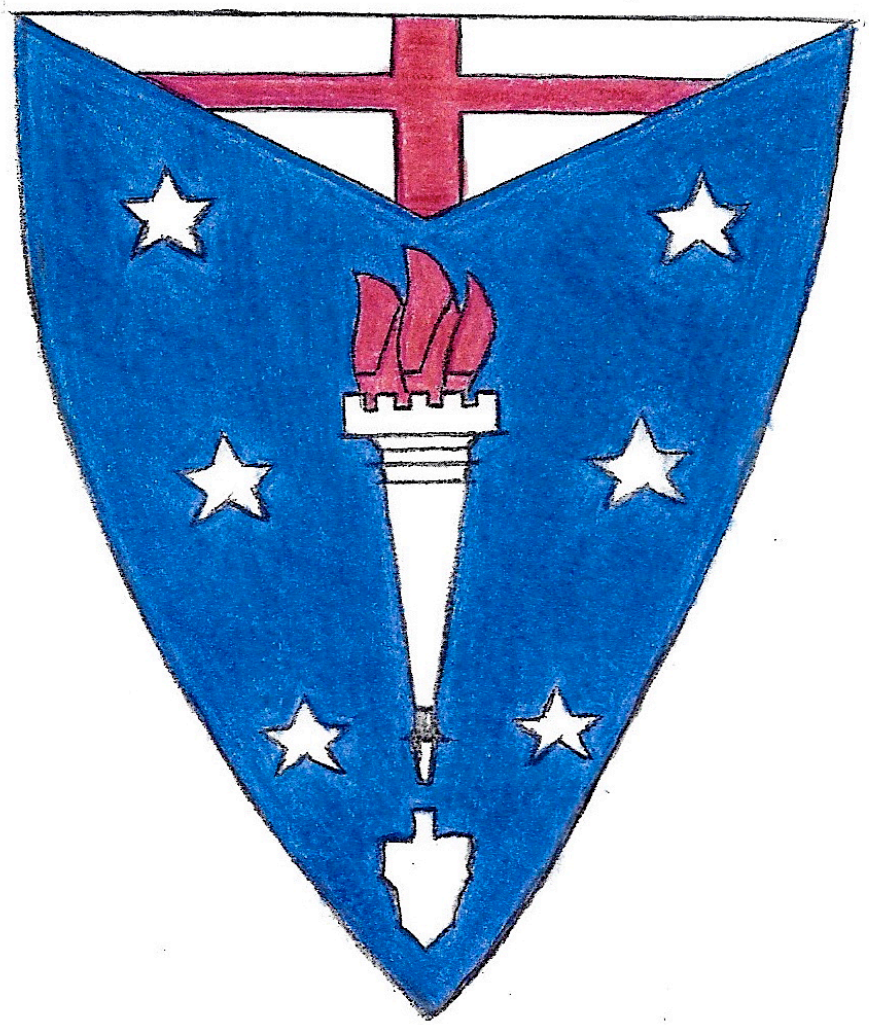
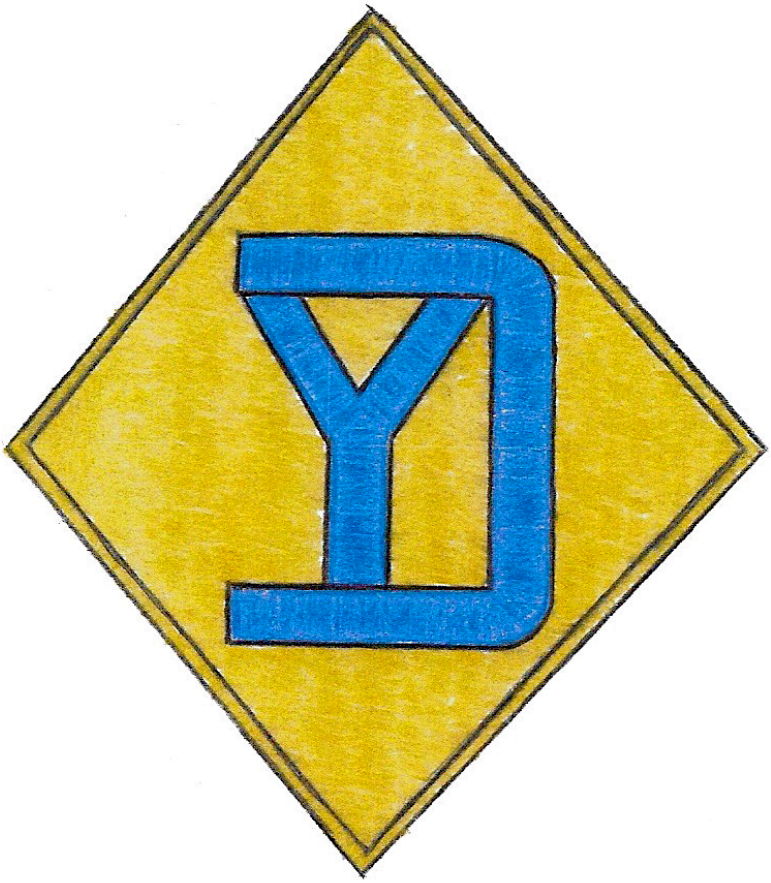
The World War II Memoirs of PFC David A. Markoff



David Aaron Markoff

PFC Markoff



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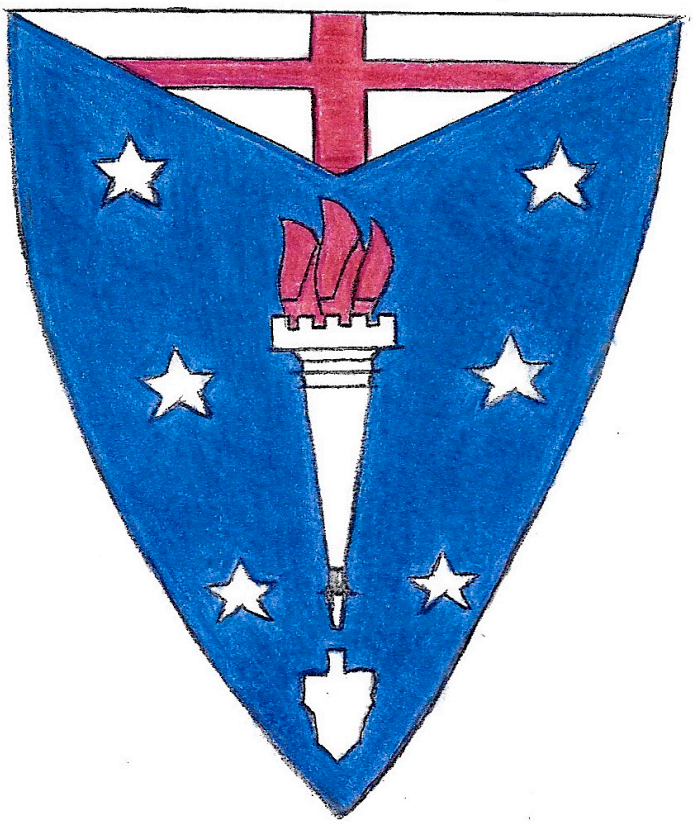

David Aaron Markoff

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This is a slightly revised edition of the original version published in 2013,
edited and retyped by Bruce Novak, with editorial assistance from Hilda Banks

Dedication

For First Lieutenant Sidney Novak who served in the 89th Calvary Reconnaissance Squadron, 9th Armored Division. He fought in Luxembourg, Belgium, and Germany as part of the First US Army, and was wounded in the Ardennes in November 1944. He served in Europe not far from where I did, but as his son and my friend, Bruce, regrets, he never got around to writing a memoir of his own World War II experiences.

Acknowledgments

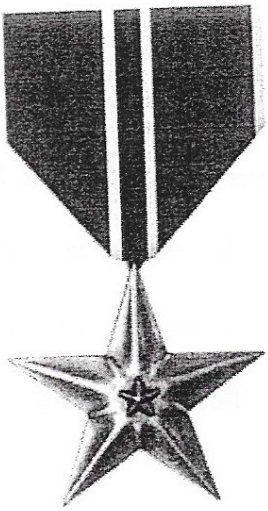
I wish to thank the many individuals, and especially my own family, who have helped me to prepare this memoir. My daughter, Laurie, assisted me in using the tape recorder and transcribed many hours of dictation. I thank Laurie's good friend, Barbara Engel, for letting me borrow her recorder. My sister, Hilda Banks, also helped with transcription, and edited and organized the manuscript. Ellen Banks, my niece, typed several versions of the text. My great-nephew, Joey Banks, drew the images of the shoulder sleeve insignia of the 26th Infantry Division, the "Yankee Division," as well as the Regimental Distinctive Insignia of the 104th Infantry Regiment in which I served as a combat rifleman. I am also grateful for the support and encouragement of my wife, Lee.

I appreciate the help of those people who generously shared their knowledge and devoted time and effort to this project. Brig. Gen. Leonid Kondratiuk, Director, Historical Services, Adjutant General's Office, Concord, Massachusetts, provided copies of numerous pertinent documents and reports. Bruce Novak, a student of military history, was likewise generous in offering advice and supporting materials. Rabbi Isaac Neuman, a Holocaust survivor, now deceased, provided details concerning the sabotage of munitions in the slave-labor camps. I am also grateful to Allen Avner for his willingness to share information from his studies of the war.

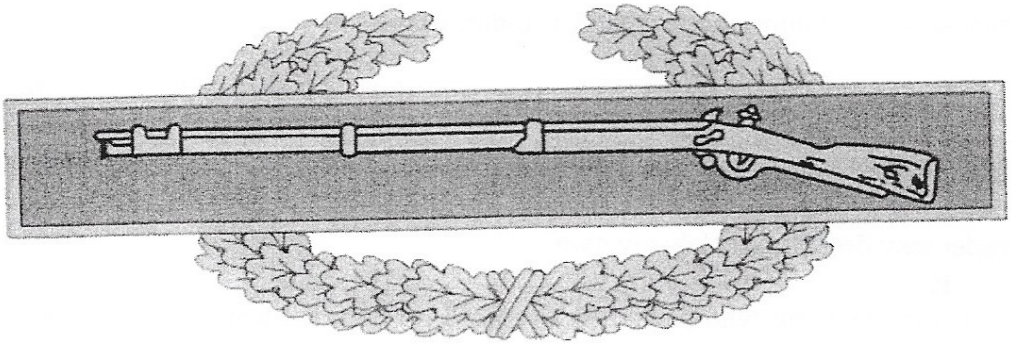
These recollections have been written 68 years after the end of World War II. I have tried to present my memories as accurately as I can, and any errors of fact that the reader may detect are solely my own.

I thank all those who helped me to record my personal war stories and who believed in the value of passing them on to future generations.

David Aaron Markoff
(1923-2013)



Bronze Star Medal



Combat Infantryman Badge

About the Author

My brother, David Aaron Markoff, was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on October 27, 1923. Our father was a prosperous businessman who had emigrated from Russia along with many family members, and he owned a successful jewelry store. Times were good. It was my father's second marriage, and he, my mother, David, and I, born about two years later, and dad's three older children plus our uncle, aunt, and three cousins lived together in a large, comfortable, if very complex, family home until a new reality struck hard in the form of the Great Depression of 1929.

Our father lost his business and investments and for a year or so tried unsuccessfully to get reestablished in several small towns in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Eventually, we moved to New York City, our native-born mother's home, to which her family had emigrated from Latvia.

We settled into a "railroad" flat on the second floor of one of the row houses characteristic of Brooklyn's Bay Ridge working-class neighborhood. Our father found a job as a watchmaker in a credit jewelry store.

Dave grew up on the "mean streets" of Brooklyn, a member of a gang of neighborhood boys from Italian, Scottish, Irish, Scandinavian, and German immigrant families, in which he was the sole Jew, who were free to roam at will after school, essentially unsupervised by their distressed parents. An excellent observer, he learned a great deal about reality from this experience.

Our father's sudden death in 1938 changed our world. We moved into a tiny apartment in upper Manhattan, and mom began the first of a long succession of secretarial jobs. Dave, who had just turned fifteen, worked daily in the garment district, lucky to have been hired by a family friend, making deliveries and doing odd jobs on the factory floor. After high school graduation he worked full time and attended the City College of New York in the evening until drafted into the army. He welcomed this wholeheartedly. Dave was eager to become a soldier and believed in the struggle to defeat a hated enemy.

He served as a combat rifleman in Company G, 104th Infantry Regiment, in the 26th Infantry "Yankee" Division of Gen. George S. Patton's Third US Army during the brutal campaign in northern France. Dave earned the European Campaign Medal with three campaign stars, the World War II Victory Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, the Bronze Star Medal, and the Combat Infantryman Badge. His war memoirs, presented here, were composed 68 years after his combat experiences. He emerged from the war changed in many ways, but steadfast in his loyalty and belief in the meaning and promise of America and our duty to protect our country.

Dave returned home to New York City after the war, managed to buy a car despite his aunt's concerns about how dangerous this was, and found work as a traffic manager for several large plastic and machinery companies in New Jersey. He married Leona Shulman, and they raised a son, Jeffrey, and daughter, Laurie. They lived longest in Rahway, New Jersey, before retiring to a senior community in Monroe Township.

Dave was a skillful league bowler, enjoyed trap shooting, and was a formidable Scrabble player. A perceptive, avid reader, he studied the stacks of books on political and social issues and foreign affairs provided by his nephew, Dan, an FBI agent whose work he greatly admired. Dave spoke excellent colloquial Spanish, and even some Tagalog, to the delight of his Philippine caregivers in later years. As his health failed, his wife and daughter cared for him with great love and devotion. He often joked that he had finally found a new goal in life—to be the oldest surviving veteran of World War II.

The last few months of his life were spent at the Veterans Memorial Home in Menlo Park, New Jersey. David died on February 27, 2013, at the age of 89, and was buried with the military honors he had earned with pride.

Hilda Markoff Banks
Champaign, Illinois
June 2013

From left: Shoulder-sleeve insignia of the Army Specialized Training Program; 26th Infantry Division; 9th Air Force

Ribbons (from left): Good Conduct; American Campaign; European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign with three campaign stars: Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe

Bronze Star Medal and Ribbon

Good Conduct Medal

PREAMBLE

World War II: Duty, Honor, Country

I am continually looked down upon by my friends for my "naive" attitude toward wars, spheres of influence, and current acts of treachery. My feelings are still straightforward, to the point, and unalterable. They may not meet your particular standards, but so be it.

Question: It seems out of everything else that happened in your life, "The War" had the biggest impact. Why do you think that is?

Answer: Everything else in my life has been "run-of-the-mill." I realize that many would greatly envy the life I have had, and for good reason. I have a devoted wife, a son and a daughter, a comfortable home, family and friends. I am indeed grateful. But the war has held the most meaning for me because of my searing memory of the significant events I witnessed and was a part of. The experience of repeated combat, of random life-and-death moments, of losing friends or seeing their lives forever changed by wounds has left an indelible mark on me. Those who served in combat often paid a terrible price, but we ended an unspeakable evil. I am proud to have been a soldier in such a cause.

My feelings toward the war can best be summarized by an old Boy Scout saying: "Duty, Honor, Country." As naive as these values can be perceived, I truly believe in them. Duty—Honor—Country. Take it or leave it!

CONTENTS

I. THE CAMPS: TRAINING FOR WAR

Camp Upton, New York

I was classified 1A for the draft and inducted into the army on July 29,1943. I had been working full time and taking evening classes as a perennial freshman at City College of New York. This automatically made me eligible to be put on the roster for ASTP, the Army Specialized Training Program. My mother had convinced me to sign up for this in the comforting belief that the program would be a three-year college course in engineering followed by a commission as an officer. I was not allowed from that time on to change my program. For example, at one point my friend MacVarish and I decided to enlist in the paratroopers but were unable to do so.

In due course, I received orders to proceed to Camp Upton, New York. At the Grand Central Railroad Terminal I met my future fellow candidates—Jimmy Murphy, Hank MacVarish, and Jim Collins—all of us destined for Camp Upton. Our parents came to see us off, with the exception of MacVarish's. We arrived some hours later at our camp and were fitted with government-issue apparel, "oriented," and assigned to Ft. Benning, Georgia, to learn the art of war.

Fort Benning, Georgia

One of my most pleasant memories from that time at basic training at Ft. Benning was the experience of the retreat ceremony. It was held at the end of the duty day just before the units were dismissed for the day. Our usual daytime attire were fatigues, the regular workday uniforms. These were taken off, and everyone showered and shaved in order to look presentable in the Class B khaki uniform. The retreat formation was used for issuing any necessary information, communications, etc. One part of the inspection consisted of an elaborate close look at our individual rifles. It goes without saying that our uniforms had to be immaculate and perfect in every way. For example, all neckties had to be tightly folded and placed in the third opening from the collar and we looked pretty sharp,

almost as though we were soldiers. No exemptions were allowed. Any violations of the rules would involve punishing the soldier and his entire platoon. These punishments would usually be enacted on a Saturday or Sunday, our normal time off. One of the most imaginative punishments was companywide and consisted of the entire unit moving on their hands and knees picking up the ever-present pine needles. This was further embellished by an inspired noncom who would send men up into the trees to shake down more pine needles. This was looked upon by the army as very good thinking.

A humorous event of the fading day was afforded by a pack of camp dogs. You need to know the retreat tune itself to truly appreciate the strange behavior of these dogs. The melody for the retreat ceremony is haunting and once heard never really disappears from one's memory. It was a beautiful little melody, not too long, just nice and sort of military.

The odd thing about this particular retreat was that the camp "garbage dogs," whose regular occupation was hanging around the mess halls getting free food, would all be in a pack waiting for the ending tune of the retreat ceremony, which rose in quite gentle musical levels slightly above one another. At this point the dogs would take over and all in unison would howl, as though it were a ceremony for them. I've never gotten the connection between dogs and wolves and soldiers, but something existed. It was an enjoyable time.

The subject of "garbage dogs" reminds me of the general conditions of the mess halls. For example, a fellow private, whose name was Sam Mandel, would unfailingly attempt to dodge the details about to be assigned. In one instance, he chose to hide behind the kitchen door, which when opened revealed Private Mandel against a moving background of approximately 5,000 specimens of German cockroach. This sight not only spoke ill of Mandel but shone a large light of inspection on the mess sergeant and his cronies.

Undaunted, Mandel continued trying to escape the details he was assigned by employing various and sundry strategies aimed at deceiving his tormentors. For example, the company had a rule against chewing gum while marching, and one day, when called upon to refute this charge against him, his reply was, "Ha, ha, it's not gum but a pebble!"

Despite this defensive move, he was assigned the task of digging a six-by-six foot hole, putting the pebble in it and refilling the hole, this all on his own time. He was continually repeating this and other infractions of our rules, which made my life considerably easier. One last anecdote: Crossing the Okefenokee Swamp, which was difficult at best, included traversing a large fallen tree that was part of the path. I knew from Mandel's first and second steps that he would end up in the swamp, and he did so with a loud splash.

I believe that Mandel turned out to have some proficiency in Japanese and was eventually deployed to the Philippines. I lost track of Sam, but I certainly hope that his tenacious efforts to beat the system actually paid off and that he survived.

Pinski and Racoosin were from Baltimore, Maryland, and were friends. They were both from wealthy families and did not have financial problems. However, Pinski was extremely weak and could not, in fact, get over a three-foot fence that was part of our training exercises. I remember the day when three or four of our guys were pushing him up and over this little fence so that he would not be thrown out of the unit. The other men kept a blind eye on this maneuver, and he was accepted and actually finished out the war with us.

Bayonet training was given at Ft. Benning, and the instructions were very good. Generally speaking, the average German that I met overseas was not anxious to fight with a bayonet and would prefer not to if he could help it. There were very few attitudes that I shared with the Germans, but that was one of them, at least on the battlefield.

During training, we were run through six or seven straw targets arranged in a row representing the enemy on the field, and we were supposed to properly take care of them with either a vertical or horizontal stroke. In any event, I was quite carried away and really enjoyed this exercise and found it very interesting and even fun. The problem I had with this training was that I was so engrossed running from target to target that I got completely caught up with the general idea behind the training class which was to more or less instill a fighting or military attitude in the common soldier who would otherwise have had no experience at all.

One day I was having a very good time running from target to target and more or less working up and getting into the spirit of things. Unfortunately, this one particular target called for a vertical stroke, which means you go with the bayonet in front and come up with it. I was distracted and used a horizontal stroke which brought the point of the bayonet laterally backwards in an arc. Unfortunately, Sergeant Griffin was standing a little too close, and I nicked him in the chest and he fell down clutching his small wound. Sergeant Griffin was an older, Regular Army man who was extremely well liked, and I personally admired him very, very much. I was quite shaken by this incident.

The follow-up came the next day at the battalion parade with all personnel present. The colonel made a speech announcing that from this point on bare bayonets would not be used in training. We were ordered to scabbard them with a plastic sheath to protect against this type of accident. Such was my brief moment of glory, more or less, in bringing about a change in official protocol.

Of all the exercises we received in basic training at Ft. Benning, there was none more calculated to focus the mind than crawling forward on a prescribed course around an obstacle under live fire from a 50-caliber machine gun. The exercise was further enhanced by having small explosions of preset detonations go off to simulate artillery. The object was to get you used to the "feel" of being under fire. This was extremely valuable training, and we used it just about every day of our time in France. I can recall many, many times when I used it to save my life. That's the training!

University of Maine, Orono

After my basic training at Ft. Benning, I was assigned for a brief time to the ASTP at the University of Maine at Orono for technical training. I recall that it was during this period that I received "Care" packages lovingly prepared by my Aunt Fanny. She sent bushels of cut-up, fresh carrots in a brave, if misguided, attempt to improve my vision so that I might possibly qualify for the Air Force. However, ASTP was soon closed, as the need for additional infantrymen in Europe was critical, and I soon found myself on maneuvers in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

It was there that I joined the famous 26th “Yankee” Division and was assigned to Company G, 104th Infantry Regiment.

Murfreesboro, Tennessee

“Meezerable Mizwa” was the nickname for our company supply man. He was a dedicated budding entrepreneur. Mizwa spent all of his time off duty collecting and mailing to his home in Oil City, Pennsylvania, parts of machine guns, tanks, and who knows what appliances. I’m sure that when the war was over he had the makings of a large well-supplied arsenal.

Healy from the Bronx was a very wild Irishman who brooked no nonsense. There was an incident where he had a disagreement with Sergeant Charles, who was 6’2” and no easy pickings. Nevertheless, Healy ended up picking up Sergeant Charles physically and dumping him in the middle of the street. This was quite an advertisement for Company G and certainly a good advertisement for Healy.

After the war, oddly enough, I caught sight of Sergeant Charles who was then a policeman assigned to Grand Central Terminal in New York City. But I didn’t see Healy again.

During our free hours, my good buddy MacVarish and I took off AWOL up the road in Tennessee just to see how far we could go. We went about six miles when we came upon this shed in the middle of nowhere, and on that shed was a large, large nest full of hornets. There was a Coca-Cola machine filled with cold Coke, a nickel a shot. The owner came out with a piece of rope tied around his waist in lieu of a belt. He sold us two Cokes which we took our time drinking, finished, and left, never having been really bothered by the hornets, but I’ll always remember them.

One night in March brought a less pleasant memory. During training and maneuvers in Tennessee, our unit was waiting in line. Pontoon boats, small, inflatable, raftlike boats, were loading up. The soldiers carried full field packs, and each boat was filled to capacity. Very heavy, very heavy. And what happened was that a strong current carried one boat out into extremely swift-running water, and it sank. Twenty-two men drowned.

We held a nice ceremony for them. “And they shall not have died in vain.” Maybe yes, maybe no. So much for maneuvers in Tennessee.

Fort Jackson, South Carolina

My final training experience before shipping out was at Ft. Jackson. While there, I would follow my good buddy MacVarish on a more or less nightly AWOL trip, where we would go around the camp and approximately five miles off the post to this little bar which was on the side of the road. The bar was run by a tattooed lady and a one-eared man. A woman with tattoos was unusual for us in our inexperienced period in this game; the one-eared man indicated a history of some sort of violence. They were nice people. A pitcher of beer was a quarter, and we never had trouble there.

One evening, three friends, Hank MacVarish, Jimmy Collins, and myself, went carousing. Carousing meant drinking as much beer as we could. And what did we want to do?

Around the town square the army had built sixteen maybe twenty urinals. It was at midnight that we saw the statue of General Wade Hampton, the famous Confederate general, who was mounted on his horse that had one foot up. The position of the horse (how many hooves were lifted) corresponds to the amount of respect the rider should get from his audience. Unfortunately, the three of us were quite drunk, and were peeing on this poor general and his horse. Along comes this very nice police officer. Very, very nice about it. And I still remember today what he said: “How would it be if every soldier in Ft. Jackson came down and peed on this statue?” Then he showed us where the urinals were and where the buses back to the fort were right behind them.

Well, I did it. I peed on General Hampton.

II. AT WAR IN FRANCE AND GERMANY

Normandy

In the summer of 1944, six weeks after D-Day, I found myself in France, Private #32992576, a combat infantryman in Patton's Third US Army of 12th Army Group, 26th Infantry Division—the famous "Yankee Division"—104th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Company G, about to take part in the massive invasion of Germany and earn the memories that would forever define my life.

It was a day in late September, and we were still in Normandy on training walks or exercises. We were hiking along the road when we passed a boy driving a cow across a field. This cow stepped in a bee's nest. The bees came barreling out and attached themselves to this boy. When he ran down the road, I thought he had on a yellow shirt, but it was a black shirt all covered with bees. They were stinging the devil out of him. We directed him to a first-aid station down the road. I don't know whether he lived or died.

Alsace-Lorraine

On a moonlit night, our unit was sitting in a large field in France, waiting to be assigned to our frontline location. When our turn came, we followed the guide to the line directly facing the German positions. My first introduction to the rifleman whom I was replacing was friendly enough. I did notice, however, that his rifle was mud-packed and dirty. I thought to myself that this must be a poor unit, but it was, in fact, an experienced armored rifle company. We talked briefly in the early evening and eventually retired to our foxhole for the night. This hole was big enough for two and was dug into the side of the trench we were defending. That night was uneventful except for occasional evening bursts of fire and an 88-mm shell sent our way.

The following morning, MacVarish, the rifleman, and I were sitting on the edge of the emplacement, smoking and chatting, when I suddenly heard the sound of incoming rounds. I hesitated only briefly before jumping into the foxhole.

I was followed immediately by the rifleman, who covered my body with his own. The shelling continued for perhaps another twenty minutes before stopping. I felt that I was finally in action and still alive.

The position held a short downhill drop toward the enemy line which was covered with empty C and K ration boxes, indicating a rather long stationary position at this point. That night I was selected by Corporal Addis to outpost this route to the enemy line. I was, in fact, quite nervous and shaken by the fact that nothing stood between me and the enemy.

In October 1944, the month of my twenty-first birthday, my platoon directly faced the Germans. I could see them, and each of us had dug his own foxhole.

I was assigned to cross a muddy field to a supply station and bring back three loaves of bread for my platoon. Carrying the bread, I was making my way back when I became aware of the sound of an 88-mm shell coming directly at me. I dropped the bread and hit the ground. The shell buried itself in the mud about five-feet away but failed to explode. It was a "dud," and I was still alive.

I started back for my lines, and the first foxhole I came to was that of a sergeant. I asked him to let me share his foxhole, but he refused and told me to go back to my own. I searched frantically for a foxhole and came upon one dug by Sergeant Justynowicz, who let me climb in. He always carried an ax, lined his foxholes with pine boughs, and became known as the "Woodsman of Brooklyn." At this early stage, his hole even had a roof of branches. From this extraordinary refuge, I counted at least five more shells exploding near me.

It was much later that I learned about numerous small munitions factories, some in southern Poland or what would become East Germany, and the assembly lines of Jews, Poles, Russian prisoners of war, and others—those still strong enough to be marched there from the camps and work as slave laborers. Among this shapeless mass, there were some who were highly skilled. Somehow, resistance fighters taught a few how to disable an artillery fuse, to deliberately tip their slim odds of survival against themselves, because duds did not go unnoticed by the Germans and retribution was common. But their efforts may have created the dud to which I owed my life.

When the shelling finally stopped, I found my way to the front line and the hole that I had dug. I sat there, alone, and had time to think about the dud, my close encounter with death, and luck. Anything that moved was a target. The dud had come from a nearby two-man German artillery piece, very maneuverable and accurate, and I believe to this day that they had me and my three loaves of bread in its sights.

The Maginot Line

In November we reached and entered the Maginot Line. This defensive French fortification was built in the 1930s, and it didn't work too well. The Germans simply bypassed it and avoided a frontal assault. Their tanks outflanked the Maginot Line, broke through in the Ardennes, and reached the Channel in a week.

When our troops reached the line, we found that it had these fixed pillboxes all facing one—now wrong—direction, making it very difficult for the Germans to defend when they took it over. The Germans built tank traps, large, pyramid-shaped, concrete structures intended to slow up if not stop tanks. These proved very ineffective, and our engineers quickly got around them.

When we came to the first pillbox in our area, I was with two engineers, and they had a satchel charge. A satchel charge is armed with composition C, an explosive used at that time which could be placed on a pole and theoretically put into a window, lit, and exploded inside. We were very gingerly creeping up on this pillbox, and I suppose my purpose was to protect the two engineers. While we were doing this a GI appeared around the back and said, "Hey, this door is open." That saved us a lot of trouble. We spent at least a day or two in the Maginot Line. The pillboxes were very damp inside and, I guess, rat-infested, but outside was dry.

The Siegfried Line was constructed by the Germans and better made than the Maginot Line which it faced. However, it was not much of a problem for our engineers who managed to blow up the traps and create paths for our forces to come out at the back of this line. I would say that this defense was not a successful deterrent to our advance.

Bezange-la-Petite

The battle of Bezange-la-Petite was fought basically for a series of five or six small hills, all of which we just knew by their numbers: for example, 264, 259, and so forth. [Each number was the hill's altitude in meters.] The hills themselves and where they were were meaningless. Each hill, however, had a commanding field of fire that made taking it extremely costly. What made it a problem was the fact that we had to take these individual hills the hard way, meaning going directly into enemy fire.

We had started our bombardment before dawn, and the steady artillery fire had lasted at least an hour. When we went in, the scene was quite eerie in that phosphorescent shells were still burning in the middle of the road and all about, and the smoke from them mixed with the general smoke of the battlefield created an unearthly scene.

In the middle of this, we came across a very, very large shell hole. This could only have been caused by a shell of an enormous size. The hole was at least twelve or more feet wide and about six or seven feet deep. In fact, we had about ten soldiers taking cover in this hole. While in the hole, I heard a soldier say, "I wonder what it feels like to be hit." Mizwa lifted up his pants leg showing his wound and said, "It just stings a little bit." He was a cool customer under fire. From that point, I don't remember the details of how we moved, but we re-formed our platoons, which were badly mixed, and almost resembled a military formation again.

We were on the road coming from Bezange-la-Petite when a German tank —someone said it was a Tiger but I don't know—was coming straight at us down the road. Sgt. "Grandma" Johnson handed me a box of five rifle grenades in a little canvas pouch, and he took the sixth one and fired it point blank at the incoming tank. Of course, these tanks had about seven inches of armor on the front, and it was laughable to see the sparks generated by this grenade. We did get the Germans' attention though, because they stopped and started to look around and buttoned up some more. A buttoned-up tank has everything closed that you could shoot in through with the exception of eye slits in the front,

and consequently has very poor vision. These tankers, however, were quite experienced. They pulled up alongside Sergeant Johnson and myself where we were pinned down, lying in the ditch, playing dead. They turned the turret of the tank around and shot up the hill at Jimmy Murphy's squad, taking Murphy's hand off and killing the man next to him. After this, they started to withdraw toward Bezange, and they backed up the tank all the way there.

Sometime after that I visited Murphy while he was in the evacuation hospital. General Patton happened to have visited that day. According to Murphy, Patton asked him where he was shot, and Murphy showed him his stump with a missing hand. Patton then asked, "How many Krauts did you kill?" It having been the first day in combat, Murphy said, "None," at which the general more or less turned on his heels and went to the next cot. There he could be overheard talking to the doctor. This soldier was lying on his stomach with his tail in the air, and Patton asked, "What happened to this man?" The doctor said that he had piles, whereupon Patton became a little irritated and said, "I didn't come here to look at piles. I came to look at bullet wounds," and stomped off.

General Patton, a nut, came from a wealthy family. He didn't have to serve but he did. He seemed to derive a great pleasure from killing or injuring the enemy. Patton may have been an effective, talented general, but to many of the soldiers who served under him he wasn't much of a human being. His strategic belief that knocking out one tank was worth five (or more) infantrymen did not add to his popularity among the troops.

I believe that I saw Patton two or three times during the war. When moving toward the front, he would have all sirens and horns blaring, announcing his movement. However, when returning from the front, he moved as unobtrusively as one could while riding in a staff car.

Moncourt Woods

The battle for Moncourt Woods came shortly after Bezange-la-Petite. This was a very, very tough fight. Because of the forest branches, many shells exploded overhead, thereby changing the pattern of their shrapnel downward and inflicting more casualties than usual.

In any event, we were advancing through Moncourt Woods when I saw this huge wild boar, easily seven feet long, come bounding down in our direction. It was moving in great leaps of five or six feet at a time, and its tusks looked very threatening. Several of the men tried to shoot this animal, but nobody hit him and he went through our whole platoon safely. Where he went I don't know, but I'll always remember this boar.

The following incident also occurred in Moncourt Woods. We were being subjected to a continuous artillery and mortar attack. Hank MacVarish, my foxhole buddy, had had enough of this, and in the middle of the shelling against us, when I was in the bottom of the hole with my nose in the lowest position in the mud, Hank sat up, raised an arm above his head, and called out, "Hit it, you bastards! Hit it!" He was looking for the million-dollar wound even if it cost him his arm. I found this interesting.

On November 5, 1944, the Company G morning report recorded that I, along with six others including my special buddy Henry R. MacVarish, had been promoted to the rank of Private First Class. The names of two soldiers in this promotion group, Anthony A. Marzullo and James R. McDaniel, also appear in the unit records kept at the National Archives Annex in College Park, Maryland, as having been killed in action.

Chateau-Salins

The significance of Chateau-Salins was multifold. It was a major railroad crossing and the entrance and exit for the various Saar Valley manufacturing plants.

I would have to go back to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) to properly put this whole Alsace-Lorraine area in its correct context. During that war, which the Germans won, they replaced a large part of the population, which was French, with German natives. This was evident in any home we went into, which we would immediately search for enemy activity. Very frequently, we would find two sets of uniforms, one German and one French, suitable for a quick change of sides—this is sort of dirty pool. The French take the position that we Americans were fighting for France, whereas in effect we were not. Here in

Alsace-Lorraine we were fighting for German civilians, sympathizers, and the goals of the German population. If they had to vote, they would vote German not French.

This brings one thought to mind, which is the French “Legion of Honor.” This award was originally created by Napoleon Bonaparte to honor exceptional service to the Republic of France. Over 600 World War I American veterans received the medal. Only after the 60th anniversary of D-Day did France begin to bestow it on American veterans who fought on French soil in World War II and liberated France. In my opinion it is nothing but a farce. I will never forget my experience in Rodalbe where French citizens enthusiastically pointed out to German tankers the cellars in which the trapped American troops were hiding so that the Germans could point their guns through the windows and slaughter them. To believe that we were fighting for the French here when in fact we were not is only fooling ourselves.

The German forces at Chateau-Salins were formidable, efficient, and they knew their tactics. For example, they had the terrain marked out in advance into three major killing fields through which the American soldiers dutifully marched to their execution because there was no way of avoiding these traps. One field faced forward, one to the right, and one came back again forward. They had machine guns set up waiting for us at those places. Our casualties were quite severe.

When we finally got through this area of Chateau-Salins, we came upon a stream, also part of the planning, a little scrub-topped stream running, I think, north to south. We ran into pretty heavy resistance, including mortars, 88s, rifle fire, and a smattering of “screaming meemies,” which were nothing more (or less) than rockets with special fins, giving out a loud unnerving sound in flight. To a new or inexperienced soldier, this could be quite a disturbing event. All this firepower was right on target. It was a rough spot.

In any event, we were fighting in this stream when my rifle jammed. I could not unjam it, so I had no recourse but to take it apart and clean it, this while standing in water and being subject to fire. While taking my rifle apart,

I was struck by a small piece of flying shrapnel which knocked the rifle out of my hand and into the water. After being unable to retrieve it, I figured to hell with it. I'm not going to spend any more time looking for a rifle, I'll just wait and pick up the next rifle available from the men who were wounded. I continued on with the group, and curiously enough from that point on I did not meet or see a single German, as they must have withdrawn behind their lines.

I eventually joined up with Lieutenant Chester and the remnants of our company in a railroad yard. The lieutenant stopped and asked me where my rifle was. I told him that I had lost it in the stream, but that I still had my bayonet. He was amazed and said to the few men around him, "Look at this man. He fought a whole war with only a bayonet!" as though I should be commended for that.

My next recollection of Chateau-Salins was going into the town on tanks. These were the "black tanks" from the 761st Tank Battalion, manned by African-American soldiers who were still very inexperienced in action. The following is hearsay, since I was in the back of the tank and did not hear the actual words as purportedly spoken by the driver. The driver was told to direct his fire at a cellar window which was across the courtyard and some 400 to 500 yards away. This driver did, in fact, spray the entire street and windows and all the buildings around with 50-caliber ammunition, during which period he looked up and spoke to Lieutenant Chester and said, "Ha, ha, ha, ha. How'm I doin', boss?" which was black vernacular for that time because the officers were all white, and white personnel were "bosses." This black tanker was actually a volunteer. He became much more experienced and much more successful, and the black tankers were considered by Patton to be one of his best units.

Another incident concerning the battle of Chateau-Salins involved being strafed by a P-47 American fighter. We were advancing across the field when this fighter plane came up overhead and fired. I saw three bullets hit the ground on the left of me and three bullets hit the ground on the right, shot from its left and right wing guns. Luckily for me, I was in a good position in this pattern. At any rate, I dropped to the ground, but the incident was over, and this plane flew on to bomb and strafe the Germans at Chateau-Salins.

A post-battle incident

The following events occurred on or about November 11, 1944. We had come back from a grueling, hard-fought battle with many casualties. We were in a municipal building, sitting against the wall. I was talking to another rifleman, whose name I can't recall, comparing notes as to who got it that day—"got it" meaning who was either shot or killed. He was recounting the people, and after recalling six or seven names, he said, "and Daley." So then I asked, "Which one?" because there were two in our company—one was 1st Sgt. John J. Daley and the other was Pvt. John F. Daly. He said, "Both of them."

While I was thinking about this I looked up, and standing over me was this apparition. It was a major from XII Corps. His face was pasty white and he had a thin William Powell-type mustache. He wore an officer's trench coat, and in one hand he carried gloves, and in the other hand he had a goddamned swagger stick. A swagger stick is a short, metal-tipped rod that is held by some officers to express their superiority. They don't actually get to use this prop. However, this major was talking to me and he said—and I'll never forget it until I die—"Look at yourself, soldier. You're filthy! What kind of impression do you expect to make on these people?" After he said these words, he turned around and went into the next room where I could hear him say in fractured, high-school French, "*Je demande le clef pour le plus grand chambre de ce maison*." He wanted the key to the biggest room in the house. That was all he said. I got up. I had my rifle up close, in position for a vertical butt stroke to the skull, as I had been taught, and I think I would have killed him. There was a black tanker sitting across the hall. He seemed to be alone. Perhaps I tripped over my own feet—I doubt it. I think that the tanker stuck his leg out just enough to trip me up, and slow me down. That action probably saved my life. I made several attempts over the years to locate that tanker—unsuccessful attempts—but that is another story.

Rodalbe

The battle for Rodalbe, France, was a major engagement that took place from November 11 to 18, 1944. It involved many battles.

I had been late coming up to Rodalbe because I had been on outpost duty with MacVarish and missed the first day or two of the engagement. I was attempting to rejoin my company. When I first crossed the Bailey bridge in the early morning it was a beautiful sight, sparkling and shining with the dew. Coming back over it several hours later, the bridge was slippery and thick with the blood of retreating soldiers fleeing in panic and disarray. We had suffered a serious defeat.

After returning over the bridge, we fled through a large field where many soldiers had been left to die, partly bandaged and propped up against trees. There were no aidmen left to help them. The rest of us were fleeing straight to the back, to the rear, each man for himself. Now a rifle company that was more experienced than we were would have retreated by using some of its power to stop and fire back at the enemy to hold them down for a moment while the rest retreated. This did not happen.

During my four months on the line in combat against German infantry and tanks, I can remember specific details very clearly. However, in the battle for Rodalbe everything is not so well recollected. I think that this is partly because we were called on to retreat. Someone yelled out “Fall back!” and that person would usually be a noncom or an officer ordering soldiers under him, not the whole line, to withdraw. But that’s what I heard, and I couldn’t keep up because they were falling back so wildly. We were fleeing the scene like a beaten mob, and it was disgraceful.

We ran on for half a mile through a large field strewn with wounded and dead soldiers until we came upon a jeep on a little hill. Major Heath was standing up in this jeep and exhorting the soldiers to stop fleeing and to stand by him and re-form companies. This was the single strongest factor in stopping the rout and holding that line together, and he certainly deserves credit for it. In the official

accounts of this engagement for the Yankee Division and in *The Lorraine Campaign*, by Hugh M. Cole, Historical Division, Dept. of the Army, Washington, DC, 1950, Major Heath's action is not mentioned, and we will return to this incident.

When we had at last stopped our retreat and re-formed, we then started a march around the entire site of Rodalbe, which we should have done in the first place. We took a route that carried us at least two or three miles, I believe it was toward the west, but I am not sure of the direction. We came upon a machine-gun nest facing in the same direction in which we were now marching and saw the machine gunner standing up at his gun and frozen to the ground, a memory that stays with you. We then continued on, and I don't remember exactly which town was next.

At this time, I wish to pause in the story of the Rodalbe engagement to comment on the materials given to me by Brig. Gen. Leonid Kondratiuk, Director of Historical Services, Adjutant General's Office, Concord, MA. Essentially, there are different descriptions of the same events in two different sources. One is Cole's *The Lorraine Campaign* and the other *The History of the 26th Yankee Division: 1917-1919, 1941-1945* [Yankee Division Veterans Association, Deschamps Bros., Salem, MA, 1955]. I am still studying the various papers involved, but it is clear at this point that the two reports differ and contradict each other. After more study, I plan to list the specific differences and quote them line by line and phrase by phrase. [Dave passed away before completing this research.—ed.] From talking to military historians who have researched many reports, I am convinced that such discrepancies were a frequent occurrence and served to cover up the actual facts. My problem with the reports of the Yankee Division is that these events, that is to say, the battle of Rodalbe, fleeing the battle of Rodalbe, the bloody bridge, and Major Heath's heroic actions in stopping the retreat and re-forming the combat units, were all eliminated from the records of the daily events. The daily events, as printed in battalion records, read in effect that the attack went according to plan. Everything was going as good as possible. This was an out and out fabrication, an untruth.

The battle for Rodalbe ran for approximately seven or eight days. What happened here was that the Germans got there first. Their tanks were there waiting for our infantry to approach. Our infantry did not have tanks to support them because of the bad road conditions which mired our tanks in deep mud. The treads on our tanks were too narrow for these conditions, so they could not move. The end result was that we faced eleven Panzer tanks, which were equipped with wider treads, already in location at Rodalbe.

The Panzer tanks sealed off all entrances and trapped inside some 400 to 500 Yankee Division soldiers. The action of "civilians" inside that town bears retelling. They were eagerly pointing out the hiding places of the American soldiers who were in the cellars to the waiting tanks that could easily reach in with the muzzles of their 88s and blow them up. This is quite a comment about who these civilians were. Were they French or were they actually German sympathizers?

The following related incident took place when I was on outpost duty. In spite of Rodalbe's strong defenses, 1st Lt. John B. Hull had led a force of about twenty-eight men from Company G to enter that town to get word to the 3rd Battalion, which was fighting inside, to withdraw on order. Unfortunately, this mission was not a success, and Lieutenant Hull had to give it up. MacVarish and I were sitting in our outpost foxhole when we heard a whistling sound. It was Lieutenant Hull coming back from that patrol, whistling either "Yankee Doodle" or some similar popular American tune, the reason being that he didn't want to be shot by our outpost. He came back with three men, although when I met him at the outpost he seemed to have only one man following him closely, so that patrol must have suffered severe casualties.

Basically, in assaulting Rodalbe our riflemen were attempting to overcome a greatly superior force. Of course, it was an impossible mission and idiotic to try because it is an accepted military fact that to attack a force holding ground you need to have superior numbers and quantities of everything including tanks. So we are left with memories of the reality of the bridge that had looked so beautiful in the morning being covered with blood a few hours later, wounded and

dying Americans left on the field, and the rest of the units fleeing in panic until stopped by the heroism of Major Heath. Yet we could find no record in the battalion reports acknowledging what he had done or any account of the terrible rout. Apparently the battle for Rodable had gone “according to plan.”

Several factors had led to our defeat and the death of so many soldiers. The German General Wietersheim had brought a unit of approximately ten to twelve tanks from the 11th Panzer Division to the gates of Rodalbe before we arrived. This trapped other units of our battalion inside. Our infantry faced tanks in an unprepared manner without the support of our own tanks. This could be accounted for by our relative lack of experience, but after several weeks in action we should have known more and certainly been better led. These failures were critical in my opinion.

I believe that the reader will find the following account of the composition of the enemy force of interest. In addition to the units from the 11th Panzer Division, the German force consisted of two Grenadier divisions, the 553rd and the 559th Volksgrenadier, and several other units including the 33rd Storm Trooper Corps, who were junior cadets in Hitler’s SS and fought very well for their age and size. The cadets were in fact children, sixteen or seventeen years old, but each one was thoroughly indoctrinated, a bona fide murdering little bastard whose basic military proficiency would be beating up and killing an old person—a rabbi would be great—or any other Jew they could find. But at this late stage in the war they had been pressed into battle. I hated them very much.

The Germans also had machine gun, artillery, and mortar units, other mobile units, and parts of the 5th Panzer Army Corps that I believe was SS. The 11th Panzers especially were all professional and fine soldiers. They were very experienced, had been over the terrain, knew it by heart, and could identify each and every field and ridge. They had a tremendous advantage. We were badly outfought and outmaneuvered, and generally made a bad day of this battle. The Germans were waiting, ready for infantry to approach, riflemen against their tanks and superior forces.

In my notes, I have November 18 as the date for the recapturing of Rodalbe by American units. These included the 80th Division, units of the 35th Division, the 4th Armored, all three regiments of the 26th Yankee Division (the 101st, 104th, and 328th), and the 761st Tank Battalion. However, Rodalbe fell without a struggle because the German forces had withdrawn.

Sarre Union

We were coming off the line in the Sarre region one night. Most nights were used for troop movements either in the woods or asserting control over an area. At any rate, we were working our way down a trail, and this man was handing out what looked to me like cold pancakes. I thought, "Boy, that's a nice thing to do!" I'm not sure what outfit he was from. Actually, he was giving out not pancakes but apple turnovers! And how he did such a thing in the midst of that area I can't imagine. He went out of his way to stick his hand out and offer us apple turnovers, and they were extremely good. I never knew his name. I don't know if he's alive, but anyway, in case he's reading this book, thanks for the great "pancakes."

This event happened somewhere in France during one of our operations, and I can't really remember the locale. We were on a night march, changing our position. We did this frequently to possibly confuse the Germans, but I don't think they were confused at all. In this particular incident we were crossing alongside a large field and keeping complete silence, supposedly not tipping our hand to the Krauts, when on the horizon we could see the silhouette of a bull doing his thing with a cow. As this became evident to the troops, the common reaction was a loud cheer that went up in unison from these troops that were otherwise being silent. The Germans must have wondered what the hell we were doing. So did I.

In a combat area, with the enemy close by and hidden, snipers were a constant threat. The possibility that a sniper would single you out was very real and seldom out of mind.

The sniper's first qualifications are physical. He must be comparatively young, able to easily climb trees and tall objects such as steeples, and be expert

at distinguishing natural colors such as hedges, hedgerows, etc. Their preferred targets were generally higher in rank than noncoms, and the higher the officer the better. This created an amusing situation whereby almost all the senior officers surrounded themselves with bodyguards whose main purpose was to confuse and blind the sniper's shot with simple movements around the target. This was a very common tactic. Because a sniper spent much of his time seeking out brass in his area, whenever my Lieutenant Bailey (who since was killed) received replacements he would instruct them never, never to salute him. If they did, he said he would salute them back three times and bow. This was to make clear the point that he did not want to get picked off by a sniper as the head honcho.

My own personal experience with a sniper was one cold night in November 1944. I was crouched down in a foxhole that was gradually filling with ice-cold water from the run-offs. My feet were soaked and my clothes wet, and I spent the entire night there in the hole. When the dawn came, I must have lost my senses because I got up and stretched. This was a perfect invitation to a sniper who had been watching me a good part of the time with his nightscope. My first knowledge that I was, in fact, the object of his efforts came when I heard the snap in my left ear. When a bullet passes your ear within two or three inches, real close, you hear a snap which is pretty unmistakable. I immediately sat down, realizing that I had been dumb enough to provide a target, and I don't think I got up again for a couple of hours. I was consoled by the fact that I was still alive and that the sniper must have been mad at himself for the rest of the day because of his near miss.

Trench foot

The weather in October and November was extremely cold and wet. During this time, I made three visits to the aid station because of my feet. The boots we had been issued were of poor quality and were not waterproof. This was not a trivial matter. An estimated 75,000 troops eventually became incapacitated because of trench foot, a painful condition caused by prolonged exposure to low but not freezing temperatures combined with dampness or immersion in water.

Boots of better quality apparently existed, but for reasons too complex to discuss here did not reach the front line. Many well-made pairs of boots rested under dry desks far from combat. That is another story, but one that deserves the telling. In any event, one of my shoes had shrunk from being in mud and water for hours on end, causing a large blister on my right heel. What they did was have me walk back to the aid station, approximately three miles away. There they put a little sulfa powder on it and sent me right back. By the time I walked back to my outfit, it had moved up to the next town or two, so I wound up walking quite a bit. I had on a pair of shoes that did not fit and hurt.

It was on my third trip coming back from the aid station that I passed Dordal Farm, which at the time had been taken over by our security patrols. These were volunteers who were supposed to go out and search for any enemy activity and report what they found. They were living pretty well. This place must have been owned by some kind of Nazi or sympathizer. He had wall-to-wall wine bottles, cans of sardines, and all kinds of foodstuffs. I did not receive any welcome whatsoever from these well-situated buddies. I was mainly ignored. They offered me nothing, and I don't recall eating anything.

However, I walked through the grounds, which housed an experimental station for prize pigs. They had a sow there that must have been ten-feet long. A really big pig, and she had piglets all over her. The straw was clean, better than what we were sleeping on, and I can only hope that someone ate her for dinner.

I fought on through the month of November and early December in the bloody Lorraine Campaign and the many hills, villages, and towns we fought in, and the dates and sequence of these engagements have become a blur in my memory. I do recall well the bursting shells, mortars, bullets, mines, freezing cold winds, torrential rains, soaked boots and socks and uniforms, deep slimy mud, cold rations, misery, and the wounds and deaths of my fellow soldiers.

Evacuation

Eventually, my swollen feet succumbed to the rampant affliction of trench foot, and I was evacuated.

We came in by train to the first field hospital, and I was sent into a room. I still had my rifle, which was against the rules, and there were personnel there who took these rules seriously, namely, that first-aid people are not entitled to carry arms.

I needed to go to the bathroom, and a nurse gave me someone to take me to the latrine. I looked up and there was a Kraut, a German prisoner whose job, he was happy to do it, was bringing people to the latrine. There seemed to be something incongruous about this. One night you could be ready to kill this guy, and the next he was walking you to the latrine. Oh well, that's war.

On the train to the nearest holding hospital east of Nancy in Alsace-Lorraine, there was an assortment of more or less severely injured soldiers as well as several of us that were being evacuated because of trench foot. The funniest part was that one of these soldiers, who must have been from Jersey City or thereabouts, was trying to get something to eat, and he said to the nurse, "Noyce, we may have been wounded but our troats ain't cut!" We all got a big chuckle out of that, a really good chuckle.

As noted earlier, trench foot is an affliction that eventually hit thousands of our combat troops. You will recall that it is caused by very prolonged exposure of the feet to wet, cold conditions. Eventually, trench foot landed me in an evacuation hospital in Paris where I came upon an article in the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper that under the heading "No Purple Heart for Purple Feet" offered welcome advice on how to maintain proper foot hygiene, such as keeping boots and socks clean and dry, washing and toweling toes dry carefully, sprinkling them well with talcum powder, and visiting a "drying room" on a regular basis. This was sage medical advice, but written, unfortunately, by desk journalists who, mercifully for them, had no idea whatsoever about the reality of combat conditions. I remember flinging the paper from my bed across the room, prompting one of the doctors to come over to my bed to inquire what my problem was.

It's probably much too late in the game now, but an investigation of companies with government contracts who cut corners and provided defective boots that leaked and shrank, quartermasters who lost control of where shipments of improved combat boots actually landed up, noncoms who hid "extra" pairs of

new socks in their own helmets against a bad day instead of distributing them to troops—all this would provide a useful field of study for historians of WWII. As they say, “Justice delayed is justice denied,” but maybe some good could still come from such a study. In any event, 75,000 combat soldiers were effectively “demobilized” by trench foot, and I was one of them.

This incident took place in the hospital in Paris about December 9, 1944. We were in a ward for trench foot and were put in the charge of a lieutenant doctor—or at least he claimed to be a doctor. One morning the nurse came in and gave all of us a shot, not telling us what it was. It was, in fact, insulin. Now insulin is a very powerful hormone and is not to be administered lightly or routinely. This doctor had a theory that he was trying to prove, namely, that there was something wrong mentally with those of us having trench foot. This abnormality affected thousands of troops, all first-line soldiers, all of whom had serious mental problems as well as defective feet. That’s what he believed. The first day that I received the shot, I tried to get out of bed and immediately fell on the floor. This happened because insulin shots decrease the level of sugar in the blood, resulting in hypoglycemia. Someone in the outfit who knew about this physiological reaction told us to take a candy bar and eat it right away after the shot. Sure enough, as soon as I started eating my Baby Ruth I began to feel better. During the three or four days that I was under treatment by this doctor, I had candy bars ready and subsequently did not fall on the floor. However, this bad experience stands in contrast to my opinion of the Medical Corps, which I thought was dedicated, skillful, and superior. Many lives were saved by American doctors and their aidmen and helpers, and I have nothing but praise for them. My animosity, if any, goes to this “doctor” who was not medically sound yet had the freedom to experiment dangerously on soldiers in his care to acquire data for his ill-conceived “theory.” I suppose he was a legitimate doctor, but I don’t know about the condition of his own mind.

After treatment for trench foot at the hospital, I was evacuated from Paris on a flight to England. We flew in a C-47 cargo plane that, as best I can recall, had twenty-four stretchers plus a crew of two. It was an uneventful trip

except that when we neared England the pilots had this game going. One of them pretended not to be ready for landing the plane yet, and the other insisted that he was ready. This banter went on for about fifteen minutes. It turned out that both pilots were absolutely qualified to land the plane, because the landing was smooth as could be. They had their little fun.

Reassignment in Germany

After a stay at a hospital in England and after hostilities had ended, I was ready to be reassigned. A group of soldiers was preparing for our flight to Germany, and all these so-called soldiers were lined up next to the plane. When the officer said, "Does everybody have a weapon?" this individual held up a little penknife and asked, "Is this a weapon?" So that gives you some indication of what kind of trouble we were in. In any event, from the replacement depot (the "repple-depple"), I wound up in an air force unit in Furstenfeldbrook, Germany.

On my first night there, I had guard duty. The town had a prisoner-of-war camp, and our duties included patrolling the area around the back of the building. This was an unguarded stretch leading into a wilderness of trees with poor visibility. The soldier assigned to go with me said, "I'm not going out there." I asked, "Why?" He replied, "Because it's too dark." And he would not. He wouldn't go in the dark. Such was the quality of many a replacement or inexperienced soldier at that camp. It was very funny, but that's the way it was.

The unit had the impressive title of 1st Air Disarmament Wing (Provisional) and Headquarters Squadron and had the nicest officers I ever met. They were college professors in real life and obviously had very, very little, if any, training in the military, but held the ranks of captain and lieutenant and so forth. My job was principally to serve as bodyguard for the captain, and he was the most gentlemanly captain I ever saw. Captain Jones was a very charming, erudite, kind person whom I would be happy to have to dinner. He sort of adopted me as his bodyguard for his stay in Germany, and I had only one office assignment. Every day I used a typewriter and produced a few small lines of print, about eighteen to twenty words, after which I was through and could sit at the typewriter and do

whatever. Mainly I was kept on for any altercations that occurred. For example, there was a second lieutenant from the South who couldn't understand German at all, and one day he was listening to a German who was trying to explain his complaint. This officer, being unable to translate any of it, said to me, "Get this man out of here." My main job in that room was to get them out of there, and I did so by sticking a carbine in his ear and saying, "A*rous, arous, arous!"* which is German for OUT! I had very little trouble with the Germans at that point.

Of the many useful assignments that I received while on duty with the air force unit, one of the most interesting was painting a trail of rocks white. This trail went from the officers' quarters to the officers' latrine. One day I looked up, and there stood this pleasant major. He complimented me on my work and how carefully I was painting the rocks.

The air force band practiced every morning, and I would wait for the bagpipers. The British troops called them the "Ladies from Hell," and they marched down the street keeping perfect step.

That reminds me of an argument I had with another soldier. We had heard about a practice raid before D-Day, when Scottish pipers in full regalia marched into battle. A Scottish piper in action walks straight ahead, damn the torpedoes, great targets, wearing big stiff hats, right in front—a smart thing to do! My friend took the position that that would be terrifying to the Germans. I, on the other hand, thought the Germans would be practical and just shoot down the pipers, as neat and brave as they were. No way to stop them. We had a small argument, and there was no way of resolving it. It was a tie.

My roommate in the barracks was a man whose name happened to be Nathan Ail. He wore very, very thick glasses. How he ever got in the army I don't know. He was a true nut, and in addition was bucking for what we used to call a Section 8. Section 8 was an army classification for those looking to get out for psychological reasons. He claimed his rights to the fullest, giving a fine example of someone who had lost most of his marbles.

He acquired a collection of bayonets, maybe a dozen or more, and he got into the habit of throwing them through the door of our barracks, so that anyone

passing might know that we were home. We more or less terrorized these inexperienced types of air force people, and they had absolutely nothing to say to us.

Another memorable incident from my stay at Furstenfeldbrook involved a trained German guard dog. We were passing this house when an unleashed, large German Shepherd came snarling and running toward us with its fangs bared ready to bite. I was carrying a carbine at the time, so I bent down and took aim at his head. This dog was so well trained that when he saw the gun come down on him he put his tail between his legs and slunk away. Now that was a well-trained dog.

Heidelberg, Germany

The following occurred when my friend Sandy and I drew passes to the town of Heidelberg in Germany. We had no sooner arrived when several military police congregated around us and started giving us tickets for our many violations of the dress code. We were obviously out of uniform, not having ties. I doubt whether we had hats either, and were otherwise improperly attired. General Patton's rules were extremely rigid when it came to people who were visiting, and these took their toll on hapless GIs who happened to be getting off the buses to visit the town.

During this leave, Sandy and I visited Heidelberg Castle, which contained a gigantic, albeit empty, barrel for beer or wine for festivities in happier times.

Heidelberg had a rich history and many attractions above and beyond its great castle and curiously large vat. Heidelberg was also noted for facial sword cuts. Prussian officers were proud of having the special scar received from the wounds of the owners' participation in duels of honor. This "badge of honor" was displayed with pride at one time. German military culture was powerful, glamorous, and idealized.

Coincidentally, it was during this visit that we witnessed the funeral cortege for General Patton. On December 9, 1945, he had been in an accident in which his staff car was hit by a 6X6 truck. He suffered a broken neck, was left

paralyzed, and died in a hospital in Heidelberg on December 21. Oddly enough, a lot of the German population seemed to be in tears and actually sorry to see Patton gone, whereas Sandy and I had a slightly different view of Patton and were not particularly disturbed.

On this topic, another encounter with Patton's legacy occurred when I was learning Spanish at the Berlitz School in New York City after the war. Somehow, his name came up, and I forthwith proceeded to give the instructor my very frank opinion of the Great General. How was I to know that the instructor was, in fact, a relative of this remarkable man? She hastened to chastise me for my defective attitude, and was effusive in her praise of her relative.

Going home

One notable experience took place during my return home from LeHavre, France. I was assigned to guard our luggage being held at the pier. This involved an approximately one-mile walk at night through the town of LeHavre to the bags stacked there by the boat. As I was walking back toward the pier, two Frenchmen came out of an alleyway, calling to ask for a cigarette. This request was a strategy to stop my progress and mug me for my coat, hat, and whatever other valuables I had. I was wearing a GI overcoat and it had very deep pockets. In one pocket I had a loaded Hungarian pistol that I was taking home as a souvenir, but I was otherwise unarmed. As these two Frenchmen kept coming closer and closer, I kept tugging at these deep pockets to pull out my pistol. Just in the nick of time I got the gun out, and I didn't even have to point it at them because they turned around very promptly and scurried straight back to the dark alley they had come from.

I was honorably discharged from the army at the Ft. Dix Separation Center, New Jersey, on February 26, 1946. I am proud to have earned a Bronze Star, my Combat Infantryman Badge, and a campaign ribbon with three battle stars. I still believe deeply in the precious values for which we fought and for which so many gave their lives: Duty—Honor—Country.

III. FINAL THOUGHTS

In memoriam

In war, Death is your constant companion. I can recall many, many instances of dead bodies lying here and about, but two of the most memorable were a replacement who was lying face down just outside a foxhole I took over. He was so neat and clean, and his uniform almost spotless, at least in the back. The front was probably a different story. He lay there about two days because the Germans at that point were shooting our aidmen, and any aidman trying to pick up the dead and wounded could very easily be shot himself.

The second figure that I remember, I knew the man. His name was Wisz, a very tall, thin young man. He had been hit in the next field from us, and the explosion or whatever hit him threw his arms out, so that when he landed he formed the shape of a cross or crucifix. This in itself was not too unnerving, but we had to look at him for two more days until we could move on when the Germans moved out, allowing us to pick up our dead.

It is 68 years later that I write this, and I am now 89 years old, but I have kept their memory and that of all my other fallen comrades with me. They were America's sons, brothers, husbands, fathers—almost all had left somebody who would forever grieve for them. America must remember their sacrifice.

Appendix

For those readers with a close interest in the details of the Lorraine Campaign, I provide the following alphabetic list of villages and towns. I was assigned to the 104th Infantry Regiment, and these are the sites that I recall either fighting to capture or passing through as we pushed toward Germany. As the reader will note in the Contents, I have chosen to describe my experiences of just a few of these in particular detail.

Bezange-la-Petite
Chateau-Salins
Chateau-Voue
Dedeling
Dordal Farm
Hampont
Kalhausen
Leidrezing
Lidrequin
Merzig
Morhange
Oermingen
Pisdorf
Rodalbe
Saarbrucken
Salonnes
Sarre Union
Sarrewerden
Sotzeling
Trier
Wolfskirchen
Wuisse
Zarbeling

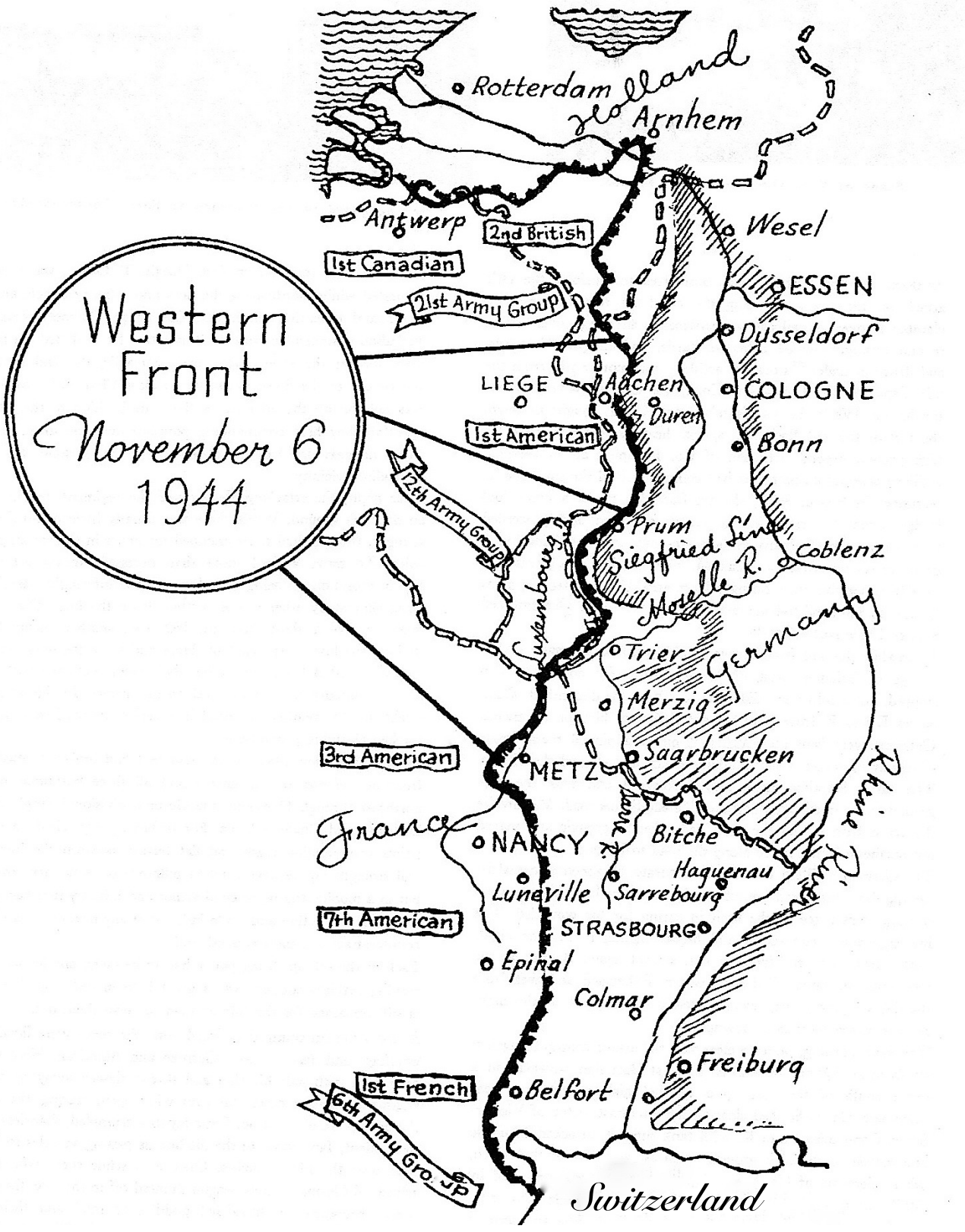
The location of the towns listed above can be found on one of the maps that follow.

Map sources:

Anderson, Trezzvant W. *Come Out Fighting: The Epic Tale of the 761st. Tank Battalion, 1942-1945*. Salzburger Druckerei und Verlag, 1945. This book is available online at http://www.761st.com/j25/index.php/history/come-out-fighting .

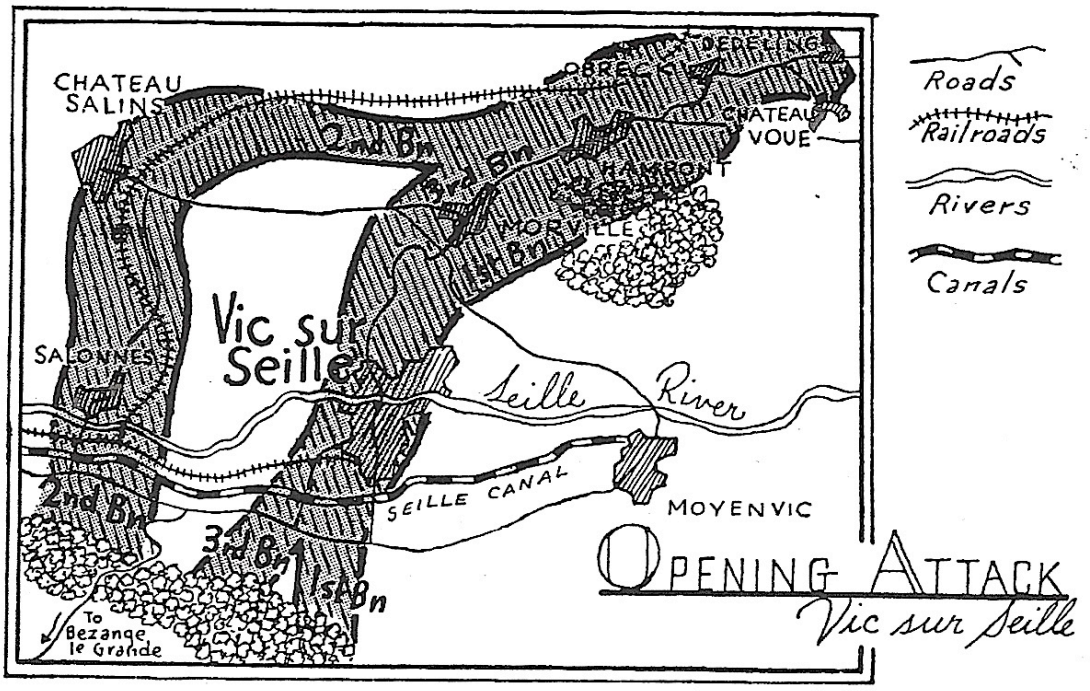
Palladino, Ralph A., ed. *History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945: 104th Infantry Regiment*. Baton Rouge, LA: Army and Navy Publishing Company, 1960. (The1945 edition has page numbers; the 1960 version, strangely, does not.)

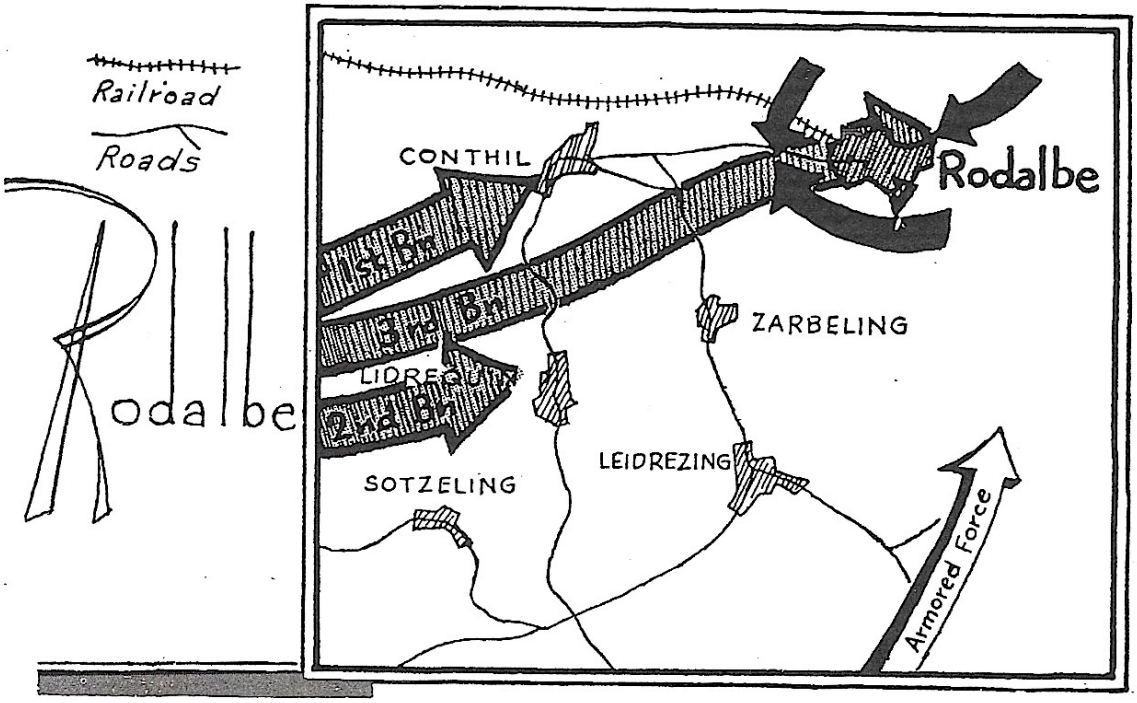
The History of the 26th Yankee Division: 1917-1919, 1941-1945. Boston: Yankee Division Veterans Association, 1955. (This history was written and first published in Germany right after the war. Its second edition was published in 1955.)



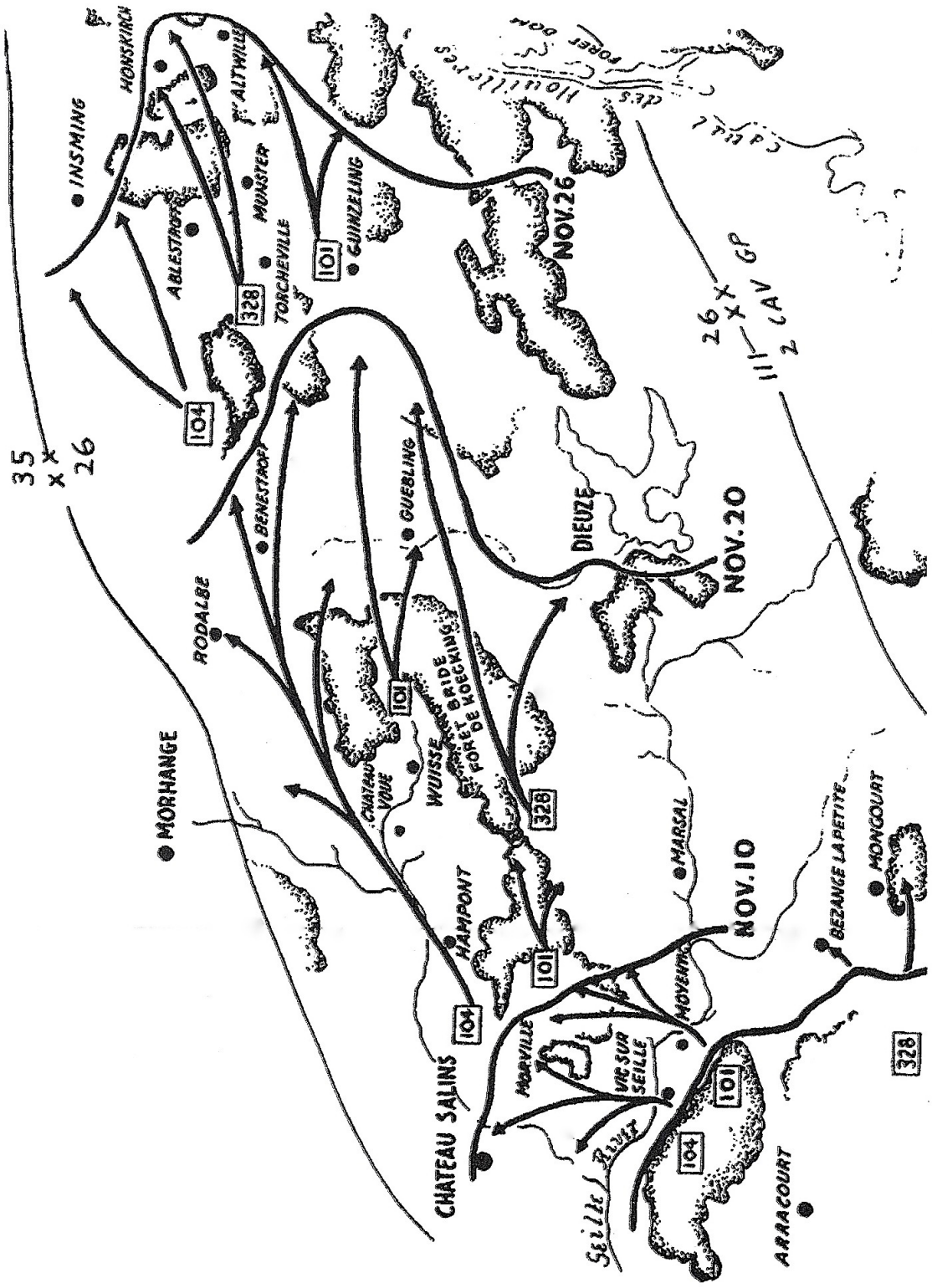
from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment*,
1960 edition, 2nd page of Chapter 7

from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment*,
1960 edition, 14th page of Chapter 7

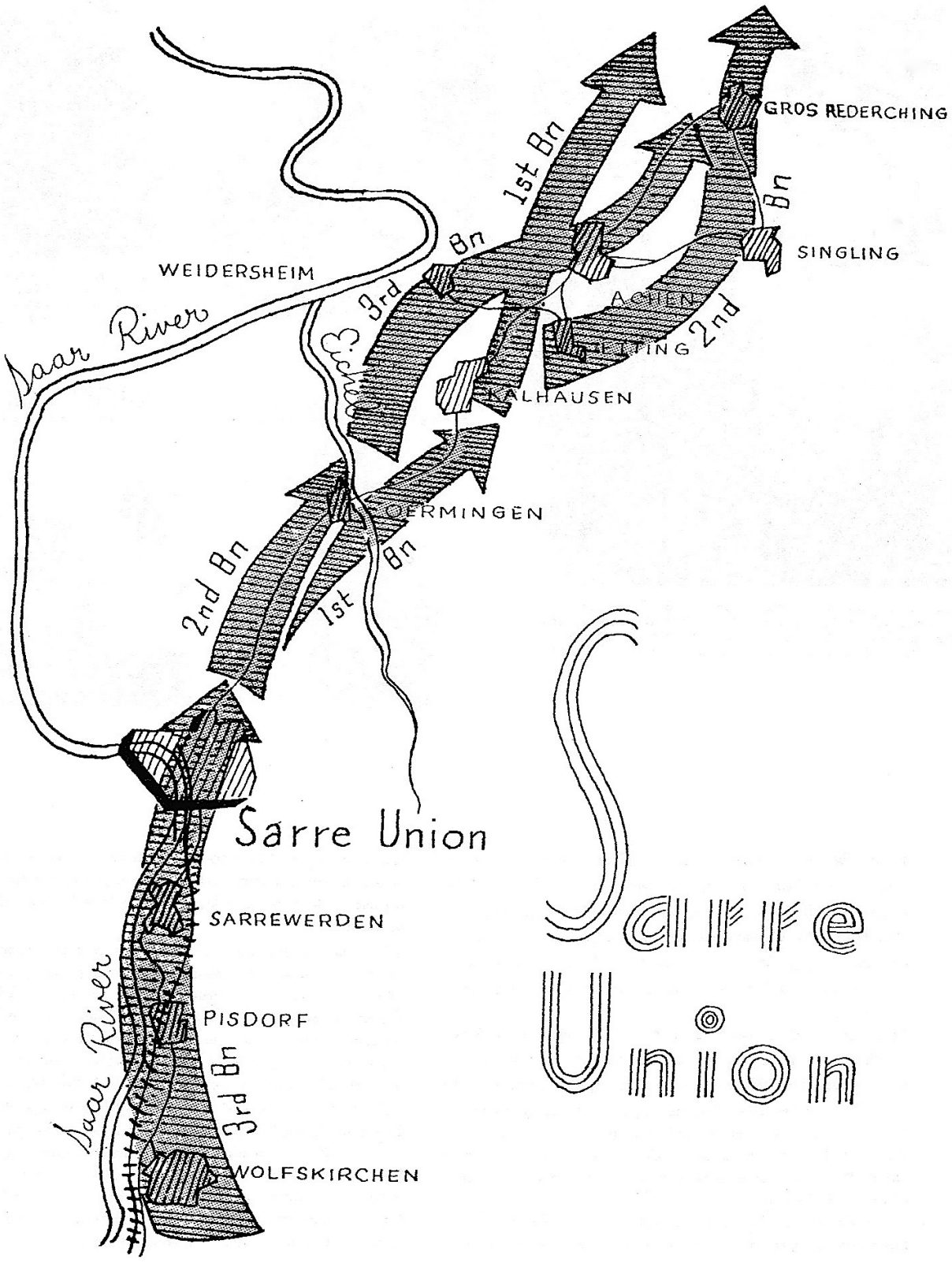




from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment*,
1960 edition, 4th page of Chapter 7



from the Yankee Division Veterans Association's
The History of the 26th Yankee Division, 1955 edition, page 38



from Palladino's *History of a Combat Regiment*,
1960 edition, 12th page of Chapter 7

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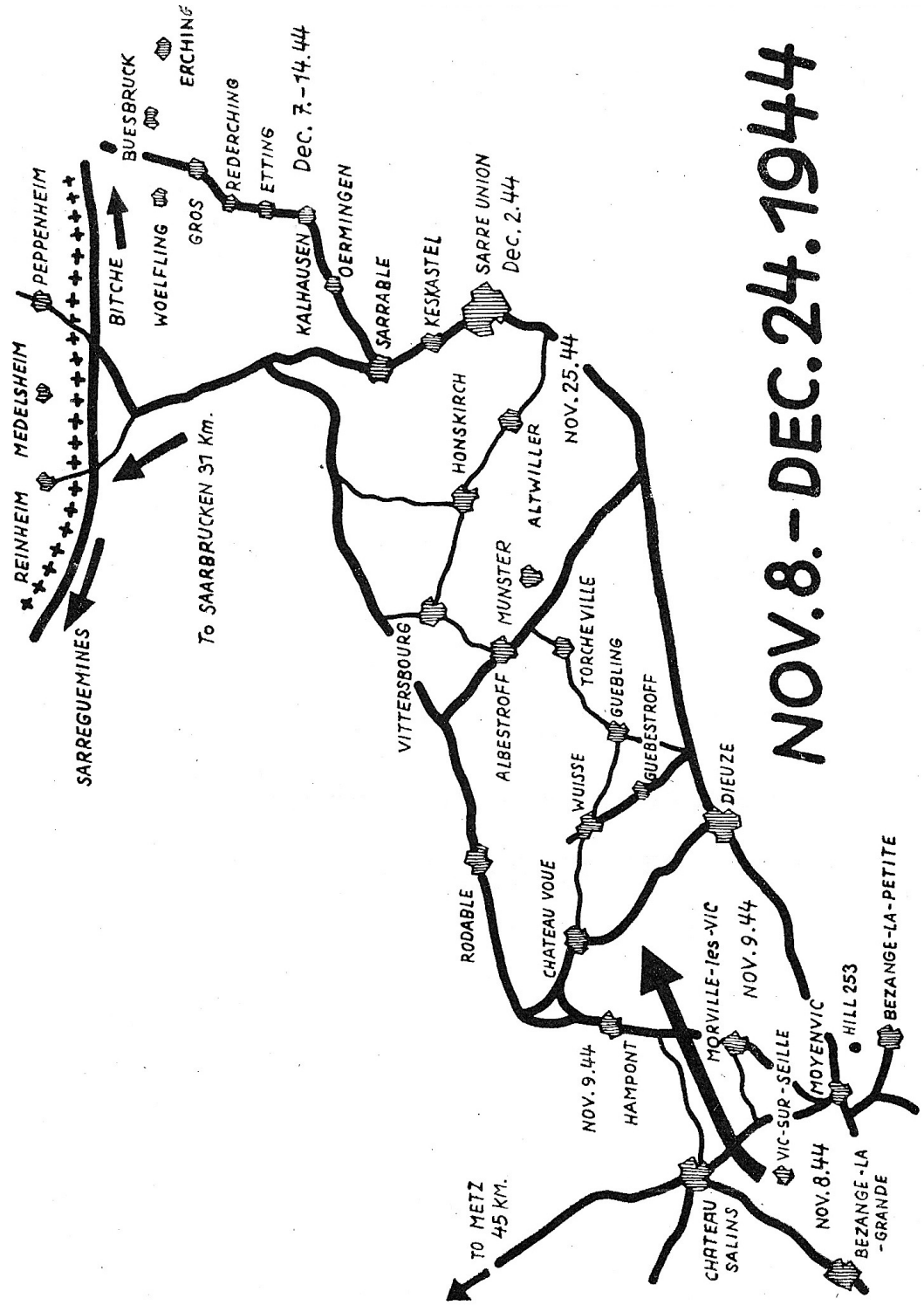

from Anderson's *Come Out Fighting*, 1945, page 20