired day and night. Finally, on the 17th, the bridge collapsed into the Rhine with 87 engineers aboard, 38 of which died.

Somebody found a supply of raw alcohol, a splash of which in a canteen cup of water made for a pretty awful drink. Some of the squads had one man carrying a canteen of alcohol, while the rest carried the water. A tattered copy of a recent issue of Reader's Digest was making the rounds, and I read an account of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. Our efforts seemed like peanuts in comparison, but perspective tends to blur differences -- what matter if one dies in an action of thousands, or in a patrol of seven? Small actions involving a few are often as deadly and brutal as those involving many, only the scope is changed.

We were not immune to enemy artillery, though we were in reserve positions and well back from the active front. Being in reserve did not mean that you could totally relax. Some replacements were trickling in again to help rebuild our ranks, and many of these were former Air Force personnel with little conception of infantry operations. Though many of these men were of limited use they learned quickly under combat conditions. The trick was to survive long enough to learn -- combat is a stern teacher. On the plus side, we "old" infantrymen were secretly pleased that men of less dangerous calling from other branches of service were getting their chance to play infantryman. We needled them a bit, sometimes referring to them as chairborn infantry, but it was in good humor.

On the 16th Easy moved to Reidenbruch, much nearer the front, but still in reserve. But this was short lived, for on the 18th we returned to the active front around Hahnen. 2nd Plt got the nod again -- we were to move east of Langscheid to a point near the Weid river opposite Niederbreitbach and perform the function of Bn OP. The route was exposed to German gunners much of the way, and we were alert for incoming artillery. At one point near a rock quarry we had a choice of taking advantage of a deep draw where we could be out of sight of the German observers, or an exposed road. Bowers chose the road, and marched us along in full view of the Germans perched in the heights across the river, his thoughts being that the methodical Germans undoubtedly had the draw zeroed in in anticipation.* We passed along the road safely.

The platoon, now comprising only two squads, maintained two OP's of its own, both well forward of the houses we occupied when not on OP duty. 2nd Sqd, to which I was temporarily attached, operated the OP on the left, a brush covered knoll some three hundred yards from our house. From our slit trench on the knoll we could view the river and Niederbreitbach to our left front. A wrecked P-38 Lightning lay a few yards left of our path to the OP. We maintained a low profile, being so under the gun. The Germans were careful about movement across the river and in the town during the day, and we saw little. But at night we could hear furtive engines and wagons moving in and around the town, and knew the place was being used for military purposes despite their disclamations. Considerable controversy arose concerning such use and, finally, our guns had to shell the place despite the big red crosses painted on one large building.

3rd Sqd had their OP well to right of ours. An odd and slightly bizarre event took place there one morning. A new replacement recently converted from the Air Force, and two older men, were manning the post. The replacement nervously watched from the hole, while the two combat wise characters snatched a little shut eye. He suddenly announced that a German soldier was coming up the hillside. "Ain't no Jerry dumb enough to be on this side of the river, unless he wants to surrender," was the answer. "Well, he's got a gun!" "If he's got a gun and he comes this way and gets too close, you just shoot him." The older men probably figured the new man had an overactive imagination. A couple of minutes later, blam, blam, blam -- eight times, the whole clip. There, a few feet from the hole, was a dead German with his rifle still slung. "What in the hell did you shoot 'em for -- he didn't even have his rifle in his hands -- you coulda took 'em prisoner!" "Why, you said shoot him!"

Nobody could figure why a lone German crossed the river and advanced on American positions with his rifle slung. Most of the men chided the new man about the shooting, until he began

* The assumption proved correct. A 2nd Div officer leading his platoon in to take over our position on March 21 insisted on moving through the draw, and lost a man there to artillery.

crying -- we had carried it too far. Then Bowers caught hell from Co Hq when they heard about it, mostly because of the information they might have procured. I don't know what such a dumb German would have known that could be of value to us, though the incident was unfortunate.

Bowers led a night patrol down to the river. After we reached the river we cut right and moved along the high bank for a mile or so until we came out of woods onto a highway with white posts on each side of the roadway. The scouts went out on the bridge and found that a section in the center had been blown out. We returned by a different route, one of the basic rules of patrolling, to avoid possible ambush.

I disliked patrolling, though my training had been in I&R, and despite the fact that casualties during patrol work were, with exceptions, surprisingly light. Patrols are usually conducted with as much stealth as possible, but sounds have a way of magnifying when you are creeping along -- a tripped foot, a broken twig, a dislodged stone, a frog in your throat that must be cleared -- all seem to invite the ears of hundreds of enemy perched behind black snouted MG's with full belts. But these are risks that must be taken. On this patrol much of our course was along a sharp incline overlooking the gurgling water below, and we were obliged to cling to tree trunks and scramble from trunk to trunk to prevent our tumbling into the river. Rocks dislodged in the scramble tumbled and clacked downslope and splashed loudly in the water. We were sweaty with the exertion, and my cold threatened to close my throat. Such a throat cannot be cleared noiselessly, but I kept trying. I must have sounded like a suffering animal to the Germans on the opposite bank. We received no fire, however -- possibly because they were wary of revealing their positions. Our return brought us out to a large open expanse, where we stopped to rest and get our bearing. A glimmer of light showed inthe distance, and we approached carefully to investigate. It was a faulty blackout shade in the window of our own house, which we figured was much further up river.

The validity of total stealth on patrols sometimes comes into question -- there were patrols conducted so silently that the approach was not detected by the enemy until the patrol was almost on them, in which case enemy fire in reaction was at such short range as to be deadly. There were patrols whose members survived only because their excessive noise triggered premature German fire, allowing them to escape readily. Many patrols are mounted simply to determine where the enemy is located, while avoiding contact or action. Moderate noise can succeed in generating enemy fire at an acceptable range, revealing his position -- what you wanted to know in the first place. A pilot learns that no two landings are alike. An infantryman learns, similarly, that no two patrols are alike.

One of the other platoons were ordered to send a patrol out the next night and, good luck, two members of our patrol were ordered to lead them down to the river across from the town. Further luck -- I was one of those so honored. This patrol

was more straightforward, and was only to scout the bank across from Niederbreitbach. Under protest, I took the lead as ordered and struck out directly for the river slightly to right of the town. After a few minutes everybody decided they had to have a smoke, so we lit up under our jackets and puffed away -- none but seasoned infantry or fools will try this. Soon we were on our way again, and in a few minutes were on the high ground immediately overlooking the river a hundred yards downstream from the town. I stopped at that point, but the patrol leader ordered me to proceed on down to the river bank. That was a little too much, and I reminded him that I was to lead them to the river -- there it was. After a short exchange of viewpoints as to my perceived duties, he agreed to send his own scouts ahead. They moved on down to the bank, and then returned running, and announced that the bank was clear. We remained there in the open for a few minutes and listened to muffled traffic in the dark town. The SCR 300, that piece of electronics that could pick up London, Luxemburg, Berlin, etc. refused to contact Hq a few thousand yards away. The radioman was practically into the thing, shouting loud enough that Hq could have heard him if they hung an ear from the window. It was decided that contact may be made if we moved uphill into the edge of the woods, and contact of sorts was finally made there, but I am sure the Germans across the river could hear the message as well as Hq could. Soon thereafter, I was asleep in my bin of potato's back at the house.

Next morning I was upstairs writing a V-mail home when I heard someone come in downstairs, and some excited talking, then, "Where is old Arnold?" Feet pounded up the stairs, and in rushed Gray, back from hospital after his burns in our foxhole the night of Jan 29. It was now March 20. He had come from a week in Paris, following his stay in hospital and the Repple Depple. The poor fellow was a physical wreck and white as a sheet -- he had been "round the world" too many times with the whores of Pig Alley (Place Pigalle).

Forty-eight! Forty-nine! Fifty! All together, but not so loud. SOME SHIT!!!

Introduced by Gray, and used in formation to express disapproval. The count is by three separate men, and the instruction line by one man. The last line is chorused by the entire formation.

Weid River: Preparation, Crossing, and Move Inland

Easy was relieved by 2nd Div troops on March 21, and we marched rearward to Weissfeld where we quartered in houses to prepare for the Weid crossing. The company got a new CO, Lt George Dufresne, slight of build, energetic, quick of movement. Lt Ross reverted to command of Weapons Plt. A new batch of replacements were delivered to help fill depleted ranks.

In late afternoon I was called to Plt Hq for some detail, As I stood in the doorway talking to Harbeck I noticed a large crock of eggs in a brine solution standing beside the door. "I see you fellows are in luck." I commented, nodding toward the crock. "I wouldn't touch them," Harbeck said. "If you people don't want them...," I mused. "We don't want them he take 'em away," he said. I could see that he thought the eggs might be bad. I didn't argue, and lugged the crock back to our house, where we enjoyed fried eggs by the dozen before turning in for the night. As the procurer of our fortune I downed eight or ten. It was an unbelievable find.

Next day chubby Shapiro succeeded in running down a chicken, and gamely tried to wring its neck, but lacked experience in such matters. One of the other boys did the honors, and we had chicken with our rations. The eggs and chicken represented a feast most of us hadn't had since leaving the States.

Harbeck stopped me as I was going up the steps to our door at nightfall. "I've got some good news you will be glad to hear," he said. "We've got enough replacements to start your squad back in business." "That sounds good to me," I agreed. He continued, "Your squad leader will be _____, and _____ will be your assistant squad leader."* "Okay," I said, and turned to go on in the house, but he caught my arm to restrain me a moment. "You think you are getting shit on, don't you, Arnold?" Anything I would have said would have smelled of sour grapes, so I said nothing, just pulled away from his grip and went on in the house.

We marched to the Weid that night, and crossed the river at Waldbreitbach, a town a few miles north of Niederbreitbach. Our 1st Bn made the initial crossing near midnight against little opposition, catching the Germans by surprise.

* I have no recall of these names.

Instead of crossing on over in cover of darkness, we were held back from the river until the dawn mists began to clear, and by that time the pockets of resistance unfound and bypassed by the lead battalion were ready to do business -- the coming of dawn gave them ample targets to shoot at. Under MG fire, which was thankfully a bit high, we dashed across the bridge. A burned and charred human form, almost unrecognizable as such, lay to left of the bridge approach. I wondered at the manner of his demise -- informer, deserter, spy? The gap in the center of the bridge, which had been blown when the Germans pulled back to the east bank, had been temporarily bridged by a long stout house door, preventing all but infantry to cross here. A road ran parallel to the river on the east bank, and was sandwiched between the river and a steep bluff overlooking the river. The fire on the bridge and the western approach originated beyond the bluff, which was the reason the fire was a bit high on the bridge. The road on the east bank, however, was being effectively swept by MG fire from upriver, denying use of the road for several hundred yards. To avoid the fire sweeping the road we were forced to press our bodies tight to the almost vertical bluff. Thus we were trapped between the fire along the road and the fire coming from above the bluff.

As more men came across the bridge the situation became crowded along the bluff wall. Looking over my shoulder toward the river, I could see bullets roilling the water to within a couple of feet of the roadway, and this was coming from above the bluff, the gunners having improved their angle of fire. This we could avoid, for the gunners could not further depress their fire unless they moved to the brink of the bluff -- they could, and did, make crossing the bridge an unpleasant task. We had crossed minutes before the fire had been adjusted lower. Our greatest menace came from the MG fire directed from upriver, for this was directly down the roadway -- but we were relatively secure so long as we remained pressed against the bluff wall. But two things were apparent -- we hadn't crossed the river to lean against the bluff, and the Germans would surely bring mortars in action, and these would make our present circumstance untenable.

A few of the men nearest the MG fire from upriver began to move against those guns, and succeeded in destroying or moving them out, with the loss of one dead to us. Several of us from 1st Sqd meanwhile had climbed to the bluff top, searching for the guns spraying from that direction. The roofs of some houses and a church steeple could be seen a few hundred yards back of the bluff -- the fire was probably coming from the steeple. I asked that two or three of the squad come with me to try for the gun in the steeple, but they declined -- and I was glad. I wondered that I had made the suggestion in the first place, it wasn't my style. I certainly had not been enamored by the thought of such an enterprise.

Moving across the bluff in the face of the fire was definitely unappetizing, but with the guns silenced upriver it would be possible to move up the road to the right so long as we

clung to the bluff side as we moved. A marker smoke shell from a mortar plopped down, and that was all the cue we needed -- we headed up the road. The bluff tapered more gently as we moved further from the crossing point, and we were not running into any appreciable fire, so we cut left and struck inland into the heights. The last view we had of the road and bluff at the bridge as we turned inland was one of concern and relief -- men were still spewing across the bridge and German prisoners were moving across in the other direction and, amidst all this, mortar bombs were raining down. We had moved out just in time. Moving inland across some forested hills toward our main objective, Kurtscheid, we drove the few defenders ahead of us, a few giving up here and there. As we crested one high rise we could see some burning houses to our right rear and some troops running toward them from the direction of the river -- another outfit was doing their thing too.

In mid afternoon the lead elements drove into Kurtscheid and the Germans withdrew from the town and began throwing in artillery. On one street we found a second floor shoe store. Two or three of our men stood in the shop throwing shoes down to a gathering crowd of women who joined our festive mood. The news travelled fast, and women were coming in from all over town to share in the distribution. As the shelling became more intense a few of us meandered on from the shoe store and entered the church, a solid stone affair that offered protection against the blasting shells. Emerson and I climbed in the steeple to the highest point to get a good view of the area around. Incoming shells caused us to think of what would happen if one hit the steeple, so we went back down and stopped at the organ loft. As the shelling banged about, Emerson played the organ and I worked the bellows. "How about playing the funeral march?" Emerson grinned, and out came the somber strains loud and clear. It seemed fitting to the set.

We took position on the east edge of town near nightfall, and an hour or two later Sam brought up hot chow. Soon after eating we sprawled on the floor in our blanket cocoons, dog tired -- we hadn't slept the night before, and had been on our feet and under fire much of the time. Seven of us were not to sleep tonight either.

We were dropping off to sleep when Block called Bowers. They conversed for a few minutes by flashlight and a piece of paper, then Bowers called six of us for a patrol. Grousing and grumbling, we tried to shake the sleep from our heads. Minutes later we were on a road heading east out of town.

The night was bright with moonlight strong enough to cast strong shadows, and we set a fast pace calculated to get the job done so we could get back and get some sleep before morning. After a few minutes a small single street village loomed ahead, and we stopped to plan strategy. It was decided that we would split into three groups and enter the village from both sides as well as up the street. Bowers and one man circled left to come in from that side, and two more circled right, having to cross a board fence into the field. The re-

maining three of us moved up the street directly into town. We gave the flanking groups time to get into position, then we moved on into the edge of town. The place was awash in moonlight, and silent as a tomb -- the houses on the right side cast shadows onto the street. We crept along in the shadows with safetys off and fingers on triggers, expecting MG fire to lash out or a potato masher or two to tumble on the roadway. A sound of scuffing feet ahead caused us to duck into the shadows as low as possible, then we recognized the two men from the right group. They hadn't seen or heard Bowers and the other man, so we moved on along the street together. Near the center of the village we heard a commotion in a house on the left, and investigated. We slammed in unannounced, and found Bowers and his man with a bunch of nervous civilians they had routed from the cellar. Information from them indicated that all German soldiers had vacated the area earlier.

The road out of town curved left from our intended route, so we struck out cross-country at a quick pace until we came to a woods about seven hundred yards further along. No challenge or fire greeted us, so we moved on into the woods and kept going. Three hundred yards in the woods we came to a wide firebreak with a fire tower or hunting stand in the center. Still no sign of the Germans -- we continued on, but now we had that feeling... A couple of hundred yards further along the area ahead began to lighten, indicating the beginning of an open area. With more caution we moved on forward, creeping now. The scouts, who were very near the woods edge, suddenly froze. A German voice called loudly, "Hallo!" The scouts turned and tore past, heading west. The rest of us followed, scattering to the sides as we ran. Behind us was the sound of thrashing feet, punctuated by, "Hallo, hallo!" But still no fire. By the time we reached the fire break we had left the Germans behind. We listened, but there was no sound of pursuit. Dekker got on the radio and made contact with Hq and gave them our findings, and we were directed to come on in. The trip back to Kurtscheid was done in jig time. As we cheerfully retraced our route across the open fields, a question gnawed at us: What did "Hallo" mean? Why hadn't the Germans fired -- the scouts had seen them sitting behind a MG, coal scuttle helmets reflecting moonlight. And, why had they followed us for a short distance? Sheepishly, we began to suspect we knew the answer -- the bastards were trying to surrender! But we had demonstrated our superiority, we had outrun them.

After reporting in we were finally allowed to roll up in our blankets on the floor and go to sleep.

"All right, everybody up! We're moving out!" We had been asleep no more than an hour.

The Air Corps and Artillery, the Corps of Engineers -- none can beat the Infantry in a hundred thousand years...

Infantry Song

Battle and Breakout

After a quick breakfast provided by Sam we were on the move again, 2nd Plt without benefit of an officer -- Harbeck having been evacuated. Bowers, without lieutenant bars, which he still rejected and would continue to reject, was now commanding the platoon. My luck was still holding -- as a member of the patrol during the night I was assigned, along with another member of the patrol, to accompany the lead elements over the ground we had covered on the patrol. This became useless, however, when the command section insisted on taking another and unfamiliar route soon after moving out, though we ended up at essentially the same spot where we had encountered the Germans on the patrol. We were greeted with the now familiar "Hallo" from those aspiring to become PW's, probably five or six of them. They were near a dirt road that ran across our line of advance. We cut right and followed the road to where it was bordered by woods on both sides, and then moved off the road and into the woods to resume our eastward bent. It was decided that 4th Plt would move forward and take over point duty there. I used the opportunity to point out that, since we were now beyond where our patrol had reached, I was in unfamiliar territory and would like to return to my platoon, which was now the follow up behind the lead platoon. This request was granted, and I waited as the 4th Plt moved on by, picking up the lead of 2nd Plt as it began crossing the road.

A handful of my platoon were now across the road and we resumed the march behind the 4th who were now deep in the woods. The rest of 2nd Plt was on the road and beginning to come in behind us, as were the PW's who had not yet been escorted to rear. From up the road to our left came the sound of engines moving toward us. I was thinking that some of our armor was following the road around from Kurtscheid to join us. But on the road the PW's were clearly excited by the sound of the engines, and were huddling near and in the ditch on the west side -- they were gabbling excitedly in German. They should have no fear of our tanks, I thought -- they were under our protection as prisoners. Suddenly, several of the PW's began to cry out the American word, "Bazooka, bazooka, bazooka!" Then it hit me -- they were warning us of the approach of German tanks. The realization hit everybody in earshot of the call almost immediately. I shouted ahead to tell the lead platoon that enemy tanks were coming up behind them and, not wanting to be cut off from my own platoon, dashed back across

the road, now under MG fire from the tanks. Most of the lead elements of 2nd Plt made it back across with me. For 4th Plt a pullback was now out of the question -- besides panzers on the road separating them from us, firing broke out to their front as well, and they were engaged in action of their own.

Since Co Hq group, including Block, was with 4th Plt in the woods ahead, a lieutenant (unknown) sought to take over and establish a defense, calling for the bazooka teams. Somewhere in the melee of bursting shells, crackling bullets, and milling men I heard the cry, "I say, Arnold -- are you there?" The accent was decidedly veddy, veddy British, but I recognised Dekker's voice -- he had the bazooka, and I had the rockets. "Righto, old chap," I responded. We got together and selected a spot some fifty feet in the woods from the road and plopped down on the forest floor, Dekker on the left with his bazooka hefted across his shoulder in the firing position, and me to his right as loader. The Lt ran up and pressed our shoulders groundward in emphasis. "You stay here and get those tanks," he said, "and we will be just behind you giving you covering fire!" I nodded my head in assent -- it had to be done, even if I wasn't a tank killer type. The Lt ran off to collect our support.

The sense of hurry was pressing as my thumbnail searched for the end of the tape that would allow the cardboard rocket container to be opened. Through the trees to our left front we could see the tanks coming up the road toward us (thumbnail searching for end of tape) firing as they came, turrets swinging and traversing as if in slow motion, MG muzzles winking (scrape, scrape, scrape, the thumbnail fled around the tape seeking the lifting edge), and rapid fire cannon slamming out five shot magazines (where is the goddam end of the tape), the barrels jerking back in recoil with mathematical precision. They creep forward up the road further, like mindless beetles, spraying death ahead (the thumbnail is frantic now, digging, digging, digging). MG bullets crack roundly into the trees, and the light rapid fire cannon is making a mess of the forest.*

The glued edge of the tape finally gave grudgingly, and I peeled it off, slipped the cardboard cylinder apart, and slid the rocket out. It was one of those blunt nose affairs with which I was unfamiliar and had little confidence in (I had not been instructed in the hollow charge projectile which was more effective against armor than the pointed nose -- this was probably the hollow charge). I slid the rocket in place in the rear of the launcher, wired the connections, and tapped Dekker on the shoulder to let him know the bazooka was armed and ready to fire.

Dekker shifted about on his stomach and moved the launcher tube back and forth, trying to draw a secure bead on the lead tank, but the intervening trees made the job chancey. All the while shells and bullets were crashing and snapping around us.

* These may have been Czech light tanks which employed a 47mm magazine fed cannon. Their fire, against infantry, could be more devastating than the single shot heavier tank guns in close action because of the volume of fire produced.

I managed to get a second rocket out and ready to reload, but I figured we wouldn't get another shot if the first one missed. Then I did a very stupid thing; I slipped behind the bazooka so I could see down the top of the tube to check Dekker's sighting -- the tube was wavering a lot as he tried to line up a decent shot in the narrow space between trees. As I looked, a rocket hit the right front of the lead tank's turret at an angle and spun off harmlessly without exploding -- a team somewhere on our left had had an unsuccessful go at it. It was about then that I realized if Dekker pressed the trigger I was a goner -- the backblast would disassemble me in a flash. I rolled to the right from behind the tube. The tanks had stopped again and were pumping shells all over the place with their traversing cannon. "Shoot!" I shouted at Dekker through the terrible noise, "Shoot, shoot!" But he was still trying to get a line on the lead tank, and bullets sprayed all around us. I don't think the tanks or the infantry with them had seen us yet, but it sure wouldn't be long.

Glancing furtively behind, I saw another horror -- there was nobody there, our support and cover was gone. Some distance back I could see Bowers and the lieutenant trying to establish something out of the chaos, but with little success.* That did it for me. I banged Dekker on the arm to get his attention, and when he finally looked around I pointed rearward without saying anything. When he got the picture he looked a question at me. I crooked a finger in the time honored "come on" gesture, and we began crawling backward -- the Germans were that close. After several minutes of crawling backward and putting some distance between us and the tanks, we began to hope we just might make it and we turned and crawled speedily in the usual fashion until we came across a small slit trench the Germans had dug. There was only room for Dekker and the bazooka, so I lay flat beside the hole. The fire hadn't lessened any, and I was as exposed as ever, and the range for the bazooka was hopeless, and we still didn't have any support...

We stayed there long enough to get our breath and then took off again toward the rest of the outfit. This time we tried a running crouch. As I ran I could see some of our men near a road that Teed off from the road the tanks were on, and I veered in that direction while Dekker headed straight on. My course took me within twenty yards of what appeared to be a large depression to my left, so I again changed course to take advantage of the low ground. Surprise, surprise -- the low area turned out to be an excavation of perhaps ten by twenty feet and six feet deep, the sides of which sloped gradually in as though worn by years of the action of the elements -- this being born out by the accumulated forest litter in the hole. But more important, the hole was full of Germans -- perhaps Twelve to fifteen of them! I had run up with my rifle in my hands, and they seemed even more surprised than I -- their only reaction was to stare at me. I motioned for them to come out, and they looked at each other as if to seek concensus, gabbled a bit, then climbed meekly out.

* The Germans aptly called this reaction Panzer Fever. Few men are immune to it, and it is contagious!

Dekker, further right, saw the commotion and came running over to help -- without a rifle. In the excitement he had left his rifle where we first set up with the bazooka. So, with a rifle and a bazooka, we herded our prisoners rearward to where many of the men were grouped near the road.

That, as a unit, we had performed badly I think we were all aware. But standing around back here wasn't going to retrieve the situation. Wounded men had to be taken care of, prisoners had to be sent to the rear and, most of all, we would have to go back and face the Germans and drive them back and extricate 4th Plt and Co Hq group who had been cut off at the onset -- if they were not already prisoners of the Reich.

Some men attended Johnny Long's wounds while others herded the group of prisoners Dekker and I had brought back onto the road to be moved toward Kurtscheid. The first prisoners, those taken before the arrival of the panzers, were probably with the 1st Plt to our left. The tanks had come across that platoon's front also when they clanked up the woods road, and we had no idea how they had fared. I had to assume that the rocket I saw bounce off the lead tank had come from 1st Plt.

The prisoners were put on the road in a column of twos facing toward Kurtscheid. One had a stub of a cigar still clamped in his mouth. I pointed to the cigar and then to the ditch, meaning for him to get rid of it -- I intended that he not feel all that comfortable. But he thought my intention was otherwise -- he got down in the ditch on his knees and clasped his hands together in supplication, his eyes frightened and pleading. I was angered at his assumption that I was intending to brutalize him, and I grabbed his collar and roughly dragged him back into position on the road. I was further angered when others were given the posh job of escorting my damn prisoners to Kurtscheid while I went forward to re-engage those who still wished to fight. Such are the fortunes of war...

We formed up in a cohesive group again and re-entered the woods, hoping to recapture our honor in future action. Behind us we could see a column of soldiers marching toward Kurtscheid. Far to our left, along the route we had come up at dawn, we saw one of our tanks, or a TD, warily approaching the area where we had been engaged by the panzers. By now, the firing had tapered off. Dekker picked up a German rifle similar to our M-1, in that it was a gas operated semi-automatic, until his fortune could improve. Approaching the road where the action had occured, we found that the tanks and their accompanying infantry had vanished. They had probably assumed that we would return with suitable support to get the job done, and had prudently drawn back.

We crossed the road and moved on into the woods beyond where we, happily, encountered Farris Block and a few others who told us that the cut off platoon was intact and in good shape -- they had ridden out the storm handily.

We wrongly assumed that the company had escaped the heated engagement with a minimum of damage. Included here are some recent contributions to this account.

Some comments by Sgt Jim Bowers, commanding 2nd Plt:

I never saw the German tank, and was confused about what was going on. There was a lot of firing up front, and wounded men began to come back past me. Second Platoon was in the rear that morning, probably because Harbeck went out the night before (leading me to take out that infamous patrol with only a few minutes briefing by Block with a map and a flashlight) and we were rudderless. All I knew was that all hell was breaking loose and lots of guys were milling around with the wounded. I decided the best thing I could do was to settle them down and get some organization going for the evacuation of the wounded, which I did by just standing in one spot and yelling at everyone. We got the wounded started back toward Kurtsheid, and by that time all was peaceful again. A little Lieutenant emerged from the denser part of the woods and told me he was taking over. That suited me. But neither of us knew where the main body was or where the Germans were. He said, "There's a tank up there," and that he'd go to Kurtscheid and get some American tanks. I never saw him again. Someone said the Colonel busted him for leaving his command.

I hung around with about 20 guys for awhile, and finally decided that we would push on through the woods and see what happened. We were making our advance when here came Farris Block banging through the bushes. He was sent by the CO to see what had happened to us. A U.S. light tank came clanking up the road from Kurtscheid but he, too, decided to sit around rather than go in where the alleged German tank was. Eventually, we all got to a place called Wilsenroth just about dark and rejoined the company. So much for my first day of command!

Some comments by Sgt Andy Bosetti, Sqd Ldr 2nd Sqd, 1st Plt:

After we took Kurtscheid my squad was put out on OP at the end of the field. I remember the sheep ba-baing all night. Edgar Henson who was a comedian at times, said to me, "Lt Mudd must be trying to get at them." I suppose you remember Lt Mudd. He smoked a pipe and was great at lectures.* Anyway, we were on OP all night and I remember hearing tanks moving and I radioed back, but could not give artillery a sure location.

When we moved out next morning we didn't get far in the woods before we saw two tanks around the bend in the road, just as your map shows. The lead tank pulled up on the bank of the road and started shooting his cannon. According to your map 1st Plt must have been on your (2nd Plt)left. When the tank started shooting I was fortunate enough to get behind a tree. When the shells exploded in the trees, the shrapnel just sprayed the ground. I got hit in the rear and the left leg. The tank must have been 50 yds in front of us. I was watching the tank as it would fire three quick rounds and then turn its turret and fire again, turn the turret and fire again until it covered our whole area.

I watched the tank pull up on the bank and thought, this is

* I would venture that the intended was Lt Ross.

it, but he was turning around. I then got up and started to run back to where the other guys were, but I passed out. When I came to the fellows were calling for medics. I know we had prisoners at the time because four of them were my litter bearers.

Anyway, when I got back to the outfit in July, I learned that about eight of our guys were killed. I know Red Magee was our bazooka man and he was one of the dead.

Things happened so fast its hard to remember.

The patrol referred to by Bowers was our patrol which preceeded the action.

The action as described falls short of Hollywood type heroics, glowing tabloid accounts, or the descriptive phrases that accompany awards ceremonies. The public does not want to hear, nor will it believe, that soldiers are so spooked by tanks. But truth and the actual is more prosaic, hence the title on these pages. One thing is certain, and I have observed this in action after action, if the men had performed in this action as the popular conception would have them perform, the company would have been greviously damaged and would not have been physically capable of continuing and achieving the successes it, in fact, achieved by nightfall. The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the eating. Instead of being heroic and destroyed, the men were yielding and prevailed. None should be ashamed that they failed to die that day, rather that they lived and triumphed should be remembered in pride. As Patton was supposed to have said, "We don't want you to die for your country, let the other sonovabitch die for his country -- we just want you to grab him and kick him in the ass, and keep kicking him in the ass..." So the Germans got a little rough on us at times -- just remember this, we were the ones doing most of the ass kicking!

But the day was not done -- several hours of daylight remained. We pushed on deeper in the woods. Here the tanks of neither side could operate, but we again ran into German infantry and were brought to a halt by their fire. There were no prepared defenses such as foxholes for either side, since our advance had taken us beyond the hastily prepared line the Germans had thrown up overnight. The opposing sides went to ground flat on the forest floor and potted away at each other. We noted quickly, however, that the German fire seemed desultory and half hearted -- they were tiring of the game. Farris Block took the initiative, recognizing the possibilities. He called to us, "Cease firing, cease firing," and motioned downward with one hand. Gradually the firing from our side let up.

Block stood up slowly in full view of the Germans, his rifle held well away from his body in his left hand, his right hand waving the "come here" signal. "Come on over," he shouted in English, "We won't shoot! Come here!" He kept waving with his right hand, stretching the rifle and his left ha nd as far out as possible to emphasise that no harm was intended. The German fire died to only a few scattered shots, none of which was directed at him -- shooting him now would end any possibility of what he was suggesting. On the German left a man rose from the ground, followed by another, then another -- dropping their weapons. "Come on," Block waved. The three started toward us, followed by a couple more. A shout in German. The lonely group faltered, then came on. A shot was fired from the German side, and the command repeated. They faltered once more, and another shot turned them back the other way. Block shouted and waved, and now we joined him. They turned and began running toward us, but more shots were fired in warning to them and, afraid of their officers, they dropped to a half crouch and started back. The prisoners I had roused from the hole earlier had been willing to answer questions until their officer shouted a command of warning, and they would say no more. This little group was intimidated similarly.

Now the most surprising and comical thing of all took place. From our right, opposite the group of Germans, a lone figure darted forward -- Lt Ross. He ran faster than we would have imagined his pudgy frame capable of. The little group stared in wonder at the man tearing toward them. Then he was on them, nearer to the German line than ours. He grabbed a collar in each hand and actually began dragging two of the would be PW's toward our side, the others following meekly. First a twitter, then laughter came from our line -- it simply couldn't be helped, it was so unimaginably comical! Several shots blasted overhead in quick succession, and the two broke free of Ross' grip and began running toward their line, with Ross in hot pursuit. Incredibly, he managed to overtake them yards short of their former positions and began dragging them bodily again and this time, despite shouted German commands and scattered shots, managed to bring his charges triumphantly in, all five of them.

But the hilarity ended as quickly as it had begun. Further invitation was useless -- no more were willing to attempt the crossing. So the grim business of armed persuasion had to be resorted to again. The firefight on the forest floor came to stalemate with neither side able to gain the upper hand or cause the other side to give ground. A bigger hammer was needed, and it soon arrived in the form of a mortar section Sgt who crawled up beside me and, propping himself on elbows, inquired as to where the Germans were located. I pointed them out, hugging the ground ahead and barely visible amidst the forest litter. He spoke into the field phone which he had brought up with him, having spieled the wire out as he crawled forward. A mortar tube coughed somewhere to our rear, and we expectantly awaited the blast of the shell among the Germans to our front. Bang! The damned thing hit two yards in front of us, but it was only

a marker shell. The Sgt adjusted the range, and the mortar bombs began falling among the Germans ahead. It was good to see them in flight as we had been in the morning. In less than a half hour we were advancing unimpeded through the rest of the forest.

After a few more hundred yards travel we emerged in open ground beyond the forest, and assembled there to await our next move. Within another half hour tanks, our own, emerged from the road that split the forest, and 2nd Plt was ordered to mount the tanks for an end run attack on the next village, Nieder Raden -- the rest of the battalion moved for the town overland. The tanks lurched forward, and we were on our way. A few miles further along we turned left on a road that branched off in that direction toNeiderRaden, and entered the town unopposed.

The town was almost an oddity. Instead of the usual drab stone and masonry dwellings of the farm villages, this town sported brightly painted wood frame structures of varied design. It could have passed for a prosperous small American town of the time. Our tank pulled up on a well tended lawn in front of a bungalow type house which sported a white picket fence extending out from the front corners at about thirty degrees to the front of the house. A tall, well dressed man of about sixty-five came onto the front porch and greeted us with a wave and smile.

We wanted to climb from the tank and talk with these American looking types, but were cautioned to remain aboard for expected orders. Boredom set in, and we began pilfering the various containers strapped to the tank's deck and turret. We drank the tanker's wine, ate their rations, and one guy took a clip fed version of the Tommy Gun. Inside the tank the radio was crackling with garbled voices. A head appeared from the turret ha tch. "Good news, guys," the man said. "We've made a breakthrough! We're supposed to drive forward about seventy-five miles in the next couple of days. Hang on, we're heading for the next town!"

The big engine roared to life. The man on the porch, seeing that we were leaving, stood waving goodby with a happy smile on his face. The tank lurched into reverse gear, backed onto the white picket fence, and backed unerringly down its full length, clack, clack, clack, cllaacckk! The waving hand faltered only momentarily, the smile maintained a physical caricature, a frozen parody of a smile.

Our three tanks hit the road again, engines bellowing lustily. We swung back on the main road and bored on. One of the tankers shouted from the hatch, "Hang on, we're going to hit the next village cross country. In the distance to our right front we could see the tops of houses hidden in the folds of land. In the run across the fields the tankers veered from side to side to spoil the aim of AT gunners that may be hidden within range, but there were none -- the enemy had vanished from the area and we were free to roll at will. This was the way to do it! The crucial battle, no more than a half day

past, seemed eons ago... By early night we had dug in a perimeter defense around the small village. Those of the Hurtscheid night patrol, having had no more than two hours sleep in the past seventy-two hours, were permitted to pull a minimum of OP duty that night.

Among the spoils of this small village were stovepipe hats, some a foot tall, and a decent accordion. The six foot plus Emerson, replete in frock coat and foot tall hat, played soulfully on the accordion, his head bowed forward to evade the ceiling, and we sang, "You gotta ax-centuate the positive -- ee-liminate the negative -- latch on to the affirmative, and don't mess with Mr inbetween". With his doleful expression he cast a macabre figure as he played mournfully through my request, the Funeral March. From across the room Dekker shouted, "I say, Arnold -- are you there?" "Righto, old chap!" I enjoined. Things were looking up. How much longer could the war last?

Next day we swept across the famous Autobahn, hooked around and hit the town of Grosse Maischeid from the rear with little resistance. We marched along the great highway for some distance in light cold rain. "It's not raining rain today, it's raining daffodils," Shapiro chirped, leaning back in mock exhuberance to let the rain wash across his face. The Germans had blown all bridges where lesser roads passed beneath the highway, but we simply marched down the bank and back up the other side. Somewhere along the way a sniper hidden in far woods pinged at the column, but we didn't have time for him, we were on our way to more important things. Most of the civil populace of the town was still there when we entered, testimony that we were not expected so soon.

From Gross Maischeid there followed days and nights on the move, either by foot or on tanks or TD's. Time, actions, events, and places are jumbled and disjointed in memory. We were constantly on the move night and day, half numb and bleary eyed from lack of sleep or rest. There is memory of those hectic times, scattered and without sequence or series -- a polyglot hanging in dim consciousness like floating mobiles. One night I half slept and half hung on, partially wedged beneath the turret extension of a bouncing, slewing, and bucking TD, and there is memory of hanging on for dear life as the thirty-five ton Sherman we were on went into a spin on a wet concrete curve. And another memory of our steel mount crossing a bridge that swayed erratically, threatening to dump all into the swirling water below. Some bridges had lifeless and crumpled Germans at the east end and dead GI's at the west end. Sometimes the bodies were in shallow rushing water near the banks, their faces washed white by the cold water, eyes unaware of the roar of traffic overhead -- unable to accompany us to the final victory that must be somewhere up ahead, they seemed infinitely sad. In some towns German civilians greeted us with the familiar V sign with spred fingers, urging us on -- some even cheered. One man told me he was glad to see us come -- he had always liked the Englanders. His face was painful and mute

when I explained to him that we were not Englanders, we were Americaners. Back to the old drawing board for him! At yet another town our armored column passed through late at night, German civilians in a constant stream were hauling and dumping stone, rock, dirt, and anything else they could get their hands on into a great maw churned out at a sharp turn by many tank tracks. Though they employed wheelbarrows, carts, and their bare hands they were fighting a losing battle. That night I think we rode the armor all night.

For some of us the hectic pace suddenly halted. I don't know where the rest of the outfit went, but we parked our Sherman beside a house in a residential neighborhood and settled in. The family received us warmly. The hausfrau, Paula, was a pretty woman in her early thirties whose husband was in a PW camp in Canada. Her fifteen year old daughter, Hilda, was an amply endowed pretty girl of sweet disposition. In view of their attractiveness and friendly nature, I think it was to our credit that, at least to my knowledge, no untoward attempts or overly suggestive language was resorted to by us. We were, for our stay there, received as friends and returned same in kind. There was an aunt, however, a gnomish, short woman of forty with a mild affliction that caused her to walk oddly, who was the life of the place -- she possessed a happy, almost wild, ribauld humor. Within hours she had succeeded in grabbing me in the tender places and, within a few more hours, I learned that I hadn't been specially favored -- she had managed in those few hours to bestow like affection on all.

Paula, when speaking of her husband in Canada, would invariably break into tears, and Loesch, who was back with us at the moment, would as invariably seek to console her, crossing the language barrier with, "Dine man iss kommen home!" The most tender of men, Loesch gave the appearance of angered roughness, his craggy face reddened with effort, was inches from her's when he would shake her shoulders with his huge hands and bawl twenty decibels too loud, "Dine man iss kommen home!" She would look at the large face through anguished tears, seeking hope, and Loesch would boom out the message several times for emphasis. It was impossible to watch the two and know precisely whether to react in sadness, or mirth.

We spent the night there and shared our boxed rations with the family, and I contributed a box of candy I had recently received from home. Paula cooked a white potato pie in our honor -- it was all she had to offer from a bare cupboard. Next morning her brother, invalided out of the Wehrmacht due to his wounds, and his friend, a French conscript laborer, came into the house from somewhere. They joined in and contributed to the cheerful atmosphere. The brother was the only "hep" German I ever saw -- he had the nature, usually peculiar to Americans at that time, of taking nothing seriously. I think he had discovered that life had more to offer than a cold hole on the eastern front in service of der Fuehrer. I tried to communicate with the Frenchman through the terms of Liberty, Equal-

ity, Fraternity -- but he was as immune to the premise that had fostered the concepts and terms as many of my own countrymen seemed to be. I gave up the effort, showing my palms and shrugging my shoulders French style.

When we mounted our roaring steel steeds to move out, the little family stood by the house waving farewell, tears rimming their eyes and streaking their cheeks. We had suspected it before, and we knew it now -- this was a crazy war...

Oddly, we stopped by this house for a few minutes later on. I have no recall whether it was a couple of days later, after Wetzlar, or if it was during our move from the Ruhr to Bavaria.

Wetzlar was something totally different from our usual haunts. We were familiar with the drab stone farm communities and their rough inhabitants. Wetzlar was a modern commercial city, though of moderate size, peopled by more sophisticated types. We rode into the city on tanks, meeting a stream of east Europeans and Russians leaving on foot. The tank radio was garbled due to German jamming efforts, but enough got through to warn us that elements up ahead were running into some mortaring. I was on the turret mounted .50 Cal MG, and kept my eyes peeled for any suspicious movement in windows, doors, or around corners. We proceeded on through the mass of slave laborers who cheered and waved lustily to us. A holliday atmosphere abounded. Near the heart of the city we pulled to the side of the street -- up ahead was a concrete bridge across a river, and the bridge was intact. At that moment a jeep pulled anongside our tank. A large "Press" card was attached to the windshield, and a movie camera's eye locked on us atop the tank -- and I stuck out my tongue. I was immediately sorry -- now we wouldn't be on newsreels in movie houses back home.

We were ordered to dismount and proceed across the bridge on foot. I thought of the Sad Sack cartoon that showed the value of a tank as eighty seven thousand dollars and an infantryman as eighty seven dollars. Hand and I were sent ahead as scouts. "Arnold, you go underneath the bridge and check for explosives!" I climbed under the bridge, knowing that if a defense was to be made here I probably wouldn't survive my task. I could picture MG bullets ripping through my body, hitting the concrete abutment behind my back and bouncing back through me again. I always had that great imagination... I found no explosives, and climbed back up in relief. Hand and I walked on across the bridge in a drizzle of rain and entered the first house on the right to check it out. An old woman followed us through the rooms, babbling away. I found one door locked, and motioned for her to open it. She shook her head vigorously, and I motioned with the butt of my rifle at the lock. She relented and opened the door. In the middle of the room was a casket with a very old man in repose. We went back outside and joined the rest of the men coming across the bridge, and we all continued on down the street with the tanks following at a discrete distance. I chased a gang of heckelers up a side street, only to have them reappear on the next block,

but they were harmless and I was enjoying the game as well.
The tanks rejoined us when we reached the outskirts on the far side of town, and we covered the flanks in case the Panzerfaust boys were in the area. A recent replacement flushed a German lieutenant from a small outbuilding slightly upslope to the right. The tank commander of the lead tank, one of the boxy Honey light tanks, shouted to the man to bring the Jerry to him. I knew what he was after, so I shouted to the man to get the officer's pistol, but he was excited and shook up and promptly marched the German down to the waiting tanker, who just as promptly "captured" the lieutenant's sidearm. A little beyond there we met troops of another division coming in from that side, and we were ordered back toward the center of town where we continued searching houses, mostly for our own benefit -- pistols. While I was rumaging through the 1st floor of one house, some of the men of 4th Plt came in and went to the cellar and came back up with five pistols of different calibers. In one large house in a prosperous neighborhood a thin pompous type incurred our dislike, so we broke up every damn gun in the place, ranging from fine hunting pieces to a child's pop gun.

Bedlam ruled the streets. Poles and Russians roamed about smashing and stealing whatever they could find, and some of them found their former masters -- they meted out some of the treatment that they had received earlier. But mostly, they all wanted bicycles and watches, and a lot of the Herrenvolk lost their bicycles and watches on the streets that day.

At a hospital filled with German and American wounded I intercepted a beautiful young German nurse heading in with a bottle of champagne clasped tightly in her grip. I tried to induce her to give up the bottle of wine, using every trick I knew in the process. She was happily amused by my many devices, none of which worked. She went on in to whatever celebration she had planned. Considerable looting took place in this prosperous town, but I stuck to my personal rule of not taking personal valuables such as fine watches, jewelry, opera glasses, and the like -- I ended up with fresh socks and handkerchiefs, and a nice Nazi party knife and scabbard which I never managed to get home.

We enjoyed the holliday atmosphere of Wetzlar, some men loaded up on Leica cameras and gloves -- there were factories there that produced both. But the celebrations had to end, and we had to resume our eastward plunge. So, on tank and on foot we continued our drive eastward toward the old university town of Geissen. Armored spearheads preceeded us, striking swiftly along the main routes, but we had to mop up scattered German units that were bypassed in outlying districts. Again the rapid movements and diversions on the way to Geissen tend to confuse memory of events and places. And again we were operating through small towns and villages and open country.

One afternoon our Sherman began hopping and bumping, and we pulled off the road to see what the trouble was -- we had

burned out two boggies in the left track suspension. The other tanks went on ahead and we limped on to the next village. We had to remain overnight there to await new parts to be brought up and installed, so we had plenty of time to check the place out to our satisfaction. We inserted ourselves at table with a large family for the evening meal, trading rations for milk -- they had gallons of the stuff, and we hadn't had fresh milk in ages.

Dekker and I took over a bed room in a house on the main street for the night. The night was cold and we had to borrow extra blankets from the man and his wife. The old guy was a little grumpy about sharing the blankets until I suggested we pool all available blankets and the four of us sleep in one bed. Extra blankets were soon provided.

Next day all the kids in the area turned out to check us out and try out their school English, and we distributed a little cow gummie and chocolada around to give them a thrill. They were all friendly except for one older girl who had obviously swallowed the master race line dished out by the Nazis -- she spent a lot of effort pointing out how inferior we were and how fine the German soldiers were.

A woman invited Dekker, Shapiro, and me in for coffee. She had only ersatz, the national beverage of Germany at the time, but we were touched by the invitation and gladly accepted. It turned out that her husband was an American soldier in WW 1 and had remained in Germany after the end of the occupation. He would be home in a couple of hours if we would care to return. Dekker and I came back later and talked with him for a few minutes and were invited to come back to share their evening meal, which we accepted. It was not to be, for the repair work on our tank was completed soon after, and we climbed aboard and roared away to catch up with the rest of Easy.

We found the company scattered about near Geissen doing mop-up and patrol work, and we were soon put to work in the same enterprise. We marched all over the place, and rode a little -- but mostly we were bored stiff.

We learned that our army, 1st Army, had linked up with 9th Army to encircle the German industrial heartland, the Ruhr. 99th Div was included in the forces selected to go in and root out the estimated seventy five thousand German troops encircled. We were not to have the opportunity to continue the drive east to link up with the Russians driving west. The green division who had relieved us at Udenbreth in the Siegfried a month and a half back, 69th Div, would be the first to meet the Russians at the Elbe. The Ruhr Pocket, or Rose Pocket, was to prove crucial, however -- before it was done we would root out three hundred and seventy five thousand Germans there -- five times the number Intelligence had estimated!

It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it.

Gen R.E. Lee

Into The Ruhr

Before attacking into the Ruhr Pocket itself we had to advance through and neutralize a vast area, and for most of us the forty plus miles was covered on foot in twenty four hours. Little resistance was encountered -- a wild mortar shell flung in desperation here, the quick scream of a single MG there, the gunner melting into the countryside to have another go at it somewhere further along. Just enough going on that we couldnt afford to relax. Though few Germans barred our way the walk seemed unending, and memory recalls more of pained feet and exhausted energy than of places and incidents.

Along one section of road we paused for a few minutes to take a short break. A couple of the Sherman tanks pulled off the road into a field, and began sinking in what looked like firm ground. Attempts to drive them out only bogged them deeper, until nothing but the turrets were above ground level. When we marched on more vehicles were hooking to the tanks to begin the job of extracting the thirty five ton hulks -- I suspect they are still there, quietly rusting away beneath a farmer's field.

We marched through a long shallow valley in which fields along side the road were littered with dead animals, mostly horses and cattle. The circumstance of their demise was unknown -- there was no sign of violence having visited the peaceful farmland, just dead animals with bloated bodies and stiffly extended legs. Whatever killed them, perhaps a disease of some sort, it was indescriminate of choice.

The route out of the valley climbed heights that overlooked breathlessly beautiful countryside dotted with quaint villages. Some benches along the route provided places where the weary traveler could rest and enjoy the view, and some of us sat on them for a few moments to imagine that we were in another time in cheerful and leisurely circumstances -- then we resumed our pursuit of the enemy. Shapiro noted, as had Mauldin, that when we caught the Germans we tried to make them run, and when they ran we tried to catch them so we could make them run so that we...

In early afternoon the column stopped to take a ten minute break, and a couple of us shucked our combat boots to dangle aching feet in cold clear water of the roadside ditch. What a feeling it was to lean back and smoke a cigarette while the cold water soothed chaffed skin. Then it was time to go, but we dallied, telling the others we would catch up in a couple of minutes. The column moved determinedly on and we watched

their progress, calculating the time we could remain before overtaking our squad. We were strapping our boots on when Col Pete drove up in his jeep and chewed us out. We climbed in the back of the jeep and were transported the few hundred yards to where the squad toiled onward, winking at the others as we were dumped unceremoniously in their midst. "You know what they say in the Russian Army," somebody ventured, "Tough shitsky!" Ah hell, it was worth it -- Col Pete hadn't been as bearish about it as Bowers had been back in December in a similar incident but, all things considered, neither had I felt the need to argue the finer points of the matter with a Colonel as I had with a brand new sergeant. So everything went along smoothly for another hour, then a towed 57mm AT gun came creeping by -- I simply couldn't miss the opportunity. I climbed astraddle the barrel of the weapon and rode gloriously onward, waving farewell to the squad as I pulled slowly ahead. And along came Col Pete, and we went through a repeat performance -- I listened and he chewed.*

There is memory, too, of a steep wooded hill up which we literally climbed on all fours, and which so exhausted my failing stamina that half through the climb my arms and legs would no longer respond to the urging of my brain. I clung desperately to the slanted earth for a couple of minutes until some response returned to tired limbs. On that hillside my eyes welled with frustration and anger -- the only time in five months of war. There were others on that hillside in similar condition. On that grueling march, as the miles and hours of exertion piled up, it was common to pass groups of men who had fallen out of the column for a few minutes respite, after which they rejoined the march, plodding grimly onward.

In a fair size town Dekker and I found a small cart which we loaded with our combined equipment, taking turns pulling it. Others got the idea, and the column soon sported a variety of wheeled devices -- carts, baby carriages, children's wagons. A couple of miles later we were forced to abandon this mechanized conglomeration because of more steep hills and cross country routes. On one such climb the lead platoon flushed out a handfull of prisoners who were made to march along, there being no stockade available on such a long march. During one of our breaks Lt Ross tried out some of his German on them. "Sitzen zie sich, you sonovabitch!" he would snap. The quaking PW's, alarmed by this obvious figure of high authority would bob up and down to suit the order, anxious to please -- and Ross would glare menacingly at them from vexed eyebrows, meanwhile running a red tipped tongue across his pride and joy, THE MUSTACHE. Since they had to come along, they may as well be of use, so they were loaded with coils of communication wire.

* Peters nailed me twice more when I was in Military Government; for smoking while driving our confiscated Opel-Benze truck (he threatened to send me back to Easy -- the war hadn't ended yet), and for fraternizing with a fraulein through her street level window (If you're going to fraternize, get off the street and in the goddam house). I thank him for what proved to be sound and sage direction.

As the day wore on more men, unable to keep up, fell behind and were lost off from their platoons, companies, etc. Dekker and I fell behind in some woods and couldn't regain the platoon, so we came out on a road our vehicular traffic was using and snitched a ride for a mile or so. When we rejoined the platoon we were all loaded aboard three tanks or TD's for a quick thrust to the next objective. The route was along a narrow woods track where the tree branches overlapped from each side. It was a chore just to keep from being swept off by the limbs. Our objective was overrun in fine fashion, no resistance, and we were dismounted again, to continue on foot as before. And so it went on into the night. After more than twenty four hours of marching we stopped in some burg and slept for three hours. Then we were up and moving again.

Resistance stiffened as we closed with the German units and positions protecting the huge pocket. Sister battalions were already running into determined resistance and, in these cases, artillery was thrown in to help break the grip of the defenders. Our method of taking towns and villages had been developed over the past weeks and was simple and straightforward. We had no wish to bring more destruction than necessary. The defenders usually based their defense on the villages, and it was necessary to go in and root them out. If a gentle nudge did the trick, fine. But when the Jerries wanted a real fight we usually called artillery down on the villages to help smoke them out. Even then our reaction was tailored to our immediate needs rather than massive destruction. Of course, once the Germans decided to hold on to a town the town was pretty well doomed -- artillery isn't designed to play footsie, it is designed to blast and burn, rip and tear. This was the case one springlike day when we moved on Oberhunden.

On the approach march Easy passed through Fox, and I saw Batson again -- he was still surviving in F company as I still survived in E.* We crossed the summit of a hill on which stood a fire lookout tower. In the distance to our right front we could see part of Oberhunden, white sheets of surrender hanging from windows. We continued along a road that dipped down the hillside beyond view of the town, 1st Plt on point. Near the valley floor the road branched left and right -- the road to the right led directly into the town, the one to the left snaked around the valley at the opposite end, curved back to follow the far side of the valley, and ended at the town also. The company pulled to the side of the road to take a short break before reaching the curve that led to Oberhunden on our side of the valley.

Leaning back and enjoying a cigarette, I thought I heard the sound of tank engines in the distance across the valley floor,

* I saw Batson again a month after the war ended. In trading past experiences he mentioned that Fox, following Easy down the hillside cross country after the fight, found three bodies sliced and cut up badly and, of course, dead.

and mentioned this with some concern to Dekker. "You know, I thought I did too," he said. We both cocked an ear and listened, but no further sound of engines was apparent. We finished the break and set out again, but in the back of my mind was the barely perceptable sound I had heard, and I had a definite sense of unease. The fact that 1st Plt was ahead of us gave my concern a margin of cushion.

Soon after rounding the curve the lead platoon picked up a group of three prisoners from the low growth that covered the hillside to the right. These were sent back to us as we were turning the curve, and we sent them on back down the line to the followup platoon which, in this case, was 4th Plt. Ahead we could see the white sheets hanging in Oberhunden, causing my concerns to relax a bit. The main body of the company had rounded the curve when it began.

Massive fire erupted from across the valley from a great variety of weapons -- it was obvious that every weapon the Germans had in the vicinity were assembled there to cover our approach to the town. In the hail of bullets and exploding shells some of us went to ground by the roadside, while others ran uphill into the low growth. It was the most perfect killing ground one could imagine. If we stayed at the road we were dead and, if we ran up the hillside, the angle of slope face was such that exposure to the deadly fusillade increased -- yet the psychology induced by the low growth was attractive. Knowing this, I stayed by the road several minutes but, in the end, succumbed to the false attraction and ran upslope. From somewhere came the cry, "I say, Arnold -- are you there?" I managed to croak out, "Righto, old chap!" "Are you going to stay where you are?" Dekker called above the noise. I considered the possibilities, none attractive... Then Dekker called again, "We better get out of here, everybody's gone!" That convinced me. "Let's go," I shouted.

After running about fifty feet upslope I still had not seen anyone. I hit the ground and shouted for Bowers, wanting to find out where the platoon was. "Here," came the answer from far upslope. On up I ran, still not encountering a single soul. I shouted again, and the answer came from nearer this time. "Do you have any cover?" I called. "No," came the answer, "You may as well stay where you are!"

The fire was incredible. We had never encountered fire of such density and volume, and most of it came from flat trajectory weapons -- we were impaled on the hillside before it in the fashion of the target on a dartboard. To move right or left, up or down, would avail us nothing, so we could only hang on to the slope with our toes and fingernails -- and wait. Identifyable among the weapons were multi-barreled 20mm Oerlikons, the rapid fire 47mm tank guns, and numbers of conventional MG. Interspersed among these, but not easily identifyable due to the pattern and volume, were probably mortars, conventional artillery, and hundreds of rifles -- not to mention a probable sprinkling of the new Jagd Tigers with the 128mm high velocity rifle (some of these monsters were captured later). It is safe

to say that only a small percentage of WW 11 infantry were ever exposed to such a volume of fire for so long under such inhospitable conditions. The conditions of fire volume, type, degree of exposure, and time of exposure must be near unique.

Each of the larger caliber automatic weapons created its own special terror as it swept the hillside from left to right, right to left, back and forth, remorselessly and continuously. The Oerlikons impacts and explosions could be heard faintly to the sides, increasing as they approached, and dwindling after they passed, fram,fram, fram, FRAM, FRAM, FRAM FRAM, FRAM, FRAM, fram, fram. The 47's were deeper and spaced greater, blam, blam, BLAM - BLAM - blam, blam. The MG's stitched rapidly by and returned as rapidly, though they could hardly be heard in the din of weaponry. With each sweep of each weapon our bodies tensed involuntarily, awaiting the bite of hot steel.

Ten yards to my right Williams, another infantryman, and a medic had found a shallow gully, and I intended to chance a move there, but changed my mind when the other infantryman was hit. The medic was afraid to administer first aid, even with Williams pleading for him to help. Another nearby medic, an overly stout, heard what was going on and volunteered to help. He came walking by me and asked where the wounded man was. I pointed my finger and watched as his big frame stamped off in that direction. He was unfamiliar to me, but was all guts and compassion.

The fire continued to sweep us without pause, and the noise prevented us hearing whether our own tanks, artillery, and mortars were firing in our behalf -- when under heavy fire or involved in a firefight men are seldom aware of events beyond their immediate locality. This may be due to a sort of psychological tunnel vision in the heat of action. It is probable, however, that our support weapons were in action soon after the firing began.

My estimate is that we were under the intense fire of that combined gunnery for two or more hours. Sometime during the ordeal I discovered two disconcerting things; my right thumb was bleeding around the nail from having nervously peeled all the bark from an exposed tree root, and my pants pocket and handkerchief had caught a piece of 20mm flak. This I added to a shell fragment taken from my pack at Elsenborn and carried both until their friction wore holes in the skin of my leg. Sometime past mid-afternoon the firing subsided, then mercifully died. The Germans had probably expended all their ammo.

I know of no way to properly compliment those men who endured the hell of that hillside for so long. I can only observe that their toughness and resilience was unbelievable, for after the firing died they bounced back immediately from hours of utmost tension. Everybody was up checking on their buddies and sorting the different squads out. Shapiro cheerfully offered the stock army admonition, "Men, it could be worse, you know!" Several of us assembled by the road, and others began coming from the low growth and crossed the road to join up. We stood about comparing experiences while we

waited for others to come out and join us. From across the road Ross called to ascertain if it was safe to cross the road, and we assured him that it was -- he could see our group standing about. Satisfied, he scampered across on hands and knees and stood up when he reached us. "I say, what are you birds up to?" he said. We laughed -- it was his usual question whenever he encountered a group of enlisted men. He was a good and courageous man, but his view of himself didn't exactly coincide with that of the men. He tended to view himself as an aristocrat and member of the officer elite, but the men saw him as a humerous figure with a jiggling paunch with a penchant for licking his mustache.

From the direction of Oberhunden we could see smoke, indicating an artillery strike earlier. But most of the fire that had hit us had come from across the valley to the left of the town, and we hoped artillery had worked that area over as well. While we awaited orders we watched P-47's pound the town, they did not concentrate on the area where the firing had originated. One had to wonder if the bombardment of the town wasn't an act of vengeance, at least in part. True, the Germans had the surrender flags flying in the town and had not mounted their defense in the town itself. Nonetheless, we had received the wrath of their fire while attempting to enter the town. It was one of those instances where each side justified their conduct of the battle according to their peculiar viewpoint. My view is that the Germans had, indeed, used a flimsy technicality and an underhanded approach in their defensive preparation, and we were justified in hitting the town. But it seemed proper and tactically important that the weight of our firepower should have been directed at the German guns.

It was decided that we would move on the town at nightfall, so chow was brought up and we moved up the hill where it was being dispensed. I saw Loesch, and hailed him. He gave his big grin, but his face was cut badly by shell fragments. "Aw, just a few little cuts," was his comment. I was unable to learn the degree of casualties we had sustained that afternoon, but I did hear that 4th Plt had lost their Plt Sgt to a flak shell in the face.

As daylight changed to twilight Col Peters ordered the resumption of the attack and called for the "Marbles" to come forward.* We were to drive on down the road into town with our armor support, while a platoon of Shermans took the long road around the valley to deal with any resistance from that quarter. Immediate dissention erupted -- the commander of the flanking Shermans refused the mission. I was standing no more than ten feet away, and heard the conversation or exchange. Like a bantam rooster, Peters climbed to the turret of the comma nder's tank, chewed him out thoroughly, and order- him to proceed with the mission, threatening court-martial. The tanker had little choice, and as he started off Peters shouted, "And fire those damn guns across the valley as you go!" The tanks began to move slowly up the road, pausing now

* Marbles was 2nd Bn code name for our tanks.

and then to punch a 75mm shell across the valley. Easy started up the direct road to Oberhunden. "There's the right way, the wrong way, and the army way," Shapiro said. "You guys wanna guess which way we're going?" "Don't worry about it, Shapiro," somebody said, "It could be worse, you know." "2nd Plt, on the road -- we're moving out," Bowers grinned. Our spirits were definitely up.

Some buildings were smouldering and others blazing as we moved into the town, and farm animals were running the streets. In the light of the fires we could easily see and be seen, but it appeared that most of the Germans had withdrawn. Up ahead the firing was light -- maybe a high blast from a badly aimed MG. On the road out of the far side of town an Oerlikon flak wagon challenged a TD, but it was no contest -- the 90mm wrecked the gun and killed the crew with one shot. We quickly secured the place and dug in in case of counterattack. The night was cold, and many a hole had fires fueled from the shattered houses. Overstuffed chairs and couches were rescued from doomed houses and placed in holes to increase the comfort. The odor of the burning town barely registered on our senses -- we were used to it. It was now our town, but the bulk of the horde who had so effectively rung our chimes in the afternoon had escaped to fight another day.

Charley Co came into town before dawn, a bit pissed that we had taken the town. They claimed that they were supposed to have taken it. Ingrates!

Dawn broke cold, and I went inside a smouldering ruin to get warm -- there was no floor and no roof, just walls. Later, a grim civilian of near sixty came in and stuck his finger in my face and shouted something about nine kinder. It turned out that the kinder, as well as the rest of the local populace, were safe in the woods on a nearby hill. Nine kids, and his house was ruined! I could sympathise with his woes, but I didn't feel personal guilt and wasn't prepared to accept his abuse. I used my spare German to acknowledge that his house was in a mess and assured him that, had Herr Hitler not waged war on his neighbors, the house would certainly still be in good condition. He understood that he was now dismissed, and left. War was not my idea of paradise, nor was it intended so. There was much in the war of which I didn't approve, things which I would have prevented if possible -- but couldn't. To quote Bowers again, that's just the way it was. I still have anger about stupid and mean acts that happened -- my fellow man doth endure -- and he doth dish it out. The pity is that he ignores the inevitable bond and connection between the two. Violence and meanness are acts that breed their equal.

Four or five German soldiers came down a hillside, their arms raised high in surrender. A gunner, anxious to even scores, opened up on them with his MG. Everybody was shouting for him to "knock it off", and he finally did after he had done irrepairable damage. Not only did he wound some of the little party, but he thwarted the intended surrender of the rest of their company, for they were watching to see how their comrades were

received. Even an idiot must be capable of making the calculations of probability that prospective prisoners viewing the deed would now choose to fight on. Further, the message would quickly travel the grapevine to other units that attempts to surrender could be extremely hazardous. I am aware that flaws exist in the rules of warfare that allows an enemy to shoot at you until he deems it expedient to surrender, but a suitable alternative doesn't readily present itself. A man who shoots those in the act of surrendering should be stopped in the act by whatever means necessary, by his own comrades if necessary -- for they, too, will bear concequence of his deed.

It proved to be a day for lunies for, as we prepared to move on our next objective, a tanker opened up with his turret mount-.50 cal, spraying our right flank guard in the edge of woods up the hillside. Refugees from the fighting were in the woods too. Again we were shouting "knock it off", but he sprayed away for a full minute before he got the message. Fortunately his aim was terrible and none were hurt, soldiers or civilians. I was particularly incensed because my friend, Dekker, was a member of the flank guard. It is enough to worry about enemy fire, it being provided in ample measure. Friendly fire is a cross hard to bear...

Throughout the day we marched through villages and communities against minimal resistance, passing through many half completed roadblocks that were being thrown up in haste and desperation by the retreating Germans. These and the scattered resistance slowed us little. The steady marching was tiring and boring. At one point the lead platoon ran into MG fire as they passed around a curve in the road. We stood in a ditch and leaned against the high enbankment and waited for the men ahead to silence the recalcitrant MG, hoping meanwhile that we would not be forced to join the fun. A jeep came tearing back around the curve, having advanced too far around the curve into enemy country and a hot reception. Shapiro, staying in the ditch for protection, edged around the curve to see what was going on. Some minutes later a scuffling sound around the curve -- curve preceeded a figure that scrambled around the curve -- sweaty red face, hands locked overhead in surrender, helmet hanging by strap from rifle belt -- it was Shapiro. "Kamerad," he croaked. Joining in the humor of his little skit, I patted him down roughly for hidden weapons. "Pistola?" I inquired. "Nix pistola," he answered. I unstrapped the watch from his wrist and gave him a push rearward. "Get along, you Kraut bastard," I said. Shapiro had once again created mirth amidst a tense atmosphere.

We moved into Selbecke near dark, greeted by a few wild artillery or mortar rounds, and the platoon settled in the hotel for the night after digging and staffing perimeter holes. Dekker and I climbed with the bazooka to a spot overlooking an incoming road and waited for German tanks until dark came.

From Selbecke the company marched to Ernestine to become the Regimental reserve for a couple of days. These periods of reserve duty gave us time to relax a bit, get a little much needed rest, and refurbish our equipment.

The platoons separately, or sometimes only a squad, were often sent on missions coordinated with but separate from the company actions. Terrain and assigned company objectives dictated these far flung operations. Sometimes, as the company flowed through the hills, each platoon was practically on its own for extended periods. In one such case 2nd Plt was sent into the hills to the company left. Just before dark we heard artillery around a hillside -- another town was catching it. We entered the town and rejoined the company after dark, had some chow and prepared to get some sleep and rest. Not to be. We were ordered on the move again, maintaining relentless pressure on the defenders as they fell back time and again. We marched through the darkness a few miles, turned left at a group of farmhouses, continued through fields and up a wooded hill crest, where we dug in for the rest of the night. Our knowledge of European soil types continued to expand. After an hour or two of sleep we were off again at dawn. That day was particularly hard because of the difficult terrain and our lack of sleep and rest. The platoon was sent on another of those clearing operations away from the company line of march. The memory of it is lost in a tangle of country roads and rolling hills. On a hill outcrop scorched and burned by a recent airstrike we found destroyed and burned German equipment. An issue of Jules Streicher's "Der Sturmer" had survived the raid, but we could only gawk at it and pass it around. It would have been interesting to know what tack German propaganda was taking in those days. Striking out from there in the direction the company had taken, we caught up and joined them in mid afternoon.

I reached my lowest ebb one afternoon during this period. After marching into yet another town, we stopped and took over a few houses to rest and await our next assignment. Harbeck was back with the company at the time. A few hours of rest and recuperation it was not to be. We were ordered to get busy on our equipment -- cleaning rifles, etc. Three of us cleaned our rifles in a chicken coop while we groused and argued and cussed. The BAR man with us in the coop vented his anger by loosing a burst of fire through the low roof. I vented mine in a V mail to my brother in England, expressing my frustration and anger, accusing the outfit of being chicken-shit and reminding him of his previous offer -- I was ready for a transfer now, anywhere -- I was fed up! Harbeck, after reading the letter for censoring, approached me with the letter in his hand, and he was in a cold rage. "Arnold, why did you write this kind of crap, you know I can't pass it!" "Well, it's the way I feel right now," I said. Harbeck turned and walked away with the letter of gripes. Mission accomplished! I had said what I felt I wanted to say about the situation causing my anger and frustration, and I had known that Harbeck would have to read it. Anyway, I felt better...

Six or seven of us led by Bowers were sent on a mission far to the flank to sweep a large area not covered by the general battalion advance. We walked down a highway for a mile or two

and rounded a hill overlooking a flat valley about three miles across and absolutely devoid of cover or concealment. The road crossed the approximate center of the valley and, a little more than halfway to the hills on the far side, crossed a narrow bridge over a small stream that cut the valley. "All right, you guys spread out and maintain your distance," Bowers said, and we chorused, "Or one mortar shell will get you all!" We swung along, chatting as we went. I remember feeling good about being on our own and away from the company -- a great day to be alive. Some days just strike you that way, and this was one of them. As we neared the bridge two or three field guns located somewhere in the hills beyond decided we were the largest group that was going to come their way, so they opened up. The shells dropped fairly close, and we broke into a jog to hasten our progress. By the time we got across the bridge the guns had had time to reload, and here they came again -- still fairly close, but not close enough. We quickened our pace -- the bastards were getting enough practice, and they might learn to shoot before we got out of the valley. Of course, we had little idea what we would run into after we crossed the valley. But that wasn't the immediate problem. The guns tried one more volley, then gave up -- or we had reached a point where we were obscured from view by intervening hills. These gunners weren't as good as those in front of Elsenborn, and that was a good sign.

The road left the valley and entered a gorge in which sat a remote community of three or four houses across a crude bridge. A gang of dirty but happy children came out to meet us. I was reminded of Erskine Caldwell's south of the thirties -- had these people heard that a war was on? The war was probably the least of their concerns -- they were so remote that we, American soldiers, were hardly more than anyone else who came their way from across the hills. Anyway, they had seen no soldiers so we continued on. In mid afternoon we entered a tight little valley with about ten houses packed in the confines. Four of us were dropped off there to secure and hold the place until further notice, Bowers taking the others with him back to the company.

We luxuriated in the thought that we four had a whole village to ourselves, like minor kings. The first order of business, of course, was food -- we checked out cellars and sampled preserves, jellies, and the like to our satisfaction. We chose our quarters with care, should we remain the night, and posted one man overlooking the single entry road to the little valley. A handful of hausfrau's remained in the village to look after their homes, and they seemed congenial enough and were obviously pleased to be able to try conversing with alien soldiers. One asked if Shapiro spoke German. "Eating, drinking, sleeping, pissing, shitting, fucking," said Shapiro with no change of expression.

We played our role with relish until a jeep was sent to pick us up next morning. Just after dawn a single German soldier had walked into town, unaware of our presence, so when we returned to the company we at least had something to show for our overnight efforts.

At one point our column marched past a military convalescent hospital unit in the country. It was a rare warm day, and we had been marching since morning along dusty roads -- we were sweaty, dusty, and tired. On the grounds, leaning against the building, and looking from windows and doors, were hundreds of wounded men -- a high percentage of them amputees. They stared without expression at our column, and we stared back -- neither side spoke or waved. The bitterness of combatants hung in the air like a dark cloud, but I'm sure hidden thoughts on each side considered many things; we were healthy and they were hurt, we were still at war and their's was over, we were the victors and they wished we were not -- and yet, being human, maybe each felt a small stir of compassion for the other, we for the tragedy that had befallen them, they for the tragedy that may yet befall us. And an unspoken bond, we were all soldiers and, assuredly, most were combat personnel. The rare poignancy of the moment was now increased and enhanced by an unforseen act -- German nurses bearing water in buckets, pails, pans, and pitchers came to the roadside and stood offering each of us a refreshing drink. Some wanted water but would not drink. Some wanted water and drank. Some did not want water but drank anyway. We passed in minutes, but those minutes will forever be impressed on my mind.

At a town near a river the battalion halted, the advance to be resumed next morning.* Most got the opportunity for sleep and rest overnight. Some didn't. Five or six of us, led by Bowers, were assigned a night long mission. We were to cross the river and move on beyond, scouting the battalion advance route and guiding the lead elements by radio in the attack.

Our crossing point was held by friendly forces on our left flank, but on upriver and inland was hostile territory. We crossed on a makeshift footbridge, then struck out from friendly forces and followed the bend of the river some distance before turning inland. A railroad and a road ran parallel to the river, and we walked along the road in the dark. In the high hills darkness came quickly, but the road surface reflected enough light to allow us to move at a good pace. Sometimes you have to put aside stealth and bore boldly on along the easiest and most direct route. We all seek ways to generate courage to advance in hostile environs, whether against withering MG fire, remorseless artillery bombardment, or on a quiet dark night straight down a road in enemy territory. Many infantrymen learn to employ the most simple method of all -- putting one foot ahead of the other in sequence and succession. It may be helpful to turn off an imaginary switch between the feet and the mind. Bravado has less to do with it than simple neccessity.

After some time we came to a small building sandwiched between the road and railroad, perhaps a rail station. Just beyond there another road branched left and led between high hills.

* Probably Ostentrop and the Lenne, or a tributary of that river. Place names in relation to actions and dates are often avoided because of uncertainty or lack of firm identification.

We turned up the left fork and continued at a fast pace until we drew abreast a large wooded hill to our right. Bowers halted us and decided to use the hill for our observation point. We would be able to see the river, the railroad, the road, and the road branch that went inland.

Near the summit the hill climbed steeply, so we set up on the face of the hill on a more gentle slope -- a quick scout of the summit and face had turned up no sign of enemy activity. Nothing more could be done until morning when the battalion began to march, so we rolled up in our ponchos and blankets, with our heads pointed uphill. Later it began to rain, then to pour, and sheets of water flowed rapidly downhill, entering our ponchos and blankets at the top and flowing out at the foot. Misery kept vigil through the night.

In the morning the SCR 300 refused to operate after the wet night. Two men were sent the long way back to the battalion while the rest of us stayed hidden in the wet forest. The two returned in late morning and informed us that the battalion had moved out early in the morning, attacking generally NE along the other side of the river. We crossed back to the other side and managed to overtake the company in another small town in early afternoon. From there the company moved on to secure the next town. Another company took over the lead and headed for another town, and we spent the night in place. CP holes were dug for the night, but the patrol members were required to pull only the first watch to allow them to get an hour or two more sleep.

In late afternoon of another day we secured against light resistance what we hoped would be the last town for the day. Some of the towns we had recently captured and moved through were Renkhausen, Affeln, and Friedrichsthal. Bowers was told to send five men to Co Hq for briefing on a mission. You, you, you, and you were volunteers under Sgt Lyell Thompson for the duty. Dufresne* explained to us that a German had just come in from the next town, probably Ederingsen, and surrendered. He reported a roadblock that was set up to intercept any move up the road to the town. The German wanted to walk back up the road with us to talk the defenders into surrendering without anybody getting hurt. This Dufresne refused, he would send us up the road to do the convincing. It was already growing dark so we started up the road immediately.

A MG chattered from a hillside to our right, but offered no immediate danger to us. We walked on quickly, again hoping to get it over with in short order. The surfaced road ran along a cut in the hillside. On our right the wooded hill continued upward and was lost in the dark. To our left the ground dropped sharply and was also heavily wooded. We walked on, our rifles ready at the hip. Through the gloom ahead we saw some figures, three I think, coming up the road toward us. I nudged Dekker to make sure he saw them. "Looks like they couldn't wait for us," I said. They became aware of us at that moment, and bolted for the downside slope. We got off a few unaimed

*We sometimes referred to Capt Dufresne as Capt Dofunny, just for the hell of it.

hip shots as they jumped down the bank and headed into the woods. We ran to where they had left the road, but they had already vanished in the dark of the woods -- we could hear their feet thrashing through the underbrush. We decided not to pursue, and to continue on up the road. The BAR man, the fellow who consumed too much spirits at Linz, was not to be restrained, however. He ran crashing into the woods in hot pursuit, while we called for him to return. There was a short burst from his BAR, and he shortly rejoined us on the road, saying that he had fired to scare the running Germans.*

We walked on up the road, more wary now in the full dark. After a few hundred more yards Spandau fire from directly ahead ripped down the road, and we dived for the roadside, getting off more unaimed shots. I threw myself down the left embankment below road level. In the dark it was impossible to see where any of the others were -- I think some had hit for the other side of the road where the bank climbed steeply. As I inched my head above the road level to locate the others and the MG position, bullets literally poured by my head, and I ducked below road level immediately, wishing I had made for the other side of the road. Though there was no cover on that side the MG was concentrating on this side. But I was relatively secure from the MG so long as I kept my head below road level. Suddenly something exploded by my left shoulder, giving off terrific heat. Mortar, I thought. Then another explosion, this time by my leg, the heat coming through my pants. Should I chance a move? Another one now, by my waist. Keerist! The damned things kept coming in, and I could feel the heat from each one as I clung to the sharp bank. Far in the back of my terror I heard the deep bark of a couple of Garands some distance away, and thought about having a go for it in that direction. But the bastard was right on me. Curiously, there was no buzz or zip of shell fragments, not even a whirr of the incoming bombs. Then, as quickly as it had begun, the screech of the MG and blast of shells ceased. I called and got response from the others, then moved to where they were. "I didn't hear your M-1," Thompson said. "Hell, I didn't get chance to shoot," I answered.

For some time after I thought of what his words inferred, and maybe he was right -- but I am honestly inclined to think not. The battle sounds told me that I was the only one with shellfire right on my tail. Now, these many years later, I am certain it was not a mortar -- no cough, no whirr, no fragments. That leaves two possibilities, Panzerfausts or concussion grenades. In which case the bastard was right behind me, looking right at me, and missed every time! It's a hell of an infantryman that doesn't check his rear, particularly in a night battle. To that I plead guilty.

Our little battle wasn't over yet, for the MG up the road resumed its chatter, and we banged away at it from the roadside with no apparent effect. Meanwhile, Dufresne was sending

* 4th Plt members scouring the woods next morning were said to have found several dead Germans.

help. A squad from 4th Plt came up the road on the other side, clinging to the high bank. When they neared our position they were forced to go to ground. A Sherman and a TD also came up the road, but stopped well back from us. Thompson sent one of the men back to bring the armor up, but he returned empty handed -- the tankers didn't want to expose themselves. Nor did they want to fire their weapons at the roadblock -- they didn't want to reveal their position. It was a mystery why they had agreed to come at all.

The two scouts of the squad across the road began crawling forward, hugging the bank as they went. We tried to call them back -- they were exposing themselves to point blank fire from the roadblock unnecessarily. One good shot from the Sherman in the lead would do the trick and save lives. The 1st scout persisted, and reached a point seventy-five feet further along before he was hit. The 2nd scout tried to reach him but was wounded after advancing only a few feet. It was impossible to help the lead man without fire support from the idle armor. He died where he was.

Now another enemy automatic weapon joined in the fight. It was well up the hillside to our right front, and was spraying the road from a good angle though he couldn't reach the squad against the bank. Happy days! The two armored vehicles had finally decided to move forward. Their slow advance was frustrating. They would idle forward a few feet, stop, creep forward, and stop again -- still not firing. The minutes passed, but they finally drew up beside us, still not firing a shot. I could see sparks where the Spandaus were striking the hulls and turrets. We implored, we begged, we did everything we could to persuade them to fire -- if not the cannon, then the MG's. "If we fire we will give our position away," was their answer. "They know where you are, they are hitting you with MG right now!" we told them. Most of us from the left side of the road had now taken cover behind the armor where we were much safer, and from there we could fire directly up the road as well as at the weapon up the hill.

It was a standoff until the BAR man took matters in hand. He climbed the Sherman and swung the .50 Cal in position, pulled the bolt back a couple of times to start the feed, and began slamming bullets down the road and up the hill. Sparks appeared on the turret near him, but he wasn't aware of them. When he had fired the belt out he hammered on the turret until the top hatch opened a couple of inches. "Where's the goddam ammo for this gun?" he shouted. A finger appeared and pointed, then the hatch closed. He loaded another belt and went back at it. He concentrated on the roadblock and we moved to the right bank and hammered away uphill.

Finishing the belt of ammo, and not finding more, the BAR man jumped down from the Sherman and ran back to the TD and climbed it. He pointed his weapon down the TD's open turret and shouted, "Shoot that goddam gun, or I'll kill you right now!" HOT DAM! Now we were getting somewhere. He pointed his finger toward the gun up the hill, and the turret swung slowly and the 90mm elevated a bit, and blam -- the shell ex-

ploded fifteen feet above our heads against the hill. The gun elevated higher and cut loose again. The crew of the Sherman (their position now suitably compromised) joined in with their 75mm against the roadblock at point blank range. Within minutes we were through the roadblock and marching on, the rest of the company joining us.

Beyond the destroyed roadblock the road curved left and downward. Housetops of a town were almost beneath our feet to our right as we rounded the curve. We had not reached the level of the town when our vehicles began passing us on the road -- jeeps, ambulances, trucks. It was then that we learned that the town had been entered cross-country while we were working on the roadblock. However, the houses along the road at the edge of town where we entered had not, as yet, been checked out or searched -- we were not aware of this. We went past the first house and probably would have continued on were it not for a glimmer of light at the edge of a shade at the next house. Three or four of us decided to have a look, so we went in the front door. It opened on a dark hallway, but a door to the right opened to the room where the light showed. I opened that door and we went in.

Seated around a table under an electric light were eight or ten German soldiers. Their ages and uniforms indicated that they were officers. I knew nothing about German rank markings, figuring the highest among them may be a major or some such. One had obviously assumed the role of spokesman for the group. He stood up and said in English, "Come in, we have been waiting for you" -- almost jovially. "And we have come," I said. A taller, thin guy on the back side of the table nervously started to rise, but bumped the table and almost knocked a glass over. The one who had addressed us gave him a stern look and the guy sort of wilted back down. None of them said anything, and seemed to be watching each other more than us. "Will you have a drink, gentlemen?" the spokesman asked. We declined.

"If you bastards knew you were going to sit here and wait for us and surrender, why did you set up that roadblock outside town?" I asked him. "We know nothing of a roadblock," he said, looking fake questions at his comrades. They all averted their eyes. The nervous one studied the table and half cleared his throat. "The hell you don't -- you could hear the firing from here!" He shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"Come on, let's get these Krauts locked up somewhere and find us a nice house for the night," one of the men said. And so we did. We dropped our prisoners off at a house where other prisoners in the town had been herded together, then we went house hunting. It was not until later that we learned that our prisoners were high level, two or three Generals and some of their staffs. In the PW cage they had objected strongly to being thrown in with the ranks. They wanted separate quarters befitting their rank. So what's new? It seemed significant that we captured the high brass in the only town that still had electricity. Those boys knew about the good life. As for us, we found a nice house with electric lights too.

The house we took over for the night was occupied by a man, his wife, and sixteen year old daughter, and all tried to be friendly. The girl was good at the piano and spent hours playing requests. Before we called it quits Emerson played the usual for me. I think that was the first house we had stayed in that had electric lights since we left England. It was almost like a new experience for us, and it brought memories of home. How much longer could the war continue? A couple of days earlier we had taken a small town deep in a long, narrow valley just at dark. The civilians there told us that Roosevelt had died -- they had heard it on radio. I had asked the above question in conversation with a Professor of a small nearby college, and he had answered, "When you have taken every foot of Germany. The Nazis will not surrender until then." Then I had asked how long it would be before Germany went to war again. "Maybe never -- you see, in the first war the German people never saw war. This time they have seen war." It seemed impossible that the Germans could go on much longer. In the past two weeks we had marched through and over what seemed to be half the equipment the Wehrmacht possessed -- huge railway guns, tanks, tracked personnel carriers, artillery, AA guns -- everything. That, coupled with the scattered and sometimes light resistance we were meeting gave us hope that the end couldn't be far off. Some of us were beginning to dare hope that we may yet survive, and we were becoming less willing to take chances because of that.

Next afternoon we marched out of the town toward our next objective in high spirits.*

1st Plt was on point, with 2nd Plt next in line as we swung down the road. Woods bounded the road on the right, but gave way to open field up ahead where the road curved sharply right toward the next town. On the left was open field on a rising slope beyond which woods began some three hundred yards away. Dekker and I were sent into the field to the left as flank guard for our platoon, Dekker fairly close to the road on the inboard position, and I further out on the outboard position. I was watching the woods as we moved along parallel to the men on the road. A handfull of Germans popped out of the woods and came downslope toward me. I saw the surrender flag they carried, and motioned for them to come on down. As they came on, more appeared out of the woods and followed. Suddenly it was like opened floodgates -- Germans were pouring from the woods all along by the hundreds and flooding toward me. I remember thinking there were enough of them to take our whole company barehanded. All I could do was advance to meet them.

The first group was led by a young officer who carried a beautiful pair of field glasses around his neck. He only smiled as I lifted them over his head and put them on. None had pistols, so I sent them on toward the column on the road. As the

* These towns were probably Ederingsen and Hegenscheid, respectively.

prisoners reached the road they were pointed to the rear and told to keep going until somebody back there could take care of them. I was unable to continue dealing with those coming down the slope, so I just pointed downslope and rearward -- the platoon was marching on up the road and I was being left behind. It was truly a mass surrender. There must have been hundreds of beautiful Mausers, Lugers, P-38s, etc., but I was forced to hurry on along the flank.

1st Plt had already turned the curve and disappeared up the road toward Hegenscheid when the lead elements of 2nd Plt reached the curve and started around it. In the field to the left I was almost in a run to swing the wide arc necessary to keep up. At that moment, as they say, all hell broke loose. MG and Oerlikon fire swept the road and fields, and from the sound of it we knew that several flak wagons were involved along with the small arms fire. 2nd Plt went to ground in the ditch and along a low bank that preceeded the curve, those in the lead pulling back around the curve to gain cover there. Of 1st Plt we had no information, but it was certain that they were under point blank fire from the guns, and with little or no cover. In the field to the left I was trying to feel sorry for them and stay alive -- staying alive became my paramount interest. I had to go to ground where I was on flat field. I was in the inevitable paradox again -- whether to make a run for it or try to ride it out in the field. I was forced to choose the later, for the fire was thick as hair on a dog's back and pouring low across the ground -- I could actually see 20mm hitting the ground a few feet ahead of me and spinning and bouncing by and over my head, many within a fraction of an inch as they carommed past. Many of the small shells were exploding, and many were not. Dirt was being flung about by both. Above the din I could hear Bowers and others shouting, "Come on, Arnold -- you can make it! Run for it!" But I wasn't convinced, and I hugged the ground in total fear -- besides, there was a wire fence between me and the road, and I had no thought of trying to climb it... It was obvious, too, that to stay where I was would amount to suicide. By hugging the ground I made it to the fence, and finally managed to thread my body under the bottom strand, mole like. From there a quick dash brought me to the platoon and the cover of the ditch.

We still had no news from 1st Plt, or knowledge of whether they still existed -- they could be prisoners, or slaughtered. The MG and mortar sections of Weapons Plt now joined in the fight. Mortar bombs started fires in some of the houses at the edge of town and scored a hit on an ammo dump. Smoke was boiling up and ammunition was exploding and popping off up ahead. If they could just get those guns or drive the crews off... Our MG support fire was coming from woods a couple of hundred yards to our right. A cry went up from some 1st Plt members scattered in the field in front of the town. "Raise your fire, you're hitting us...!" But the guns kept hammering. "Tell them to knock it off -- knock it off, dammit!" The guns continued yammering, lacing the men in the field. Shouts all

along the road took up the cry, but the gunners couldn't hear above the noise of the combined weaponry. Bowers sent one of the men running along the ditch back toward the woods to get to the gunners, and the fire was finally lifted. Meanwhile, those in front of the town had been catching direct fire from the guns of both sides. It is a mystery how any survived.

As night drew near some of the men caught in the field were able to wriggle their way back to us, and we pumped them for information. The lead elements of 1st Plt had reached the town along with the small Hq group, which included Dufresne and Block. The Germans at the edge of town had started surrendering, and everything seemed to be falling into place. But some diehard had other ideas and began firing one of the flak wagons at a few yards range. In the excitement others took up the fight, and all guns began to fire. Those in the field were forced to ground, and those who had gained the outskirts darted inside the first house. With Germans milling around the house and shooting up the place Dufresne felt he had no recourse but to surrender himself and the few with him. A white flag was flown from a window, with the result being that the man flying it was shot through the arm. Those in the house and on the ground nearby were captured and herded together. It being considered a death warrant to be captured with enemy equipment on your person, the men speedily divested themselves of pistols, watches, etc. One man got rid of his German bayonet, but not the scabbard, and the Germans were going to shoot him. Others in the group of prisoners argued with the Germans and managed to cause them to desist. In the mixup Block had somehow managed to escape from the house, leading Dufresne and some others out with him. Linking up with uncaptured members of 1st Plt, he turned the tables and recaptured those lost earlier. Block's memory of the action is included further along in this account, in his usual manner of understatement, of course.

In the remaining light before full dark a single figure came running across the field toward us, shouting, "Nicht schiessen, Ich Polski!" We held fire and took him as he stumbled across the ditch and onto the road. He was in civilian clothes and half drunk, and carried a full bottle of schnnaps in his hand. I took the bottle, reasoning that some of our wounded making it back to us might appreciate a good slug. I tested a draught of the stuff, and it was wicked. One of the other men divested the man of a wristwatch he was sporting on his wrist. The poor fellow broke into anguished sobs and vile curses, and we sent him stamping along rearward, still spewing invectives. Next came a 1st Plt man shot through the fleshy part of the upper left arm -- a neat wound, the medic said, and while the medic bandaged the arm I gave the wounded man a slug from the bottle. He coughed mightily at the burn in his throat, and went on his way rearward.

With nightfall the gunnery halted except for scattered shots here and there. Bowers took about a squad of us and moved out across the field toward the burning houses at the edge of town. Near town we ran into Block and paused to check the situation with him. It was decided that we would provide him with some

[illegible] and provide cover while he disabled the first [illegible] In the light of burning houses we could see that the crews had left the guns, probably because of the mortaring and because they would be exposed to view by the fires. The mortars had, in fact, disabled a couple of the guns of which there were four or five, all multi-barreled. Block was taking an awful risk working on the guns in the firelight, but he took the chance because the crews might return to action when the fires began to die. The method was simple enough -- place an armed grenade on the breech, run a few feet away and dive flat on the ground, wait for the explosion, then return to repeat the process on the next gun.

When Block had finished with the guns we moved warily on into the town, and Bowers sent for the rest of the platoon to come on up. Meanwhile, Dekker and I were posted at a fence in front of the house the platoon took over. The roof of the house was burning and smouldering, and a German civilian soon appeared with a ladder which he placed against the house. Bucket by bucket he hauled water up the ladder to the roof and worked at extinguishing the fires.

With our rations that night we also had some German rations, including some Wehrmacht issue maltrose tablets.

We either didn't have a radio, or it wasn't working, because a runner came up with a message from battalion for us to pull back and get the hell out of town -- German prisoners had convinced S-2 that a panzer attack was to be launched through the town, so our artillery was going to shell hell out of the place. Bowers, being diplomatic and democratic, polled us to determine if we wanted to retreat or stay. Everybody, to a man, intended to stay until driven out. We sent the runner back with the message that we weren't leaving. Exasperated, he left.

The runner came back again. "Look," he said, "Col Pete said for you to get your asses out of here. You've got thirty minutes before artillery flattens this place." "No sale," was our answer. He left, mad. Once more he returned. "Last chance," he said. "Stay for the fireworks," we invited.

Dekker and I were flat on the ground by the fence when it came, HE and WP -- 105mm. It came too fast for us to make it to the house, so we clung to the ground by the fence. Some of the shells hit within fifteen feet of us. The first moment we didn't hear a shell coming we made our dash. Shells slammed in as we scooted through the door. It continued for a while, then we returned to our place by the fence. If our artillery couldn't drive a handful of men out of town, how in the hell did they think they could stop a panzer attack?

And, yes, while the shells rained down there came a shout, "I say, Arnold -- are you there?" And the answer came, "Righto, old chap!"

A couple of hours before dawn the rest of Easy marched into town, and 2nd Plt moved on through town and took up residence in the last house in town on the far side. We encountered no Germans on our way through. We managed to get about an hour of sleep before chill dawn arrived for a new day.

Farris Block's discription of his memory of the action follows:

Our last action in closing out the Rose Pocket was an unique experience for me. Technically, for a period of several hours, I was a hapless German PW. The events that brought this about were bizarre. Although as Communications Sergeant for the company and normally expected to stay with the headquarters and the C.O. at the rear, I had a propensity to be with the lead platoon and in radio contact with the rear echelon. I can't recall, it was either the first or third platoon that was in the lead this day. These assignments were usually traded and the second platoon was held back this day. After a brief fire fight the platoon had taken this large farm house complex. We moved into the main building, a three story structure. We were just settling down when the Germans assisted by mounted flak guns counterattacked. I went to the third story of the building to try and maintain contact with the remainder of the company by radio. I could hear firing all around. Initially, I was unaware that the Germans had retaken the bottom floor of the building and had captured some of the members of our platoon.

While proceeding down the stairway, I heard German voices. I retreated to the third floor. I knocked my 300 radio out of commission -- I didn't wish for it to fall into their hands. I then hid in a storage room, thinking that I could remain undetected. In the meantime someone had ordered mortar shells to be dropped on the house. Some of the shells must have been phosphorus, because the house roof caught fire. Block was caught between the roof top blaze and the Germans below. I left my hiding place and started downstairs. I immediately ran into German soldiers and civilians who were trying to remove furniture from the building. One of the Germans motioned for me to aid in this project. I didn't argue and pitched in and began to help. Soon, I heard rifle fire outside the house. The Germans, probably thinking that there was little to gain by remaining in the house, caught between a blazing fire and U.S. soldiers, elected to depart the premises posthaste. For some unexplained reason, they left me behind. Soon the welcomed faces of Second Platoon soldiers appeared on the scene. I was glad to see Bowers and his troops. The fire, in the meantime had abated, after severely damaging the roof. The next day we moved out.

By this time the Germans were beginning to surrender in large numbers -- it was the end of the Rose Pocket. Several high ranking officers and their staffs, including one general, surrendered to us. A sidelight to this episode involved the German general. His aide first appeared and informed us that his commander wanted to surrender to an American officer. We said fine, we would accomodate him. He then asked the rank of the officer. We told him that a 1st Lt was in charge at the time. We were informed that the general would only surrender to a field grade officer. We told him that was tough, but a lieutenant was all that we had. The general finally came in,

obviously unhappy. He was accompanied by a young woman, very attractive. We were told by the aide that she was the General's girlfriend. The temptation was to keep her, but we sent her back with the General.

After the Rose Pocket was closed out, the unit was transferred to Patton's 3rd Army and sent south to join the forces moving toward Czechoslavakia and Austria.

Thus went Block's brief employment as a furniture mover... But there is more yet to tell about the final hours of the Ruhr Pocket.

I had left my bulky equipment by the fence when we moved on through the town in the night, because of the possibility of encountering trouble. As gray dawn dispelled night blackness I walked back through the chill air to pick up the extra equipment. Fox company had taken over where we had spent most of the night, and when I arrived they were picking up pistols in the yard by the fence like chickens picking up corn. Dekker and I had spent the night amidst a veritable fortune of fine pistols, and hadn't known it. I saw Batson, his belt lined all the way round with prize pistols. Feeling frustrated at having spent the night there without getting a single pistol (my luck in that department was lousy -- I hadn't yet a single pistol of worth), and regarding Batson as a close friend from training days at Blanding, I asked him for one of those several lining his belt. He grinned happily, but declined the request. Now, that really pissed me! The pistols probably came from two sources; from the hard pressed flak crews who fled in terror, and from the men of 1st Plt who had wisely got rid of their captured pistols when they contemplated imminent capture by the Germans.

With no Germans in evidence, most of the men spent the day catching up on sleep and enjoying whatever the town had to offer. Soldiers in top hats and frock coats rode horses about the town as others watched and laughed. It was a rare moment of fun and hilarity.

The ground sloped gently away from the town to dense forest a few hundred yards away. Emerson and I mounted our own expedition into this, as yet, uncaptured territory. Our hope was that the fleeing Germans had evacuated the woods, leaving it safe for us, and that they had been considerate enough to dispense more pistols along the way. That's how desperate some of us were becoming in our quest for suitable souvineers. Usually a conservative and prudent fellow, I changed my stripes and agreed to this mad venture.

At the edge of the forest we found and ransacked a German communications lorry and a kitchen truck. The lorry was full of radio equipment and the truck was full of potato soup -- nothing of immediate value to us. We moved on into the woods

and to the right, the slope deepning as we forged ahead. From the bottom of the slope a figure emerged from hiding and ran upslope toward us, a surrender leaflet clutched in his hand signed by Eisenhower himself, and shouting, "I surrender" as he ran. We searched him, but no pistol. We suspected that more Germans lurked nearby and instructed our prisoner to tell them to come out and surrender and they would not be harmed. He called downslope, and three more came from hiding and gave up. These, in turn, motioned for us to follow them.

They led us to the left along the crest of the hill until we reached a little used single lane road that dipped sharply through the woods. Motioning for us to remain, one of them walked down the slope a hundred feet and called from cupped hands several times. After a minute four more figures stepped onto the road a couple of hundred yards away, but only stood staring up at us, undecided. We called to them and held our rifles out a la Block to indicate we meant them no harm. The small party conferred, then three of them advanced upslope to us, the other remained rooted in place. We searched them, and were in luck, each getting a couple of pistols. I got a Belgian 7.65mm automatic and a Russian automatic which I could not identify at the time -- it was a Tokarev 7.62mm of very high muzzle velocity, and has since become my favorite, even over my P-38.

The man downhill simply stood and watched the proceedings. Our prisoners called to him, as did we, but he refused to move. I lifted my new field glasses and stood watching him as I waved for him to come on up. The guy had humor -- he too pulled out a pair of field glasses and stood, legs braced apart, looking at me. We stood thusly contemplating each other for a full minute, then he darted into the woods, and that was that. We returned with our prisoners back to the platoon in town, satisfied with our success. This prompted others to emulate our little venture, though I am unaware of what success they had, if any.

On the move again, we boarded tanks and bored up a woods road, meeting more prisoners coming out to surrender. These we simply motioned rearward and continued our drive forward. But the drive quickly bogged down -- we ran into Germans by the thousands marching in double column, on vehicles and on foot. Our column had to pull to the roadside to allow the heavy traffic room. A huge staff car with open top crept along in the mass of marching men, occupied only by the driver in the front seat and a monocled old officer in the rear seat. Sweaty privates marched alongside, in front of, and in back of the roomy vehicle. From the back of the Sherman I motioned to the men around the car to climb aboard -- I could as well have ordered them to attack a tank with bare hands. They blanched and tried to ignore my suggestive motions. The old Junker type turned cold eyes on me momentarily, then continued to look stiffly forward. Not to be defeated so easily, I pointed my rifle threateningly. Now they had to determine which

they feared most, the officer in the car or the rifle pointed directly at them. The choice was a hard one for them, the age old traditions of subservience to authority having been so ruthlessly and deeply ingrained in the fabric of the national character. I determined that the rigid line between master and servant be breached here and now. Fearfully they began climbing in the car, in the front seat! With as much rage as I could demonstrate without hurting anyone I compelled more to occupy the rear seat. The old Junker steadfastly ignored the lot of them. You could have smeared dung between his lip and nose, and he would have ignored that as well. I suspect that, before they reached the cages, the human carrion were evicted from the PRESENCE. The faces in the surrendering columns spanned the range of human emotion -- some were jubilant and happy, some carefree, some sad and dejected, and some wept. A few maintained their arrogance.

Driving onward, for there still were areas to be cleared, 2ns Plt vehicles were detached from the column and swung right up a side road, the treads generating rolls of dust from the dry road surface. We were to neutralize and occupy a position off the right flank of the main advance line. Having met no opposition or even taken any prisoners in our little foray, we were dumped at a farmhouse that sat in a sharp curve left in the road. On beyond the house a couple of hundred yards forest began again. The house, occupants, and grounds could easily have fitted into the rural country of my upbringing with nothing more than a change of political outlook and language. A 1937 German Ford stood in a tree shaded yard which was surrounded by a trimmed privet hedge. A hand operated water pump was in an enclosed section of porch, the sink emptied into a shallow drain which ran from under the porch and through the yard to the roadside ditch. The family were congenial downhome types, a middleaged man and wife, and a daughter of about eighteen. The girl was slender, vivacious, talkative, friendly, and bouncily energetic. Quite similar to her American counterpart of the time, she was the proverbial sister, or the tomboyish girl next door. And I had to spoil the illusion. She spoke and understood a smattering of English and, pointing to my Combat Infantry Badge, asked its significance. "For killing twenty five German soldiers," I said. She thereafter pointedly ignored me while continuing her bubbling conversation with the others. A further counter to the illusion was the attic, which served as a hayloft in the European tradition.

Some of us drove the Ford up and down the road for the joy of it -- we intended it no harm, but the transmission gave a thunk and proceeded to grind itself into random bits.

Perhaps a half mile from the house in woods to our rear an air strike had destroyed and burned several command cars and other vehicles. A Belgian 7.65 in one of the cars was heated beyond use, but along the road I found a Russian produced Nagant designed revolver -- a unique design in that, on firing,

the mechanism effects a seal between cartridge and barrel, preventing the escape of propellant gases common to usual revolver design, and resulting in higher velocities at the muzzle. This, of course, I was unaware of at the time. No ammo was available for it, so I fired a round of auto 7.65 in it which lodged half way the barrel and produced an egg like swelling. It was now useless and I was preparing to throw it away when one of the more recent replacements took it. The last time I saw him he was still carrying the useless weapon.

Timmerman, the platoon runner and fellow survivor of the original platoon, and I joined together on another foraging foray similar to the one that had netted Emerson and me a few pistols and prisoners earlier. We went in the woods beyond the house which had not been checked, and immediately struck gold. Parts of pistols of all kinds were strewn all through the woods bordering the road -- trouble was we could never find enough matching parts to assemble one complete pistol. The damn Jerries had field stripped every weapon and scattered the parts over a wide area. We crossed the road and began searching there. We got lucky again, but not in the way we wanted. We found two hiding Germans and took them prisoner. One of them was a nineteen year old who had an exceptional command of English as well as a fine sense of humor, plus a good singing voice. On the way back to the house he first sang the popular "Amour, Amour", then broke into "It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go..." It was his way of needling us -- we made him shut up. They had no pistols on them, but promised that when we got them to the house they would produce some that were hidden there. At the house they dug in the sink drain and came up with two or three mud covered specimens, one a coveted long barrel Luger. I still can't explain it today, but neither Timmerman nor I ended up with the pistols -- they were grabbed by some of the other men who were more alert and faster. I still smart a bit about that one. To top it all off, the men of the platoon had found ten or twelve pistols hidden in the hedging around the house while we were scavenging odd parts in the woods. One must be philosophical...

The problem of what to do with the two prisoners (we were some distance from the rest of the company)was solved when six or seven 4th Plt members came by the house heading for the company. They carried the prisoners along with them.

Dekker and I bedded down that night in the attic cum hayloft, carrying a candle to light our way. Suddenly MG fire whipped over the roof, and we snuffed the candle. In the blackness we could see stars winking through large cracks in the roof. The MG fire was distinctively American Browning. The gunner must have seen the candlelight through the cracks and decided to wink it out.

Next day we were ordered to show up at company Hq, where Dufresne gathered the company together to address us. Was

it time to be read the Articles of War again, with its repetitive "...or as a court-martial may direct"? No, it was because the PW's in the cages were complaining to the Red Cross of being deprived of non-military items when captured -- namely their watches. Dufresne described how unethical, immoral, unsupportable, and unpardonable our behavior had been. He separated his helmet from the liner and handed it to a man in the front row to be passed among the men. "Now, you men cough up those stolen watches so they can be sent to their rightful owners back in the PW cages." He seemed to reflect seriously for a moment, then said aloud to himself, "Course, I wouldn't put my best watch in that helmet." The helmet was soon filled with a polyglot of broken and worn out watches.

Our entry into Altena was a bit anticlimatic. We went in and checked a few of the houses at the edge of the city, then gave it up -- it would take days to do a search like that in a city that large. So we marched on into the city without further pause, poking about only in that which was of interest. A large modern building on a hill still flew the Swastika -- it was Nazi Party Hq for the area. Some of us went in and rummaged about to our satisfaction. The only people remaining were female office personnel, both SS and civilian -- and some of them were still sorting and shuffling papers and files that were now obsolete, proving Parkinson's Law. The mighty SS had departed. I could not possibly have conceived then that in a few weeks I would be making love to a pretty SS fraulein on a wooded hillside overlooking the Main River.

Note; My combat association with Easy ended abruptly on the morning of April 23, 1945, shortly after our move to join 3rd Army in Bavaria. Without explanation I was given five minutes to load myself and equipment aboard a waiting jeep -- no time for farewells! Hours later, at Regiment, I learned that I was now a member of the new 2nd Bn Military Government detachment. I was saddened at leaving the squad, but appreciative of my new lease on life and the opportunities afforded. A few days later, at the footbridge crossing in Landshut, a passing recent replacement in G Co hissed, "Rear area bastard"! I grabbed him by the collar, pulling his nose to the vicinity of my Combat Infantry Badge. "You little sonovabitch," I growled, "I got this while you were in Basic. Now, get your ass across and start chasing Germans!" I gave him a brisk shove. He went on in silence, as did those following him. My sorrow at leaving the squad was tempered by the knowledge that I was the only original member left and, as such, felt fugitive and alien -- the move seemed fitting. While trading stories with other former riflemen now in MG I told of being 2nd scout in the lead squad the morning of Jan 30. A Bn Hq man sitting in on the discussion looked at me in awe. "I thought everybody up there was killed that morning," he said quietly. I visited the platoon once that summer and, though I was no longer fugitive, I was alien -- I didn't belong. And that was sad too.

Next to a battle lost, the saddest thing is a battle won.

Wellington

The Second Platoon: The Final Campaign

by Jim Bowers

After the surrender of the Ruhr, 2nd Plt and the other elements of 393 Regt rested for two days in the vicinity of Altena. We took over a farmhouse perched on the steep side of one of the numerous hills which are characteristic of this industrial area of Germany. Many men just loafed around in the shade of the trees while others searched the grounds of the farmhouse for pistols and military paraphenalia that might have been cast off by the Germans during their mass surrender. A few of the men tried to start a large motorcycle abandoned in a nearby pasture. They were not successful despite much heaving and grunting.

It was a pleasant time, the weather had turned sunny and clear, and the countryside was peaceful. Conversations turned on the events of the past few days and the astounding sights which confronted us with each new town or village overrun: long lines of weary, dirty and generally bedraggled German soldiers marching into captivity with sometimes only one or two American infantrymen to shepherd them and sometimes no Americans at all. We expressed the hope that this pleasant respite might continue for a few more days; everyone was dogtired from the rapid push we had made through the hills and valleys of the rugged Ruhr countryside.

It was not to be.

On April 18 we received orders that the platoon should "saddle up" as quickly as possible in preparation for a long motor march to the south of Germany. There we were to join Patton's third army. We did not know it at the time but SHAEF was concerned that the Nazis, and particularly the S.S., planned to set up a "National Redoubt" in the mountains of Bavaria and Austria. Here they hoped to carry on the war using guerrilla tactics. Accordingly, SHAEF had directed Third Army to proceed to secure this area as speedily as possible in order to break up any aggregations of German troops within strongholds.

As the platoon prepared to board the familiar 6X6 trucks, the balmy weather turned cloudy and rain began to fall. It was cold, wet, and slmost nightfall when our vehicles took their places in the 99th's convoy. Our trip would extend almost 300 miles. The men were stolid faced and resigned, there was little joking, as each of us was familiar with General Patton's nickname of "Old Blood and Guts", a term frequently translated as "Our Blood and his Guts". At Altena there had been some wishful thinking that perhaps the war was rapidly coming to an end, that it was as good as over. This thinking was justified to a

degree by the utter routing of more than 350,000 German soldiers in the Ruhr. These were not wholly rifle units but units equipped with tanks, SPs, artillery and antiaircraft weapons and fully capable of continuing to fight for many more days. Their surrender was taken by some Americans that the Wehrmacht had become disheartened and disorganized.

The belief by our men that the Germans were finished could have been a problem for our leaders in the conduct of future operations with Third Army. When a survivor of bitter campaigns such as the Bulge and the Remagen Bridgehead perceives that the war is all but over, he can be forgiven if he banked his aggressive fire and opted for the safe course that might assure his being present at the victory ceremony. This was not the case with the men of 2nd Plt, they were just as aggressive in Bavaria as in the Ruhr or the Rhineland. To the contrary, they were often too anxious to get another shot at the enemy, a condition that sometimes raised problems of directing them in the prescribed platoon and squad tactics.

The long motor movement was relatively free of mishaps although we rode the first night under hazardous conditions of rain, fog, and blacked-out lights. The truck in which I was riding had a minor accident when it failed to follow exactly the narrow slits of the tail lights of the truck ahead as it rounded a short, flat curve in the road. We were jolted suddenly by crashing into something and the driver frantically applied his brakes. There was the splintering of wood and the cackle of chickens and shouts and curses from the men in the rear of the truck. When, after a stunned moment or two, we were astounded to discover that we had driven through the doors of a large barn-like structure as neatly as if we had planned it, we felt like laughing at our situation.

I was riding in the cab of the platoon's leading truck along with the driver and a relief driver and now found myself with the problem of whether we had any injured men, whether the truck was capable of proceeding in the convoy and, lastly, how we would get back into the line of trucks and vehicles without causing an even more serious accident, since we were running in the dark with extremely limited visibility. I opened the door on my side and checked in rear for any injuries. There were none, but the men were sure as hell unhappy over the way we stopped so abruptly. I then told the truck driver to back out and get back in the line of march without hitting another truck or being hit, that I was sure the truck was not damaged, being almost as sturdy as a tank. While the relief driver and I kept watch the truck was backed out of the barn and onto the roadway. We could see no lights anywhere and could hear nothing but the continued cackling of chickens, so we assumed we had a space in the convoy which was a gap between two sections. Hurridly, we shifted gears and roared off in the dark.

Our change in convoy position caused some momentary consternation when the main part of the company arrived at the first stop, the small town of Rosstadt, which is about seven or eight miles from the city of Bamberg. When our truck failed to turn up in its alloted position in the arrivals, no one knew where

we were or what had happened to us. Thus there was some relief when we pulled into Rosstadt almost thirty minutes late. Aside from this interesting diversion, our trip was noteworthy for our having passed through the ruins of Schweinfurt, the city that was blasted by American bombers because it was the heart of the German ballbearing industry. We were not prepared for the destruction we saw; block after block of factories were nothing but twisted steel and shattered bricks. We could only imagine what it must have been like in that city when the bombs fell.

By the time we had dismounted from our truck the weather at Rosstadt had cleared and a warm sun shone. We enjoyed walking and stretching after the cramped confines of the truck. Rosstadt is situated almost on the banks of the Main River as it makes its way to Bamberg and Nurnburg. It was typically picturesque in the traditional Bavarian style and we enjoyed walking its quaint streets. We were awed by the difference in Architecture of this town and the drab and austere appearance of many of the villages in the Ruhr. A few men discovered a small church which they urged the others to come and see. I entered its cool and quiet interior to see what had caught their attention: on the white plastered walls surrounding a few wooden pews were painted the names of the village's men who had died in Germany's numerous wars. We were impressed not only for its linkage with history, the dates went back to the Napoleonic wars, but as well by the sheer numbers listed. We could scarcely believe that so many men could have come from such a small community. The sight made us quiet with awe when we realized that we had not yet finished with these militant people.

After resting and being fed, we mounted our trucks once again and were taken almost 65 miles to the village of Plockendorf, somewhat west of Nurnburg. Here we remained two days practicing river crossing using small assault boats manned by our engineers. This was our first experience with this type of equipment and we were none too happy over the prospects for crossing a river under fire while bobbing along in what we considered to be a not too stable little boat. Some of our fears must have reached the ears of the battalion CO, for after the practices were over he assembled the troops on the slope of a small hill and gave us a pep talk in which he predicted that we probably would not have to use the boats. We knew then that it was a certainty that we would be using these boats to cross a stream somewhere.

We left Plockendorf on foot, marching about seven miles when we met up with the trucks again. We trucked on to the village of Ruhling, where we were again on foot and wondering how long this game of musical chairs was going to keep up. We were now about 100 miles from Rosstadt and we had seen no sign of the German army. Our bodies were getting sore from riding and walking, riding and walking. But it was not over. After a short march we met our trucks again and were driven to a place called Bitz, a speck on the maps, but 20 miles deeper in Bavaria than Ruhling. It was now April 26 and we had been eight days on the march to Third Army. We officially joined Third Army at Bitz.

While we had had no contact with the enemy since our transfer from the Ruhr, we had encountered hundreds of white sheets and pillow cases hanging in surrender from the windows and lofts of the quaint Bavarian houses which crowded the narrow streets of the little villages and towns of this region. Often the windows contained the plump figures of German hausfraus whose curosity overcame their fear, causing them to want to look at the American invaders. Some waved with big smiles while others were grim faced and silent. At Bitz we learned that our rapid movements were an attempt to keep up with the 14th Armored Division's tanks which were plunging across the Bavarian countryside. Our regiment, the 393rd, was now in the 99th's reserve but the other two regiments were advancing and fighting ahead of us.

Sometime during this period 2nd Plt received a replacement for Lt Harbeck who had left us way back at Kurtscheid. Our new platoon leader was a Lt Aschoff, formerly from New Jersey and never before in combat. He rapidly adjusted to combat conditions and remained with us until the platoon was broken up, so to speak, in July. E Co now had only one officer remaining from the command that led it into combat in Nov., 1944. The majority of the company's sergeants were men who had been privates in 1944 and a few were even from the ranks of the many replacements we had received along the way. When one looked around there were few faces left from that eager bunch that had first entered the lines in the Ardennes in November. I recounted for Aschoff that we had sustained ten men killed and too many wounded to keep tally on, not to overlook the men who went out because of the weather or some other reason. We had not had any deserters.

There was little time for the enjoyment of the scenery around Bitz. We pushed off on foot and proceeded southward in the region known as the Altmuhltal. Taking its name from the Altmuhl River the area is considered to be one of Germany's most beautiful and romantic. We were on the approach march to the Danube River with the objective of crossing this fabled river and driving on Landshut, a city believed to be a key point in any attempt to set up a "National Redoubt". We had mixed feelings about the Danube: it was likely that the Germans would resist our crossing, but on the other hand we wanted to see for ourselves if it really was blue.

We crossed the Altmuhl without any problems because of the good work by our two sister regiments and pushed on foot to the north bank of the Danube. Here we caught up with the sights and sounds of combat again for we could hear firing up and down the length of the river in our area. The Danube was wide and fast flowing at our positions but it was not blue, merely a muddy yellow. Engineer units met us in the woods and guided us to the boats. We were to cross in the zone of our 394th Regt. It was busy firing across the river keeping the enemy well back from the immediate south bank. Later, we learned that the plan had been changed. 395th Regt was scheduled to make the initial crossing, but they had run into heavy resistance. We would have a go at it.

Crossing any river with boats is a perilous and sticky operation for infantrymen, who are burdened with the weight of field packs, rifles, ammunition, heavy boots, and clothing not intended for water wear. We climbed gingerly into the small boats so as not to capsize them during the loading process, there being no such thing as a dock to lend stability. One clambered down a muddy bank and into the boat as best one could. Each boat held 12 to 14 men, six or seven of whom were given paddles. The men with paddles were lucky, for they were fully occupied; the rest crouched down in the boat and hoped for the best. The only sounds close at hand were the steady swishing of paddles, but from up and down stream the sounds of occasional rifle and machine gun fire told us that we were in the war. I took advantage of the quiet in our zone to fill my canteen, dropping in a Halazone pill to purify the water. Thus I could always claim I drank from the Danube!

As we moved across and somewhat downstream to take advantage of the current, we talked little for we were praying that a hidden machine gun did not open up on us. None did and we reached the south bank without mishap. We scrambled out of the boat and made for the nearby woods as fast as we could run. Here we assembled the squads and proceeded in the general direction downstream where other boats were discharging their loads. Our boat turned around and headed back for the north bank with the lone engineer to paddle it; he would return for another trip and another as hundreds of men had to be ferried across for the battalion to become an effective force.

Our success in crossing was due in no small part to the practice we had been through at Plockendorf. There we had practiced on a small fast moving little river without concern for enemy. But we learned how to get into and out of the assault boats without swamping them and how to paddle and how to sit still. And it was at Plockendorf that we encountered an amusing incident, one of those small events that provide the survivors with a good tale to tell later. We occupied a large beautiful farmhouse, more like a manor house than the usual German rural house, which did not have the usual attached barns and stables for animals. There were several large barns and hen houses on the grounds, indicating that this was a layout of some size and profitability. Here we dined on fresh eggs and other farm produce under the watchful eyes of four rather young women who apparently were the resident owners. After a period of watching us eat and having been shared some of our coffee, the women produced a tall and rather handsome man attired in work clothes. He was a Frenchman who had been captured and sent to the farm as labor. When we indicated to him that he was now free to return to France, he smiled and said he would be glad to get home again and see his wife and children but that he had it so good here he did not know if he really wanted to return. Leaving would not be all that good, he told us, because here he was the "rooster". He gestured toward the women and said something to them in German. Their blushes told us that he was indeed the rooster. When we moved out onto the roadway to resume our march

there were many shouts of encouragement to the "rooster", who by then seemed genuinely worried over the prospect of having to leave his coop.

Turning downriver from the Danube we soon heard heavy firing ahead. Pushing toward the source we met an E Co rifleman crouched in the cover of an embankment and learned from him that elements of E Co were engaging some German troops dug in on the upper slope of a steep hill overlooking our approach to our first objective, a village called Anglhub. The enemy was well hidden and had good fields of fire except for a slight depression between the foot of the hill and the river. The E Co man told us that by waiting between bursts we could cross the foot of the hill by running as crouched as possible. Meanwhile the 4th Plt of E Co was working its way up the hill to deal with the Germans. I passed the word to the platoon by voice and hand signals as best I could under the hammering of the German guns. I then waited for a burst, crouched low and ran as fast as I could. Each man did the same until we had all safely negotiated the crossing and reached the cover of a clump of woods. Here we found other E Co men being assembled for the move on Anglhub. While waiting to move again we heard our 4th Plt open up on the Germans and shortly thereafter the machine gun fire ceased. Later we were told that the sight of our black troops charging the Germans caused them to break and run. This was not the first such occasion that the Germans folded in the face of these fearless fighters.

The temporary road block having been removed, we advanced on Anglhub. As we gained the outer edge of the village, firing again broke out ahead of us. We closed into the first line of dwellings and discovered that the trouble was coming from a large two storey house located in the center of the village. Here, we learned, two SS men were holding out from the upstairs windows, firing their machine pistols in brief bursts and then ducking back from the windows. Since the house commanded the single paved road through the village it was necessary to remove these men in order that following units could use the roadway.

Lt Aschoff had me hold the platoon in the yard of a small storage building while he went forward to confer with the Co CO, Captain Dufresne. Holding the men out of the action proved not so easy; many of them wanted to go up and help rout the SS. Infantrymen dislike not knowing what is taking place and will risk their lives to find out the situation. It wasn't long before a couple of the men sneaked off to take a look and then returned to spread the word that the SS men were proving to be real trouble because of their second floor advantage. The house had only a single stairway and all attempts to deal with this were turned back by their fire. Then ensued a rush of demands to go get them. I told the men our orders were to stay in place until Lt Aschoff returned. "After all," I said, "there is only the two of them while we have the entire 1st Plt out there dealing with them." We could hear the staccato bursts of the machine

pistols followed by the barking of our M-1s.

The barrage of pleas to go to where the firing was continued until I agreed that a man named Hill, a replacement who had proved to be extremely aggressive, could go forward and see what was happening and then report back to me. I thought this would be a positive step that would satisfy some of the men who were straining to get into the action. Hill left with all the enthusiasm of a cowboy gunfighter. (Later I was told but could not confirm it that Hill had accounted for one of the SS men when the German made one too many appearances at a window.) A few minutes after Hill's departure there was a lull in the firing, then shouts of some kind that I could not understand, then several M-1s boomed and all was silent again. While we were pondering events, Lt Aschoff came down the narrow road to our position and walked up to me, saying, "They got the SS men but Sgt Holda was shot and killed by one of them when he charged up the stairs in the house." Tech Sgt Holda was the leader of E Co Weapons Plt and I wondered what he was doing engaging in 1st Plt action. When I enquired of Aschoff how Holda came to be there, he replied that he had volunteered to try to rush the house and take out the SS men. Aschoff said that besides 1st Plt, there were a number of other men and officers who, like Pvt Hill, had more or less volunteered to deal with the SS men.

Hill came back about then and he told me that Holda was lying on a stretcher in the street beside the house. I told Aschoff that I was going to pay my respects to a good man.

By the time I had walked the couple of hundred yards to the scene the light was beginning to dim and rain began to fall. I stood by the covered body of Sgt Holda and thought of the time earlier at Langscheid, in the Ruhr, when we had been ordered to go to 2nd Bn Hq. We met on the roadway that led to the Hq and walked along together in the warm Spring sunshine. All was quiet and the war seemed far away. We talked about first one thing and another and then Holda asked me if I knew why we had been sent for. I told him that my guess was that the brass wanted to talk to us about accepting field commissions. When Holda asked me why they would want to give us bars, I said, "Because we both have been leading platoons for some time without officers and I suspect that this may be their way of getting someone with plenty of experience." Holda agreed that I was probably right. We walked along for a few more minutes in silence. Then Holda stopped and said that he did not want to be an officer. I told him that I did not want to be one either, that the war was obviously winding down and that taking a commission could mean having to serve an extended period beyond the end of the war. Neither of us at the time thought about the possibilities of our having to go to Japan someday. Europe was our war and when it was over we figured that was it, we could go home.

Sgt Holda and I then turned around and walked back to our platoons. This action caused us some small difficulty when the Co CO discovered that we had failed to report as ordered. He became Quite upset and irritated. He came down to our position and upbraided me for not doing what I was told to do. I told

him that we saw no point in wasting Battalion's time when our minds were set against anything they might propose to us. He left, unhappy, but I learned later that he smoothed it over with the Bn CO. And that commissions were what the Bn CO had in mind.

Now, standing there in the gloom of twilight, I viewed Holda's covered body and wondered how different it might have been for him had we not turned about and rejoined our platoons at Langscheid.

As I stood there I saw a small group of our men bending over another stretcher. I walked over thinking that it was another casualty but it turned out to be a couple of our medics administering to an elderly German man. The old man had an injured arm and the medics were giving him penicillin. When I asked what was going on here, had the man been wounded in the encounter with the SS troopers, one of the medics shook his head and said that the man had been injured several days earlier in some kind of accident and that they found him in one of the houses, that he was developing gangrene in the wound and would most likely have lost his arm, if not his life, had he not received prompt and proper medication and treatment. The old fellow lay dazed and mute on the stretcher, no doubt suffering mixed feelings about being tended by men who a short time before had been trying to kill two of his countrymen but who were now showing obvious concern over his own plight. The whole affair made me wonder at the incongruities of war!

With the clearing of the snipers, E Co moved out of Anglhub at a fast march, our timetable having been set back by the stubborn but senseless action of the SS men. We took no time for a meal but moved off into the dark countryside, with the rain abating to a mere drizzle. Our first stop was at a roadside farmhouse where a number of men from the company were wandering in and out of the house. Curious, I went in to find out what was going on that seemed to produce so much interest. Inside were two women whose age I could not determine in the light of numerous cigarettes and an occasional match. They were smoking and laughing and bumping into the men who crowded into the room. But I could not find out why we had stopped at this particular place except that it just happened to have been after a few hours of marching. Later, I learned that the women had been questioned by the officers and they reported some SS troops had been through there about an hour before our arrival.

We moved out and by daybreak had marched into a little villag where bedsheets were flying from the windows. While resting and hoping for some food from our kitchen, one of my men came to me and said that a man and two women were lying in a bed in a secon floor room of one of the houses and we ought to check them out. I agreed that it was suspicious that they would remain there when all the other villagers seemed to be either in the street or hanging out their windows. I followed the soldier and climbed the stairs to the room. There I found several of my men standing around and attempting to converse with a frail young man of twenty odd years who was propped up on a pillow and who had what appeared to be two young girls alongside him. The girl

were cowering under the blankets with just their eyes peering over the edge. I ordered them to get the hell out of there and down on the street where they could be questioned. When they failed to respond I pulled out a captured pistol and waved it toward the steps, indicating they were to get up and get down there. They climbed out of the bed and showed themselves to be fully clothed. Questioning later revealed that they were frightened and had hoped to escape our interest by hiding under the bedclothes.

Our break in this village was soon ended when the word came down that we were moving out again and without benefit of any breakfast. The men were told to go sparingly on any boxed rations they might have because it was not known when the situation would permit our kitchen to catch up with us. It was now April 30 and in a few hours Adolf Hitler would end his life. But we knew nothing of this and the fact that we were experiencing an historic day was lost to us at the time. The infantry does not get much news, seeing as how it is in the point of things in a war and the news takes a while to catch up, if it ever does. Now a light rain was falling once more as we advanced down a paved roadway following a single railway line. We were tired and we were hungry and we were not happy with 3rd Army. We concluded that Patton only had an interest in tanks and did'nt care what problems the infantry had in attempting to keep up with the armored spearheads.

Before the day was over we cleared almost two dozen villages while pressing down the valley of the Isar River. The German folk expected us and had their white sheets displayed as insurance against any hostile action by us. We learned to pay them little attention and, with the exception of one rather bizarre encounter, the civilians were not a problem for us. The singular incident was a case where we found several women of a cottage with their mouths and teeth painted a bright purple. They stood and grinned at us and pointed to their purple teeth and gums. Whether or not they had been medicated for some kind of mouth or gum disorder, such as trenchmouth, we never knew, but whatever the reason it was effective. None of our men would even get close to them. I always suspected that this was a ruse to avoid unwanted attention from the Americans; it was highly successful!

The next morning, May 1, brought us snow and a quick drop in the temperature. Most of us had discarded our winter underwear and sweaters and were discomfitted with this turn of events. However, before we could take any action to scavenge additional clothing from the cottages and farmhouses we were passing, the snow turned to rain and the temperature rose. We were now approaching the beautiful Bavarian city of Landshut, but we first had to cross the Isar River, about which we knew little. Here, at the Isar, the war seemed to commence again, for there was scattered fire from heavy guns and occasional mortar barrages. As we drew near the river we heard rifle and machine gun fire, much of it from our 395 Regt attack on Moosburg, a city on our side of the Isar. Closing in to the river, we

crossed it in the same type assault boats we used at the Danube. Despite desultory rifle and mortar fire from the defenders, 2nd Plt crossed without casualties and joined the company in its movement to the main part of the city of Landshut. It was night and movement was slow. With the coming of dawn resistance lightened and we were soon moving down a main thorofare lined with large buildings and littered with the detritus of warfare. Here and there was a corpse lying sprawled in the street or a doorway, mute testimony to the fight for the city.

Our regiment did not pause in Landshut but quickly pushed on through the city and into the countryside beyond. Our objective now was to cross the Inn River, the border river between Germany and Austria. Combat, it seemed to us, was turning out to be one damn river crossing after another! We wondered how many more rivers we had to cross before the Germans gave up. Maybe, we thought, we will have to fight our way across Austria and into Italy or the Balkans. None of us were excited over these prospects. With these thoughts to sustain us we pressed on to the town of Tattendorf, clearing the countryside behind the advance of 14 Armored Div, which had crossed the Isar after it had been secured by 99th Div. The sun reappeared and our spirits improved. At dusk we moved into the tiny hamlet of Johanneskirchen, a place so insignificant that it does not appear on many maps of Germany. We took over a house for the platoon and wearily bedded down for the night after setting out our usual security.

Morning brought warm sunshine and a pleasant surprise. While we were readying for breakfast to be served by our kitchen, one of our platoon runners, PFC Patrick Keenoy, dashed to the doorway of our quarters and announced that the war might be over, that we had received orders to hold where we were and not advance any farther until the situation was clarified. Since we were not certain this really was the end of the war, there were no whoops or shouts. Instead, the men were subdued and quiet as if they were doing a lot of silent praying. After breakfast we let the men do whatever they wanted. Some wrote letters home, others tended to equipment, and a few just lounged around and discussed the possibility that it was all going to end here. About midmorning a message from Co Hq arrived stating that 99th Div had received orders to advance no farther but, instead, to prepare to relocate somewhere within a zone of occupation. This was it! We knew that this meant the war was over for us. Now there were smiles and laughter. We knew we would not be moving into a zone in the interior unless the war was really finished. It was at this time that we heard that 1st Army had ended all fighting and forward movement almost two weeks before us. This news gave us a momentary surge of unhappiness over our having been switched from 1st Army. However, the war was over... we had no time to dwell on this kind of thinking.

We remained a second night at Johanneskirchen. It was May 4. We relaxed our discipline and permitted the men to engage in their usual pastime of exploring our area. In Johanneskirchen's schoolhouse several of the 2nd Plt men discovered the friendly

schoolmaster had a Wehrmacht tank corps uniform hanging in his closet. When questioned about it, he admitted it was his and said that he had been invalided out of service and had taken a job of teaching here because it was all he could find. Since he was of middle age and his uniform indicated he had held the rank of Colonel, he was promptly hustled off to Co Hq. His uniform, however, was rapidly stripped of its medals and insignia as souvenirs of war. This was not the usual practice for a captured officer but in this particular case he was not wearing the uniform at the time and he claimed to no longer be in military service. The ex-Colonel also turned out to have a beautiful "daughter" of around twenty-five years of age staying with him. She, too, was taken to Hq. It was not uncommon to capture ranking officers with their girlfriends along with them.

While the men were roaming the area, S/Sgt Gene Domachowski told me he was going to hike back to a larger village about five miles from Johanneskirchen where he understood there was a dentist. I decided to walk with him, it being a pleasant day and my teeth not having been near a dentist in months. We found the dentist in Vilsbiburg, on the second floor of a small brick building. The dentist was an elderly gentleman who greeted us as if we had been longstanding customers. His equipment was primitive, the drill was powered by a bicycle-like contraption, but his work was professional and he made no charge for his services. Again, I was struck by how quickly things turned around in this world; not three days before, American tanks and troops had come storming through his little village. In addition, Domachowski and I walked the return distance as casually as if we had been in our home towns. Somehow we knew there were no guerrillas in this peaceful backwater region.

The next day, May 5, trucks arrived to take us to Landshut, a ride of 17 miles. We pulled into a vast tree-shaded esplanade and up before a large multistoried building. This was a former German Army school barracks. 2nd Plt was quartered on the second floor. The rooms were large and equipped with double-deck bunks. It was good to sleep again in a bed, even a bunk. The building had showers and commodes and wash basins. We lost no time in sprucing ourselves up. Our kitchen set up in the park across from the barracks and we enjoyed hot food on a regular basis. We performed no duties but were told that we were here temporarily awaiting the 99th's movement into its permanent occupation zone.

We stayed four days in Landshut; then trucks arrived for the motor movement to Aschaffenburg, our occupation area. Our first stop was a small town along the Main River, Obernau, the site of locks to enable boats to negotiate what must have been a change in elevation of the river at that point. We were most fascinated with the operation of the locks and each time the water was raised and lowered a crowd of GI's stood by to observe the process. We spent one night in Obernau, sleeping on the floor of a large house overlooking the locks.

The next morning we were trucked to Haibach, a village on

the outskirts of the city of Aschaffenburg. Haibach was not an attractive place but it was but a short walk to Aschaffenburg and some of us often made the walk to the city to look about its ruins. Our quarters in Haibach were in a schoolhouse which had more recently been used as some sort of hospital facility. Part of the roof was missing and the bare rafters stood starkly against the sky. The second floor protected the first floor from the elements, so we used only the first floor. There was a basement with kitchen, which we did not use, and showers and laundry facilities which we did use. We soon learned that washing our own uniforms was a waste of our time when, for a half bar of GI soap, one could get a hausfrau to do it much better. We would give our clothing to the small children who perpetually hung around the barracks, along with the required amount of soap, and the children would disappear with them to return next morning with everything nicely washed and pressed. I never knew who took mine or where it was taken, but it always came back intact.

On the second day in Haibach some of the men made their usual explorations of the area and found that beyond a wall bordering our grounds was a cemetary. In a small wooden shed they found the body of a civilian laid out on a kind of bed. They quickly came and told me about it and I said we'd have to get him buried at once. When I went to see for myself I found an elderly man entering the cemetary with a black wooden coffin perched on a two wheeled cart. We found by much hand signals and pidgin German that he was a sort of sexton and had come to bury the dead man. Since he was alone I volunteered three of my men to help him with his task. As the grave had already been prepared it was but a matter of minutes to carry the coffin to it and lower it in. Another strange happening, I thought, in what was proving to be a number of strange events to us.

Haibach was interesting duty. We manned roadblocks to screen the hundreds of refugees streaming westward. We provided security for the local Germans against unwelcome incursions by former forced-laborers who often attempted to rob the Germans of their stores of food. We were not happy with this kind of activity because our sympathies lay with the laborers or DP's, as we called them. Although the military had gathered these people into camps they sometimes broke out and went back to the farms and houses in which they had served because they knew where the food and spirits were stored. When they got hold of alcoholic beverages they would often terrorize the German women and old men who would prevail upon the CO to put a stop to it -- there were no young German men around.

In addition to the Haibach area we had a guard post in each of the pleasant little villages of Strass Bessenbach, Ober Strass Bessenbach, Hellenthal, Gailbach, and Grunsmorsbach which were tucked away in the surrounding hills. Platoons rotated manning these posts. We also had a winery in our area and it was not unusual to find our guards there in good spirits after a couple of hours of duty. Also in our E Co zone was a large DP camp located between Haibach and Aschaffenburg. As

these people were not our immediate concern we generally did not interfere with the operation of the camp. However, one day the camp erupted with some shooting and the CO ordered Lt Aschoff to take some men and quell what seemed a small riot. Aschoff got hold of a jeep with trailer, a 30 cal light machine gun, me and about four other men from 2nd Plt, and took off to the scene of the trouble.

When we arrived at the camp, a building of three or four stories, we parked the jeep about fifty yards from the building, mounted the machine gun in the roadway in front of the jeep, then Aschoff and I went forward to see what the problem was. We could hear yelling and shouting in the building, and men and women leaned from the windows, shouting in their native language. After much gesturing we learned that a drunk male DP had somehow acquired a pistol and was threatening the others and firing out one of the windows now and then. Our presence soon calmed everyone down and the man with the pistol disappeared. We never found him. Later this same DP camp was the scene of a wedding between two Czechs, and several of us from 2nd Plt stood by outside to be sure that the couple were tendered proper respect.

At this time a number of men who had been wounded in the winter battles or who had gone out of the platoon for one reason or another began to return. Frank Fogg and Carl Johnson rejoined the platoon, as did S/Sgt Diguillio and S/Sgt Menge. We began to take on some of the semblance of the "old bunch", the guys who had gone into the front lines in winter of 1944. But many would never return, men such as Anderson and Allmond and Carey, who died in Belgium during that winter. And some gravely wounded or frostbitten like Jupko, Becker, White, LeMaire, Glass, Bonner, Swanson, and Long who survived but did not come back to 2nd Plt.

It did not take the military command long before we were experiencing garrison life again. Reveille, retreat, etc., and saluting officers were restored. There were conditioning marches and even lectures on the nomenclature and operation of the Garrand or M-1 rifle. But there was some fun too. We had our own beer parlor. And in our off duty hours we were free to roam the fields and orchards of the area. The cherry trees were favorite sources of sweet fruit. And the fields of ripe yellow grains were a pleasure to view. There were passes to Paris and the French Reviera for men who had not had any time off for months. A USO show with Jack Benny and Ingrid Bergman played at Wurzburg and many were fortunate enough to attend.

All in all, duty in Haibach was not unpleasant. But it ended around the first of July when E Co was transferred to Hasloch Am Main, a small place located on the banks of the Main River between Aschaffenburg and Wurzburg. Two squads of 2nd Plt, however, were dropped off at a village called Esselbach which straddled the main highway between Aschaffenburg and Wurzburg. Here the 2nd and 3rd Sqds were under my command, while Lt Aschoff and our 1st Sqd were stationed in Hasloch.

Our assignment in Esselbach was to man around the clock a hazardous right angle bend in the road as it went through the village. This turn had been the site of several accidents by U.S. Army vehicles speeding along until they suddenly found they were going too fast to negotiate the turn.

Although Esselbach was mostly a collection of large sturdy farmhouses, most with animal barns attached, it did not take our men long to realize that the hardworking inhabitants were watching us with great curiosity. There was a flagpole in what could roughly be construed as the center of the village and from somewhere an American flag was procured and thereafter each day it was run up the pole in the morning and down in the evening with a formal ceremony. Even though we had no bugler, the Germans were suitably impressed.

Esselbach had the usual quota of small children and these delighted in standing around and watching the GI's who were not on guard duty. Soon a couple of our men were giving each other haircuts and this spread to where some of the small boys of the village were clamoring for haircuts too. Our men obliged and the children seemed happy with the results. This was during a time when the American forces were forbidden to fraternize with the Germans. However, we figured this did not include the children. Naturally the children were pleased to be the recipients of GI candy and chewing gum (chokalada und Kowgummie) and our men good naturedly shared these with them.

One morning I was awakened by one of the guards from the roadblock. A bunch of German farm women were at his post with an injured cow and they were raising all matter of cain with him and his partner, who was still at the post. He could make out that the cow might have been struck by an Army truck as it went through the narrow street of the village at the same time as the cow was being taken to pasture. Not knowing anything about cows, or any other farm animals for that matter, I asked S/Sgt Lyell Thompson,* an Oklahoma farm boy, to accompany me to the post.

There we found several civilians, mostly stout farm women, standing around a cow and muttering in German. The cow seemed unconcerned. Sgt Thompson and I examined the cow, which did have a thin narrow scratch on its hide about midway down from its backbone. Lyell said he figured something extending out from the truck body must have barely grazed the cow as it went by. He said he did not think it was hurt internally but, rather, it seemed healthy, fat, and in good humor. It was then that a short, stout and red faced woman of about fifty approached me and in not too good English indicated she wanted me to do something about her cow and its injury. The other Germans crowded around us and by gestures and language made it clear that they were unhappy over the cow having been struck by the truck. Figuring that this little episode had gone on long enough but not wishing to ignore their cries for justice, I pulled out my notebook, wrote "IOU ONE COW", dated and signed it as a Sgt in the U.S. Army, and handed it to the owner of the cow. She and her friends studied the paper a moment as if trying to understand it, obviously did not, but exhibiting the inborn respect

* Correction re Thompson. This man was Leroy Anderson or Walter Williams. Most likely, Anderson.

J. B.

all Germans give to official documents, they broke into smiles and left, pulling the cow after them. I never heard any more about the incident from anyone. However, I wonder if somewhere a German family still has a claim on the U.S. Army for "one cow". Or, perhaps there was a perplexed HQ somewhere in our area that didn't know what to make of a smiling dumpy German woman presenting her paper to claim a new cow. I often think about the possibilities.

Meanwhile, the single squad at Hasloch was not idle. They were quartered at the site of a former ammunition factory. Among the buildings there was a complete woodworking shop. It didn't take Pfc Loesch of this squad long to get the shop underway and soon he and several of the men were turning out foot lockers for the men at Hasloch. There was a large pool on the grounds, probably a source of water in case of fire, and this became a swimming pool for E Co.

For those of us in Esselbach it was too good to last and after two weeks we were replaced by two squads from another platoon. We were taken to Hasloch and there we once more experienced a kind of garrison duty. There were marches and exercises, but there was also the swimming pool. For many of us in 2nd Plt Hasloch was a stopover on a greater journey. On July 22, about fifteen of the "originals", along with some early replacements, were notified to turn in rifles, packs, helmets, and so forth preparatory to reassignment. The order caught us by surprise and at the time we did not realize that for us the days of 2nd Plt were at an end. We were hustled off to a nearby rail siding where hundreds of 99thers were gathering to board box cars. It was only after we were clicking along the rails on our way to the French seacoast near Le Havre that we realized that for us the old 2nd Plt was no more. Among the men making the trip beides myself were Domachowski, Diguillio, Timmerman, Dekker, and Johnson, among others. Our places were taken by high point men from other units who were destined to return to the States with the 99th. But from July 22, 1945 2nd Plt as we remembered it ceased to exist. There were no parades, no generals made any speeches, the folks at home didn't even know about it until our first mail reached them from France. Somehow it did not seem to be a fitting ending for what had once been a proud and spirited group of infantrymen. A group that had managed to keep going throughout six long months of combat even though turnover was high, but which somehow also managed to retain the comraderie of the platoon that first set foot on the soil of France in November of the year before.

J D Baldwin

September 12, 1985

WITH THE 99TH INF. DIV. IN GERMANY

Staff Sgt Farris F. Block, Port Neches, Texas, Communications Sergeant of Company E, 393d Inf displayed outstanding leadership and initiative in reorganizing the units of his Company which had been cut off by an enemy attack.

While approaching its objective* just prior to dawn, the Company was counterattacked by enemy infantry supported by tanks and flak wagons. The enemysucceeded in severing the Company into three separate units, thus greatly disorganizing the attacking force. The leading platoon needed reinforcement and needed it quickly, but radio communication was not available.

Sgt Block unhesitatingly volunteered to go out and contact the other units and bring them together. He was fully aware of the danger of the deadly accurate fire of enemy snipers in the woods, but the welfare of the Company was at stake.

While proceeding through the dense woods, he encountered two squads of riflemen which had been cut off. He quickly organized them into a skirmish line and set them about clearing the woods of enemy riflemen. Farther back he discovered the remainder of the Company and united it with the two squads into one big skirmish line and set out for the leading elements of the Company, clearing the woods of enemy as they went. Sgt Block walked in front of the skirmish line most of the way, talking some thirty odd Germans into surrendering.

Although many snipers fired at him, Sgt Block steadfastly continued until the job was finished and the Company reunited.

Quoting his Company Commander, "Had it not been for Sgt Block's superior devotion to duty and unselfish actions, I can truthfully and frankly say that our mission could not have been accomplished."

* See action east of Kurtscheid, page 147.

Thoughts, Reflections, and Loose Ends

The use of our support weapons was dismal -- used often in less than the best advantage, often at cross purpose, and often not at all. Support fire seldom seemed to be on immediate call, and not well coordinated. On Dec 14, when we hit the Pillboxes, German mortars were in action in minutes, and light artillery soon after. Where was our support? Some will argue that the Germans were defending from a set position and had support keyed in, and this is true. As the attacker, we should have had reasonable recourse to our support. We didn't.

On Jan 30 the few light 105mm that came overhead were ineffective, and even compromised our efforts. The barrage that hit the woods that night, while satisfying, ended long before we moved on the woods. Ideally, artillery should immediately preceed the ground attack and be in close enough proximity in time and distance as to be of some possible danger to the attackers.

At the Weid crossing I can think of no good reason why the guns back of the bluff were not pummelled in minutes by support fire. They were not.

At Oberhunden our support came late, and concentrated more on levelling the town than on destroying the German guns across the valley.

These instances are few among many, and reflect poor and deficient planning and execution.

Our accompanying armor offered good psychological support and fair transportation -- but these were not their primary tasks. I note in Lauer's book several instances where he proudly proclaimed that, by the time the armor reached the scene the infantry had already reduced the objective, beaten back the attack, or otherwise settled the issue. This should be deplored -- not applauded. Too ofter our armor seemed like rear baggage -- brought up after we had taken the objective, or pulled back when things got a little hot. Show me the proper use of armor at the Krinkelter Wald, at Ginsterhahn, at the roadblock the night before Hegenscheid, at Hegenscheid. The one exception in these actions was at Ginsterhahn, as employed by the Germans! In their counterattack there the German armor failed mostly because their covering infantry was driven off.

One cannot fail to note that, in many of our most crucial battles, surprise was compromised foolishly and unfortunately -- at the Pillboxes Dec 14, at the woods Jan 30, at Ginsterhahn... These were miscues of incalculable costs.

On the Krinkelt patrol we came across a German weapon new to our experience. Crude in appearance and cheaply built it, nontheless, was the precursor of today's generation of light automatic assault rifles (AR-15, M-16, AK-47, etc.), and was designated MP-43. It fired a short version (2/3) of the conventional German rifle round from a curved magazine, and was a more useful and formidable weapon than the MP-38 in that the velocity, range, and accuracy was greater. We were impressed by the volume of fire produced by these and other automatic weapons which were employed by the Germans in large numbers. Most modern forces have now gone that route, but I have reassessed my thinking about relying so heavily on such weapons. They are underpowered by WW 11 standards, inherently inaccurate in the automatic mode, and are largely unaimed as employed by their users, who prefer to spray the general area -- and they consume ammunition at a furious pace. Time and again American forces prevailed in firefights in which they threw a tenth of the total volume thrown. It speakes for itself -- aimed fire with long range capability versus unaimed fire with restricted range. Every hunter worth his salt knows the value of aimed fire over the scattergun approach. The modern infantry squad should have both capabilities, of course -- plus a light 40 or 50 mm mortar integral to the squad. In considering the consumption of ammunition by people equipped with a predominance of automatic weapons, I ask one question -- How often did the Germans expend their available supplies and have to fall back to obtain more, thus breaking off the engagement to our advantage?

To further assess automatic fire versus aimed single fire I pose the following to WW 11 vets and Vietnam vets alike: You are moving along a road, or through woods, etc., etc. Just ahead fire breakes out, initiating a firefight. In that instant; which had you rather that opening volley be, single shots, or automatic weapons fire? In my experience the answer is almost always, "an automatic weapon". The reason being that the first blast of automatic fire rarely results in casualties when you first go to ground, while the firefight heralded by a single shot, or shots, more often results in one or more casualties immediately.

I had considerable respect for the abilities of the German soldier, but didn't find him a paragon of virtue. As mentioned earlier, he was often prone to open defensive fire too early and from too great a range for maximum benefit (thank God). And I must add this comparison -- the same artillery tha t broke up many German tank and infantry attacks, and drove many German defenders from countless towns, villages, and woods all across Europe, failed to drive a platoon of American infantry from Hegenscheid. Probably the German soldier had no equal in rolling over a surprised and off balance enemy. But when that enemy managed to turn and fight intelligently, effectively, and willingly, the "perceived" superiority of the German diminished.

As for the American soldier, he had grave shortcomings also -- in many wars his reluctance to fight showed early. But when

the grim reality of war became painfully evident, when the grime and mud and blood and sweat and fear and mutilation and death assailed his perception of the world, when his anger at being humiliated on the battlefield as second best suffused his brain, then he began to grow into his proper role as an effective warrior. Given time to make the necessary psychological adjustments demanded by war, and properly trained, equipped, and led, he was a formidable and worthy opponent.

I must compliment the German soldier on his courage, particularly in attack situations. That courage was so often exploited and misused by his commanders.

An omission somewhere along the line failed to prepare us for the fact that we would seldom see our enemy except when he was dead, wounded, or surrendering. Observable targets being in such short supply (the Germans were too wiley for that), we were too sparing in our use of our available firepower. It was a lesson some soldiers never learned. Some infantrymen went through the war without ever firing their rifles (they also serve who only stand and wait). In too many actions a few men carried the brunt of the fighting simply because others failed to join their fire. Our base of fire was pitifully small on the morning of Jan 30. This was a case where the enemy was well concealed (no observable targets). But there may have been another facet to the problem of reluctance to fire -- some may have been squeemish about shooting at other men. Such men should not be infantrymen, for obvious reasons. I cannot understand a soldier who mourns at having had to shoot at an enemy, or an airman who mourns at having had to drop an atom bomb. There was ample and compelling reason and justification for both. Further, I think the world, if it would survive and be free, must forever honor those who did, and insure that there will always be enough of those who will.

Superior weaponry, correctly and timely employed, has considerable influence on successfully concluding a battle. Simply put, if you are going to a knife fight, always carry a gun. All combat must seek advantage -- to contest with an equal on equal terms and on equal grounds is sheer folly. Trusting to luck or providence may be worse.

99th Div suffered poor to nonexistent press during the war, forever diminishing the importance of our role. Who, other than us, knows today that we were kept on the secret list until after the fact in the Bulge, one of the greatest battles in history, or that we had similar treatment in much of the Remagen Bridgehead fighting and breakout, the Ruhr, and the Bavarian drive? Who knows that we were the first full division to cross the Rhine, or that Sam Visintine carried the first U.S. Army field kitchen across? Subsequent historians have been generous, but they can't rectify all wrongs. The real sore spot, of course, are some misconceptions about our Bulge activities -- namely, that we were saved by just about everybody else. Well, how about that, guys? Could it be the other way around or, at worst,

somewhere in between the divergent viewpoints? For sure, if 99th had not foiled German attempts in those early hours and first days, those divisions who moved down from the north to save us would have been unable to move south with any degree of impunity, and may well have been trapped where they were. So, who saved the situation? Obviously, the answer does lay somewhere in between. All benefitted from the actions of others. May the matter rest there. Perhaps we should ask what our enemy thought of 99th. Well, they were asked -- and their answers were affirmative, positive, complimentary, and congratulatory. We have little to hide or be ashamed of, and much to be proud of, else SHAEF, Army, Corp, and Div. commanders would have been less enthusiastic in their praise. And finally, most historians credit 99th with a remarkable stand. Peter Elstob, in his "Hitler's Last Offensive" added a further observation that 99th went on to become one of the best divisions in Europe. Many historians are content to leave us locked in our Bulge role, but the war did not end there, and we have rightful pride of participation in those remaining actions also.

We served in 1st Army and, later, 3rd Army. 3rd Army and its commander, Patton, were a bit flamboyant, and caught the eye of the Press and, like the U.S. Marines, tended to believe their own propaganda. Patton considered that his Army carried the greater load while "those gentlemen up north" were sitting on their hands. It must have come as a jolt when they came up from the south to drive into the Bulge from that quarter. Against poorly rated troops in the initial going, and in the land of "those gentlemen", in three weeks they sustained more casualties than in the previous five months of 3rd Army's existance. Patton observed, "We can still lose this war." 1st Army chalked up a few records too. In the six weeks of the Bulge, 1st Army sustained more battle casualties than MacArthur's entire command in the Pacific during the war. 1st Army also sustained more casualties than any other U.S. Army in WW 11, met and defeated more enemy, and conquered or liberated more territory. It was also slated, under Hodges, to be the main force in the projected invasion of Japan. But we were impressed when we joined 3rd Army -- we were required, under monetary penalty, to wear a tie when a few hundred yards back of the front. We were also forbidden to sleep in the towns we captured. Ruffians that we were, we failed to observe these niceties.

To be initiated into combat as a green soldier in a green outfit is bad. To be initiated into combat as a green replacement in a veteran outfit is bad. Every infantryman must do one or the other. Given a choice, most would prefer the former. We older men always felt sorry for the new replacements coming in, and did what we could to point them in the right direction to improve their survival chances. Nontheless, replacements came and went at an alarming rate, due mostly to their lack of combat savvy. Jim Bowers exercised a conscious

choice to join 99th in preference to becoming a faceless replacement in some unknown line outfit. I was glad my lot was similar. I once knew a man who rolled out of a truck and broke an arm to prevent himself being delivered to 106th Div -- he had recently recovered from wounds received in a veteran outfit.

The paradox of the new infantryman is to survive long enough to learn how to survive. While experience increases the chance of a soldier to survive, no amount of experience will eliminate the effects of occupying the same space in time with a bullet or shell.

The ties that bind soldier and unit are strong -- there is a sense of home, of belonging. We all want to be with the familiar when facing danger. I remember how anxious and forlorn I felt that night outside Krinkelt, lost off from Easy, and with very good prospects of having to face enemy tanks, etc. before morning in an unfamiliar outfit. I can't express my relief at finding my own company to die in -- I figured that would happen no later than dawn.

WW 11 was notable in that cut off troops were increasingly seen by astute commanders as having functions beyond simple surrender. I have often tried to visualize what havoc the cut off Regiments of 106th Div could have wrought if they had been properly and positively led east from the Schnee Eifel, and supplied, at least in part, by air. The Germans were flowing around the Eifel on the north and south -- almost nothing lay in 106th Divs path eastward. Cut off units should be taught and expected to move and fight and survive to a reasonable degree.

The souvineer thing didn't pan out too well for some. As mentioned earlier, none of the stuff I sent home by APO ever arrived. My Schmeisser MP turned up missing (I would have gotten it home). The beautiful field glasses I took from a German officer at Hegenscheid were stolen from me in Landshut. A sword I picked up for my brother in England was given similar treatment, as was a "lemon squeezer" Spanish 7.65mm automatic. I gave two pistols to other guys who had none. So I came home a bit light. I intended bringing home one of those busts of Hitler (we saw hundreds of them), but urinated on it most of that summer, instead.

Since the war it has become fashionable to criticize some models of the Tiger tank and TD as being too heavy, bulky, cumbersome, etc. Even the Germans often called them moving vans and elephants. And that is odd, for they were feared by allied soldiers above all else, and sought by German units as the panacea for their problems. In our passage across Europe it was rare to find one knocked out -- most often they were out of fuel, broke down, or simply abandoned. Despite its shortcomings and reputation it was the most deadly fighting vehicle of the war. In a slug fest with many tanks of today

it would still be a dangerous opponent.

A final comment on light infantry weapons -- everybody remembers, or should, that the low velocity, short range carbines were thrown aside in preference for the Garand in the Krinkelt fighting.

While we were attempting to enter the Krinkelter Wald with little or no support Jan 30, 2nd Div was using everything at their desposal to reduce enemy resistance at Krinkelt-Rocherath. 3,200 rounds of artillery were poured into the villages, and parts of two armored battalions supported the infantry in their attacks.

Everyone seems to have a pet theory as to why American Regiments have no "J" company in their 3rd battalions, so I take the opportunity to include my two cents worth. In I&R training, while doing message center work with written messages, we were taught that J and I were easily confused on battle reports and messages when hastily written and read, and when the messages were exposed to battlefield conditions of damp, mud, etc. J was eliminated as the most confusible letter.

In an issue of "Checkerboard", the 99th Div Association publication, one letter chastised another whose author purported to have heard 88mm shells coming in. The letter pointed out that the 88 was supersonic, thus could not be heard coming in until after the shell arrived. I consider the objection in error. Those who were on the Elsenborn front, and many other places later, heard thousands of 88s coming in. Though supersonic when leaving the gun, the speed of the shell decayed in flight and distance. This was particularly true when the gun was used in an artillery role of high trajectory in order to achieve distance. It is true, however, that a soldier being fired on point blank at short distance would not hear the firing of the gun or the flight of the shell until the shell had moved past his position.

There were some things many American soldiers couldn't, or made little effort to differentiate between; shrapnel and shell fragments, Tiger tanks and the lesser varieties, tanks and SP guns, 88mm and 105mm, artillery and mortar fire, Schu mines and Bouncing Bettys, etc.

As an Infantryman, and proud of it, I would have liked for Infantry to have had uniforms easily distinguished from others, something to definitely set him apart. The confusion of Air Force people with pants bloused over combat boots, a la Infantry, was unacceptable to us, as many a hapless airman discovered in dismay. The concept of Infantry having "weak minds and strong backs" must go, too! Infantrymen with weak minds are a bit like unguided missiles -- outdated. The Infantryman of the future (there will always be Infantry) will be required to have mental agility second to none.

The high command, the planners, the strategist -- all can think of war in terms of disrupting economies, of isolating battlefields, of denying sea lanes, plus a host of other high minded theories, until they tend to obliterate the final and ultimate harsh fact -- the final battles must be fought on the battlefields, ground must be taken and held and, for these tasks the infantryman always has, and always shall be the final arbiter.

Wars and wars ago somebody ordained that it was unseemly for veterans to talk of their experiences. This has, unfortunately, carried through to the present. Veteran and civilian alike, we have been conditioned to the idea that the veteran does not and should not talk about war, and that the civilian does not and should not ask. The silence and avoidance embarrass, as does breaking that code of ill advised restriction. When decorum or social mores demand silence one should be wary, for silence is often a lie. A society, in a world in which the condition of war plays such an omnipresent and omnipotent role, who chooses to suppress or ignore vital information concerning that condition places itself at dangerous disadvantage and risk. Will we not learn from lessons already taught?

As the war drew near the end there was much agonizing back home about how society was going to manage to control the returning combat men. Some people were so concerned that we would continue our "violent ways" it is a wonder we were allowed to come back at all. Little did they realize that old combat men generally are a mild mannered bunch who have no wish for violence. Indeed, they are often the most peaceable people around, having had a belly full of the violence crap.

There may have been quick and rare flashes of awareness of being a part of historically valuable events but, for the most one cannot, in the midst of battle, successfully stand apart from oneself to view and contemplate.

A few odd memories still persist; the beauty of WP shells exploding at night, creating fiery umbrellas. Standing short-arm inspection in nothing except a raincoat (it was always in extreme cold or rain or hot sun). Convincing a replacement at Udenbreth that he needed the finest footwear available, Shoe-Paks (I gave him mine for a pair of his new combat boots, my first). I am still amazed that we managed to keep going and function as well as we did with so very little sleep, sometimes as little as an hour in a couple of days, or worse. I remember also how fear would seem intolerable, and then would dissapate entirely, then return again with renewed vigor. That taught me that total fear is an extreme which can no more be sustained uninterrupted than can extreme pleasure.

A further word concerning the Tiger tank; Near the end of the war some armored units were being fitted with the Pershing

tank, our new Main Battle Tank which sported a 90mm gun. It was an impressive looking vehicle, and far better than the old Sherman it replaced. At the first opportunity I asked a Pershing commander how the Pershing stood up against the Tiger. The answer was, "When we come up on a Tiger, we turn around and run like hell!" Our Sherman crews certainly had some legitimate fears, what with Tigers, Teller mines, and thousands of Panzerfaust antitank rockets.

One German criticism of American infantry in attack concerned an alleged penchant for going to ground or cover when fired upon. I plead guilty of such on numerous occasions, and with much pride. We weren't there to oblige the Germans by presenting ourselves as clay pigeons for their sport. We were there to overcome -- and we did. Nor am I aware that the Germans limited their offensive options -- deceit, deception, and trickery, of a type heretofore unacceptable in warfare, were employed offensively and defensively to circumvent disaster and defeat. History records that the result was disaster and defeat.

At the time of the Bulge, we all heard about the long barreled German tank that, like a wounded and enraged beast, whirled and waltzed its way through several reinforced concrete utility poles in Krinkelt, snapping them off like match sticks with the long barrel of its cannon. We heard about the guy who ran into the street with a bazooka and kneeled directly in front of an oncoming tank in order to launch a rocket at a "can't miss" range. We heard of the cooks, KPs, and clerks who threw away their carbines and grabbed Garands for the fighting in the town. We heard of the TD being chased by a tank -- the TD turned down a side street to escape and, at the next corner, met a tank coming from the left, only a few feet away. Swinging the turret quickly to fire from the side position, the muzzle was so close to the tank that the backblast rocked the TD onto its side. We heard of the BAR man who piled up German bodies in the draw near the Olef Stream where we had our positions before moving to join the Roer attack. A MG was moved around his flank and finally took him out. We missed being there by a few days. And our first place on line along the border highway -- our guys were cut up badly there too. In those early days we seemed to be in the right place at the right time -- but fate would deal with us in due course.

Fear control for some simply consisted in refusing to contemplate or be concerned about that over which they could exercise no control. I was incapable of such. It has been said that "a coward dies a thousand deaths". In my mind I died a thousand times -- well, nine hundred and ninety nine, anyway. Bravery has its place and is admirable, even though bullets do not respect valor.

Enemy who surrendered and offered aid to our cause were often treated and viewed with derision and disdain, and referred to as

traitors, turncoats, etc. I diagree with such attitudes. Many were opportunists, of course. But many were following dictates of conscience, wishing to help end the nightmare in progress. The former had value to our cause, the latter deserved our honor. There were those among us who wished to take no prisoners, and I have commented on that elsewhere. I distinctly remember feeling that prisoners were welcome.

One of our little group in MG, a boy from G Co who had been wounded twice, said to me one day, "Tell the Lt I've gone back to the company." "Why," I asked? But I already knew -- most combat infantrymen knew. "The boys need me there," he said simply, and he slipped from the truck, heading back to G Co and his comrades. I couldn't bring myself to emulate his selfless act. We heard later that he was wounded again at the Danube.

In those last days we were flooded with people wishing to join us -- Russians and Poles who wished to help us fight the Germans, and Germans who wished to help us fight the Russians. The Germans were perplexed that we had no intention, or wish, to continue on until we conquered the world. In fact, they intended aiding us in that enterprise which they saw as a natural sequence to our having conquered them.

The news that the war in the ETO was over was received calmly and with gratitude by most combat men. I'm sure many, as I, reflected on the fact that they had survived -- it was a feeling of immense pleasure and relief. We were so taken with that pleasure and relief that we tended to forget that we must still eventually die, but that sobering thought did emerge in time.

That summer, Shapiro stopped by Hq Co one day en route back to E Co after being on leave. "Have you learned any more German besides 'eating, drinking, sleeping, pissing, shitting, and fucking'," I asked? "I don't speak any German," he said bitterly. "If the bastards want to talk to me, they will have to use my language!" That boundless, boisterous good humor was gone, as surely a casualty as is a physical wound.

A Frenchman once observed that the American Army was like a huge business that operated in inexorable fashion. I think we on the front felt that too, that if we didn't push ever onward we would surely be trampled by the minions behind us who planned and intended to construct and open vast supply depots, communications centers, fuel distribution points, et al on the ground where we stood. I sometimes suspected that , if we on the front were to disappear, the massive body to our rear would surely, almost overnight, construct overwhelming facilities atop the German defenders, innundating them remorselessly step by crushing step, ignoring the pitiful efforts of German shells, bullets, mines, etc. to forestall the inevitable. A different juggernaut to be sure, but a juggernaut nonetheless. Some have said, in fact, that WW 11 was the last government program that worked.

We all had a certain amount of unit pride and allegiance, so I include a couple of vignettes pleasurable to memory. Hq Co, 2nd Bn was garrisoned at Goldbach, near Aschaffenburg for about two months after the war. Some 2nd Div personnel in an outlying district were fed daily at our mess. Things were fairly amicable until a brawl erupted in a local beer hall one night between 2nd and 99th people. Seeing that it was going to get nasty, I made an early exit to the street, where I was almost hit by the piano coming through the window. A timely retreat, that. Anyway, prior to that night, 2nd Div people had been trucked to and from our mess three times a day by our vehicles, they having no transport of their own. Col Peters (bless his heart) saw to it that they marched to and from our mess three times a day thereafter. They were sullen and subdued, marching in and out the many miles.

We were moved from Goldbach to Marktheidenfeld in the middle of July, and a 6th Armored unit took over our former haunts. 99th people returned often to Goldbach to see girlfriends, etc. The armored boys, disliking the continuing bond between 99th men and the local womenfolk, waylaid some of our boys and beat them up rather badly. The next night the guys filled every vehicle available and invaded Goldbach, establishing a sort of curfew -- all armored people were swept from the streets and remained quietly inside. 99th visitors encountered no serious objections to their presence in Goldbach thereafter.

Leaving Germany in early August, our train stopped for a few minutes at a border crossing into France. Wanting to make it a special occasion, I shouted in my crude German to a German at the Bahnhoff, "Kamerade, wenn kann wehr weider kampf (when can we fight again)?" He thought gravely for a long moment, and shouted back, "In funf jahr (in five years)!" Thus did I leave dear old Deutschland.

Some of my most pleasurable moments over the years have been at those rare times when I was able to trade combat experiences with other combat men. All that is required is that the other fellow know what the hell you are talking about and what he is talking about, and that there is enough beer to keep the voice box reasonably damp and the stories flowing. Fakes are easy for a combat man to spot -- they tell the most outrageously bloody stories, for instance. But there are a dozen other ways in which they trip themselves up -- mostly, their stories just don't ring true. One such fellow, a Sgt at Ft Bragg (he had never served anywhere else), got the message when he found Sgt stripes sewn on his raincoat and all his long-johns (I helped sew 'em on, but all the old combat Doggies in the barrack were privy).

You old guys who made it through from start to finish unscathed are a very rare breed indeed -- the percent of line infantry who survive six months line combat is awfully low. As such, you can be considered authorities on infantry combat, for the average infantryman in WW 11 probably became a casualty in under two weeks.

Maybe there is some consolation in what we did, what we were a part of -- for we were an integral part of the leading edge in some of the most significant events of our time. Throughout human history this has been the destiny of a comparative few.

Those men encountered in this account no longer exist. Alas, we are not the people we were! We are not those young men who faced and endured the wrath of German fire, for they are only memories now. Nor are the Germans the same either. Friend and foe alike, they are long gone. We shall always carry our memories with pride, ever to be astonished by those days of our youth when we grappled in momentous events almost beyond our ability to envision. A black truck driver at Ft Bragg, thinking I was a recent recruit, told me of working the "Red Ball Express", and described with fascination how, one black night, he had come so near the front that he could actually hear the boom of artillery. What is extraordinary to one may be mundane to another, and all is relative. For sure, he too will always remember how near he came to being a part of "it".

Note: In addition to those named earlier, I also thank Donald Glisch, Alfred Gernsbacher, and Douglas Emerson for their letters.

The hard way, the hard way -- that's how you get there, the hard way...

Infantry song

For the Soldier in Battle Old Truths Remain

Few endeavors by mankind throughout recorded history have changed so much, and yet remained so implacably the same, as has combat -- for the things that drive men to battle, and the concepts that shape their behavior in battle, are near constant. That ancient story of battle, The Iliad of Homer, does much to enlighten us on that score, as shown by selected excerpts:

* "...destiny is a thing which no man can escape, neither coward nor brave man..."

Hector to Andromache

"...If to escape from this battle meant that we should never grow old and never die, I should not be fighting here in front,.. ...since whatever we do ten thousand chances of death are about us, which no mortal man can escape or avoid -- Forwards! whether we are to give fame to another, or he to us."

Sarpedon to Glaucos

"...he's often slain that wants to slay!"

Hector to Polydamas

* Translated by W.H.D. Rouse

The following is a Roster of 2nd Plt compiled by Jim Bowers about May 15, 1945.
** Represents those few original members who were with the platoon all the way from Camp Maxey, Texas to Haibach, Germany, where this list was compiled.
* Represents those original members whowere with the platoon at Camp Maxey and were returned from hospital.
The rest came in as replacements at various times. No list is available at this writing of those replacements who fell by the way, just as there is no list of the Maxey men who fell.

James S. Bowers **
Lester E. Timmerman **
William Frazier **
Lyell F. Thompson **

Eugene R. Domachowski *
James J. Diguilio *
Frank D. Fogg *
Edward Bonner *
Raymond E. Menge *
Carl E. Johnson *

George R. Burton
James F. Catron
Rolland V. Buscher
Walter H. Williams
Irving H. Shapiro
Joseph M. Dumond
James T. Butler
Frank C. Dekker
Floyd H. Wynn
Robert J. Whelan
Raymond C. Hand
Vincent J. Tanzola
John Burek
James W. Page
Joseph R. Murray
Domenico Caramagna

Allan Rogers
Corithans Green
Samuel Giles
John S. Rowland
Hobart B. Welborn
Salvatore Frangipane
Robert Brigode
Irving C. Grendell
David M. Casarez
Patrick T. Keenoy
Douglas Emerson
Robert Bates
Thomas Toomey
Joseph Safian
Avery Stone
Elmer B. Lien
James Burkhart
Benjamin H. Harvey
Bernard P. Howe
Joseph J. Grannatti
Leroy B. Andrick
Allan R. Stewart
Jack W. Hall
James W. Willeford
James T. McIntosh
Louis Rhodes
Frederick D. Bahn
Walter H. Vancleve

Unofficial and incomplete 2nd Plt KIA. * Denotes probable Maxey members (some uncertain).

Herman Allman *
Darrel L. Anderson *
Richard V. Carey *
Jay P. Kapple
Arthur P. Mongoy

Hugh Underwood
John Harboy, Jr
Charles Heffner
Benjamin T. Maynard
Johnnie D. Moore

A very few of many other E Co KIA. * Maxey members.

Roy Engelbretson * CO, Co E
Walter J. Hulda * Weapons Plt

William C. Ward *
Red Magee * 1st Plt

Unofficial and incomplete WIA or invalided from 2nd Plt.
* Probable Maxey men.

Edgar P. Mann * Plt Ldr
Garnard E. Harbeck * Plt Ldr
David O. Keyser * Plt Sgt
Sidney Lemaire *
"Frenchie" Laburere *
Henderson ? *
James Diguiallio *
Whiting *
Anthony Morelli *
"Swede" Swanson *
Urbon *
Raymond E. Menge *
Donald Glisch *
Bonner *
Neiderer *
Stewart *
Elliot Glass *
Alfred Gernsbacher *

Joe Jupko *
Carl Johnson *
Frank Fogg *
Homer Williams *
Ervin Benders
Loesch
Johnny Long
Ottis Williams
Walter Williams
Malin
Jewell
Floric
Mahon
One Man Squad ?
Gainer
Carr
James Moore *

Glisch and Loesch were twice wounded. Keyser was wounded a second time after moving to another outfit. Lt Orlando was wounded after moving to another outfit.

A few of those WIA or invalided from the rest of Co E

Carl S. Miller * CO, Co E
Donald O. Driscoll CO, Co E
Donald C. Sutherland CO, Co E
Andrew Bosetti *
Conley *

James F. Cavanaugh *
Calkins
Hettle *
Neidermeyer

1-919-793 3805

Roper, N.C. 27970
Rt 1, Box 745
Jan 23, 1985

Dear J.R,

I am glad we could trade a few observations about 2nd Bn actions, and particularly pleased to get some viewpoints from someone in Fox Company. Since the war I have been in contact with only 3 or 4 of the men I knew in Easy Company. Your comments on the Jan 30 actions interest me much - our experiences were similar. I was 2nd scout in the lead squad when Easy hit the woods that morning. Within minutes the company was damn near slaughtered. Oddly, the 1st scout survived, though wounded - and I survived without a scratch - unbelievable! When we followed you boys into the woods next morning (Jan 31), I was the only one from my squad that left Maxey, Texas in Sept. who was able to go in. It (Jan 30) was our worst day of the war. March 13, at Ginsterhahn east of Remagen was a bad day for Easy also. I was on patrol when my platoon hit the town. My squad was shot up bad that day, too.

We didn't have much of a problem when we returned to our holes night of Dec 18, but we heard that Fox had to scrap for their holes. Your comments in your letter bears that out.

Since E followed F into the woods morning of Jan 31 when 3rd Bn hit the woods from the other side, I would be interested in your account of Fox's entry into the woods. Did you run into opposition, or had the Germans pulled back during the night? Your comments will help fill in some missing information in my write up of what happened morning of Jan 31. Also, do you have any information about George company on Jan 30 - 31? Was your request for information to 2nd Bn members had much response?

Respectfully,
Harry S. Arnold