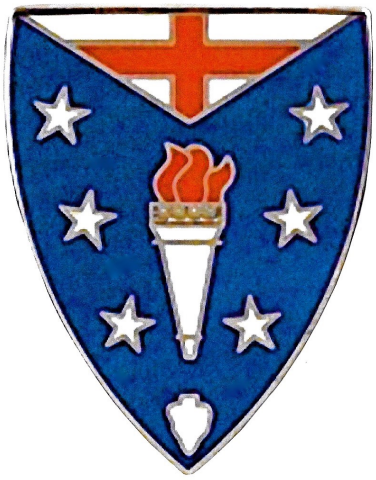
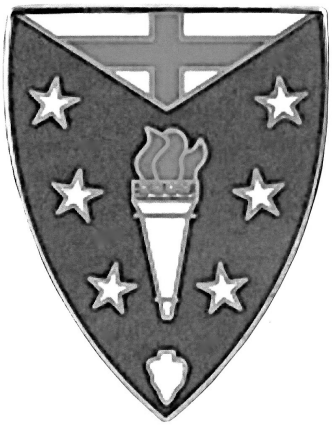
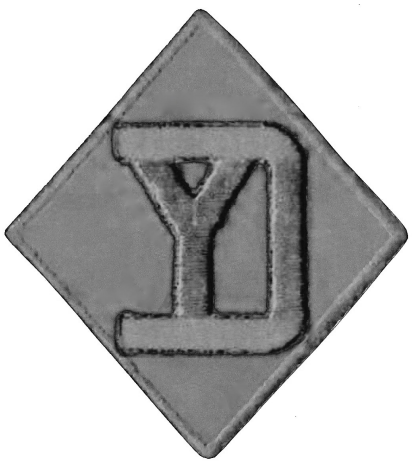


MY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES WITH THE YANKEE DIVISION IN WORLD WAR II

William W. Houle





MY MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES WITH THE YANKEE DIVISION IN WORLD WAR II

William W. Houle

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Typed and edited in 2007 by Ray Tonchen
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Also edited by Hilda Banks and Len Kondratiuk

This book is dedicated to the memory of
2nd Lt. Marvin B. Nelson
who died less than two weeks before
the end of World War II in Europe

Table of Contents

A Divine Role

The writer emphasizes that he is unalterably convinced that God was aware of the massive killing, terror, and vicious acts of evil governments. God unleashed the American sleeping giant and caused the Americans to rise and destroy these brutal, tyrannical, and murderous regimes of terror in Germany and Japan.

We cherish the victories which we gained. However, was the capitulation of the enemy a work of our military might or a directive of God?

Please recall that when people are called to perform the Lord's bidding, it is achieved at a cost or a price. The Lord will exact an exchange for his help. We paid with a half-million soldiers and millions of wounded to fulfill God's assignment.

So be it!

William W. Houle

Chapter I: Horrors, Oddities, and Necessary Realities of War

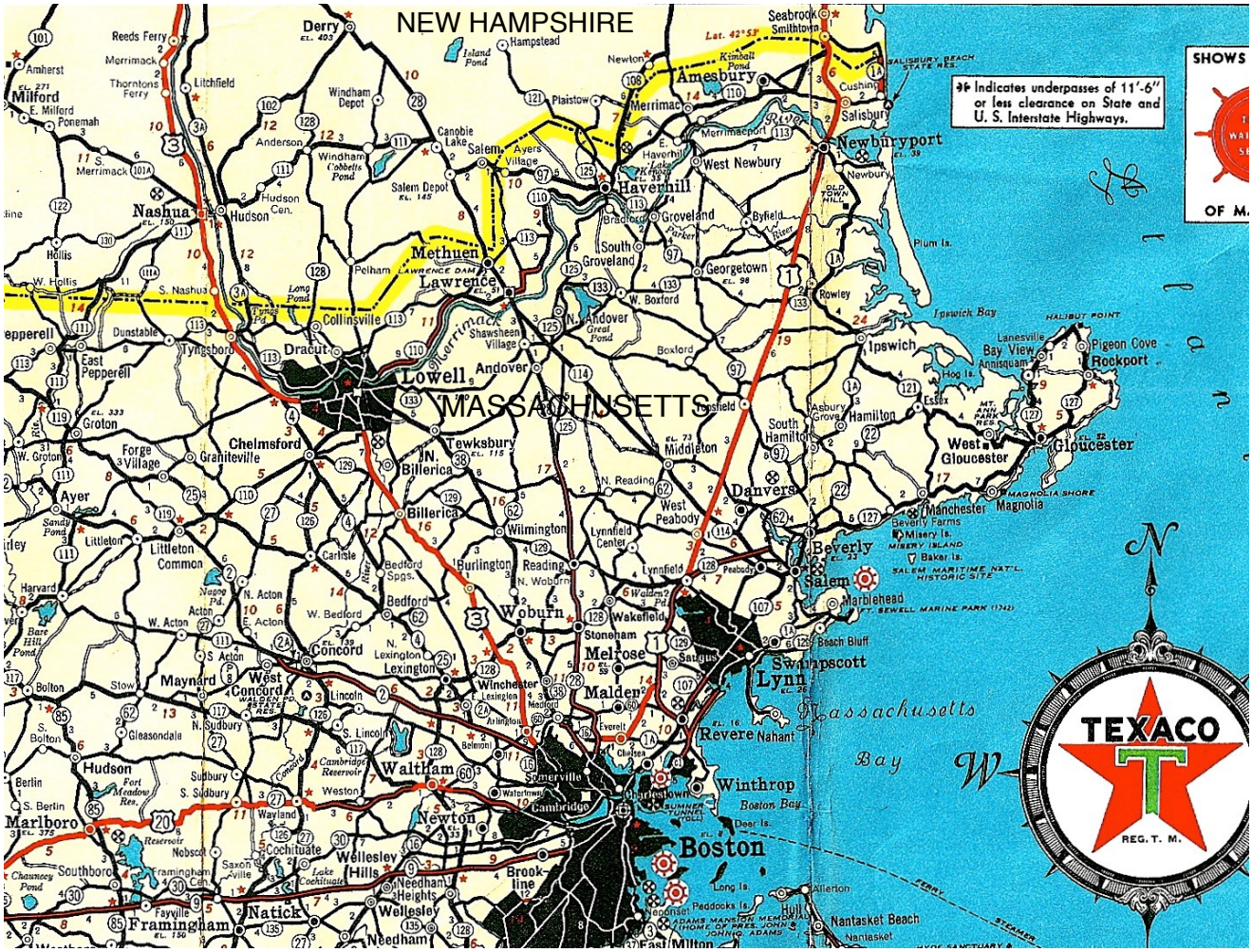
I want to start this memoir with part of a letter sent to me by Oskar Sperl who was a member of the Hitler Youth during World War II. Oskar is one of the few survivors of an encounter we had where 12 Germans were killed in a forest near Rohrmunz, Germany. Rohrmunz is located near Deggendorf. This encounter occurred the morning of 27 April 1945, and I was part of a 12-man reconnaissance squad operating directly under our battalion commander.

Prior to this battle, I had come to know 2nd Lt. Marvin B. Nelson. Lieutenant Nelson was well-known and admired among the troops. Interestingly enough, there was a Native American in the squad that Lieutenant Nelson led that morning. Lieutenant Nelson was shot and killed that day with a bullet to the head. Lieutenant Nelson was born on the 27th of October, shot and died on the 27th of April, and was 27 years old. Many years later I would relive these events, and I have chosen to honor his memory by dedicating this book to him.

These are the horrors, oddities, and necessary realities of war.

Below is a part of a letter from a German RAD [Reichsarbeitsdienst = German Labor Service] survivor, Oskar Sperl. He sent this letter to me giving his thoughts about the massacre that followed Lieutenant Nelson's death.

> After 57 years, I am still dealing with the events in the Rohrmunz Forest which occurred on April 27, 1945. Most of the labor service men were 16 years old. My place was opposite to the unlucky man who was shot. As a patrolman, I was alone at a horse and cart near the Loos River. Obviously, the first two bullets were meant to hit me, but they missed my head. Then the gun battle started at the upper narrow pass, and I became ear witness of the loud screams of the Indian. Then the sound of an engine started, and I couldn't identify anything more. Suddenly, two GIs appeared in apprehensive proximity holding two submachine guns ready to fire. I threw away my rifle and hid behind a small rock. I intended to shout, "Please, do not kill me. I want to surrender. I am alone!" They passed without looking at my rock.
>
> Later, when I went to the battlefield, I saw the smashed skulls of my comrades. After dusk was falling, there was rifle shooting again. That was reason enough for me to disappear finally. The next day, after a temporary PW [prisoner of war] captivity and questionings, a bullet hit me at the Danube River. It went through my upper arm and 30 cm approximately 1 ft. by the lends [*sic*]. I was cared for well in a US Army Aid Station, and it meant the end of war to me. At no time and no occasion was the conduct of the US soldiers criticized negatively after the death of LT Nelson all these following decades. Nobody had any understanding that he had to die due to his peaceful intention. His fate has also occupied us as well as that of our dead comrades. Thanks to you [Bill Houle] and Mr. Haberl, his personality and family mean something to us. — Oskar Sperl



Northeastern Massachusetts 1940 Road Map
[Full credits for all maps and photographs in this memoir can be found on pages 54-55.]

PFC Bill Houle posing with his brother's .22-caliber rifle in Newbury, Massachusetts, just before going over to France with the 26th Infantry Division

Chapter II: Civilian to Veteran

Growing Up

My name is William Worthen Houle. I was born on 29 May 1924 in Newburyport, Massachusetts. My parents came from nearby Amesbury, MA. Dad, the son of a factory worker, made silverware and was a graduate of Wentworth Institute in Boston. My mother was a housewife and raised my brother and me. My sister was killed in a car accident in 1930 when she was only seven years old.

I grew up on the northeast coast of Massachusetts in Newbury. We lived on a small farm that was more of a hobby than a commercial operation. Our family raised rabbits, apples, peaches, and pears along with a wide variety of vegetables that we sold at our farm stand.

From our home I could view the Atlantic Ocean in all its majesty. From our attic I could see the ships in Boston Harbor. They were mostly freighters and the occasional passenger ship. The harbor was about 25 miles away, so the ships looked the size of footballs.

Down the road in Rowley was the Clam Box. This little place served fresh and day-old clams, scallops, shrimp, and fish. During the summer, folks could be seen lined up outside waiting for their meals. The Clam Box serves some of the freshest and best tasting seafood along the coast. In May 2004, when I was back in the area, we stopped in for lunch and to travel back in time.

From the sixth grade on, I worked at various jobs for our elderly neighbors, mowing lawns, raking leaves, putting up storm windows and screens, harvesting hay, and any other odd jobs that came along. Down the road from us was the sleepy town of Hamilton where the Ayer family had a large estate. Father always pointed that out to me when we passed it on our trips to the other small towns in the area. We used to drive by their mansion where my father did some plumbing work. My dad and I would see the Ayers and their guests playing polo on occasion in those innocent times between the world wars.

I graduated from Newburyport High School in 1943. Though I participated in a college preparatory program of studies, my transcript read, “This student is not recommended for college acceptance.” To its credit, Newburyport High had very high academic standards. Unlike in the Vietnam War era, during World War II no one got a deferment for going to college. I chuckle at this today since I’ve earned my bachelor’s degree in secondary education; a master’s degree in education with a specialty certification in elementary education; and worked my way through all of my Ed.D. program, quitting near the end because of the politics of the situation and just wanting to be with my family more, but I eventually earned that one too.

On Monday, 8 December 1941, there were many, many empty seats at the Newburyport High School morning assembly when most listened to President Roosevelt ask Congress to declare war on Japan. Soon after, Germany declared war on us, and the most desperate times of the 20th Century were upon us.

Sports was part of my high school preparation. I played football, ice hockey, and ran track where I ran long-distance races from the half mile to the six mile. I didn't join many clubs and was a bit of a loner since I had to work the jobs I spoke of to supplement our family income. Not that we were poor, but we were just coming out of the Great Depression, and money was still tight. The rest of my high school days were filled with typical activities. I saw many friends and classmates being drafted, which left many social opportunities open to those of us who were waiting our turn to serve our country.

In March 1943, during my senior year, I received my draft notice. Prior to my induction, the mood of the area was depressed to morbid. Our Pacific fleet had been decimated. We were losing in North Africa, and my world was in a desperate situation. But reports of the Midway engagement had reached us, and it looked as if the tide was turning in our favor. Patriotism was at an all-time high, but we knew we still had one hell of a fight ahead of us. Rationing of all commodities was on, and plants that turned out commercial goods had all become defense factories. Every woman who could was working in these plants so the men could serve in the military.

One day, those of us who had been drafted had to go to the draft board instead of school. After going to Boston for inprocessing, physicals, and the like, we went back to the draft board where we were mustered into a large hall. It was a democratic process. They would pick the first 10 guys for the Navy, the next five for the Marines, the next one for the Coast Guard, and the rest of us went into the Army which included the Army Air Corps, the forerunner of today's Air Force. I got picked for the Army.

The draft board insisted that we were to finish high school prior to shipping out for basic training. Less than a month after graduation, I received my orders to report to Ft. Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts. This was about a 50-mile drive from home. After a few days of further inprocessing, we received our academic tests, inoculations, haircuts, and uniforms, and sent our civvies home. Basic training was at Ft. Benning, Georgia, right on the Georgia-Alabama state line.

We were still numb with the resocialization process that a new recruit experiences when first entering the military. While not having been issued a rifle or firing a shot, we already had a common bond with young men whose ancestors had fought for our country since the American Revolution. Massachusetts was known for this kind of spirit, and we were in the thick of it.

To this day the towns of Lexington and Concord still argue about where the first shot of the Revolution was fired, “the shot heard round the world.” Bragging rights are a big part of our national spirit, whether we are talking sports, academics, or national defense. If we lose this confidence, we will never be able to win another war. During World War II all of these elements came together.

Army Training

Basic training during wartime tends to be more reality oriented when you realize that, if you don’t pay attention to what is being said, it really could cost you your life or leave you forever handicapped or scarred. During the next four months we drilled, fired weapons, went on field marches, and learned to survive the rigors of the outdoor environment.

The training was excellent and, in retrospect, prepared us as well as it could for combat. However, there is no way to really prepare for combat. Until it happens, it is impossible to determine who will be a hero, who will be a coward, or anything in between. War is hell. However, it is the unknown that plays on your mind more than anything else. You live month by month, week by week, day by day, and minute by minute sometimes with death tugging at you. Nothing can prepare you for that type of mental stress.

After basic training, we were transferred by troop train from Columbus, Georgia, to Bangor, Maine, then driven several miles north by bus to the University of Maine in Orono. This was where my ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) was. I studied pre-engineering. I finished in February 1944.

Orono’s weather is comparable to that of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Much snow and very cold temperatures were the noticeable climate elements.

During one of the coldest nights, a dormitory burst into flames. The only fire trucks available had to come from Bangor, ten miles away. When the fire trucks arrived, the firemen discovered that the water hydrants were frozen. We watched soldiers in rooms adjoining those on fire making rescue ropes from sheets. Because of the flames, the soldiers could not use the hallways to escape, and the rooms were too high to jump from. Several soldiers who were trying to be rescued grabbed sheets which were being swung in their direction. The two soldiers who died in the fire were named Gooden and Gunther.

After finishing my ASTP courses, I was assigned to the 104th Infantry Regiment of the 26th Infantry Division. The 26th is more commonly known as the “Yankee Division.” This was a National Guard division from Massachusetts and one of the oldest units in the army. While it was not by my design, I did at least receive a taste of being “home.”

Training maneuvers for the 26th were in Tennessee, east of Murfreesboro. There was no fort or camp involved. This was open land with only small villages and farms. This area was very similar to the French countryside where we would be fighting just a few short months later.

During these maneuvers, we would sometimes get our hands on some local "white lightning." You couldn't drink more than a thimbleful of the stuff at a time since it was about 185 proof. Putting it into a C-Ration can and lighting it also worked well, with the result being a canteen cup full of hot coffee. Our rations were supplemented when we came across a farm. More often than not, we would get a ham and eggs meal regardless of the time of day. These folks were more than happy to provide us with this.

Maj. Gen. Willard S. Paul was the boss here in the States and, for that matter, our division commander until the war ended. What we didn't know at the time was that we were to become part of Third Army. At this time Lt. Gen. George S. Patton was "in charge" of a phony U.S. army group said to be in England that was intended to deceive and thereby keep the 15th German Army and its reserve panzer [armored] divisions in the Calais region during the Normandy invasion, "Operation Overlord." This deception saved many lives and was probably due to the "slapping incident." It is funny how a couple of incidents that seemed insignificant at the time actually helped set the strategic stage for Overlord.

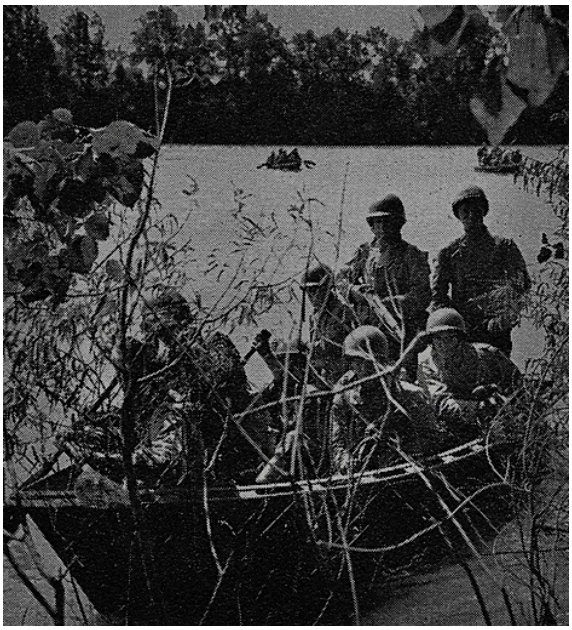
Letter from Jim Rose: Thanks, Ramsey! Amen

I received the following letter from Jim Rose on 26 March 2004 describing a training accident that occurred sixty years earlier on the Cumberland River in Tennessee. This letter was entitled "Thanks, Ramsey."

> It took a very long time to realize that the extremely narrow escape that I had during the stateside spring combat maneuvers in 1944 was not the result of a lucky rabbit's foot or some officer pulling rank. It was my great fortune (the goose-bump/hair-raising kind!) that my buddy was Bill Ramsey.
>
> Our company was involved, at this very special time, in a night-time attack. Of course, in that area the rain storms had to be typically unusual, which made being outside a very big trial for this asphalt-jungle city boy. Any part of the landscape that had even a slight slope depression allowed rapid overflowing streams of water to gush forth. Mother Nature's special gifts included the behavior of the local river that we were to cross during this cold, rainy, and mud-hampered endeavor. (No matter how bad—or good—times were to become now or during the next months, it was always a pleasure to remember that this is where I wanted to be, with these soldiers.)

(continued)

We had dressed up by putting on everything—helmets, O.D. fatigues, field jackets, overcoats, raincoats, cartridge belts with packs, and maybe overshoes, and, of course, our rifles—planning to be prepared and also to try to stay warm no matter for what and how long. My buddy and I, being little people, must have looked like stuffed toys—and maybe walked the same way! I had the feeling that this operation was well planned and highly organized, and, being guided by our non-coms and officers, off we went.



Infantry-filled assault boats crossing the flooded Cumberland River on the night of 22 March 1944. This maneuver resulted in the 26th Infantry Division's worst tragedy of its pre-combat days: 20 men, mostly from the 104th Infantry Regiment's Company B, were lost when their boat flooded and was washed downstream.

The memory of the early part of our movements has faded, although I can still recall strong hands guiding and helping us under and over obstacles. Now the last part remains clear because of the shock and horror, and maybe even for a short time, denial. It all had to do with the river crossing. I was truly amazed and apprehensive—like, oops!—as the river came into view at the established and operating place—oh, boy! Here was this monster torrent of water, maybe a couple of hundred feet across, churning and barreling along between the short, low bank on our side and a high bank on the far side, not then visible. The group of men, near the long, slim pontoon-type boats being tightly held, included the handlers, the drivers, and the loading officers, a lieutenant and a captain.

One boat had just left; the next was positioned and being filled with our platoon with maybe fifteen rows of two men each, tightly packed, when suddenly this loud "discussion" started: The single bar, "This one is already overloaded!" The double bar, "We need to hurry up. Put these two [us] on right now!"

Ramsey and I snapped to and stuffed ourselves cozily in with the driver. I proceeded to get ready to ditch by putting the rifle down, unhooking the pack from one shoulder, and unbuttoning everything down to my underwear—Oh my, I could have been the only one!

(continued)

The outboard [motor] roared and into it we went. The driver headed sharply up stream for compensation. The destination was prompted by a single dim light above the far bank. (The water people use two in-line spaced lights or targets, the near one lower to establish and maintain azimuth/precise direction.) The driver, then, used the powerful motor and his skill to cause our boat to move rapidly in a huge arc that landed us on the far shore in an area that was being used to unload the troops and allow the boats to return across for another group.

We climbed the bank, which could have been about twenty feet high, and as we waited for a command to form up and move out, we looked back to see the next boat as it made the crossing; there was some night light that was reflected off the water that made most of the river barely visible from where we stood. Their motor roared, but instead of heading sharply upstream (it might have been this driver's first time), he kept the bow of the narrow loaded pontoon-type boat headed toward the single light. This caused the back end to rotate sharply downstream. Suddenly he realized what was happening and made his last, and fatal, decision: He gunned the motor! Quick as a wink, the bow went under the water, and the boat raced out from under all the combat-clothed men as they floated free. It took about five or ten seconds for their screams and cries for help to fade away as they were all swept downstream. With a group "Oohh!", we were stunned quiet. The only sound then was the falling rain and the water rushing by. Suddenly the roars of everyone near and far burst out. We had witnessed a battle lost by all of us to Mother Nature's relentless power.

I know that these sights and sounds will always be with me as long as I have memory.

Hey, thanks, Ramsey! Now Bill had told me that he planned to become a preacher. So, I think that he asked the Lord for a safe passage, and, because there were not many in the world like Bill Ramsey, the Lord saved him for a life service! Now, don't you know, there I was by his side! Since I realized, after a long time, what may have truly occurred, I have been thanking both him and the Lord!

——————— THANKS, RAMSEY! ——— AMEN! ———————

— S/Sgt. Jim Rose, 3rd Platoon, B Company, 104th Infantry Regiment, 26th Infantry Division

A Pleasant Ride from Tennessee to Fort Jackson

It seems that our truck had serious brake problems, and the repair truck took so much time that we missed moving with our convoy. Once we did get going, the routes we were taking did not appear to be the direct route used by the convoy. After a few hours of driving we were traveling on side roads. Next we were traveling on hills with dirt roads. Finally, after climbing up several hills, we were driven to a tiny farm and the driver parked among kids, pigs, cows, and hens.

The lieutenant in charge and the driver left the truck and entered this little farmhouse. We were told to take a long break. As it turned out, this farm was the black truck driver's family home. The driver and lieutenant went into the house to eat a dinner prepared by the driver's mother.

The landscape was beautiful. The weather was perfect. My group of soldiers enjoyed heating our rations over a bonfire. About an hour later we moved on for a solitary trip the rest of the way to Ft. Jackson.

Encounters with MPs and Sheriff Deputies

Once at Fort Jackson, life changed a bit. Many of the soldiers from down south were stationed back in their home towns. We were northerners in the "Good 'ol boy" South.

Our stay at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina, was for advanced unit training. Generally, the period was uneventful and satisfactory.

However, our visit was marred by one disturbing event. Many of the maintenance soldiers were from the area. These soldiers had second jobs in the city of Columbia working as taxicab drivers and gas-station attendants. Also, many of these local soldiers were military policemen.

The MPs were very arrogant and attempted to be bully boys. The taxicab drivers picked up soldiers who had been drinking, drove them to the city dump fourteen miles out of town, and "rolled" their fares.

The local soldiers who moonlighted thought themselves to be tough and "macho." The soldiers from the 26th Division had had enough of these southern tough boys. Word was passed throughout the ranks to meet in Columbia to teach these "Southern Toughies" a lesson. Our commanding general was tipped off about our plan. Consequently, he grounded us.

However, a few days later our plan was activated. The Yankee Division boys turned over many taxicabs and beat up the drivers. A special treat was in store for the “Tough Boy” MPs. A young boy or girl would be given a dime and told to run up to an MP and tell him that a fight was going on in an alley or behind a building. Suddenly, the “Tough Southern MP” collided with the fist of a Yankee “Polack” or “Dago.” It is amazing how the attitude of the once-tough MPs and taxi drivers changed for the better after that.

In May 2006, I was in a restaurant in Sterling Heights, Michigan, near my hometown. Joe Schmitz and I had just finished a program about our war experiences at a local school. We had our jackets on with our unit patches and combat medals that we wear to these events. The waitress put down the check and a few seconds later she picked it up again. The waitress didn’t return with the check. When we went to leave the restaurant, we found out that a couple of deputy sheriffs had paid our check.

The deputies were pointed out, and we thanked them. One of the deputies had just returned from Iraq. There is a bond, a brotherhood between combat veterans, regardless of the generation you fought in. This is one aspect that cannot be expressed in words but must be experienced to be fully appreciated.

How to Screw Up

The Army does have its lighter side. This story, which will end those about my training days, seemed to have some poetic justice and brings back some of the acronyms that came out of the WWII period. Many of them can still be heard today and are just as applicable.

During our stay at Ft. Jackson someone passed down an order that all BARs (Browning Automatic Rifles) were required to undergo a bluing process, which protects the steel from rusting. This required that all the BARs in my battalion had to be taken to the Artificer Sergeant who operated the bluing process. The weapons were all disassembled and the various parts put into steel baskets. The baskets were dipped into a solution for a period of time.

We Americans are believers in interchangeable parts. The Artificer Sergeant must have had the same notion. After the bluing process, an attempt to reassemble the BARs was made. Unfortunately, the interchangeability factor did not exist. The time required to fit the correct parts in the appropriate rifles took several days. Although only forty rifles were disassembled, it was extremely time consuming matching compatible parts into the correct rifle.

Oh well. TARFU, FUBAR, and SNAFU are always close by.

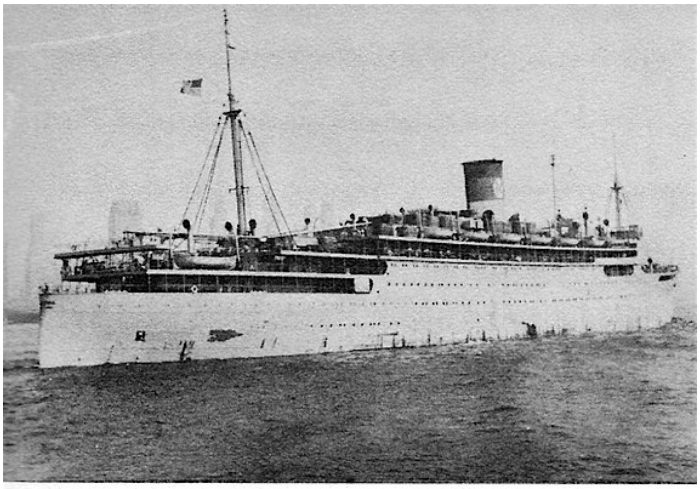
That was the end of my stateside training.

Chapter III: Off to the War

Across the Atlantic and France

The 26th Division was shipped to Europe during the summer of 1944 and had the distinction of being the first infantry division to ship directly from the United States to France. Our convoy was the largest to ever sail from America to Europe. If my numbers are accurate, 156 troop ships plus numerous destroyers and other Navy ships to fend off U-boat attacks were in the convoy.*

A trip across the Atlantic in a troop ship is an unforgettable experience. Our regiment, the 104th, and other units totaling 9000 troops were squeezed onto the converted passenger liner named the SS *Argentina*. To feed that many soldiers, the chow lines continued around the clock. Shower and toilet facilities were horrible. The bunks were stacked five high.



The S. S. Argentina before taking on its human cargo. "It brought us over to France". (Courtesy Moore McCormack Line).

The weather was clear and warm. The August sea was calm. The *Argentina* was located near the center of the convoy. The convoy covered a huge area. I climbed as high as I could reach and peered in all directions. The end of the convoy could not be seen.

A short period for exercise and fresh air each day was extremely welcome. The ship traveling on our right, or south, side was a converted cattle ship loaded with WACs. We could tell they were female because they hung out their panties each day to dry.

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* *The History of the 26th Yankee Division* agrees that this was the largest convoy ever to sail between America and Europe but says the convoy consisted of only 101 ships of all kinds. — ed.

Upon anchoring offshore at Cherbourg, we were transported by LSTs to the shore. From the landing area we were moved by truck through several villages to an area near St. Mere Eglise.

In each village we passed through, kids were yelling at us “Mademoiselle zig-zig for chocolate.” These kids were pimping for their sisters, aunts, or mothers. This was my first impression of France. My perception of France hasn’t changed a bit since.

While we were in our bivouac near St. Mere Eglise, I was on guard duty late one night. I heard a commotion coming from the officers tent located in the next field. The next morning Major Donaldson appeared with a distinct black eye. He was our battalion commander, and many soldiers in my company wished they had had a chance to give him the black eye or blacken the other eye.

The famous Red Ball Express was partly manned by drawing 3000 soldiers from the 26th Division to drive a fleet of trucks carrying supplies from the Cherbourg area to the rapidly advancing Allied armies rushing across France. These supplies were critically necessary to keep the armies moving!

While waiting on the Cherbourg peninsula, we appropriated flour from our supply and took it to French bakeries to have them make us some edible bread. Trading cigarettes and chocolate for cognac was also a flourishing enterprise.

As soon as the Red Ball drivers returned at the end of September, the whole division moved to the Alsace-Lorraine front to join the Third Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. After the 104th Regiment relieved part of the 4th Armored Division, we settled in a defensive position. This is the time when we soldiers became combat infantrymen. The series of events that took place from October to early December was murderous and vicious.

In a few days of active defense, we lost a number of men to mortar, artillery, and gunfire. One soldier covered his foxhole with corrugated sheet metal. Under the cover of fog and darkness, a German patrol sneaked into our lines undetected. A German lifted the metal and fired his pistol into the foxhole. The soldier was hit in the legs but survived only to die a few days later. The weapons platoon sergeant was leaning over to pick up his canteen cup of coffee when he was struck by numerous pieces of shrapnel in the buttocks.

The Battle for Moncourt Woods

An attack was planned to capture a hill to our left and drive the Germans out. The attack was planned for daylight on 22 October.

Moncourt Woods, a small forest area near the village of Moncourt, made a perfect German observation post from which artillery fire could be trained down upon us. It was also an area where several roads came together. The tactical value was, of course, obvious, so we had to take it. I didn't get involved in the fight until about midday. There were 185 casualties (killed, wounded, and captured) that day from B Company alone. (See map on page 20.)

A combat group was assembled from the 3rd Battalion for this attack led by Cpt. W. W. Traska, commander of I Company.*

Several German soldiers surrendered and were taken to the rear. As some of the prisoners were passing my foxhole, one of them spoke to me in an almost hysterical manner. He yelled, "Espanol! Espanol!" It was evident that he did not speak German. I attempted to speak to him in French because there seemed to be a resemblance to French. "Espanol" means Spanish. It seems that he was a member of the Spanish Blue Division which, along with other Spanish divisions, was sent from Spain to fight with the Germans.

The following incidents have contributed to my many major health problems since World War II.

At Moncourt Woods, on or about 24 October 1944, elements of my battalion endured a thunderous German artillery attack. A number were killed and many were wounded. After we took our objective, the severely wounded and dead soldiers had to be removed. Another soldier and I were ordered to use a stretcher to carry the body of a friend nicknamed "Tiny" back to the collection station. "Tiny," from Chicago, was 6'4" tall and weighed close to 300 pounds. Additional help was not available. We slid and tripped, and our feet would get stuck in the mud. To add to these problems, we had to break our way through a grape vineyard. Following this ordeal, my legs, ankles, feet, back, and shoulders hurt for days.

This soldier called "Tiny" was Pvt. John P. Conroy. As we lifted his body onto the stretcher, his brain fell out of his head. The top portion of his skull had been torn off by shrapnel.

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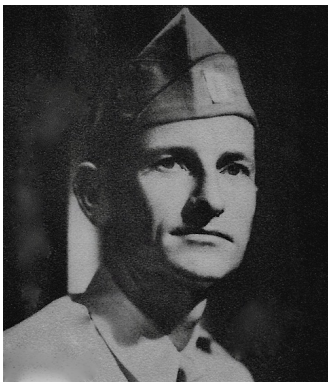
* The author was in Company I, 3rd Battalion, 104th Infantry Regiment, 26th Infantry Division. The 26th Division contained three infantry regiments, the 101st, 104th, and 328th. Each regiment consisted of a headquarters and headquarters company, and three battalions. Each battalion contained three rifle companies and one heavy weapons (heavy machine guns and mortars) company. Companies A, B, C, and D made up 1st Battalion; E, F, G, and H, 2nd Battalion; I, K, L, and M, 3rd Battalion. Companies D, H, and M were the heavy weapons companies. ("J" was skipped because, in old English script, "I" and "J" look too similar.) — ed.



Cpt. W. W. Traska
Commanding Officer of
Company I

During the Moncourt battle, I recall Captain Traska raging about tree bursts. At one point during the attack, I crept along a storm ditch and came upon a soldier. I spoke to him, but he did not reply. I crept beside him and rolled him over. He was a dead second lieutenant. I had to move on and did not look at his dog tag for his name. As I crawled further toward the woods, I noticed many wounded soldiers. The shelling finally stopped due to heavy American bombardment of the distant German artillery. As I recall, two American P-47s strafed the German artillery. After we took control of the hill, we helped remove dead and wounded Americans.

A very tragic twist to the battle took place. When the attack started, a very short, stubby-built, older soldier passed me. He said that he had fought with the 26th Division for the same hill during World War I and for sentimental reasons requested assignment from his position in the Division Postal Service to my battalion. Tragically, he was killed during the ensuing battle.*

The Battle for Morville-les-Vic**

A few days later, on 9 November 1944, as part of Third Army's "Lorraine Offensive," we launched a major attack in the direction of Morville-les-Vic, France. We had spent the night before in the woods on a sloping hill and dug in for the night. In the morning we went across a wide flat area almost like a marsh. We went across on a wooden footbridge that the engineers built. Then we came to a hill northwest of Morville. There was a road and storm ditch crawling around the hill. We had a very difficult time capturing that hill. Vicious fighting took place as we assaulted the west side of the hill, and we lost a lot of guys. I believe about eight in my company were killed.

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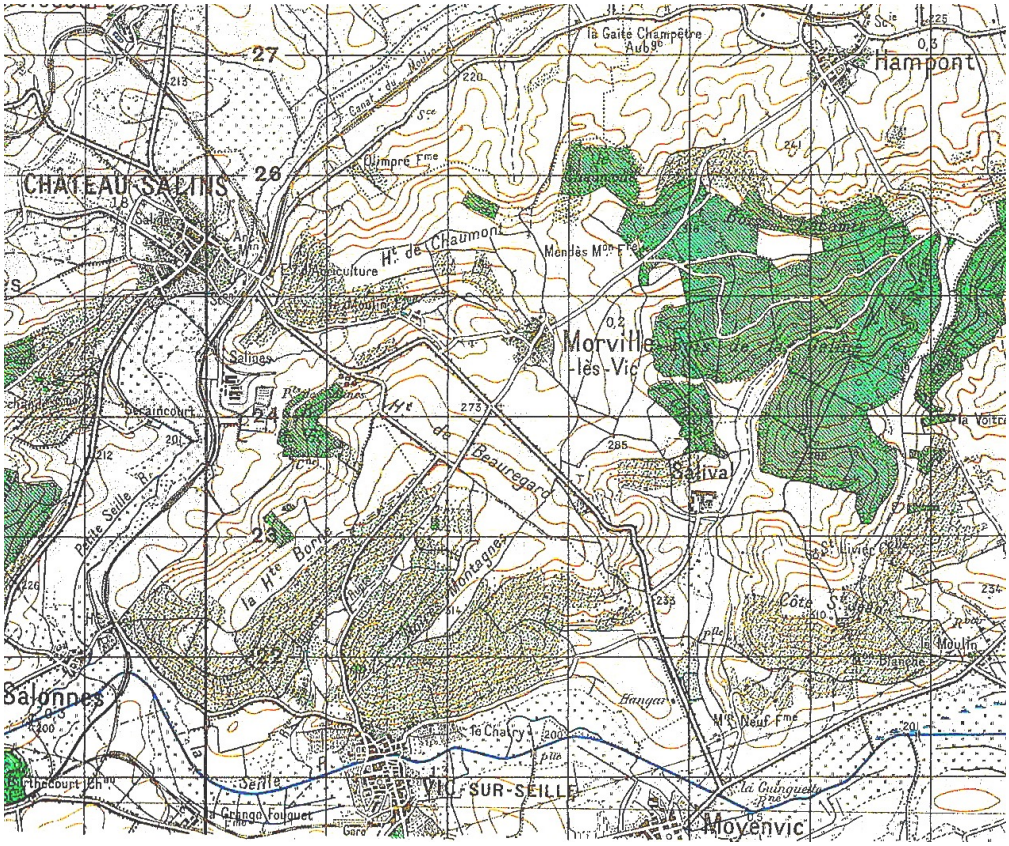
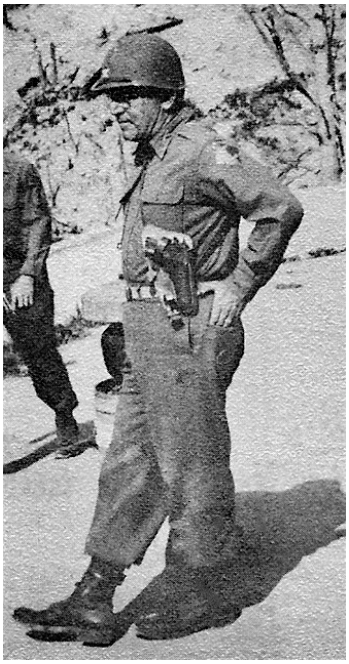
* This soldier was probably Pfc. Sven R. Chilstedt, who served in Company A of the 104th Infantry Regiment. Chapter 6 of *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945: 104th Infantry Regiment* says Chilstedt had served in this company during World War I. In spite of his age, he insisted on being assigned to this same company again. He died in action during the attack on Moncourt Woods. — ed.

** This section and the one titled "Wounded" are combinations of the author's writings from his memoir's first draft in 2007 and a 2018 telephone interview of the author by Joe Wilson, Jr., which is quoted on page 140 of the chapter titled "Whatever Happened to the 761st Tank Battalion?" in Wilson's book, *The 758th Tank Battalion in World War II*. — ed.



Region Around Morville-les-Vic from a 1944 Army Map (Each grid box is 1 km x 1 km.)

Our regimental commander, Col. Dwight T. Colley, an army reserve colonel from Rhode Island, and our company commander, Captain Traska, were severely wounded along with many others. This happened while they were leading from the front rather than from the rear. Colonel Colley had gone up to his lead battalion, which was 3rd Battalion at that time, and said he would lead the assault himself. This is what General Patton expected from his officers. By the end of this battle, all of I Company's officers had been wounded.

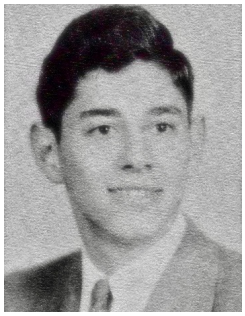


Col. Dwight T. Colley
Commander of the
104th Infantry
Regiment

Because we were moving rapidly, our machine guns would rest whenever the gunner hit the ground. An account of this action by Al Burke in *Yankee Doings* said that Colonel Colley was brandishing a .45 pistol and slapping soldiers in the ass with his swagger stick. The colonel did have a swagger stick, but I did not see him strike any soldiers. I am not willing to accept the notion that the colonel whacked some soldier in the butt. But if the GI got it, he earned it! I trust that I am not contradicting Al. We owe him a big "thank you" for bringing this important event to our attention.

Colonel Colley was wounded about 150 feet to my left. He was yelling, “Go get the Boche!”, as he pointed to the top of the hill. He yelled to several soldiers, “Get going up the hill!” One soldier said, “I’m waiting for my sergeant.” Colonel Colley replied, “I am your sergeant. Let’s go!” At this point he disappeared behind some bushes and small trees out of my line of sight. I distinctly heard a soldier, who was near Colonel Colley, yell, “The colonel got it!” I could hear soldiers talking loudly about the colonel, but I could not distinguish their words. Colonel Colley was severely wounded, but he survived and was sent back to the States. And, I’ll be darned, before the war ended he was back over there with us.

To carry this incident further, the nurse who cared for Colonel Colley during the hospital flight back to the States became a member of my Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter 1818 located in Fraser, Michigan. By 1996, this Purple Heart chapter had 120 members, 12 of whom were Yankee Division veterans.



John F. LaForte

I remember John LaForte from Sacramento, California. The platoon sergeant yelled, “That’s LaForte! He’s dead!” And sure enough, it was LaForte. He was dead or dying. I wasn’t sure when I got there, so I rolled him over and tried to do what I could, but it was useless. He had blood coming out of his ears. That was from a shell blast, and I could see where the shell had impacted in front of him. The concussion from such munitions causes internal injuries, particularly to the head.

Also, Jake Silver was shot and yelling for help. He died and vultures were going at him by tearing away his body before it was picked up. Captain Traska had his “family jewels” blown off. First Lieutenant Timm was wounded. Albert Ayotte, Arnold Bickford, and others were also killed, all in this one attack. We started out with 200 men. After we took the hill, we had only 30 to 40 left.

A word about Sgt. John J. Konopka. He was rough and tough, but he had a heart of gold. Konopka was an excellent soldier. During the battle for Morville, I watched him knock out a German machine-gun nest single-handedly. He ran right at it and threw in a hand grenade. He was killed in action just three days later. It is truly amazing that most acts of great courage are seldom recognized. It is a sad commentary on our system of merit that it ignores heroic acts so often.

When we came down the reverse slope, to our right the Germans in Morville were waiting for us. When we were halfway down the hill, they opened up with artillery and machine guns. Then, of all things, I heard motors running. Elements of the 761st Tank Battalion came from the west over the crest of the hill behind us, and they immediately opened fire on the Germans in the village. One thing about those black tankers, they could pull a trigger faster than anyone in this world. And they hit! They laid a barrage on those Germans, and they saved us.

There we were, at the bottom of the hill, and the tanks were coming down the hill towards the town of Morville. We were trapped in the crossfire laying between the tanks and the Krauts.

While we snuggled as close to the ground as we could, the tankers were shooting right over our heads. That lasted for a while, then one of our tanks got hit. An 88 armor-piercing round [from an 88mm German artillery gun, particularly deadly to American tanks] went into the front. I couldn't see it go into the front, but I saw it come out the back. During this activity, a piece of shrapnel, probably from an 88, spun across the top of my foot tearing my shoe open and causing a wound, though I didn't notice it at the time.

Eventually, the Germans retreated from Morville, and the fighting subsided. So many soldiers were killed and wounded that day.

The 761st Tank Battalion

Reference has been made to the the 761st Tank Battalion. The 761st was an all black unit that continually distinguished itself throughout the war. Any reader who wishes to study this unique combat unit can read, among other writings, *Brothers in Arms: The Epic Story of the 761st Tank Battalion, WWII's Forgotten Heroes,* by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Anthony Walton, or *The 761st "Black Panther" Tank Battalion in World War II: An Illustrated History of the First African American Armored Unit to See Combat,* by Joe Wilson, Jr.

During World War II the US Army formed many units manned by black soldiers including three tank battalions. The focus here will be on the 761st Tank Battalion. American tank battalions had about 60 tanks manned by crews of four or five soldiers. The total complement was over 700 men.

The initial combat assignment of the 761st was to support the 26th Infantry Division in the Alsace-Lorraine region. Both units were part of the Third Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. Tanks from the 761st supported units of the 26th in attacks on such towns as Bezange-la-Petite, Vic-sur-Seille, and Morville-les-Vic, among a number of engagements. Then, in mid-December, the Germans attacked through the Ardennes Forest of Belgium and Luxembourg —what became known as "The Battle of the Bulge." In response, Patton sent several units north including the 26th and the 761st, no longer working together, to break the siege of Bastogne and drive the Germans back. As that operation wound down, the 761st was sent to support a division in Holland, then returned to Alsace, crossed the Rhine, and sped across southwestern Germany and into Austria. During the seven months the 761st was in combat, it was attached successively to seven different divisions.

These gentlemen served with distinction and were to armor as the Tuskegee Airmen were to the Air Corps' fighter groups.

Wounded

When the Germans withdrew and retreated out of the Morville area, several American tanks had been hit—bad. Our first sergeant yelled at us, “Help those soldiers get out of those tanks!” We rushed over, helped them out of the tanks, and did whatever we could, which was not a lot. Another soldier and I helped a black tanker whose leg was cut open from his knee to his hip. We got him out of the tank and put him on a stretcher. All tanks had stretchers attached to the back. He was not bleeding very much because his wound was seared. We carried him to a first-aid station that seemed like a mile away. It was probably only a half mile. We couldn’t carry him nonstop. We had to stop and take a rest a couple of times. We took him into a tent, laid him on the ground, and the medics went right to work on him.

I saw an empty chair and was so pooped I sat down. A medic said to me, “What’s wrong with your foot?” I looked at my right foot and saw the shoelaces were torn and the top of the boot was torn open. My foot was bleeding slightly. He took my boot off and said, “You have trench foot! You have a wound, but you have trench foot too.” Then he took off my other boot, and I had trench foot there too. I was immediately evacuated by ambulance to a rear area hospital, the 114th Field Evacuation Hospital, located in Nancy, France. During the ride, I was transferred to three different ambulances. On each ambulance they gave us some pain medication. By the time I reached the hospital, I was experiencing the “Twilight Zone” first-hand.

A medic and a nurse walked by my stretcher. The medic said to the nurse, “This one is dead.” Imagine hearing that you are dead!! The nurse turned around and came back to check me. She said, “He’s alive.” I was so dazed that I did not respond. Later I was placed on an army cot in a large ward. There were all kinds of wounded soldiers. One soldier had his intestines laying in a pan of salt water.

During my first morning at this hospital, a sergeant came through the ward yelling, “Every one of you who can walk must go to the second floor and help care for the wounded.” Consequently, I hobbled up the large stairway to the second floor and noticed that it was covered, wall-to-wall, with seriously wounded soldiers. A very large older nurse yelled to me, “Soldier, come here!” I moved too slowly to suit her, so she grabbed me by the collar and literally carried me to a wounded soldier’s gurney. After putting me down, she grabbed my hand, slapped a bottle of intravenous fluid into my hands, and said, “Hold this!” A little later she yelled from across the ward, ”How’s he doing?” I answered, “He’s dying.” She yelled, “Hold the bottle higher!” By this time the death pallor was in his hands and face. A doctor came by and looked at the dying soldier. He said nothing and went on. A priest came and administered the last rites just before the soldier died.

I wish to emphasize that the very large nurse commanded the highest degree of respect from me, and I have always admired her efforts to save many soldiers' lives. Years later, I became acquainted with a nurse who had served with her. We both agreed that the large nurse was a wonderful person.

After leaving the dead soldier, I experienced a very nasty situation. In order to continue helping, I located a soldier who was not receiving care, and he was pounding his head with his fist. I kneeled down and attempted to restrain him from further injuring himself by gently holding his fists. Then came a wise-ass medic with a wise-ass nurse who as much as told me to get the hell away from that soldier. I uttered a good "Fuck you!" and went back downstairs to my cot. After all, we were ordered to assist with the wounded. I have always remained incensed about this encounter.

I was in the hospital only four days. This was the only time I was off the line in my 200 days of combat. For this wound, I received a Purple Heart.

We were in open-bay wards with enlisted personnel in one section and officers in another corner of the ward. During this time, Lt. Gen. George Patton came to visit the wounded. He didn't speak to me, but I heard him address a lieutenant in the same ward:

Patton: "Lieutenant, how did you get wounded?"

Lieutenant: "Sir, I accidentally shot myself in the foot."

Patton, screaming: "It's sons of bitches like you who keep this war going!"

The Battle for Rodalbe

On 12 November, three days after the Battle of Morville-les-Vic, the Germans withdrew from Rodalbe, a village about ten miles northeast of Morville and less than three miles short of the 26th Division's objective, Benestroff. Companies K, L, and M of the 3rd Battalion quickly moved in. The 104th Regiment, particularly its 3rd Battalion, was then well ahead of the 101st Regiment to its right (south) and the 35th Infantry Division to its left. However, the next day German infantry and tanks counterattacked and surrounded Rodalbe. Company I, then in battalion reserve, tried to break through to the village, but it was driven back by fierce German artillery fire. German tanks and infantry broke into the village, causing heavy casualties and capturing over 200 American soldiers. The rest of the regiment held off the attack and, on 18 November, reinforced by fresh replacements, recaptured Rodalbe. The next day, in hard fighting, the division captured Benestroff.*

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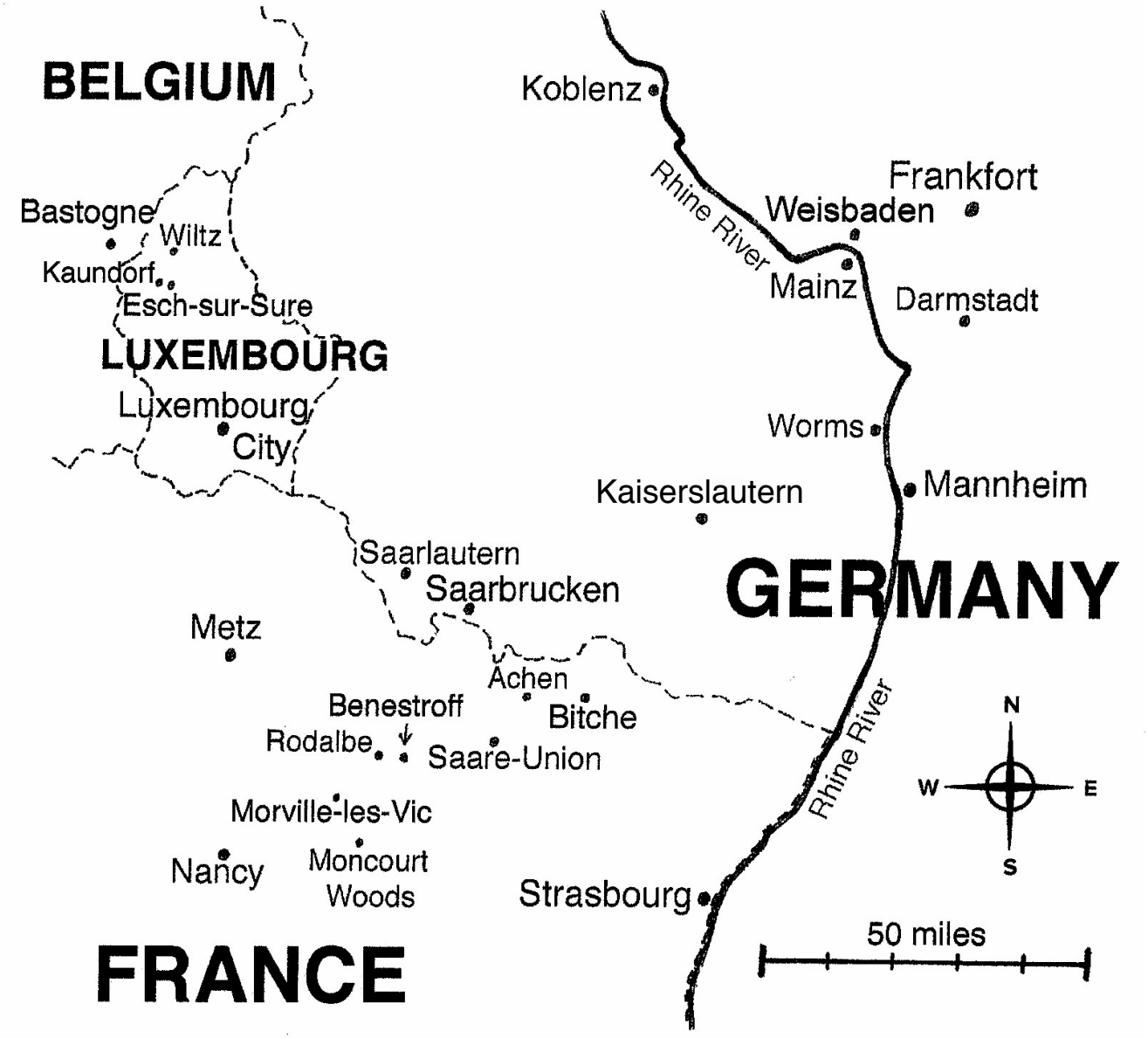
* This paragraph is based on the account given in Chapter 7 of *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945: 104th Infantry Regiment*. — ed.

I was still in the hospital during the struggle for Rodalbe—I rejoined Company I around the time of the fighting for Benestroff. But we veterans talked so much about Rodalbe after the war that I felt like I had actually been there.



104th Infantry Regiment's Area of Operations from Late October 1944 to March 1945

Chapter IV: On Through Alsace-Lorraine

On or about 18 November 1944, after recovering from my wounds, I was in the replacement depot. Around early afternoon, I saw bombers in such a mass that they darkened the entire sky. At one point, we could not see the ends of the formation, east to west or north to south. This raid may have included as many as 1000 bombers. They were not flying very high, and their engines caused the ground to vibrate.

For me, it was back to the front with my buddies in the following incidents during the Alsace-Lorraine Campaign.

Come Out or Die!

In a town located east of Saare-Union, a nasty incident occurred. The time was dusk or dark in the late afternoon or early evening. We broke into a house for surveillance and found a number of people in the cellar. We ordered the people to come up to the main floor. The order was given in both French and German by Americans who could speak enough of each language to be understood.

Apparently, the people in the cellar were arguing among themselves and would not comply with our orders. A soldier from a different squad or platoon came up to the building. He immediately understood the situation. Instantly, he took three hand grenades and, after pulling their arming pins, threw the grenades down into the basement. The screaming from the cellar was blood curdling. Needless to say, we left the building never to learn of the consequences.

An Incident of Horror

My unit was moving through a village located near Achen and Weidersheim, France. This was about 1 December 1944.

A unit of the 4th Armored Division had their tanks lined up on the main street leading through the village. My unit was moving forward in preparation for an attack. As we passed the tanks, I noticed the lower half of a body, presumably German, lying on the left side of the road. Glancing around the area, I spotted the top half of a body lying on the right side of the road. Then I saw an American tanker from the 4th Armored Division jump from a tank and, with knife in hand, he cut off the dead man's finger to appropriate his ring.

Near Acken-Bitche

On or about the 9th of December, our unit was attacking bunkers of the Maginot Line near Acken-Bitche. Our sunrise attack called for the infantry to ride on tanks. The Germans fired heavy barrages of artillery at us. We leaped off the tanks and scrambled away from the tanks to organize for an attack on foot.

During this time, the weather was cold and wet, with light snow, and extremely foggy. We were clearing out houses to capture German soldiers. Since our mission took place after dark, the only light was from flares set off by Americans. I was with Ivy Clibourne. We kicked in a house door, and Ivy entered before me. A German soldier grabbed his rifle, and the two wrestled for its possession. I could not shoot, so I maneuvered around to hit the German. Just at that moment, another American soldier stepped in the doorway and slammed his rifle butt on the German's head. The German fell to the floor appearing to be dead.

While we were in the vicinity of Acken-Bitche, a very large German artillery shell burst near me with such violence that my body was lifted totally off the ground. I received a ruptured eardrum. As a result, my head and ears suffered a severe screeching or ringing noise for at least ten days. Also, I spit up a blackish powder for at least two days.

Hallucinations and Ghosts

During the Lorraine Campaign, rain and fog were constantly with us. At night the darkness was so intense that one could not see his own hand waving in front of him. While on guard duty, we tended to descend into near sleep. We would wake up and be convinced that a German patrol was approaching us.

Needless to say, this experience was frightening. On rare occasions a GI was known to respond to the fright by firing his rifle or throwing a hand grenade. This action was dangerous because it gave away our position in the event a German patrol was nearby.

The only consolation for this feeling of terror was that a buddy was in the foxhole as a companion. It is impossible to appreciate the hallucinations that occur under such isolated conditions unless one has experienced such terror.

General Lost

We were guarding an intersection very close to the combat zone. A GI started a very small fire to warm our rations. It was foggy, late in the afternoon, and raining lightly. A very clean jeep which we knew did not belong in the area approached the intersection.

The driver and general riding in the jeep were lost and, if we did not stop them, would cross into German territory. The general did not like our "Willie and Joe" [Bill Maudlin's cartoon soldiers] looks, with a fire and without helmets on, so he started to "read the rules." A buddy approached the jeep and yelled in the general's face, "Get your asses back where you came from. You're lost. The Germans hold the ground where you're headed." The jeep was last seen making a hasty retreat.

Relief by the 87th Infantry Division

One of the most misdirected events in WWII was the relief of the 26th Infantry Division by the 87th Infantry Division. My description is limited, of course, to only the 3rd Battalion of the 104th Regiment. The 3rd Battalion was so decimated by casualties that Companies I and K had combined to make a force not equal to platoon strength. In fact, K Company had shrunk in strength to a little over a squad, about half of one platoon. The following events took place at Hill 360 near the town of Bitche.

That night we had dug foxholes anticipating a German counterattack. Much to our surprise, a horrendous amount of noise was coming from behind our lines. We soon learned that we were being relieved from our position.

The ensuing confusion was unbelievable. The 87th was attempting to replace our battalion of less than company strength with a full-strength battalion. This figures out to at least five men relieving each man.

When we were aware that we were leaving our positions, we bolted out of the area. We knew that the intense noise caused by soldiers moving around, loud talking, and rattling of equipment would draw German mortar and artillery fire. We had just made it out of the immediate area before all hell broke loose. Only two 87th Division soldiers could hide in each of our foxholes, so many of them were totally exposed.

In the confusion, a chaplain approached some soldiers to give them comfort. One obviously confused soldier shot and killed the chaplain.

As privates, we attempted to warn the 87th officers that the Germans would lay down a barrage on them and probably counterattack. The officers ignored our advice, and the 87th paid an awful price that night. So be it!

Moving Out of Alsace-Lorraine

This campaign ended up being a contradiction in terms. Actually, we never finished the Lorraine Campaign. While moving through the Sarre Union region, as previously stated, we were replaced by the 87th.

We were relocated into a marshalling area around Metz, France, which was northwest of our previous position. We were placed in barracks and ate a bit better. As much as possible, we were reoutfitted and reorganized, and promised six weeks of rear-echelon rest.

However, the US Army, or any army for that matter, has priorities. In reality, we were preparing for one of the most spectacular logistical and combat feats —one that has not been matched since the middle of December 1944—The Battle of the Bulge and the relief of Bastogne that ultimately led to the destruction of the massive German attack.

In all actuality, General Patton had us in “ready reserve” along with two other divisions, the 4th Armored and the 80th Infantry Divisions. There were rumblings in the Ardennes Forest, where the Germans were massing many divisions under the cover of the forest. The Battle of the Bulge was about to occur, and Patton was preparing to respond in what would be a most desperate fight.

During this time, I was assigned to our battalion headquarters’ patrol squad. I don’t remember why I was assigned to it—certainly I didn’t volunteer. While in the army, I never volunteered for anything. Our patrol squad consisted of 12 men. We usually patrolled at night, typically about five guys at a time. One member of the squad rarely went out on patrols; he was such a goofball that he wasn’t trusted. The others rotated. Over the next five months, we made about 40 patrols. Amazingly, though sometimes shot at, our patrol squad never suffered any casualties except for two guys wounded by “friendly fire” (see page 35).

Eight Members of 3rd Battalion’s Patrol Squad (after VE Day)
The author is fourth from the right

It would not be until 2003 at a 104th-Regiment reunion in Grand Blanc, Michigan, that this part of my life would be revisited.

Chapter V: The Bulge

I believe that the reader needs an overview of the general history of the days leading up to and during the Battle of the Bulge in order to better understand the account that follows. Therefore, I asked Ray Tonchen, who also edited and typed the first draft of my memoir, to write a short dissertation describing the strategic situation we were in. Bruce Novak, who edited and typed the final draft, also added to the following essay. I thank them for their valuable contribution.

From September to early December, 1944, the German Army massed a powerful force of tanks, infantry, and artillery in and just east of the Ardennes Forest of Belgium and Luxembourg. They used the trees for camouflage in order not to be strafed and bombed by our aircraft. By this time in the war, the Allies had supremacy in the air that made our ground attacks more effective.

Our armies were standing down, with as many troops as possible being rotated to the rear areas for the Christmas and New Year holidays. This left the less experienced, or "green," troops on the front lines. Field Marshall Montgomery's British and Canadian 21st Army Group and the US Ninth Army held the line to the north; the US First Army, in the center; Patton's US Third Army, the south. These three American armies made up General Bradley's 12th Army Group. The US First Army, consisting of three inexperienced divisions: the 9th Armored Division, and the 99th and 106th Infantry Divisions; and two exhausted veteran divisions: the 2nd and 28th Infantry Divisions, was defending the line in the Ardennes.

The Germans intended to break through the Allied line and separate the British forces from the Americans. The fighting would be some of the hardest and bloodiest of the entire war. The weather was miserable with the worst blizzard in a century. Contrary to popular legend, tanks and other tracked vehicles do not work well in snow and ice.

With the same intelligence as the Supreme and other field commanders had, our commanding general, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., realized that a German attack could be imminent. He took three divisions out of line and put them in ready reserve. These were the 26th Infantry Division, the 80th Infantry Division, and the 4th Armored Division. Our being in reserve, some believe, was a ruse in order to have us ready to jump off whenever and in whatever direction was necessary.

On 16 December the Germans suddenly attacked with over 25 divisions from the 5th and 6th Panzer (Tank) Armies and the 7th Army. The resulting struggle would become known as "the Ardennes Offensive" or "The Battle of the Bulge." Within days more troops would be involved than were at the Battle of Gettysburg.

(continued)

American reinforcements were immediately rushed to the front from the rear without proper clothing or equipment. Some Germans were impersonating MPs in American uniforms and misdirecting traffic. General Hodges's First Army was being overrun. The American 101st Airborne Division and the 10th Armored Division were rushed to the city of Bastogne, Belgium, a crossroads for the area. While surrounded in and along the perimeter of Bastogne, the 101st and 10th prevented the city from being taken. However, by doing so, they were trapped deep behind enemy lines. Poor weather made effective air support and resupply impossible. Those air drops that were attempted often fell into German hands. The "Triple Bs," "The Battered Bastards of Bastogne," as they were known, were in a fight to the finish.

On 19 December, General Eisenhower called a meeting of the field commanders in Verdun, France. Montgomery and Bradley could offer no immediate help. But Patton stated, "I can attack with three divisions in 48 hours." After getting the green light from Eisenhower, Patton placed a phone call to his headquarters and said, "Play ball." Those were the code words to attack toward and relieve Bastogne.

In recounting events of that battle, Patton said, "The Third Army moved further and faster and engaged more divisions in less time than any other army in the history of the United States, possibly in the history of the world." By late afternoon on 26 December, tanks and infantry from his army's 4th Armored Division had fought their way through to Bastogne and broken the siege.

The Battle and Potential Strategy

The massive attack by the Germans has been explained and portrayed in history books and by Hollywood as a complete surprise to the Allies. Some, including myself, believe this to be completely false.

I worked with a veteran named John Fotheringham for a year and a half (1948-1949) at the Willys Overland Plant, then located in Toledo, Ohio. During World War II, John served with the Third Army G2 (Intelligence) as a buck sergeant and desk clerk. His specific duties were to log in all pieces of intelligence gleaned from numerous sources. He said that this intelligence was shared with SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force), Eisenhower's headquarters, as well as the headquarters of Bradley's 12th Army Group and Montgomery's 21st Army Group.

John specifically stated that, for several weeks prior to the 16 December 1944 German attack, Third Army G2 was aware of the massive movement of all kinds of German assets. Particularly interesting information came from British night aerial photography, photography which revealed the German military movements. Most of the German transport was conducted under cover of darkness.

Other indications also suggest that Patton was preparing for the German offensive. On or about 12 December 1944 several divisions, including the 26th, were released from the front lines in Alsace-Lorraine and speedily moved to the marshalling area in and around Metz, France. Though welcome, such a move was puzzling to the individual soldiers. Why were highly experienced divisions and other units withdrawn from a successful campaign and replaced by far less experienced units such as the 87th Division? The First Army sector of the front was held by only five divisions, three inexperienced and two exhausted. Also, a massive defensive line was dug on the west side of the Meuse River. In the event, the German advance was stopped northwest of Bastogne, a few miles short of the Meuse.

If John's account is accurate, Patton would have been expecting some type of German offensive. British and American intelligence had been monitoring the huge German buildup of military equipment and manpower for weeks before the attack. Patton readied a force consisting of the 26th and 80th Infantry Divisions and the 4th Armored Division to be prepared for an immediate counterattack. Those divisions were augmented by the 5th, 35th, and 90th Infantry Divisions, and the 6th Armored Division along with dozens of specialized elements including the now famous 761st Tank Battalion.

The 99th and 106th Divisions were decimated by the German attack. Many soldiers from these divisions that we rescued explained that their front lines were so stretched out that they could not have stopped a small patrol. This raises several questions whose answers probably went to the grave with some of the general officers of those units. Was this done because of the upcoming holidays and the belief that the German army was too weak to stage a powerful offensive? Was there overconfidence based on incompetence? Or was there a strategy, not articulated or otherwise recorded, if the Germans attacked, to let them advance to the Meuse River, overstretch their supply lines, and ultimately face a multifaceted response from all sides with the American Ninth and Third Armies crushing the German invasion from their northern and southern flanks? This, in fact, is what occurred.

At the time, American military leaders and the press insisted that the German attack was a surprise. John's account contradicts this claim. Saying the attack was a surprise covered up mistakes made in understanding and taking seriously intelligence about an impending offensive that was painfully obvious to some.

The Americans did not withdraw support units and material fast enough. This was captured and used against the allies. Once the attack occurred, the retreat was very haphazard. That led to utter confusion among the American forces.

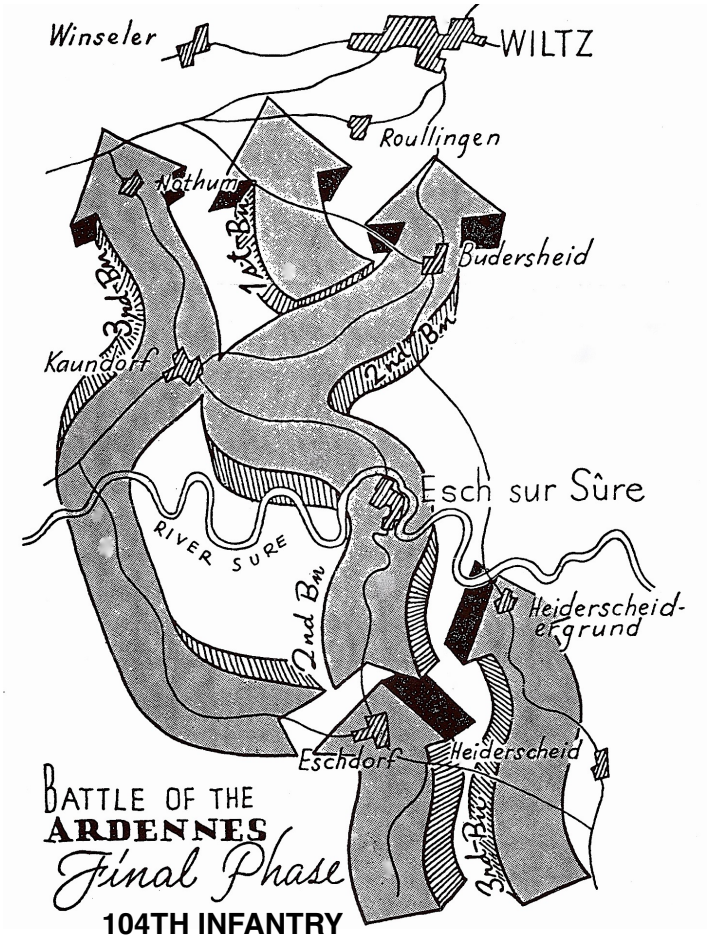
Another major factor which aided the Germans was the weather. For several days as the Germans attacked, American air power could not come into play due to severe cloud cover. During this period of time, the entire area experienced the worst blizzard in anyone's memory.

Despite the shortcomings of Allied strategy in the Battle of the Bulge, the campaign was tremendously successful. Instead of setting the Allies back by at least six months, the lines were reestablished in about six weeks.

Far too much false information has been disseminated by Monday morning quarterbacks, sensation-starved media, hordes of Johnny-come-latelys, phony experts, and self-appointed authorities who have no firsthand experience of America's greatest and most successful battle.

The leadership of Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., was remarkable, extremely competent, and more skillful than that of all other generals during the repulse of the German onslaught.

It is my intention to now relate several events in which I was directly involved and have firsthand experience.



104TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

Shoot Our Own and Survive?

The first event took place in a tiny village [Esch-sur-Sure?] located in a valley adjacent to the Sure River in Luxembourg. It was Christmas week. Sometime after midnight another soldier from my squad and I were instructed by Lt. Col. Howard C. Dellert, our battalion commander, to escort a lieutenant and a sergeant from the engineers to examine a bridge located at the end of the street.

As we started walking toward the river, my friend and I heard a “click, click” sound. We realized that the lieutenant was carrying a Tommy gun (Thompson submachine gun). We stopped to advise him that the click sound could be heard a long distance away. The night was late, the temperature was very cold, and the snow was covered with a frozen crust. These were perfect conditions for sounds to travel to the German front lines. This soon happened again.

Finally, after a third stop occurred, we advised the lieutenant in no uncertain terms that we would not accompany him any further. The lieutenant pulled his rank on us and ordered us to continue. Harsh words were exchanged. The lieutenant did not realize that he was dealing with battle-hardened soldiers who had contempt for naive shavetails.

I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, that my buddy was raising his rifle and obviously planning a shootout at the OK Corral. Likewise, I started to raise my rifle with the same action in mind. If the shooting took place, we would return to the battalion commander’s command post and declare that we encountered a German patrol and the lieutenant and sergeant were killed by Germans. There was no doubt that Colonel Dellert would have believed this.

However, the Germans rescued the lieutenant and sergeant by dropping a barrage of mortars on the village. Without question the Germans heard the “click, click” of the lieutenant’s Tommy gun. Also, they may have heard our argument and confrontation with the lieutenant and the sergeant.

We recognized the “pop” sound of German mortars being fired, so we ran for cover. As I ran, a mortar shell burst nearby. A flat piece of shrapnel hit my knee as I ran. The impact caused me to flip in a cartwheel manner. My knee swelled severely. Since we were nearly surrounded, I could not be taken to the aid station. This injury caused me to limp for more than a week.

We had no further knowledge of the whereabouts of the lieutenant and sergeant. They did not check back with our battalion commander, which would have been the typical procedure. They simply vanished.

A Hair-Raising Experience

This experience occurred while I was in the woods, southeast of Kaundorf, Luxembourg, and north of the Sure River, about seven miles from Bastogne, just prior to Christmas 1944. Late one night I was instructed to deliver a radio from 3rd Battalion headquarters to K Company.

I made it to K Company, and a soldier pointed to the company commander's foxhole. I started in that direction and asked another GI the way. He also pointed me in the same direction. I walked quite a way and up to a foxhole. "Here's your radio," I said and leaned over to hand it to, be it all things, a Kraut! He was reaching up for his machine gun. So I bounced the radio off his head and took off. About 50 feet away I hit the ground and crawled faster than any snake. The kraut opened fire and sprayed the area with machine-gun bullets. Bullets make a unique sound when they hit a tree.

Another incident near Kaundorf involved a weird-looking projectile that came crashing through the roof of our battalion headquarters and landed in the basement without exploding. Nothing like it had ever been seen. It was about 18-inches long with strange-looking tail and fins. We ruled out "screaming meemies" but could not identify the projectile.

Still at this location, I was going between the line companies in the woods and our battalion headquarters. I saw a black sergeant and his white Pfc assistant examining a shell blast hole in the snow. I inquired about their activity. The sergeant explained that he was analyzing the size of the artillery, the direction of the fire from its point of explosion, and its trajectory.

The Army keeps statistics on wounds from all different types of munitions and their point of origin. These would be compared to the angle of trajectory of these munitions. In short, this was a crude form of forensics that has, over the years, led to improvements in equipment, training, and tactics. It was fascinating.

The Deaths of Fishman and Talarico

Sgt. Stanley C. Fishman was a red-haired Jewish soldier who served as Company I radio operator. He shared a foxhole with Platoon Sgt. John A. Talarico. The location of the front line was just east of Kaundorf, Luxembourg. Bastogne was situated to our northwest about seven miles away. Bastogne was near enough for us to observe the cargo planes dropping supplies into the besieged city.

I walked to the foxhole occupied by Fishman and Talarico to discuss a few details. As I approached the foxhole, Fishman's body was lying next to the hole. Sgt. Talarico told me how Fishman had died. The Germans fired an artillery barrage which landed in our area. Fishman jumped into the foxhole first and Talarico jumped in on top of him. Unbelievably, Stanley Fishman was killed by shrapnel while lying under Talarico. The only explanation was that shrapnel from a tree burst somehow missed Talarico and struck a lethal wound to Fishman. This occurred on 4 January 1945.

Fishman was well-liked and highly regarded. Although he was always friendly and congenial, behind that smile was a serious and conscientious soldier of highest caliber.

John Talarico was in the National Guard prior to being called to active duty in 1941. He was 29 years old, but seemed 40 years old or older. He always walked in a stooped manner, "Here is my head; my ass is coming," was a favorite expression. John was extremely intelligent and always fair in the treatment of his men. When he met someone walking in his direction, he started talking while several feet away. John's voice was low and kind. He commanded his men with this tone of voice. His knowledge and understanding of the enemy was remarkable. He died of wounds about a week after his foxhole mate.

News Correspondents and Front Lines

I had the responsibility to escort a reporter, Miss Virginia Irwin, to visit the front lines. I escorted her to interview a popular lieutenant, Marvin Nelson. I took her forward to I Company. When briefed, the battalion commander made it clear to her that this could be a one-way trip. We went down a swale, and there was a German machine-gun nest at a distance. The trick was to jump the stream without getting hit by a machine-gun burst.

When we arrived at I Company, she asked where the front line was. It was a quiet day, so there was little or no artillery. She was introduced to the different GIs in foxholes. This was the front line.

The Six-Man Patrol

The 3rd Battalion Headquarters was located in a tumble-down shack at the front of a steep hill. To our south was a wide valley.

An American 240mm "Long Tom" cannon was set up in this valley. This gun was firing variable-time shells which were adjusted to explode 50 feet above the ground. Continual firing around the clock was intended to devastate any German military trying to pass through road intersections in Wiltz, Luxembourg.

One late evening, perhaps midnight, five members of our patrol squad were assigned a reconnaissance mission to check out a bridge. If we found that the Germans had the bridge armed with explosives, we were to disarm the charges.

We reached the bridge but noticed a German sentry standing in the woods. We debated our path of return since the sentry had seen us. We decided to return by the same route. The German sentry was still in the woods but had moved a short distance. We spotted him and decided to keep moving on our return.

We arrived back at the command post and checked in with the intelligence corporal who was reviewing some maps by the light of a gasoline lantern. The corporal asked us who the German soldier was. He was standing in the corner alone. We assumed that he had surrendered to one of our units dug in at the top of the hill.

Our battalion command post included a translator who spoke German. Our impression of him was that he was as phony as a three-dollar bill. The translator attempted to interrogate the German prisoner. He did not reply. The translator then started to hit him. The captured soldier said a few words, at which time a member of our patrol squad who spoke Polish jumped up from sleeping on the floor and yelled to the translator, “You hit that ‘German’ and I’ll beat your ass! He’s a Polish conscript and cannot speak German.”

We figured out that the “German” was the sentry we had seen in the woods. He sneaked into the line with our patrol and became the sixth patrol member.

A similar incident occurred in Kaundorf. Our S-2 captain attempted to interrogate a captured German soldier. The captain started to punch the German. Again, our Polish-speaking squadmate, who was pumping some water with a hand pump used to water cattle, noticed the interrogator. He raced into the farm house and told Colonel Dellert that the S-2 captain was beating a Polish conscript. The colonel ordered the captain to leave the conscript in our comrade’s care.

Shoot Up a Goat

A couple of days after the incident of the six-man patrol, another crazy thing happened. We were at the same building location.

During the night, we took turns at sentry duty. My turn came around 0200 or 0300 (2:00 or 3:00 am). While standing in the doorway, I heard noise at the rear of the house. I thought this was a soldier making his way through debris to relieve himself. I heard the noise again, so I entered the house to determine who must be outside. The S-2 corporal counted the sleeping GIs and assured me that no GIs were outside and none had been out.

The corporal hinted that I could be hallucinating. We instantly exchanged profanities and obscene gestures. On retreating to my post at the front door, I heard the noises again. While I considered my next move, a head appeared at the corner. The night was quite dark, and the head disappeared quickly. My reaction was that this crap ends right now!

I was armed with a .45 “grease gun” and raced to the corner. As I turned the corner, I blasted all 30 rounds in the magazine. The result of my devastating action was to observe a large goat running away from the rear of the building and on down the road. If I hit the goat, the wound could not have been serious.

Can you imagine the alarm my shooting caused? The soldiers in the house all came rushing out with rifles and anything else they could grab. They would not believe that a goat caused my shooting. I worked my way off guard duty and settled down for sleep—following a 10-minute exchange of vulgarities and reflections on ancestry with the same corporal.

Wrestling with the Colonel

This incident took place in a shattered farm house near Kaundorf on or about 15 January 1945. My patrol squad sought shelter in the center of the house where the battalion commander had set up his forward command post.

During the day, German artillery fire came in on us like a hail storm. All the troops abiding in the house rushed to a barn for safety. That barn was somewhat below ground level and connected to the house. One small doorway led to the barn. As we rushed to this doorway, Colonel Dellert, our battalion commander, and I became involved in a wrestling match to determine which one of us would pass first.

Truthfully, I won the wrestling bout but paid for the victory. I tripped and fell to the bottom of the stairs. Colonel Dellert also tripped and landed full force on top of me.

I nursed numerous bruises for several days after this event. Colonel Dellert razzed me upon several occasions about his losing struggle at the door and then falling upon me.

Lt. Col. Howard C. Dellert
Commanding Officer of
3rd Battalion, 104th Inf.

Chapter VI: Between the Bulge and the Rhine

About six weeks after the Bulge began, the lines had been reestablished. However, it took until mid-February to “mop up” the rest of the German units that had attacked us in December 1944. Although we were technically in Germany, the real line, pragmatically and emotionally, for the German troops and people was the Rhine River itself. We were in the town of Saarlautern, which was west of the Rhine and east of France in the Saarland.

In some ways, for us this was a time of relief and resupply while we waited for the orders to push to the Rhine and beyond. For General Patton this was “a quest in and of itself,” as going into Germany meant the beginning of the end for Hitler. Beating Field Marshal Montgomery was also on his mind.

Morale for us was about the same. We wanted the damn war to be over and to go home. In and of itself, the war was not an issue as it would be decades later during the Vietnam War. We were numb with combat, and until the war ultimately ended that would be the same. It was academic to us. Life was hard and a drudgery, witnessing death on a massive scale up close and personal. We believed that we were going to win this war, but until that day came, we just kept moving on putting one foot in front of the other.

It would not be until about 55 years later that these wounds would resurface, after I became involved with veterans’ groups. In one case, after writing to a fellow soldier, I was able to track down the family of 2nd Lt. Marvin Nelson, of whom I have written previously. The result of that inquiry is mentioned later in this memoir.

War can and will play games with one’s mind over the years. Even though I have a full disability for post-traumatic stress disorder, I completed a 35-year career as a teacher. Repression is a funny thing. Combat just makes it more difficult to deal with. Maj. Gen. Robert Smith, President of the Reserve Officers Association, made this clear at a Veterans Day presentation at Grand Blanc High School in 2005—even after 60 years, it’s difficult:

> In knowing Bill and my own father, who served in the Pacific Theater, it is clear that they were just ordinary folks, not supermen. They were not John Wayne, they were not Rambo. They were just ordinary folks, thrust into extraordinary situations, that did their jobs to the fullest extent of their abilities and won the war. After the war, they came back and built our nation into what it is today. Our current population and political leaders need to relearn this lesson in order to win the war on terror and move our country forward in this new century. — Robert Smith

Taking Prisoners

One day while we were holding our position in Saarlautern, Brig. Gen. Harlan Harkness, assistant division commander, ordered our patrol squad to capture a prisoner. If the general had accompanied our patrol, he would have quickly learned that capturing prisoners is a difficult task and frequently unsuccessful. The assignment often becomes deadly, for either the pursued or the pursuer. Moreover, the captured German prisoner may be very ignorant of his own military situation. In every way he was just like us, living each day with death at his doorstep. Upper command strategy and plans were not on his plate or ours either.

In order to capture a prisoner, we had to cross the Saar River on a bridge which had been blown apart so it was nearly impassible. We crossed this bridge by crawling around its ruptures. After crossing we went down a subdivision street looking for Germans. We encountered a German soldier who was relieving another who was on guard duty.

We divided into three small groups. One of the guys from another group tripped over an obstacle which alerted the German of our presence. Boyce J. P. Vincent yelled, “Halt!” to the German. The German reached for his rifle, and Vincent shot him. This action aroused the German troops in the area. We immediately retreated but could not go by way of the bridge, so we waded across the Saar River. As we forded the river back to our lines the water was up to my neck, and I had to hold up Ivy Clibourne. While we were crossing, the Germans were shooting at us with machine-gun fire that resembled a hail storm.

Once we had successfully forded the river, a new tragedy unfolded. Some American jerks from I Company, which we had passed through in order to cross the bridge, started shooting at us and threw hand grenades at us. I jumped down into an outside basement stairway while others ran to the left and made it back safely except for Rogg and Rogers, who were wounded. Rogg was hit in the chest with shrapnel from a hand grenade and Rogers was shot in the ass by an M1 rifle.

I spent the night soaked through to the skin in that stairway. At daybreak, I saw a door which I opened and walked through to encounter the I Company soldiers. The sergeant of that group, nicknamed “Frenchy,” had been a circus barker before entering military service. Strangely, we had alerted Frenchy’s unit that we were going on this patrol. We engaged in some unrepeatable discourse on the matter of firing on our patrol. In war, there is no such thing as “friendly fire” when it is directed at you.

The members of our patrol squad vowed to shoot one or more of Frenchy's squad if the occasion presented itself. When the war was over and I returned to I Company, some of the members of Frenchy's squad were still with I Company, but our desire for revenge had dissipated.

Another example of "friendly fire" occurred when two P-47s circled the city two or three times. On its final pass, they dropped a large bomb which hit a house occupied by our K Company soldiers. Two American soldiers died. This is an unfortunate circumstance, but often an unavoidable part of war.

After Leaving Saarlautern

Our unit attacked a number of installations which were part of the Siegfried Line. The 3rd Battalion forward command post had set up in a bunker which was partly below ground and covered with several feet of dirt.

I was told that Paul Matthews had been wounded. Paul and I had been schoolmates. I left, going toward the L Company area where Paul was situated to find him. However, by the time I got there, he had been rescued, so I returned to the bunker to be available for instructions from Colonel Dellert.

A soldier was carried into the bunker. His wound was in one of his buttocks. His buttocks were sliced open by shrapnel starting just below his waist and extending to his knee. A medic poured sulfa in his wound and pulled the wound together with bandages.

About a minute later a soldier walked through the door, pointed to his throat, and dropped to the floor. The medic pronounced him dead. Apparently, he had drowned from bleeding into his lungs.

A Bronze Star for Bravery

At the same location we noticed a jeep loaded with wounded soldiers on stretchers. The jeep was stuck in the mud. Three or four of my squad pushed the jeep out of the mud and back onto the road.

[What Bill does not mention in his account is that the jeep was in a minefield. He followed the jeep's tracks into the minefield. For his actions that day, Bill received the Bronze Star, an army combat award for bravery. While brave it was, this was the same ethic that these soldiers, sailors, and airmen would take back to civilian life after the war. — Ray Tonchen]

Kaiserslautern and Cognac

The 26th Infantry Division attacked and occupied Kaiserslautern. This city, located east of Worms and Mainz, was the marshalling area when the attack to the Rhine was launched.

Upon entry into the city, the 3rd Battalion located a warehouse of Three Star Hennessy Cognac. Needless to say, the thirsty battalion caused all hell to break loose. Within an hour, most of the battalion was so drunk it could not move on the next objective. The 6x6 supply trucks backed up to the warehouse, and the GIs were throwing off ammunition boxes and replacing them with boxes of cognac.

Numerous fights broke out between GIs. One soldier named Boyce J. P. Vincent put on a woman's dress that he had found and began attacking other GIs. Sergeant Ragland had to throw Vincent to the ground several times before Vincent backed off.

Chuck Groskopf and others including me invaded an insurance office. Groskopf was walking around pulling handfuls of keys out of the comptometers [key-driven mechanical calculators]. A military government colonel came in yelling that, if we continued, he would have us court-martialed. One of the guys said, "What the hell are you going to do about it, send us to the front lines?" After some obscenities and vulgarities, the colonel backed off. We then went into the basement and blew open a vault which contained numerous valuable collections of rare coins. Realizing that we would have difficulty carrying them, we subsequently dumped the coins into a storm sewer.

Crossing the Rhine

We crossed the Rhine River between Mainz and Worms via a pontoon bridge put up by the engineers. The 104th Regiment crossed with only one incident. A German reconnaissance plane fired a burst of machine-gun bullets and killed one GI who was riding on a weapons carrier.

A ritual developed among American soldiers crossing the Rhine on pontoon bridges. Most of the guys would urinate into the river as they passed over it. I cannot tell if this is some sort of basic animal instinct, as we had been in combat for so long, or just wanting to make a statement of our disgust for the Germans.

Even our commanding general, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, did the same. A news photographer was there to snap the picture. As legend has it, a copy of this picture was sent to Monty indicating that we crossed the river first.*

* Actually, soldiers from the 9th Armored Division of Hodges's First Army had seized a bridge over the Rhine at Remagen and crossed before any other Allied soldiers. — ed.

From my understanding, General Eisenhower also partook in the ritual when he came east across the Rhine. I have been told that original copies of these pictures exist in the Patton Museum at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, but, for obvious reasons, are not on public display. Boys will be boys.

104th Infantry Regiment's Area of Operation from March to May 1945

Chapter VII: Across Germany

Movement During This Time

One of the first major targets after crossing the Rhine was Darmstadt, which is just east of the Rhine. This city was bombed to virtual destruction. So much rubble lay in the streets that jeeps could not maneuver through them. We cleared out much of the city on foot, finding only elderly persons who had survived in basements or other wreckage. The apparent reason for the massive bombing was to eliminate a portion of the population that worked in covered mines used as factories.

An interesting concept here is that “civilians” working in factories producing war materials were as much considered combatants as soldiers with rifles. In today’s politically correct society and way of waging war, we forget that this is true. Our enemies would not have their weapons and explosives if the factories where they are produced were destroyed. Producing military hardware is just as deadly as employing it.

During this time and up to the end of the war, the 26th Division moved from Darmstadt to Wurzburg, swung south to Regensburg, southeast to Deggendorf, and then to Passau. We next crossed into Austria, fought in the Linz area, and finally went into Czechoslovakia, where we were when the war ended. As we moved across Germany and through Bavaria, Austria, and Czechoslovakia the fighting was sparse, yet intense in numerous locations. As I recall, the SS and RAD (15-16 year olds) presented the most problems.

Georg Haberl is a citizen of Deggendorf who was eleven when the war ended. Since his retirement, he has undertaken the writing of the campaign of the 26th (Yankee) Division in Bavaria. He is an excellent source for details relating to combat in Bavaria and our occupation (see Bibliography).

Hungarians Hide Us

After crossing the Rhine and moving beyond Darmstadt, our patrol squad was constantly clearing small areas and attempting to keep contact with the retreating Germans. Five GIs, including myself, were searching an area covered by scattered woods and with a tiny river. We came upon a Hungarian camp of many families with their wagons and cattle.

As we approached the encampment, we noticed that they were excitedly motioning to us to go to the rear of their camp. Suddenly, we became aware of their concern. Approaching the camp from the other direction was a German truck and a half-track with at least twenty soldiers. The Hungarians were protecting us from the Germans. The Germans stopped and talked to the Hungarians for several minutes. Finally, they moved on.

East of Darmstadt

The 26th Division continued to move east. We reached an extremely level area and noticed a sizable village which was being attacked by one of the other regiments of the 26th. These attacking units were held up, and we could see a hail of tracers coming from both American and German guns.

Suddenly, a flight of B-26s came from our rear. They were so near the ground that I believe I could have hit one with a baseball. These planes continued toward the German-occupied village and released their timed bombs on the village. The American unit began to move into the village immediately.

This incident exemplifies how a well-coordinated attack between the army and air force should function. Unfortunately, too many of the support attacks by planes dropped their bombs off target, sometimes on friendly troops.

With the innovations in guided weapons and “smart” munitions that we have today, our forces have some of the best combat support available. The claims of “collateral damage” one hears or reads about in the media are nothing compared to what occurred during World War II. While we strive to continue improving the accuracy of our weapons and guidance systems, our enemies do not.

As a matter of fact, our current enemies use civilians, children, and religious structures as safe havens, combatants, and military depots. The shoe, therefore, must fit equally on both feet. We have seen this from the Vietnam War to the current war on terror.

Hang the Bastard

Our division had crossed the Rhine and we took the city of Fulda. Shortly thereafter, we occupied a small town which had a rock wall surrounding it. The area was flat which made the town quite prominent on the landscape.

To our amazement, we had moved our battalion so rapidly that the flanking units were out of radio contact. To add to our problem, we were surrounded by Germans.

Fortunately, our battalion was nearly at full strength, and we had supporting tank destroyers plus a unit of chemical mortars. [Chemical mortars fired 105mm chemical and explosive projectiles.] If my memory is correct, a platoon of Cannon Company was also with us. Therefore, we could have held off an attack by a German division. Nevertheless, we were very nervous and no ex-lax was issued by the medics.

The event which I recall occurred within the town. A large number of prisoners were assembled in a large barn. Several of the captives pleaded that they had been prisoners of the Germans before being captured by the Americans. They could speak some English and harassed us by claiming that they were half-Jewish. We were convinced that they were Nazis or SS and believed Americans to be too dumb to figure out their scheme. They should have known that SS soldiers caught in civilian clothes would be instantly executed. No Miranda warnings were extended to SS.

One of the Germans was plain nuts. He became such a nuisance that the American guards decided to hang him inside the barn in view of the other prisoners. One GI tied a rope around his neck. Another GI climbed to attach the rope to a high beam. Still another GI kicked the prisoner off the loft before the rope was tied above. The prisoner hit the main floor, and he put on such an act that we broke up laughing and didn't hang him again.

A Flag of Truce

A very nasty incident occurred in the town of Kronach—though some soldiers say that the town may have been Weissenstadt. As we approached the town, the residents displayed white sheets hanging from the windows of their homes. As a platoon from our battalion approached the town, German soldiers opened fire on us. Several soldiers were wounded.

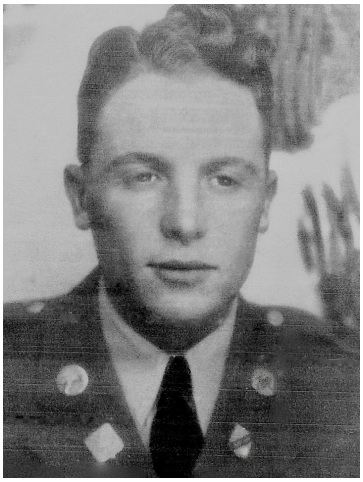
We withdrew rapidly. Supporting our battalion was a tank destroyer platoon. The tank destroyers lined up on a nearby hill and fired a barrage of phosphorus shells into the town. Needless to say, the destruction was horrendous.

The concept of enemy troops hiding behind civilians and using a flag of truce (surrender) is nothing new. We just did not have to call the Pentagon to ask permission to fire back.

Easter Sunday 1945

On Easter Sunday 1945, Cannon Company rolled into a trap and were receiving heavy fire from the Krauts. The GIs stopped their vehicles, hurriedly set up their cannons, and fired "charge 1." These were one-second timed projectiles which exploded so quickly that some shrapnel actually came back on the crews. They changed both charge and time until no live Krauts were in sight. Not one of the cannon crews was wounded.

2nd Lt. Marvin B. Nelson

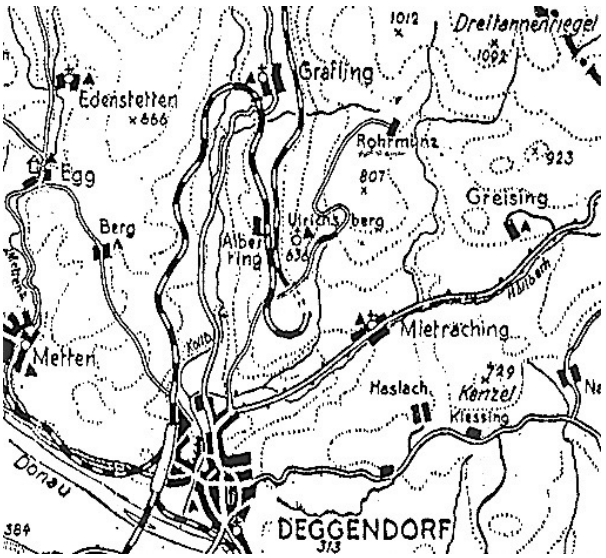

2nd Lt. Marvin B. Nelson

I first met Lieutenant Marvin B. Nelson near the village of Kaundorf. He had joined our company as a replacement just before the Battle of the Bulge. I had heard of and known him from the times when we would cross into other company areas to perform reconnaissance patrols and met him during that battle. He was brave, well-regarded, and very intelligent. Even though he had never graduated from high school, he had been accepted into OCS (Officer Candidate School) and graduated from it. Lieutenant Nelson always cooperated with our efforts, making accomplishing our missions a lot easier.

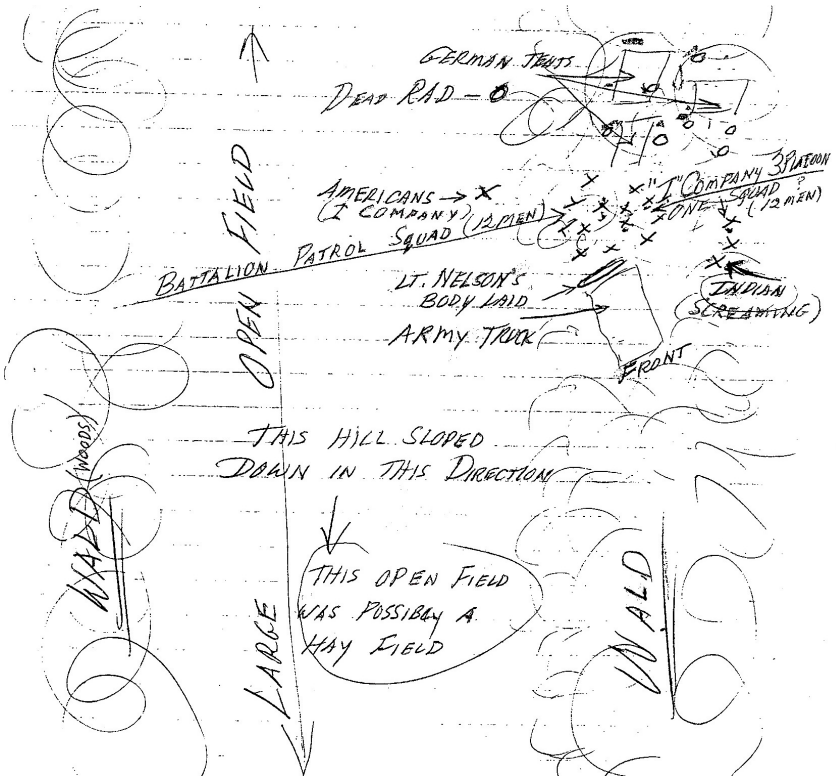
On 27 April 1945, our patrol's mission was to clear out remote villages. We had crossed a large opening and approached a woods. As we came close, we heard Americans firing M-1 rifles. We spotted a 6x6 truck parked in a small clearing. The Americans had stopped firing and were carrying the body of Lieutenant Nelson, who did not have his helmet on.

My squad, along with another squad, participated in a massacre of a dozen RAD [Reichsarbeitsdienst = German Labor Service] kids, 15 to 16 years old, near the village of Rohrmunz located about three miles northeast of Deggendorf (see map and sketch on page 43). Lieutenant Nelson led his squad into a clearing in the forest. There, after traveling by night, a group of RAD boys had pitched tents and just bunked down. Lieutenant Nelson's men surprised them. One RAD kid grabbed a rifle and fired at the Americans. His bullet struck Lieutenant Nelson in the temple killing him instantly. His squad opened fire on the RAD boys. Several were shot out of their tents. The rest were beaten to death with rifle butts. Twelve RAD boys died in that skirmish. [A letter to the author from a survivor of that massacre, Oscar Sperl, of Schierling, Germany, is printed on page 1 of this memoir.]

However equipped and as young as they were, these RAD boys were as lethal as any other German soldiers. Because many of us who returned from the war did not relate our stories, these tactics would not be known to the American population until the Vietnam War. Even then, they would not be understood. We, like our sons who fought in Southeast Asia, could have been called "baby killers." But we were not. How blissful and naive our population was during that time period. The difference is the great increase in media coverage and that its programming is often packaged to sway public opinion. In the heat of battle, events occur that are difficult for noncombatants to understand.



Deggendorf-Rohrmunz Region (scale: 2 cm = 1 mile)



Author's Sketch Showing the Situation Just After Lieutenant Nelson Was Killed

The German citizens have established a memorial in the forest at the site of the massacre. I was in Germany in 2003 to attend the annual remembrance ceremony. It was extremely touching. Oscar Sperl met us at the Munich airport and drove us to his home for a visit. I met several survivors at the ceremony. Around that time, I also visited Lieutenant Nelson's brothers and sisters in Missouri.

Chapter VIII: End of the 1000-Year Reich

VE Day

[The following is paraphrased from what the author told Ray Tonchen about the end of the war.]

On VE Day, May 8, 1945, we were in Haslovice, Czechoslovakia, which was within walking distance of Budweis [the German name; the city is called "České Budějovice" in Czech], the namesake of Budweiser beer. It was a warm, sunny, mild, beautiful spring day, so we shed our jackets and just had our shirts on. We were on patrol duty that day clearing towns and other small areas of Germans. Organized resistance had ceased, so these were "mop up" operations.

A group of us were close to Pchmuller (?) at about 1030-1100 when someone yelled, "The war is over!" That fellow might have heard it from the radio, as we could receive civilian radio broadcasts from England quite clearly, or through official channels. That news spread like wildfire.

Believe it or not, there was not much reaction from the guys. There was no more shooting, and no one jumped for joy. We were very much lacking emotion and not very demonstrative of our feelings. People look at me strangely when I tell them this. However, after 200 days of combat, there was nothing to feel. We were numb from war. A hot meal at this point would have brought out more emotion. Having death tug at your elbow for that length of time changes one's psyche and priorities.

Later that morning, a couple of other soldiers and I rode in a jeep with a chaplain who spoke German. We didn't even have our ammo belts with us, but we did have our M-1 rifles and a few reloads. The chaplain's job was to announce to the local villages that the war was over.

By evening the kitchen caught up with us, and we had a hot meal. There was still much to do concerning the occupation, but at least our minds could start returning to "normal." Some of us never fully got there. Sixty-one years after that day I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and received a "100% disability." One cannot go off to war and not be changed. But how a nation receives its warriors when they come home from battle makes all the difference in the world.

Czechoslovakia

My impression of Czechoslovakia [Sudeten Land] was that it was pretty, very neat and clean. The citizens spoke German and seemed much like Germans in Austria and Bavaria. As Germans, they were industrious, hard working, trustworthy, and cooperative.

After hostilities ended, we settled in for occupation duty in Czechoslovakia. We occupied Prachatice, a town not far from Pilsen. Our quarters were in a school. Several incidents occurred during our stay there.

The communist Czechs were a cadre trained in Russia during the war solely to take over governments as Russia occupied countries. They were a nasty bunch of street thugs. A number of these commie Czechs infiltrated our area and intended to let us know that they were taking control.

However, these Czechs were confronting battle-hardened GIs who were in no frame of mind to tolerate the arrogance and intimidation displayed by the Czech commies. One night, about midnight, a member of my squad named Sasser was being relieved by another squad member. The location was in the main part of town. Abruptly, a Czech stepped out of an alley, pointed his gun at Sasser, and yelled, “Halt!” Sasser brushed the Czech’s gun aside and struck him in the face with the butt of his M-1. The Czech reappeared 10 days later with his jaw and face still in a bandage. Such was the beginning of the Cold War that Patton had anticipated.

White Russians

At the end of the war, thousands of “White Russians” were trapped between American and Russian units. These White Russians insisted on surrendering only to the Americans because they had fought with the Germans against the Russians. Not knowing how many White Russians were in the group, a squad of GIs was sent to guide them through our lines to a large area to camp them.

A cursory look indicated that many more GIs were needed for this mission. Finally, the White Russians were allowed to come through the American front lines. It required 24 hours for all these people to walk through the town to the rear. This parade consisted of horses, cars, trucks, men, women, children, cows, goats, baby carriages, wagons, and anything else they had with them.

I never learned whether they were repatriated. If so, it meant certain death for them. These people, formerly from the Anti-Bolshevik Army, despised the communists with a passion. They were like the Kurds under Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Lords of the Dance

The 3rd Battalion of the 104th Regiment planned a dance to be held in the town hall auditorium. The plan was to put up posters in conspicuous places in the surrounding towns and villages. The girls were told that they would be driven in military vehicles to the dance and be returned home in the same manner.

The nasty Czech commies developed a plan to stop the military trucks and order the girls out to return home on foot. When a few trucks came back empty, Colonel Dellert ordered armed GIs with live ammunition to accompany the trucks and return to the outlying villages to once again bring the girls to the dance. This plan worked quite well. It was never acknowledged, but I believe that more than one Czech commie met his end as they were no match for our GIs.

Several Czech commies worked their way into the dance. They would dance very fast and spin around as they danced. This gave them an excuse to kick the GIs. But, by this time, the GIs had a fair amount of liquor in them and were in the mood to fight. Several fights broke out, but the main event was for GIs to grab a Czech and slam him into a steel column which held up the balcony. The Czechs left the dance early, and no problems were experienced while returning the girls to the villages.

Action in Budweis

The next town east of Prachatice was Budweis, home of the famous beer. The Russians and Americans agreed that this town would be off limits for both military groups. Of course, this only served as an open invitation to visit the town and raise hell!

While three of us were walking into Budweis, we were crossing a bridge with a narrow sidewalk. Approaching us were two Czech commies. In a very arrogant manner, they attempted to bump us off the sidewalk. Needless to say, the two Czechs ended up in the river. We never saw them again. Maybe they couldn't swim?!

One night several GIs went to Budweis looking for some activity. One GI succeeded in taking a girl to a bedroom in a hotel. A Russian became incensed because he assumed the girl was his. He charged up the stairs to the room. Somehow the GI learned of his approach and dashed out of the room and down the stairway. A landing was located in the stairway with a huge mirror on the wall. While chasing the GI down the stairs, the Russian mistook the GI's image in the mirror for the GI and hit the mirror so hard he was knocked out.

Explosions that Shook the Earth

I do not recall the exact date of this event. It occurred in late May or early June 1945 near Budweis, Czechoslovakia.

The 328th Regiment of the 26th Division secured an open field to use as an ammunition dump (storage area). Someone foolishly ordered the regimental ammunition supply to be collected and stacked in one giant pile in the chosen field. Needless to say, the inmates were operating the asylum! Stacking hundreds of tons of ammunition together was the zenith of moronic workmanship.

My uncle was the commandant of the ordinance depot at Ogden, Utah, during the early part of WWII. He supervised construction of the ammunition storage facility. He explained to me that a precise limit of ammo was to be stored in igloo-shaped structures. Each structure had to be spaced a minimum distance from the other structures.

It was said that the explosion created holes large enough to park semi-trailer trucks inside. Twenty-seven soldiers were killed by the blast. I was standing guard duty in a town several miles away from the blast and could hear the explosion.

Occupation Duty in Austria

Following the end of WWII, I was assigned to Cannon Company, 104th Regiment. After much reorganization, in August 1945, those of us who were single and weren't yet eligible to go home were assigned to occupation duty in Austria with the 83rd Infantry Division. Places like Scharding, Wels, Passau, Bad Schallerbach, Linz, and many others were very familiar.

I played football in Bad Schallerbach. A football program had been activated, and I joined a squad. I started as a backfield player in the first game. I hurt my left hip and moved to center. Then my left hand was injured causing me to leave the game.

I did not seek medical attention and spent many days resting, hoping the hip would recover. Following this, I requested a transfer and was reassigned to the division headquarters in Linz. My assignment was to make posters for entertainment for GIs. I stayed in a room at the Landes Theater where the Special Services offices were housed.

At one point, the American MPs became "chicken shit." They began giving out tickets for such things as having five people in a jeep, three people in the front seat, and other nit-picking reasons. A friend of mine from basic training and ASTP was a sergeant in the MPs. I warned him that the special services had to use vehicles and that the MPs should not harass our drivers.

He listened passively and smiled. So when we assigned a dance band for the MPs' party, we sent a flute, bass drum, and viola. How could anyone dance to that music? After that, the tickets were much less frequent.

Death of a Commander

We heard about the car accident in which our former army commander, Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., was injured. Days later, he succumbed to his injuries. To assure that things ran on time, Patton had refused to de-nazify the German government. As a result, he was reassigned to the Fifteenth Army, which was a paperwork army compiling reports.

The troops did not get involved much because of politics involved with General Eisenhower and Patton's removal from Third Army. The media treated Patton shabbily, and there were rumors the "accident" was really an assassination. All we knew was that we were going home soon.

Coming Home

I was high on the list to go home with 75 points because of my 200 days of combat duty with the 26th Infantry Division, the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, and the European Theater Ribbon with four Campaign Stars. Because of this, I did not get reassigned to the Pacific. At that time, January 1946, I was in Linz, Austria, working for Special Services.

One day the Headquarters Company first sergeant came to me with paperwork. He did not say a word. It was my transportation orders to return to Ft. Devens, where I had been inducted in the first place, for discharge. I traveled to Munich for an evening, went on to Paris overnight, spent the next evening in a camp, then embarked on the SS *Sea Scamp* for home. During the trip, we weathered one of the worst hurricanes but finally made it to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, which was near New York City.

A day or so later, we traveled by train from Camp Kilmer to Ft. Devens, Massachusetts, where we were discharged. On the train, I traveled with Lt. Col. Howard C. Dellert, and we reminisced. During the war, he had been commander of 3rd Battalion. We knew each other very well. My patrol squad had done many assignments for him, and many times he briefed us for our intelligence recons. Now, rank and military courtesies were pretty much out the window. We were just two weary guys looking for the comfort of our families once again. We reminded each other of the incident at Kaundorf where we raced to the barn door while being shelled. I beat him through the doorway. Then I tripped and fell, and he tripped and fell on top of me. After this train ride, we never saw each other again.

World War II was over!

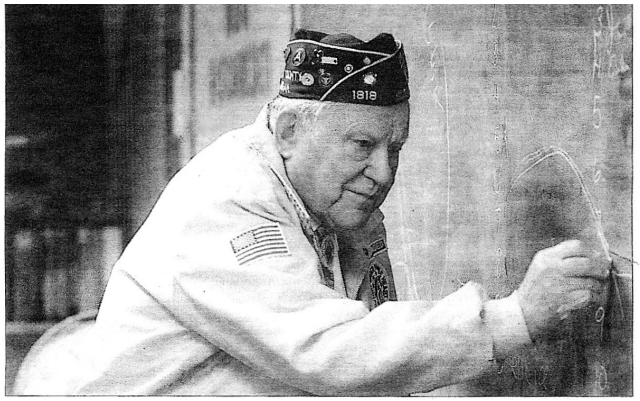
* * * * *

About the Author

After the war was over, Bill Houle returned home to Massachusetts in January 1946. There he immediately began building a new house for his parents. That task was completed after one interruption, earning his bachelor's degree at Defiance College in Ohio.

There he met and married his first wife, Connie. After graduation, they taught elementary school in Ohio and Michigan, while raising two children, a daughter and a son. During that time Bill earned a doctorate in education from the University of Toledo. They retired after 34 years of teaching. Subsequently, Bill worked in retail sales and managed a construction firm. He is a member of several civic and military organizations including the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Along with fellow veterans, he has shared his memories of World War II with local school children (see article below). He also edited a religious studies program and was awarded an honorary doctorate by Midwestern Christian Institute.

Bill's first wife died after 52 years of marriage. In 2009 he remarried. He had met Delen two years before in church. She has been very helpful in preparing this memoir.



Veterans share war stories with students

Students make cards in honor of Veterans Day

BY SARAH CORMIER
C & G STAFF WRITER

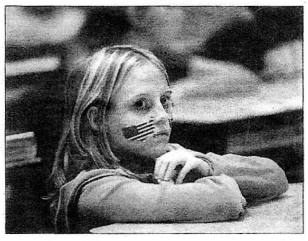
For William Houle, Gordon VanderMolen and Joseph Schmitz – all three World War II veterans – sharing their experiences of what it was like to be in the military is one of their favorite things to do.

Story after story can be told as all three reminisce about their time served – Houle and Schmitz on duty in France and VanderMolen in the Philippines.

Although all three are in their 80s, their memories of terror and triumph in the face of the enemy still hold strong. So strong, in fact, that the trio can still pass on the lessons they learned to youngsters.

As members of The Military Order of the Purple Heart — an organization where only servicemen wound-

See VETERANS on page 17A



Top: William Houle, a World War II veteran, draws a diagram of a battle that took place during the war. Houle and two other veterans shared their experiences with a fifth-grade class at Cherokee Elementary School on Nov. 1.

Above: Fifth-grader Carli Peraino listens to veterans talk about their World War II experiences.

Photos by Erin Sanchez

Part of an article published in the *Macomb Township Chronicle*, November 9, 2006, Bill's local newspaper

Appendix: Remembering Lieutenant Nelson

Text of Silver Star Awarded Posthumously
to Lieutenant Nelson on July 31, 1945:

"For gallantry in action in the vicinity of Britten, Germany, on 14 March 1945. During operations near Britten elements of his Company came under fire of an enemy machine gun located at a point some two hundred yards away from the unit. Lt. Nelson crawled to a nearby defilade, courageously worked his way to within twenty yards of the hostile gun emplacement and tossed two well-aimed hand grenades into the position, killing one member of the enemy gun crew and forcing the two other wounded members to surrender. His heroic action enabled his Company to continue its advance. His unusual courage under fire and aggressiveness in action against the enemy reflect the highest credit upon Lt. Nelson and the Armed Forces of the United States."

On September 5, 1945, Lt. Nelson was also posthumously awarded an Oak Leaf Cluster to his Silver Star for "gallantry in action" during the action on 27 April 1945.*

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* This information and the above quote are from a newspaper article titled "Memorial Services for Lieut. Nelson," printed in December 1948, possibly in the *The Salem [Missouri] News*.

Praises Work of the Red Cross

Somewhere in Luxemburg
Jan. 18, 1945.

Dear Editor:

Would, at this time, like to take the opportunity (if I may), to inform the people of Dent county (through your paper), just what the American Red Cross is doing for their sons and friends overseas.

When I was there at home on leave I was asked the following question by men that had served over here in the last war: "Just what is the American Red Cross doing for you this time?" At that time, having never been overseas, my answer was, I am sure, rather vague. But now, I feel fully qualified to answer that same question.

First, the American Red Cross is the main link between the civilian and the military. (The connection could never be better.) If the man in the service has any difficulties, regardless of the nature, the American Red Cross is, or has, a representative at hand to give every possible aid. Ladies and gentlemen, that is the organization that gets your son his emergency furlough; that, too, is the organization that will finance the same emergency furlough if the son happens to be broke.

Now, as the critical moment draws near, and he's standing at the foot of the gangplank, ready to board a troop transport for destination unknown, the American Red Cross goes to work in earnest. Every man is given a steaming hot cup of coffee; candy, cigarettes, donuts. No, maybe not much, but certainly big enough in the eyes of G. I. Joe, and especially at that time. His supply of cigarettes is replenished many times on the way over, and in addition, he's given reading material, writing material, sewing kits and many other seemingly insignificant things that actually do help more than even he knows.

Some time later this very homesick boy steps ashore on some foreign soil, but the American Red Cross is there, too, and regardless of what the weather may be, the girls are out there pushing their carts of do-nuts and coffee up and down the line.

I have talked with fellow officers that have come back up to the front from rear areas and hospitals, and from all the information I have been able to gather the American Red Cross is doing even more there.

My vocabulary is much too small to allow me to put into words the praise the American Red Cross so richly deserves.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,
Lt. M. B. Nelson.

Letter written by Lieutenant Nelson
It was published in Nelson's local newspaper,
The Salem [Missouri] News, in early 1945.

The Salem News 53¢

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Volume LXXXVI Number 36 Thursday, August 2, 2001 2 Sections, 24 Pages

News tip? Suggestion? We'd like to hear from you. Call 573-729-4126 or write The Salem News, P.O. Box 798, Salem MO 65560

Wartime memories

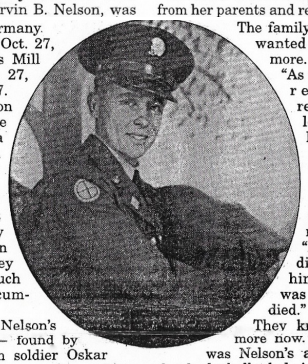
lost and found

Dent County family learns more about a brother killed in World War II

by Dwayne McClellan
News Staff Writer

Kathy Steelman, Fern Knueven and William Nelson are proving that it's never too late to learn about family.

It has been 56 years since their brother, Lt. Marvin B. Nelson, was Deggendorf, Germany.



He was born Oct. 27, 1917, in Howes Mill and died April 27, 1945. He was 27.

Marvin Nelson was shot in the temple during a skirmish in 1945. All his family here knew at the time was that he was killed by sniper fire in Germany. They didn't know much about the circumstances.

But thanks to Nelson's army helmet — found by former German soldier Oskar Sperl — and recent communication with a German writer and an Army buddy, Steelman and her family are seeing their prayers come true.

"I can't put into words what this means to me and my family," Steelman said. "It has filled a big hole in my heart."

•

Knueven and William Nelson knew little bit about their brother. They were very young at the time he was killed. Knueven was six, and her memories include sitting on his lap during furloughs.

Steelman remembers less. She wasn't even born when her brother was killed. She learned about him from her parents and read letters he

The family has always wanted to know more.

"As a little girl, I remember reading his letters and looking through his things with admiration and curiosity," Steelman said. "But I really didn't know him, who he was and how he died."

They know a little more now. First, there was Nelson's army helmet that had a bullet hole in the temple. It was found in the woods in 1950 by Sperl, who was a guard at the camp at the time of the incident. He heard the gunfire that killed Nelson and several Germans.

Writer George Haberl, who lives in Deggendorf, Germany, decided to write a book about the war. He would focus on the area around Deggendorf. He put an article in the "Yankee Division" magazine asking for information about the incidents that occurred then.

Bill Houle, a subscriber to the magazine from Michigan, read the article and responded with information about Nelson, who was killed at a camp near Deggendorf. Houle saw Nelson carried away after being shot.

That chain of events led to the three Dent County residents getting information about their brother.

Houle and Haberl wanted to find Nelson's family. They knew he was first buried in a US-Military Cemetery in Nuremburg, then moved to a French-U.S. Cemetery.

Four years after he was shot, Nelson's body was taken to Missouri, where he was buried in the Jadwin Cemetery.

Houle first called coroners in Missouri, then started calling courthouses. He hit paydirt when he talked to Dent County Clerk Gary Leonard.

Leonard told Houle that he remembered the late Virgil Parker talking about his nephew, Marvin, who had been killed in World War II. Leonard had Houle call Vivian Jordan, Parker's daughter, who gave the information to Steelman.

Steelman, Kneuven, William Nelson and Jeremy Nelson, Steelman's nephew, started talking with Haberl and Houle to learn more about Lt. Nelson.

Steelman said it was important to them to learn as much as they could about a brother they really didn't know.

•

In May, Nelson's helmet was mailed to his Dent County family.

Along with the presentation of the helmet were several stories shared through phone calls, e-mail and letters about their brother.

"He (Nelson) had a wonderful reputation," Houle, now 77, said Wednesday from his home in Michigan. "The men all liked him and so did the officers."

Houle said the process of finding Lt. Nelson's family and getting the helmet back to them took 15 months, but something that he was going to see through.

"It was a sentimental thing for me, that's about the only way I can explain what I did," Houle said. "I always had this image in my mind of Lt. Nelson being carried out of the woods. But when I responded to the article in the magazine and got started finding his family, I couldn't quit until I saw it through."

The helmet, Nelson's army uniform and medals are on display at Treasures in downtown Salem.

It's a display that Jeremy Nelson — William Nelson's son and Kathy's nephew — said means a lot to their family, because after all these years they can feel proud about Nelson's life and army career.

Kathy and Fern say they have been able to learn much about their brother. . . his characteristics, that he was well-respected by his men and other officers. They found that he sent money home for his family's needs and was a kind, sensitive and generous man.

See Nelson Page 12A

YEARS OF MEMORIES—Kathy Steelman, left, holds the World War II helmet of her late brother Lt. Marvin Nelson, who was killed April 27, 1945, near Deggendorf, Germany. Steelman, her sister Fern Kneuven, and her brother William Nelson didn't know much about their brother and who he was.

From Page 1A

"But most importantly we learned how he died and the circumstances behind his death," Steelman said.

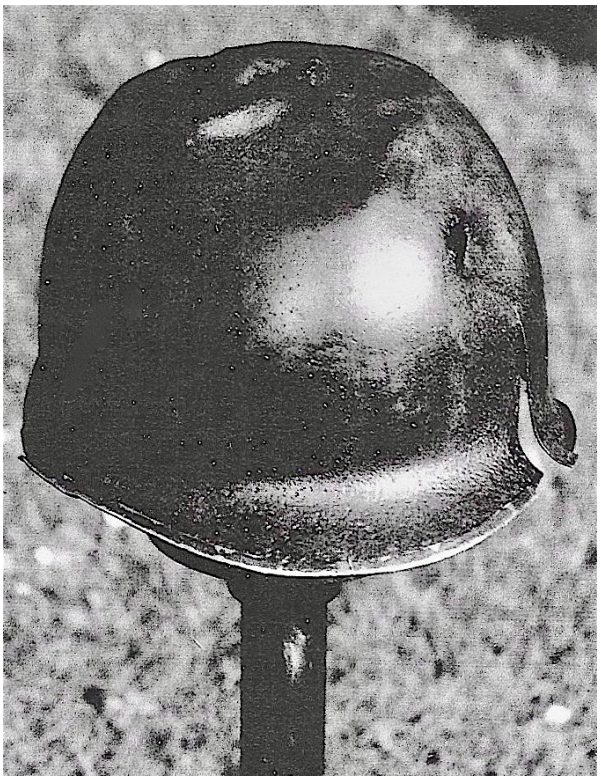
The shooting came after a troop of American soldiers, led by Nelson, marched in and ordered the Germans to surrender. After Nelson was shot, the Americans returned fire and killed 12 Germans and wounded many others.

Steelman said she feels that she really knows her brother now. The family would like to know even more.

A memorial is held each year on the first Sunday after April 27, the day of the skirmish. The first memorial was held in 1995.

This past April, approximately 200 family members and eyewitnesses attended the memorial.

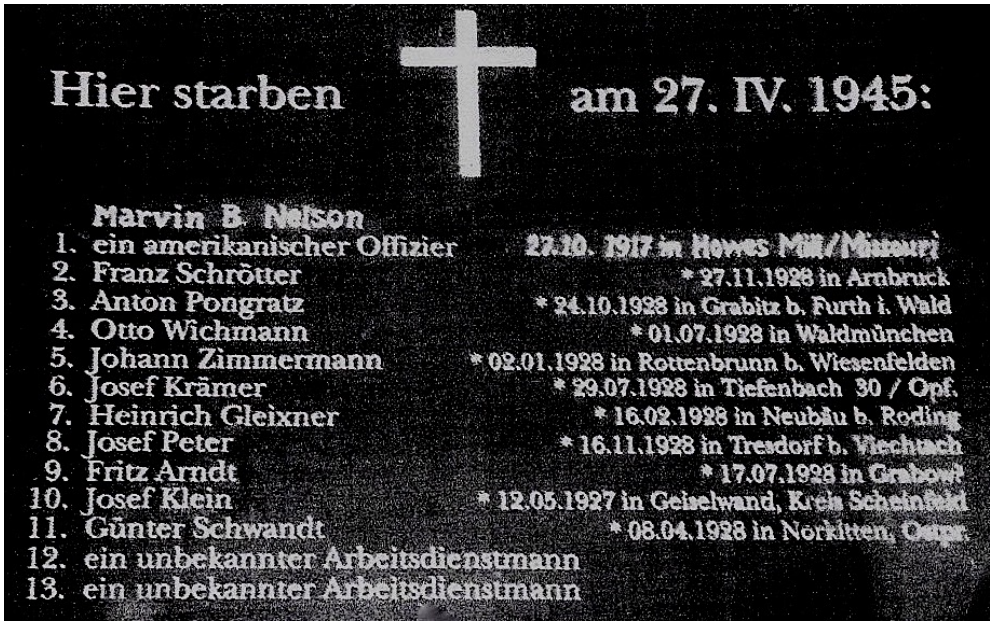
The services include a memorial toward Nelson Field, named in honor of the late Lieutenant Nelson. One of these days, Nelson's family would like to attend the memorial to learn more about the brother they are just getting to know.



Lieutenant Nelson's Helmet

Five years after Lieutenant Nelson was killed, Oscar Sperl recovered this helmet at the site. He kept it for 50 years before giving it to the Nelson family as the result of the author's contact with Georg Haberl (see story on previous page).

Memorial to those killed in the woods near Rohrmunz, Germany, on April 27, 1945. Lieutenant Nelson's name and birth information were added to the sign on the memorial cross thanks to the author and Georg Haberl (see below).



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- 26th Infantry Division Patch from https://www.google.com/search?q=26th+infantry+division+patch&tbm=isch&source#imgrc=iRTSpK_xZXqQOM:

- 104th Infantry Regiment Insignia from https://www.usamilitarymedals.com/products/104th-infantry-regiment-unit-crest-fortitude-et-courage (The motto shown in the online picture was added to the insignia after WWII.)

- Combat Infantry Badge from https://www.medalsofamerica.com/combat-infantry-badge-sterling-silver?CAWELAID=120060360000016819&CATARGETID

Page 2 - Detail from "Texaco Touring Map: Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island," Rand McNally & Company, Chicago, IL, 1940 edition.

- Photo of author in 1944, from his collection.

Page 7 - Photo of Cumberland River Crossing from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 10th page of chapter 4, 1960 edition. (The 1960 edition of this book has no page numbers.)

Page 11 - Photo of the SS *Argentina* from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 14th page of chapter 4, 1960 edition.

Page 14 - Photo of Cpt. W. W. Traska from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 1st page of chapter 6, 1960 edition.

Page 15 - Detail of area around Morville-les-Vic from 1:50,000-scale World War II army topographical map: RG 77: AMS M761, sheet XXXV-14 (1944) "Chateau-Salins," copy from National Archives Cartographic Section, College Park, MD.

- Photo of Col. Dwight T. Colley from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 4th page of chapter 6, 1960 edition.

Page 16 - Photo of John F. LaForte from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 6th page of chapter 10, 1960 edition.

Page 20 - Map compiled by B. Novak, ed., based on Google Maps.

Page 24 - Photo of part of Patrol Squad in Czechoslovakia after VE Day, 1945, from author's collection.

Page 28 - Map of Battle of the Ardennes, Final Phase, 104th Infantry Regiment from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 8th page of chapter 8, 1960 edition.

Page 33 - Photo of Lt. Col. Howard C. Dellert from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 13th page of chapter 7, 1960 edition.

Page 38 - Map compiled by B. Novak, ed., based on Google Maps.

Page 42 - Photo of 2nd Lt. Marvin B Nelson, from the Nelson family's collection.

Page 43 - Detail of the Deggendorf-Rohrmunz Region from an otherwise unidentified 1950 German map.

- Sketch Showing the Situation Just After Lieutenant Nelson Was Killed, drawn by the author around 2003.

Page 49 - Part of "Veterans share war stories with students" from the *Macomb Township Chronicle*, Mount Clemens, MI, November 9, 2006. Used with permission.

Page 50 - Silver Star from https://www.bradleyssurplus.com/products/army-silver-star-medal-large?

Page 51 - Lieutenant Nelson's letter "Praises Work of the Red Cross," published in *The Salem News*, Salem, Missouri, in early 1945. Used with permission.

Page 52 - "Wartime memories lost and found," *The Salem News*, Salem, Missouri, August 2, 2001. Used with permission.

Page 53 - Photo of Lieutenant Nelson's helmet, from the Nelson family's collection.

Photo of the memorial in the woods near Rohrmuwz, Germany, from the author's collection.

Close up photo of the plaque on the memorial cross in the woods near Rohrmuwz, Germany, listing those killed in the skirmish there, from the author's collection.

Inside Back Cover

- Map compiled by B. Novak, ed., based on Google Maps and map on the inside back cover of Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945*, 1960 edition.

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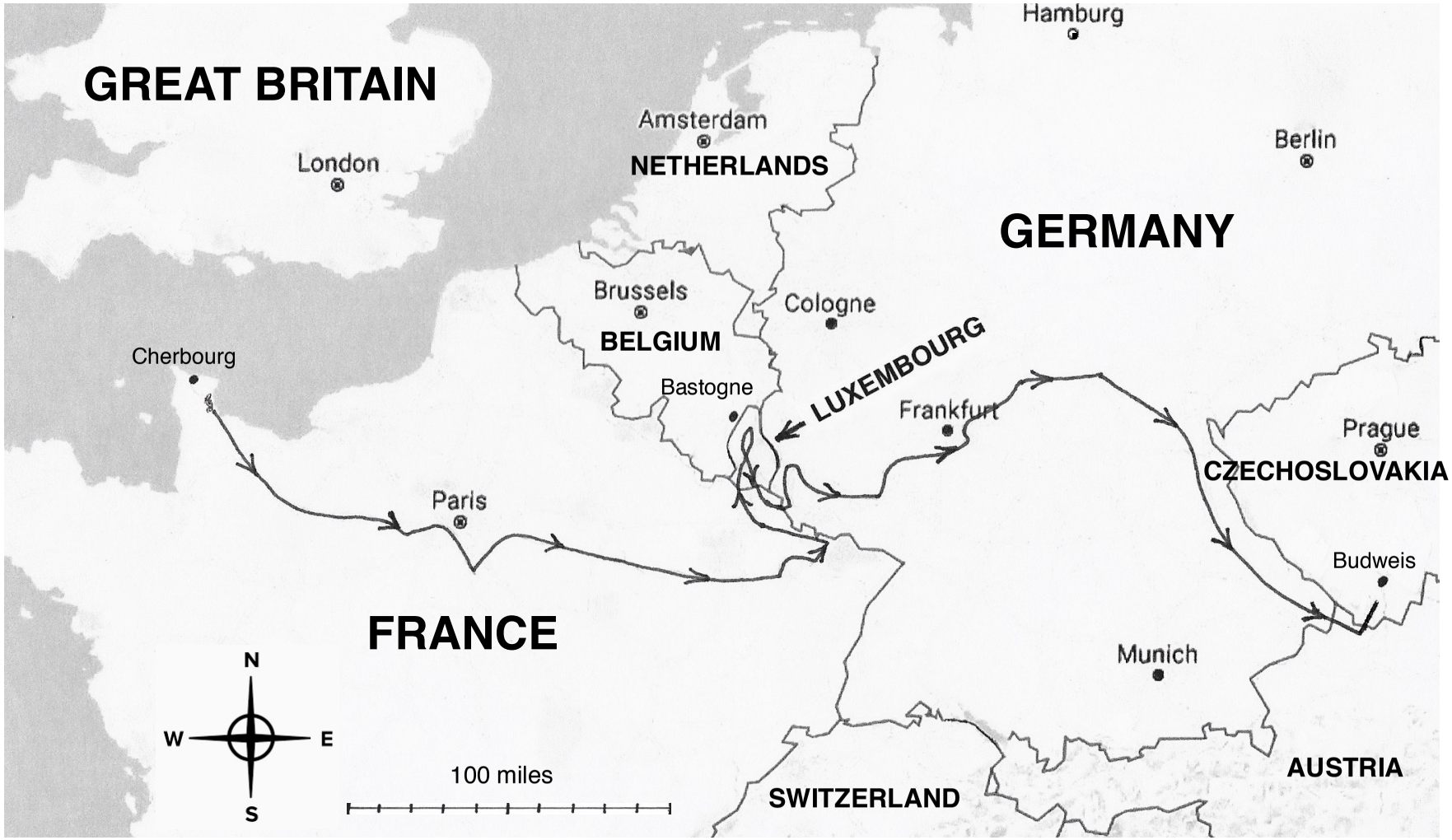
This book, written in German, is available in the collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, "Not Digitized, Requires Visit to Library & Archives." It is also available from Amazon and other online sources.



104th Infantry Regiment's Route from September 1944 to May 1945