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AS FAR AS SCHLEIDEN

A Memoir of World War II

William M. Peña

AS FAR AS SCHLEIDEN

A Memoir of World War II

TO THE CRS CENTER
FILE UNDER "PRE-CRS"

Willie Peña

By

William M. Peña

Captain, Retired
Army of the United States

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Preface

This personal memoir was written 30 years ago—16 years after the end of World War II. It started out merely as a means of organizing the events in a chronological order (hence the diary format) and ended as paper therapy. It allowed me to tie the loose ends together.

In 1961, Milton Westgate, George Johnstone, and I were reminiscing about people and events involving Company I. The three of us could agree on the events but not on the dates. We had a history of the 28th Infantry Division and a brief history of Company I—both written in broad strokes without the details to settle our disagreements. We needed something that would sort out the dates and deal with the details of war.

I borrowed both histories and began to put the puzzle together. I wrote a memoir based on my own perceptions, but I asked Milton and George to challenge, change, or add anything. And they did. I sent the first draft to Bruce Paul with the same request.

I do not claim that this memoir is completely accurate, but I think most of it is. Some of the names are fictitious. Even with four of us trying, we could not remember everybody's name after 16 years.

I've tried to avoid the exaggerations that produce great action stories. Who was I going to fool? Milton, George, and Bruce? They'd been there.

I found no reason to spice my memoir with sex since it was to be read only by my war buddies and their families. It might be said to deal more with male bonding, but the term simply didn't exist at the time.

In 1991 after I read Harry Kemp's excellent, new book, *The Regiment*, I was encouraged to dust off the original manuscript, rewrite the Prologue to give more background and add the Epilogue.

I was an officer in I Company for no more than two dozen weeks—that's not even half a year. Yet, I grew to feel that I belonged in that environment, and, when I was wrenched out of it, I was convinced that they'd patch me up and send me back where I belonged.

I joined I Company at the Siegfried Line and was never far from the German border. When people would ask me, "How far into

Germany did you go?," I would answer, "As far as Schleiden"—which is actually not very far.

One more thing. Some people have the interest and skills to do well in the military. They love risk-taking, dangerous and exciting activities, and planning strategies. (Military leadership is a separate and more complex skill.) These people are consistently good at playing the game of war. I was certainly not one of them, but let me alert the reader to a few to watch for in my narrative: Captain Dulac, Captain Paul, Major Topping, Colonel McCoy, Corporal Smith, Private Clark, Sergeant Stumer and Sergeant Collins. They were among the best.

Prologue



"Senior Year Boots." A watercolor sketch by the author in a drawing class taught by Architect Bill Caudill. 13 January 1941.

Prologue

When I enrolled as a Freshman in the ROTC Program at Texas A & M College in 1938, I never really thought that I would go overseas to fight in a war. After all, I planned to be an architect. I was such an unlikely soldier. The attack on Pearl Harbor changed all that.

On a Friday, May 16, 1942, I received a 4-year degree in Architecture. The next day, I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry—with orders to report at Fort Sam Houston, 200 miles away, the following day.

That Sunday, I was the first of my class to sign-in, around 1300 (one o'clock). The Regular Army Officer of the Day was unrestrained! He had staffed his office with clerks to process the large packet of Aggies they expected, and no one had shown up all morning. He bellowed at me that Aggies were irresponsible college brats and that the Army wouldn't stand for their nonsense. I got the message that he thought Aggie Second Lieutenants were the lowest of their kind.

Camp Roberts, California

My new orders assigned me to Camp Roberts, California, an Infantry Replacement Training Center not far from Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo. Many of my Aggie classmates were shipped right off to the Pacific from Camp Roberts. Every day I'd look for my name in the shipping orders posted on the battalion bulletin board. I was even reluctant to unpack my bags and send out my laundry.

The suspense was broken when Captain Albert Brown, my company commander, told me that I had been assigned for about a year to "Permanent Party"—a cadre of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO's) charged with the training of raw recruits to become replacements or reinforcements overseas.

Captain Brown was a stern, grey haired officer who repeatedly used foul and caustic language. That was his style, he knew no other, and one got accustomed to it in time. He ran Company A like a martinet but with as little advanced planning as possible. This kept his officers on edge all the time because they did not know until



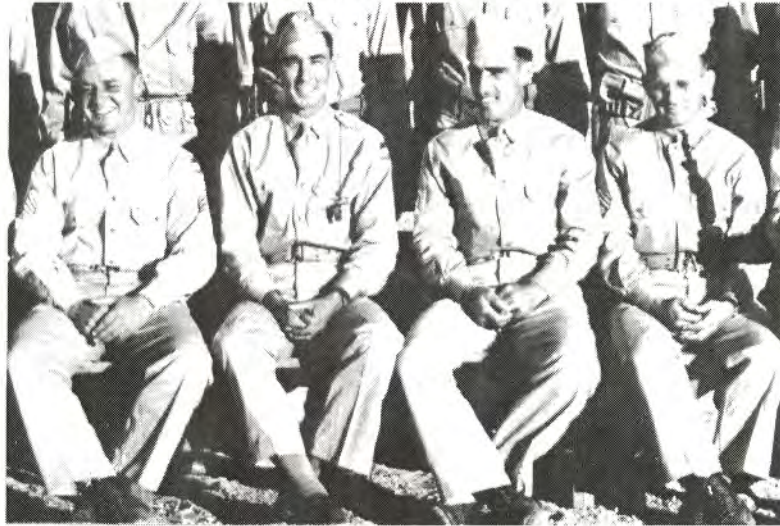
*L to R: Peña, Capt. Brown.
Back: Corp. Berchume.*

each morning for which instruction they would be responsible that day. This meant we all had to be prepared and ready for **all** instructional periods. It would be kind to say that this was the Captain's way to accelerate our development as training officers.

Nevertheless, his executive officer, Lieutenant Curtis, saw to it that I learned how to instruct the troops. And I had a lot to learn! I learned from veteran trainers—my platoon sergeant, Robert Smith, and my platoon guide, Wilfred Berchume. And I learned from Army Training Manuals, studying most nights until late.



Lt. Peña, Training Officer, 1942.



L to R: Sgt. Smith, Lt. Peña, Corp. Berchume, Corp. Noll.

At the end of my first complete 13 weeks training increment, I was amazed at the change in the men—from a rag-tag bunch to a platoon that could march and shoot.

I, myself, had gained confidence as an officer. I had even served as payroll officer under the watchful eyes of Captain Brown and our company clerk, Corporal Joe Noll. The stress there stemmed from the fact that I had to pay over 200 men the prescribed dollars and cents in cash, and not be off by a single penny at the end.

Camp Roberts was a huge processing plant for replacements located in an isolated spot. It housed 15,000 men in barracks that surrounded an enormous, paved drill field—one mile long and about half a mile wide. That summer the weather was very hot and tinder dry. Heat waves rose from the flat expanse and obliterated the opposite side of the drill field.

In response to the weather, orders were issued for everyone to swallow salt tablets and to subsist on only one canteen of water a day. Ostensibly, this was jungle training, but it resulted in additional physical stress and many sick men during the 15-mile marches and even when marching from the rifle firing range. The new draftees passed out by the dozen, while the officers and NCO's maintained their pride with hard-set jaws.

Camp Roberts was not always a pleasant tour of duty physically, but some found the emotional harassment insufferable. Lieutenant Curtis asked for and received a transfer overseas. He said that he'd had his fill of chicken s___ orders from Captain Brown and others above the Captain. Lieutenant Couch Wallace became Executive Officer, but Captain Brown would only allow him to supervise the outdoor training. He ran his company by himself.

Lieutenant Fred Renaud found out that I was being sent to the Infantry School for an Officer Basic Course for 13 weeks. That did it for him! He and I were the last two Aggies in our battalion, and he was not going to be left behind in this Old Army spit and polish situation. Renaud had failed to attend Reveille one morning because his alarm clock did not go off, and he had to answer by endorsement—a single letter that ping-ponged back and forth for months, always returning to the culprit with “reasons not acceptable, answer by endorsement.” Fed up, he applied for Paratroop Training at the Infantry School and was accepted. He could identify readily with that rough and ready group. We were there at the same time but in different programs.

The Infantry School

The Officer Basic Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, was the same Basic Course for all officer candidates; however, my class consisted of officers ranging from Second Lieutenant to the rank of Major. The course had the very best instructors in the Infantry and the very best visual aids. It covered many of the same weapons and tactics we had been teaching, but at a much higher level of sophistication. We were taught the school solution to the problems of an orderly war. Without troop responsibility, these three months were wonderfully carefree; in fact, we tended to misbehave, to the



1st Lt. (later Capt.) Wallace, 1943

consternation of the local officers (we called “bird dogs”) in charge of our class. But now it was time to return to troop duty at Camp Roberts.

Back To Camp Roberts

On my return, I was assigned to Company B under Lieutenant Couch Wallace—soon to be promoted to Captain. He immediately made me his Executive Officer. I had all the administrative duties he had not been allowed to perform under Captain Black. He was sincere, fair and caring. He looked after the welfare of his men, even if he had to bend the rules a bit. He arranged for my promotion to First Lieutenant (3 April 1943), one month after my return to Camp Roberts.

My roommate at the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ) was Lieutenant Allan Ewing from Lawrence, Kansas. He had only recently been commissioned at the Infantry School. He was a great person to be with, always cheerful and optimistic, even after a hard day’s work. When his wife and infant son were able to join him, Allan’s world was complete. His wife, B.J., would hide funny love notes in his pockets so that he’d find them during the day. Although no longer a roommate, he remained a close friend. He once borrowed money from me, without needing it, just to prove that our friendship could stand the test.

Fort Ord, California

When the Army activated Fort Ord near Monterey, California, as Replacement Depot No. 2 in August 1943, much of the cadre to jump start the depot came from Camp Roberts. Instead of being shipped overseas at the end of my year at Camp Roberts, I was assigned to Fort Ord for another year as a training officer. Here we trained men from Replacement Training Centers while they were being processed for shipment. All our training was oriented to the war in the Pacific.

Following the example of the Infantry School, the company officers were pooled for assignment to instructional units. It meant that an officer repeated the same instruction to a succession of companies



Lt. Ewing, Training Officer, 1943

of replacements. Instruction, then, became routine with the opportunity for improvement, leaving weekends fairly free for the social activities. From time to time, officers were rotated to prevent boredom in one assignment. Some of my assignments included the anti-tank bazooka, calisthenics, rifle firing range, and a company attack problem with live ammunition which required a dozen NCO's as safety guides.



The training team for the company attack exercise and visiting brass.

If Camp Roberts was a military oasis in the desert, Fort Ord was near the cool center of civilization: San Francisco, Carmel and Monterey were easily accessible for weekend dates. There was an underlying thought that this relaxed tour of duty offered a last chance for romance before going overseas—perhaps finding the love of your life. Fort Ord provided a good social setting in which to meet and date girls—dances at the Officers' Club, private dinner parties, and nearby night clubs and bars.

Good friendships were highly selective but easily bonded. My roommate at the BOQ was Lieutenant Boyce England from Bethany, Illinois, that is, until he married Annie from his hometown. He was short with a boyish round face and a ready smile. One of Boyce's good friends was Lieutenant George Dimke from Lincoln, Nebraska—a tall, blond young man. Although he had an athlete's physique and physical strength, his gold-rimmed glasses misled one to think he was bookish.



Lt. Peña, Executive Officer, 1943

As bachelors, George and I joined in a conspiracy against those married officers in our companies who were always asking us to take their weekend duty. We'd always reply that we had double dates in Monterey. George had a knack for solving problems and a superb memory. We fantasized a joint venture for after the war: I was going to design modern furniture, and he was going to manufacture it.

Curiously enough, Boyce, George and I had another good mutual friend. It was Lieutenant Whit Halladay, who had a wife and child from near Capistrano, California. He had been with us at Camp Roberts and with me at Fort Benning. (Whit would much later become Dr. D. Whitney Halladay, Chancellor of the University System of South Texas, and I would be on his Board of Directors.)



The training team for the company attack exercise and visiting brass.

Overseas Shipment

The second year was up, and we were being shipped across the country to Fort Meade, Maryland, Replacement Depot No. 1, a stop on our way to Europe. The casualties on the front line from D-Day and the hedgerow fighting needed to be replaced.

31 July – 6 August 1944

I spent a few days leave at home in Laredo, Texas—a delay enroute. I avoided alarming my family and consoled an old girl friend who had just broken her engagement to an Air Force officer.

I flew to Chicago. The four of us at Fort Ord had decided on the Palmer House as our rendezvous point before proceeding to Fort Meade. We believed that if we signed in together, we would stay together in the same shipment.

7–8 August 1944

Since I was the first to arrive at the Palmer House, I described my three friends to the pretty girl at the information desk, Grace Bruns. She surprised each newcomer by spotting him in the crowd, calling him by name, and directing him to the changing meeting places: The Petite Cafe, the bar, etc. George and Whit came in and we waited for Boyce, the fourth musketeer. Although he lived the closest to Chicago, his bride wouldn't let him join us until we convinced her of our plan to stay together. When Boyce joined us, we celebrated by splurging for dinner at the Pump Room and laughing till we cried at a new comedian, Victor Borge. We promised to meet at the Palmer House after the war for a happy reunion.

9–10 August 1944

We traveled together and registered at Fort Meade according to our plan.

11–18 August 1944

While waiting for orders, we'd slip into Washington, D.C. to have lunch and a swim at the Army Officers Club and to see the tourist sights.

When the orders were published, my hopes sank out of sight! I was the only one on separate overseas orders. Whit, George, and Boyce were on the same order—even in the same company! Our plan had worked that far. A last minute appeal by the four of us to change my orders failed. The Adjutant said, "C'est La Guerre"—that's war.

I felt left out of the fun. (What I didn't realize was, as replacements, we could all be scattered to different units once we arrived near the front line.) George quietly helped me pack. The next morning we



*Grace Bruns of Chicago—later
Grace Dorian of New York*

fell in with our respective companies and marched in opposite directions to the loud barking of orders.

19–27 August 1944

I was executive officer of our replacement company, but I was also a platoon leader responsible for 48 men. Luckily, I had a darn good platoon sergeant and a good platoon guide to round up our four squads. We were taken to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey for processing—checking that we each had with us a long list of clothing and equipment. I went alone to New York City a few times and made the tourist rounds. I was lucky enough to get a single ticket to see the new hit show, “Oklahoma.”

28 August 1944

With thousands of other men, we boarded the Queen Elizabeth which had been converted into a troop ship. We slipped out of the harbor sometime during the night.

29 August – 5 September 1944

Aboard ship, I received a letter from George telling me how the gang missed me, how my name was always slipping into their conversation. He added that, now that he was safe from embarrassment, he could tell me that I had been his very best friend. He enclosed a snapshot of himself and his girl taken in front of his house in Nebraska.

Now I was alone again among strangers with plenty of time to think about the gang and the fun we’d had together. I turned to the training manuals to learn about the identification of German planes, tanks, weapons, and uniforms. After believing for two years that I’d go to the Pacific I knew the Japanese counterparts well, but that information was now useless.

In the cramped quarters (the cabin originally designed for two passengers, now had triple bunks for six), I became more conscious of two of my company officers: Lockwood and McFeatters! Lieutenant Lockwood, our supply officer, cursed like a sophomore, spewing his venom on the enlisted men.

Lieutenant McFeatters had been in our battalion at Camp Roberts and at Fort Ord. Our rooms had been on the same floor at the BOQ,

but we never had much to say to each other. In fact, we disliked each other for some reason. Here, we began discussing different things: our backgrounds (he was a cartoonist from Philadelphia) and our mutual disrespect for a former battalion commander. We began to tolerate each other.

6–7 September 1944

When we landed in Scotland, a train was waiting to take us on a non-stop trip to an assembly camp near Southhampton. Arriving there in mid-afternoon, McFeatters and I impulsively decided to hop a ride to nearby Winchester “to see England.” It was a quaint small town of some historic value, and we lost no time in finding an intimate pub. We wanted to taste everything! And we had only one night in which to do it.

A kind, old gentlemen suggested I try their “Black and Tan,” a combination of beers. I didn’t like it so I tried something else—and other combinations in quick succession. Before long we were visiting a series of pubs, guided by two local girls. At midnight, when the curfew broke up the party, we found ourselves alone in the blacked-out streets, reeling and with absolutely no sense of direction. By a wild chance, we caught sight of the cat-eyes of a jeep and we hopped a ride back to camp. I never got to bed. I was sick all night.

8–9 September 1944

At 4 o’clock in the morning, when the troops were awakened to prepare for the truck ride to the Southhampton dock, I told my platoon sergeant to see that our platoon got aboard the trucks since I wasn’t feeling too well. He complied with a knowing, compassionate smile. Our Captain, on the other hand, didn’t approve of our little escapade (he reminded me of a school marm), and he assigned McFeatters and me a few extra duties.

At the dock, a troop of British soldiers was seeing us off with an impeccable demonstration of close order drill. At every change in movement they’d stomp the wooden dock, making a resounding racket. I would have appreciated their disciplined accuracy if my head hadn’t felt as if it would burst at the next stomping. Red Cross black coffee helped my hangover.

The 100 mile or so trip across the English Channel in a small British boat was uneventful. As Officer of the Day for our company, I got to meet the British Captain of the boat. It was my first brush with the calm and casualness of the British command. He invited me to share tea, which I swallowed out of sheer politeness. The tea breaks aboard were something to avoid. Made by the gallons, the dreary tea-and-milk mixture was awful.

We disembarked in the Colleville area off Omaha Beach and climbed the steep plateau which protruded out on the beach. When we reached the high, flat land, exhausted under the 90 pounds of equipment we carried on our backs, we were confronted by the view of a new cemetery with row upon row of white crosses. Good God. What a dismal welcome to France! We paused. Someone in charge told us (officially or unofficially) to take a good look at the crosses, and he quoted some casualty rates concerning our chances of ending under a white cross on foreign soil.

10–17 September 1944

We traveled from one replacement camp to another by truck and by World War I vintage “40 or 8” trains. On one of these train trips I was with my platoon only two box cars behind the engine. We would stop at certain intervals for relief breaks, and I would walk over to talk to the engineer. A piece of brown wrapping paper served as a map of his route. The map had a diagrammatic line in pencil and dots designating the approximate location of the towns and villages we were passing through. I recognized none of the names of the towns except Le Mans. At times he would stop and ask the natives where we were, using me as an interpreter.

My platoon sergeant gave me too much credit in saying I spoke French. My French consisted of a few words and lots of hand signals. During one stop we were all out of water, I walked down to a house near the tracks. “Avez-vous eau?” I asked the group of men and women who came out to greet me. I could see by the consternation on their faces that my two years of college French had been spent in vain. “Qu’est-ce que c’est ça, ‘eau’?” They’d ask each other in a rapid wave of questions, and then they’d turn to me for further clarification. I’d repeat “eau.” Another quick consultation among themselves. “Eau de Cologne” didn’t help. Drinking motions and

my empty canteen finally did the trick. “Ah! de l’eau” .. “some water.” They ran joyfully bringing pitchers of water. My sergeant continued to believe I could speak French.

Our engineer stopped at a bombed-out railroad station and worriedly told me we had taken the wrong track. We were supposed to be at Le Mans, but he added that we were at Sortie as indicated on the roofless tile walls in great big letters. Sortie wasn’t even on his map. He was relieved when I told him that we actually were in Le Mans and that “sortie” meant “exit,” noting the sign locations by the doorways.

Another time, our engineer told us that the next bridge was weakened and that he would cross with one half of the cars at time. Fine. He crossed with the first half, leaving us at a siding, and he went back to pick up the second half. We had understood that he would join the halves before continuing. Actually, he kept going with only the second half of the cars, leaving us at the siding in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night. Everyone was in a bad humor, believing he had forgotten us. In the daytime we could have foraged for food and water. As this happened on a dark night, we kept close to the cars. He came back for us five hours later—he didn’t give us any explanation, and by the time we joined the rest of our group we didn’t care for one.

At each replacement camp there were inspections of clothing, weapons and equipment on arrival and just before departure. Each man was supposed to have so many tent pins, so many socks, etc. True, our men lost a few small items. When our supply officer Lieutenant Lockwood found this out, he would rant and rave and curse like a madman, treating the enlisted men like animals. I felt ashamed of him as an officer. Somehow my own platoon sergeant could accomplish the same dressing down without stripping a man of his dignity.

Food at some replacement camps (all in open fields, sometimes near towns) was meager. A couple of times we didn’t have breakfast. We were told that the rations going to the front had first priority.

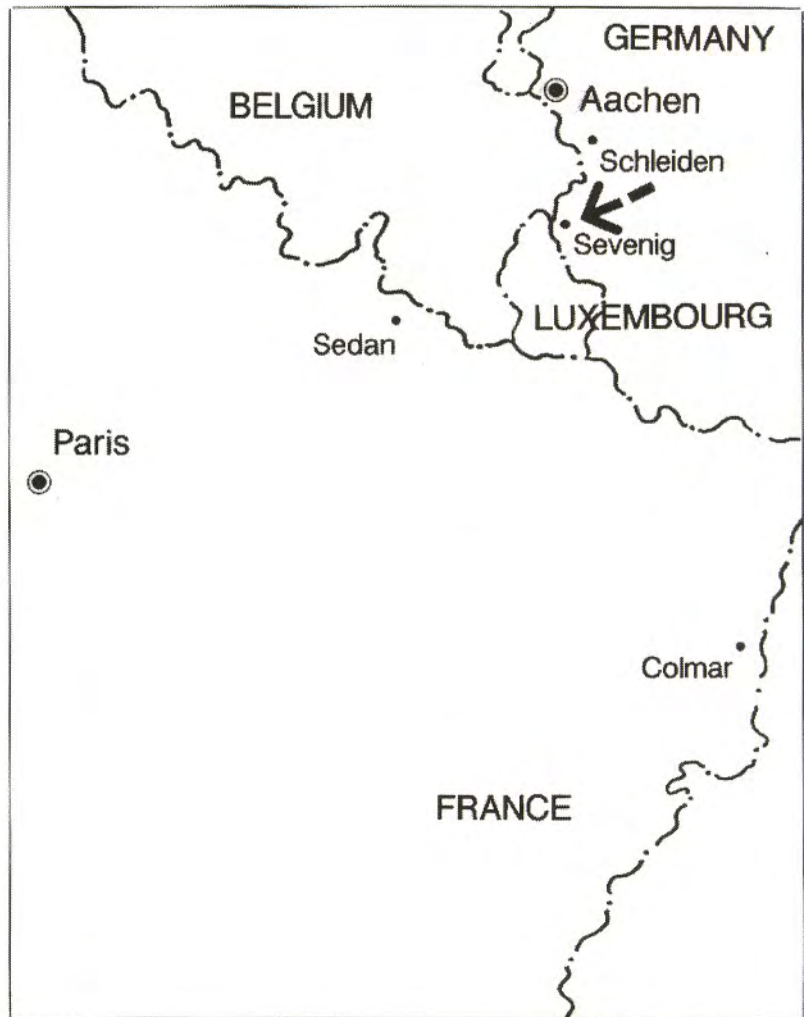
By this time we were near the front. My platoon sergeant and platoon guide were desperately anxious to get into the fight. One day they confided in me that they were ready to go AWOL to join any outfit

on the front line. They were serious enough to ask me to cover up for them to allow them a few hours head start. I convinced them to wait a while longer, reminding them that we still had a platoon of men on our hands. (By now no one expected the platoon to remain as a unit.) One of the things that fired these two men to want action was the presence of men in the same camp who were to rejoin their outfits after being hospitalized. Their battle stories, exaggerated to scare us as replacements, only whet my sergeants' appetites.

A couple of mornings later we were told to recheck our equipment and to prepare to leave on trucks the next morning at 6 o'clock. The rechecking of equipment and a lecture-demonstration on German booby-traps and hand grenades took care of the morning. The afternoon was a free period.

Around 3 o'clock I headed toward a stream to take a bath. The winding path was well worn, side tracking bushes and trees. Turning a curve I noticed someone coming back from the stream. Recognition—stop! It was Allen Ewing whom I'd left at Camp Roberts! We didn't make much sense at first; we were so surprised to see each other. The whole idea of our meeting in Europe was inconceivable. B.J. and the baby were fine, back in Lawrence, Kansas. His replacement unit had just arrived at our camp that day. I was leaving the next morning. I forgot about the bath and went to his sector. His tent buddy had already pitched their tent, and he was good enough to allow us to prattle. By the time I left to go back to my own tent, it was late at night, and I had to contend, not only with the difficulty of finding my way in the dark, but with trigger-happy guards who halted me a few times for the password.

Arriving At Sevenig



Arriving At Sevenig

18–19 September 1944

At the next camp our unit was broken up and sent forward in smaller packets of men. Lockwood, McFeatters and I found ourselves with about 24 men headed for some outfits on the line. At the 28th Infantry Division Replacement Company area we were relieved of most of the extra clothing and equipment we had lugged from the States, except for our weapons and ammunition, a blanket, an extra set of underwear and socks, shaving equipment and a few personal belongings. I held on to my pocket-book edition of James Thurber's, *The Middle-Aged Man on the Flying Trapeze*. It felt odd to be welcomed by the short, bespectacled first lieutenant in charge who had been the former company clerk, Corporal Joe Noll. He had been sent to officer training school from our Company A at Camp Roberts. I sensed that I had a lot to catch up on in this war.

I was sent as the only passenger in a jeep to a battalion command post (CP). On the way, the driver pointed out a small bridge over the Our River. This was the spot at which the boundaries of Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany all joined. I made a mental note of this. With a map I could tell where I was. The CP turned out to be a small concrete bunker on German soil east of the Our River and part of the Siegfried Line. The terrain consisted of rolling hills and flat valleys. I had been assigned to the 3rd Battalion of the 109th Regiment in the 28th Infantry Division. (This location near Sevenig was only about 33 miles, as the crow flies, from Schleiden where I would leave the outfit I was about to join.)

I reported to Major Harold Martin who was busy fixing himself a cup of potato soup—he was a thin man with ulcers. Major Martin said I was to join Company I. A couple of mortar shells exploded nearby. Someone said that this happened every time the jeep came in. No wonder the jeep had left in such a hurry!

Major Martin called the Company I command post on the field phone, telling someone there of my arrival as a replacement. I was told that Lieutenant Wilfred Dulac, the company commander, was coming to the battalion CP on other business and that he'd pick me up in a short while. I had been assigned to a front line rifle company—the main fighting unit of the Infantry.



*Capt. Wilfred Dulac, Company
Commander*

Soon Dulac came in, a bit out of breath (he'd been running), but cheerful enough. He was youthful, but with a maturity that belied his college graduate look. We were introduced, and Dulac conducted his business with the Major. Before we were ready to leave the CP, Dulac asked me casually about my army background. I ran through it briefly. Had I been in the Louisiana maneuvers? No. "Well," he said, "this war is just like those maneuvers except that the enemy fires real ammunition."

He had a certain wry smile which indicated that things were not really so bad and that there was need for caution but not for fear. He explained that our company protected the flank of the battalion and that the Germans had a commanding view of our position. However, the configuration of the hills and woods did provide us with some protection from this lethal view. To reach the company CP we would seek the protection of nearby woods, then we would have to run across an open area exposed to German observers. After that, we would be comparatively safe. "They shoot at anything that moves," he said. "Their aim is lousy but be quick to follow me."

I left with Dulac. It was exactly as he had described. We ran through the open space, and a mortar shell exploded, but nowhere near us.

The company CP consisted of a hole dug on the side of the hill with trees and bushes offering visual protection. I met the acting first sergeant, George Johnstone, and Dulac assigned me the 1st Platoon, which was located on the reverse slope of a bald hill with a fringe of woods lower down the slope. A messenger took me through the fringe to a point slightly below my CP—also a hole in the side of the hill, out in the open. My platoon sergeant and my platoon guide were in the woods to meet me. They pointed out the few foxholes on the hill containing my men and warned me against going up there during daylight. Their locations were within view of enemy artillery and mortar observers. This meant that no one could leave his foxhole except under foggy conditions or at night when the rations, ammunition and mail were distributed. (As I adjusted to the intervals of artillery fire days later, I found we could move with much more freedom, but still with caution.)

While we were waiting for nightfall, my sergeants and William McCormick of the 3rd platoon, a brand new lieutenant who had just been commissioned in the field that very day, filled me in on

the situation. I envied these men their combat experience. This was September the 19th. A few days before, on the 15th, an attack by I Company through Sevenig had resulted in the capture of six pillboxes to our front—some of them had just begun to be manned by the Germans. Unfortunately, the attack had weakened the company, and it was now low on ammunition. It was not able to resist the strong German counterattack which came before the position could be fully organized and strengthened. One particular enemy tank was deadly and demoralizing. One third of the company men had been captured, killed, or wounded. The company commander was taken prisoner.

Sergeant Johnstone and Lieutenant Tyson Bean had organized a withdrawal of some 19 men. Returning stray men probably brought the company strength to 30 late that day. Lost stragglers took longer to return. The position we now held had been organized as a defensive one. Dulac had been placed in command, and we were to receive replacements to bring up the company to its organizational strength.

The rapid, sweeping movements of August across France had stopped at the Siegfried Line. Now, late in September, we faced a static situation in which our argument was over small changes in the line.

That night I went from foxhole to foxhole asking the names of my men and telling them to take a good look at me—I was their new lieutenant. Most of these men were replacements with only a few day's more front line experience than I.

The artillery we received that day and night (as it was to continue) was generally of a harassing nature. That night I slept in the CP foxhole with my platoon sergeant and my platoon guide, alternating watch duty two hours at a time. I say "slept", but actually the artillery fire kept me awake all night. The next morning the sergeant and the guide were ordered to the rear to be court-martialled for desertion in the face of the enemy. They had left the battle action without authority. (Later I found out that they had lost their stripes and had been transferred to another company.)

20 September 1944

Later in the day I received three seasoned corporals from another company to become my squad leaders. To offset this bonanza, I

received a platoon sergeant who should have remained behind a desk back in the States. Although he had 1st Sergeant stripes, no one wanted him in that capacity, so I got him.

I learned the daily routine on the front line: (1) with no electric lights (not even a candle) in the open field, you plan to sleep and to rise with the chickens, (2) you can endure two sleepless nights in a row, and (3) if you are exhausted enough, you can sleep through harassing fire—unless it lands in your back pocket.

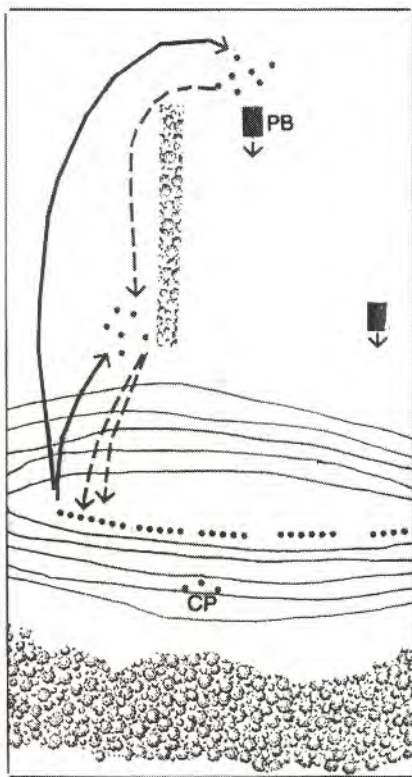
21 September 1944

More replacements. My platoon was filling up in size. Stumer, one of my squad leaders, was an especially fine one. He had that spirit of adventure so essential for a good soldier. All three of my new squad leaders were superb. Through them, the platoon was beginning to have a sense of organization and unity at last.

I had asked Tony Bernardo, our supply sergeant, to find a good M-1 rifle for me. I didn't trust the carbine that officers were supposed to carry, and I wanted to exchange mine at the first opportunity. Bernardo came through with a good one on his next trip to our platoon area. He also brought me a pair of overshoes and a small folding shovel. Out of all the equipment I had lugged from the States, these items were missing. There were no ready-dug latrines at the front. You carried your shovel in your backpack all the time. You would dig a small hole, relieve yourself, and cover it for good sanitation. A small packet of brown toilet paper came in one of the daily K-rations.

22 September 1944

Dulac called me to his CP. He was quite enthusiastic about a plan to harass the enemy. Using a photo map and an overlay, he described his plan. I was to take two of my squad leaders, each with five men, to go over our hill at 11 o'clock at night, and run down to the protection of the hedge at the bottom. We would leave one squad leader and his group at the end of the hedge to cover the front of a pillbox. I was to take the rest some 20 yards further and fire at the rear of a second pillbox. Then I was to come back, pick up my group at the hedge—who by this time would be firing at their pillbox, and come over the hill to our position. The mission of



22 Sept. Plan for a harassment mission.

harassment seemed dangerous and its success depended on quick timing, but I bought it. I discussed the plan first with the two squad leaders (one was Stumer) and then at night with the other 10 men chosen. Remember, don't wear anything that jingles; we'll blacken our faces. H-hour got closer. We were ready. At H minus 15 minutes, a signal whistle came through the platoon-company phone.

"Are you ready to take off?" asked Dulac.

"Yes," I replied in a low tone, because sounds carry for miles.

"Battalion just called me," said Dulac. "They have a reconnaissance patrol going out tonight, and they don't want any other patrols out in this area. Your mission is canceled."

I was relieved. (A year later Stumer wrote to me mentioning this dangerous mission that I had convinced him would work.) I was well-trained to follow orders. I actually thought it would come off even though we were taking questionable chances.

23 September 1944

I received a good, seasoned replacement for my platoon sergeant, Thomas Blair, and a good guide. I didn't care where the sergeant I had went, but I hoped he'd get a desk job at the rear. He'd been good at filling out the few reports we made to the company, but really useless in a tactical sense.

Dulac called me to his CP. What did I know about trip-flares? Nothing.

"Simple," he said. "All you do is sink the spike of the flare in the ground, stretch and anchor the thin wire across 15-20 feet, then pull the small spring action lever down. If anyone trips over the wire after that, the pull releases the mechanism and ignites the flare like a fire-cracker and lights up the whole area."

He gave me three flares to place just beyond the crest of my bald hill. If the Germans were to attack our position at night, the flares would not only warn us, but they would also light up the area for us to see where to shoot.

I didn't trust anyone with these tricky items so I decided to install the flares myself with the help of my sergeant. Luckily, I thought, our hill was spotted with dried corn shocks behind which we could

hide while installing the darn things. That night we began our work. For each flare we would crawl beyond the crest of the hill. I shoved the spike behind a corn shock while the sergeant anchored his end of the wire behind another shock. After I received his silent signal that his job was done, I would wave him to crawl back behind the crest, and then I would pull the spring-action lever down before crawling back myself.

We installed two flares without a hitch. The third one was something else. We were all ready, and I waved him back to safety. Then I pulled the lever down and placed both hands on the ground to crawl back. The spring-action lever didn't hold and snapped. The flare ignited practically in my face! I automatically pushed the flare away from me and toward the corn shock—which caught fire. Instantly I ran some 10 feet back to the protection of another corn shock. As if on signal, a volley of our own artillery went off at our rear, whistling safely over my head, toward the enemy line. The flare and the burning corn stalks were indeed lighting up the whole area! I couldn't crawl or even run back now. I'd be in plain view. The only thing to do was to remain still behind the corn shock until the fire smoldered down to comparative darkness. This took a matter of ten or fifteen minutes, but to me it seemed like a century. Finally I crawled back to our side of the crest.

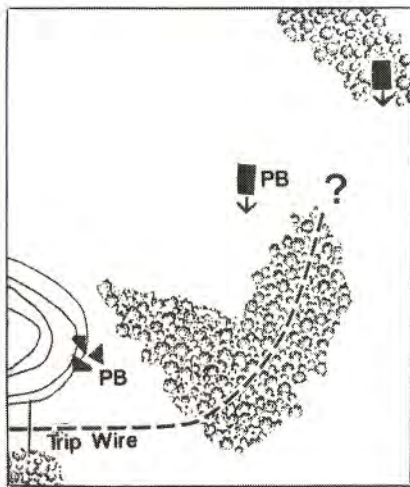
I waited for Dulac to call me. He didn't. Battalion called him asking about the commotion in my sector. He calmly speculated that a German blast had set a corn shock afire—that was all. When I explained the incident to him the next day, Dulac waved the matter aside saying that some flares had defective mechanisms.

24 September 1944

Dulac called me to his CP. He had been scrutinizing his photo maps and found one pillbox at our right front which seemed to be isolated from the usual pattern establishing mutual cross-fire support between pillboxes. "I want to capture that pillbox this afternoon using your platoon," he said, explaining a few tactics of deployment and attack.

"Is it that simple?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes," he said. "A week or so ago we captured a whole bunch of them. This one, unsupported, will be easy to take."



24 Sept. The case of the hidden pillbox.

I pulled my platoon out of position and told the squad leaders what we were to do. Dulac joined us and lead the way. At the edge of our flank was an empty pillbox. It had truly been a small fort, but this one had been rendered useless by the engineers and their TNT. Near this pillbox, at the edge of no-man's land, we had installed a trip-flare against the time when a German night patrol might want to sneak around our flank. When we came to the wire, I left one man pointing it out silently to each man in our column.

Soon after we began to take our positions in the cover of woods, Dulac spotted another pillbox (not shown in the photomap) hidden in the woods and close to the one we were after. It was useless to capture one without the other, and this was more than we had planned for. Dulac called off the attack, and with quiet signals we began bringing the men back.

I wanted to be sure all my men were out of the woods, and I waited a few minutes near the abandoned pillbox. Then I hurried to catch up with the column. SNAP! Damn, I'd pulled the wire of our own trip flare. Of course in broad daylight the effect of the flare was lost, but I felt clumsy and ashamed. (This matter of setting things off was to plague me from time to time to my last day at the front.) No one had heard the flare go off, but I confessed the stupid incident—getting a laugh from my squad leaders.

25 September 1944

Every morning just before daybreak, Sergeant Bernardo, our supply sergeant and/or our mess sergeant, Berlin, would bring us our rations, ammunition, cigarettes and mail—and sometimes, the STARS AND STRIPES, the Army frontline newspaper. Today's headlines touted the fall of Aachen on September 19th—the first major German city to be captured—after a fierce campaign.

The rations for lunch and dinner meals were "C" rations—beef stew and other concoctions. Breakfast was a hot meal, supplemented by GI cans or a Lister bag of water and hot coffee. The meal consisted of scrambled eggs, bacon, thick slices of Army bread and butter that wouldn't melt. This meal would come in marmite insulated cans with metal pan inserts for each item. Through the early mist the men would come down in small groups to be served.

26 September 1944

We were still receiving replacements—officers and enlisted men. Dulac called me to his CP. “How would you like to take over the weapons platoon?” he asked.

“But who would take over my 1st platoon?” I answered with a question.

“I have an officer replacement coming in today. He can have it. Incidentally, are you Catholic?”

Yes, I said, I was.

“Father Cummins is saying Mass in the rear area today. You can go if you want to. It’ll also be your chance to take a bath.”

The small group going to the rear was all ready to go. I joined them. Those few of us going to Mass found ourselves joining a group of kneeling men in a wooded area. Captain Carl Cummins had just started Mass, using a small table for an altar. The sermon shouldn’t have surprised me. It dealt with the broad picture of the war and why we were fighting. No mention of the gospel. Father Cummins was a stout, pleasant Irishman, but with strong convictions—at ease with rough men.

Trucks picked us up to go to the shower area. I didn’t remember when I had last taken a bath. The weather was mild, and the mass showers were out in the open on an assembly line basis. One could also exchange dirty clothes for clean ones, selecting his approximate sizes from huge piles.

At almost the last minute I caught sight of McFeatters. We were very good friends now. We had to squeeze in our reactions quickly. I knew his F Company position was a much better target for German artillery. They couldn’t move at all except at night. Deep foxholes offered some protection, but it was rumored that German artillery was using time-fused rounds which exploded in mid-air above the foxholes. One mortar round had landed directly into a man’s hole. The question of taking him out for burial or merely filling the hole had come up. What a mess!

“What about Lockwood? Didn’t he go with you to F Company?” I asked.

“That guy,” McFeatters started seriously, “remember what an ox of a guy he was? Strong, always bellowing like an angry bull. Well, after a few days on our line, they took him to the rear a blithering

idiot, Section 8. Things are bad, but I didn't think he'd crack up that easily. Say, did you know the 28th is a hard luck outfit? From my home state. Oh well, we had no choice."

"We'll have to make our own luck," I said.

Time was running out on our visit. We ended with a wise-crack as I hopped into our truck.

"Come visit me when you have time," he waved.

When I got back to the company very late that afternoon, my few personal belongings and my blanket had already been sent to my new platoon area. Sergeant William Collins, a dark, heavy framed man, was my weapons platoon sergeant. Sergeant William L. Beasley, a cheerful, wirey man, was my machine gun section leader. Sergeant James Baker, short and withdrawn, headed the mortar section. Each of these men was an old-timer in our company, having joined the outfit in the States.

Collins was a Welshminer, from Pennsylvania, as were so many in the original organization of the 28th Division. His accent was a sort of Welsh brogue and difficult to understand at first, particularly when he was excited. The rest of the men were recent replacements. We had only two 60mm mortars instead of three, and our two light machine guns were attached to the second platoon. The weapons platoon was still to receive replacements.

My new CP was at the edge of the woods at the bottom of a hill in a comparatively safe location that offered great freedom of movement. The two mortars were out in the open with a few selected target areas.

27 September 1944

I had developed a case of dysentery, probably from poorly cleaned eating utensils. I sought out our aid man (medic) at Collin's suggestion. His name was Corporal Henry Trzaska. A slender young man, he carried a bag slung across his shoulders that was full of bandages and medical items, and, of course, he wore a red cross on his helmet as well as an arm band. He smiled broadly when I told him my trouble and gave me some Bismuth tablets. He had several similar cases going, and these tablets were all he could recommend.



Cpl. Henry Trzaska, Company Medic

They seemed to work.

28 September 1944

Except for the machine gunners, who were on the front line, I had a better opportunity to know the men in my new platoon. They were few in number and we were located in one small area.

Collins came to me quite excited. "Boy oh boy! We have trouble! We've just been assigned a new man who's a real trouble-maker. No one else wanted him so we get him! Well, the son of a bitch better watch his step. He's gotta tangle with ME if he tries anything funny."

Collins had a private grape vine; nothing escaped him.

The young man's name was Joseph W. Clark. He was a robust, muscular young man who could take care of himself in a fight. He came to us peacefully enough, quiet but sullen. Collins was a bit gruff with Clark, getting him settled in our area, and perhaps Collins was just rough enough to show him who's boss.

Since Clark's record of misconduct had preceded him and his actual presence wasn't encouraging, I decided to talk to him privately at the first opportunity. Clark told me that he hadn't been paid in months and that he had been at 20 replacement camps. This, I knew, was reason enough for distemper; but it wasn't the whole story.

At one of the earlier camps, rations had been short—I had experienced this myself—yet the assignment to work details had not changed. He and another man on a hard work detail had rebelled. "No food, no work," they had declared. The argument with the mess sergeant or some officer had ended in violence.

The court-martial had resulted in a guard house sentence. Some fine had been attached to his pay voucher. His tour through replacement camps had not helped matters in any way—monetarily or emotionally. I rashly promised to see what could be done.

By chance I caught our company clerk at the Company CP. While he'd make periodic visits to coordinate his work with the first sergeant, his work place was at battalion headquarters. I told him that I wanted to see Clark paid.

"Jeez!" He said. "I've seen his record, and it's got a list of

attachments a mile long. I can't promise anything soon. It'll take time to untangle the whole thing."

"It's important," I insisted. "See what you can do."

This had been the first time I'd talked to the clerk. I didn't know what I could expect from him.

29 September 1944

My mail had caught up to me. One letter was from George Dimke—my closest friend in our Fort Ord quartet. He wrote that he had been within a few miles from me at one of the replacement camps. His letter was full of censorship caution, but the spaces between the lines told me that he had seen some action with his outfit and that he was now enjoying some delicious pancakes in some rear area. Hmmm. Pancakes! Rare indeed.

The enemy artillery was fairly quiet now, but occasionally a round would whistle in, seemingly without a target. Collins came to me laughing, saying that a round had hit a lost cow in our area. He asked to borrow my knife (Dad's deer hunting knife). I went to see the dead cow, but the fatal wound didn't seem to have been the result of shrapnel. Sergeant Dallas Elwood, our communications sergeant, was skillful as a butcher—his family was in the meat packing business. For a change, we were to have meat the next day.

30 September 1944

Bernardo had brought us our missing 60mm mortar, and the weapons platoon was now up to the table of organization. My section leaders knew their stuff. Clark was still belligerent. Occasionally he'd flare up in an argument with one of the ammunition carriers.

I had a group of men of various sizes and shapes and of diverse backgrounds. I was responsible for censoring their out-going mail and began to learn more about them and their families. This would have been a care-free time, but for the thought that I was still green as were so many of the new men in my platoon. We hadn't really been tested.

1 October 1944

As executive officer, Lieutenant Hooven paid us—a few men at a time. I kept only pocket money, the rest was in war bond allotments.



St. Dallas Elwood, Communications Sergeant.

It seemed odd to have a man selling war bonds at the front line or not far from it. Hooven told me it was my choice to pay in advance for my officer's liquor ration or to forget about it if I didn't drink. It was the first time I'd heard about this. Naturally, I paid.

Clark was all smiles. He'd been paid! A partial payment, but paid. He came to thank me. As a grateful man he seemed different, with an open face. I told him that our small clerk had performed the miracle. My evaluation of our clerk rose sky high. He was fighting the war the way he knew best. I found out that he had worked all night on this project.

2 October 1944

Clark sought me out in a quiet section of the woods on this slope of the hill. He wanted me to witness his signature to a paper. What was it? He gave it to me to read and to sign. It was some sort of legal instrument which allowed his wife to proceed with divorce proceedings. He admitted that it hadn't been a good marriage, but that it had hurt him for her to want a new marriage at this time. He had refused to answer her pleading letters, he said. Now he was willing to let her go her way without much regret. He seemed almost glad to get the papers signed and sealed.

Near Elsenborn



Near Elsenborn

2-3 October 1944

We were relieved late at night by the 13th Regiment of the 8th Infantry Division. This move in position meant crossing the German border going west into Luxembourg and north into Belgium—all within a few miles travel. We drove in trucks past St. Vith and up toward Elsenborn near the German border again.

We arrived at an assembly area near Elsenborn late in the afternoon. The boundaries for each platoon, for each company, were quickly established, providing controlled dispersement. Boundaries were set by landmarks—from this tree to that fence to that house, etc. Immediately we started digging out slit trenches—supposedly deep enough for a man to lie prone and avoid being hit by the horizontal flying shrapnel of artillery bursts. We each slept in our own trench. Later that night, one single round of artillery landed near our area—just close enough to make us wish we had dug all the way down to the recommended depth.

4 October 1944

After breakfast Captain (by now) Dulac asked his officers to start the men digging adequate trenches and then to report to his CP at the only house located in the middle of our company area. This was the first time all the company officers were together at the same time in one room. Actually it was the first time I had walked into a house, a strange environment after living like an animal for over a month in the open and in holes.

Dulac was casually discussing some things with us at this informal meeting when suddenly the door to the room flew open and in stormed our recently assigned, new battalion executive officer, Captain Howard Topping. He was a big athletic man and very angry! We jumped to attention at Dulac's command. He ignored Dulac's salute. He asked loudly, "Whose platoon is digging in the sector west of this house?"

"Mine, Sir!" I answered.

"What's your name?" he bellowed.

"Lieutenant Peña, sir; weapons platoon leader."

“Lieutenant Peña, if I catch your men again wearing only their wool knit caps without their steel helmets, I’ll personally see that you get shipped back to the States.” I was petrified with the thought of being sent back to the States in disgrace. He reminded the other officers of directive number so and such which called for wearing the steel helmet at ALL times. Having made his point, he hurried out of the room.

Captain Dulac calmly told someone to go see that all men were wearing their helmets. But it was impossible to continue the meeting in the previous vein.

Back in the States, we would salute and wear the prescribed uniform. We would shave every day and keep our hair cut short. My first impression was that Captain Topping was going to emphasize Stateside precepts.

I called my men together, knowing that they had already felt Captain Topping’s anger. “You heard him. What you may not have heard is that you’ll get a new lieutenant if he catches you again without your helmets. Now, if you want to break-in a new lieutenant, you know exactly what to do.”

“Naw, we’ll keep you with us,” someone said, and we left it at that.

5 October 1944

A rainy day. Not too bad, but a bit chilly. Our main job was to keep our weapons clean and dry if possible. We received orders for the regiment to move out toward Oberhausen on the next day.

Once a month, as Lieutenant Hooven had told me, officers received a liquor ration. We had paid in advance on pay day. This was the first time I was to receive my liquor ration which consisted of a fifth of excellent Scotch and a half bottle of gin. Although I was a bourbon and water man myself, a couple of slugs out of the Scotch bottle were proof enough that this was certainly smooth stuff. I decided to share it with my men. I couldn’t remember when I’d last tasted whiskey, and I suspected the same was true with them. I started the bottle down the line only hoping it would last to its end. Not knowing how to carry a half bottle of gin, I emptied my canteen of water, filled it with the gin, and forgot about it.

6 October 1944

Early in the morning the whole regiment was ready to move out. My platoon was all packed and standing by the road next to our area, ready to take our position in the column. Captain Topping came up to me holding an old sock fastidiously before him. He was a tall man, with football player proportions, and he towered over me. "Lieutenant Peña," he was trying to control himself, "Do you know what this is?"

"Yes, sir. It's a GI sock."

"Do you know how important it is to have a supply of clothing available with supply lines being so difficult to maintain?" He was still holding the sock delicately before me, but his voice was increasing in volume.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know that I found this sock discarded in your platoon area?" He was getting ready to burst.

"No, sir. Exactly where did you find it?"

"In the trench next to that tree," pointing in the direction.

"That's ot my area, sir. Mine starts at this fence."

Unable to pin it to my responsibility, he decided not to carry the matter much further. "Well, here! Do something with it, bury it."

I took it from him as gingerly as he held it and passed it to Collins who was standing by my side. The Captain rushed away. I was left with dark and troubled thoughts. Captain Topping had just been promoted to battalion commander, replacing Major Martin who had been evacuated with a bad ulcer.

We started marching on the road which, by now, was muddy and slippery. We were to make contact with the enemy, and we had been told to watch out for snipers and islands of resistance.

Soon the battalion units left the road and fanned out on both sides. Our company was deployed and advanced left of the road. We were now in a wooded area. Occasionally we'd hear a shot or two which could have come from our own trigger-happy group or from a sniper. The unknown is always scary, and we were in unknown territory. At one point my platoon had to go through a field of "Christmas"

trees, all about five feet high, planted like rows of corn. An exchange of volleys between a sniper and the troops to our right dropped us to the ground for a minute. I thought fearfully that if we'd have a fire fight among these trees, I'd never again be able to face the Christmas season with the idea of peace to men of good will.

Near the end of the day we settled on a position perpendicular to the road. While we were digging our holes a commotion accompanied by shots started in the area across the road. Those troops had discovered two Germans hiding and had flushed them like quail out of the woods onto the road where they were shot at by so many "hunters."

The whole event happened in a flash. I held my shovel still while I watched. Both Germans were wounded and surrendered. I had considered the area completely safe—and now it was.

Digging was difficult in the rocky ground. Luckily I had Collins for my digging partner on our mutual hole. With his coal mining background, digging wasn't as exhaustive to him as it was to me. I felt hot and sweaty. My throat was dry. I reached for my canteen. It was full of GIN! I drank some and offered some to Collins who was a good drinker. He was delighted. Baker, my mortar section sergeant, came by, and he also drank some. Collins and I resumed our turns at digging and drinking. Even when we were satisfied with the depth of our hole, there was still some gin left in my canteen. The amount seemed inexhaustible. At last I drained it.

The word was passed down that hot chow was being served up the road with a few men going up to it at intervals. When my turn came I stood up only to discover I was drunk! Suppose my men found out their lieutenant couldn't hold his liquor. And at a time like this, wouldn't Topping blow his stack! The black coffee served with chow would fix me up. I grabbed my rifle and mess gear and started up the muddy slippery road. The mud sucked at my combat boots. I staggered and fell to one knee once, but I could blame the muddy ruts.

The food was widely dispersed (a caution against providing close grouping for artillery bursts). Bread here, beans there, hash over here, etc. At least I didn't have to walk a straight line, and a fallen log or branch could be used as an excuse for complete collapse if it should come.

At last! A whole canteen cup of black coffee. I found a foxhole nearby and began by burning my lips on the aluminum cup. Nothing mattered but the thought of drinking the coffee. The foxhole turned out to belong to a chatty lieutenant in my company, but he was too busy to notice I was replying only by nodding or shaking my head. He left me alone for a while. The coffee eventually took effect, and I was able to eat some food. I returned to my hole feeling much better and relieved that no one had noticed my drunk condition.

7 October 1944

We started through the woods, two platoons abreast: the first platoon on the right, followed by the second platoon, and the third platoon on the left, followed by our weapons platoon. Our machine gun section was attached to the third platoon in front of us. Collins and Beasley went with it. I now had only the mortar section which was not very effective in this type of movement and in dense forest.

Everything went well enough until the third platoon was pinned down by machine gun fire. The enemy immediately took advantage of the situation by firing a volley of mortar rounds. We had already hit the ground and hugged the slightest indenture which might offer cover. This first volley hit in front of us between the two platoons. We heard the second volley being fired: one, two, three, four, five, six. A few seconds later mortar rounds began bursting like thunder among us. One, shattering—two, close—three, Lord, which one?—Four, helpless—five, only one more

— six, dirt flying. I pulled up. “Everyone ok? Check the man next to you.”

Still on my stomach, I checked one man near me who had not moved.

He looked at me clearly. He wasn’t hurt. “That was terrible,” he said, and started to sob quietly.

I hit him on the shoulder as I got up and said, “You’re O.K. now.” (He proved himself to be steadfast after this, his baptism by fire—and mine.)

Baker said the trees were too thick for us to fire. I trusted his judgement. I went ahead to see what the third platoon leader, Lieutenant McCormick, was doing about the situation. He said the

machine gun was somewhere in front of him. He had enough on his hands without me bothering him. I found Collins, and we checked our men. He was uncomfortably agitated about the leader's inactivity. Just then, another volley of mortar rounds started counting itself off. This time I was at the edge of the area hit. One, two, three, four, five, six. That last one was close. I got up. A man a few yards away had not moved. He wasn't going to move. He hadn't felt a thing. A piece of shrapnel (from a tree burst) had hit him between his helmet and his collar as he lay prone. Was he one of mine? He was too heavy to turn for full view. He was a 3rd platoon man. I got his name, Jenkins, from his dog tags. This was my first acquaintance with death on an impersonal basis. "Lord, take care of him."

I was angry now. I went back to McCormick and told him to send a squad to out-flank the machine gun. He was already in the process of doing this. I added that he'd just lost Jenkins.

We did not receive any more mortar fire, but the machine gun did claim two casualties before it pulled out. One of these men screamed at the top of his lungs. He'd been hit somewhere in his middle. His cries, very demoralizing, resonated in a way peculiar to forests, or so it seemed.

The other man was my machine gun section leader, Beasley. He'd been hit in one arm. The aid man had placed his arm in a sling, and he passed to the rear through our mortar section area, grinning and proud of his "million dollar wound." He waved goodbye cheerfully. I was sorry to lose him. He'd been one of the few old timers in our platoon. Some of my new men couldn't understand how brave and light-hearted he was at this moment.

As we started moving forward again, we came up to the man who'd screamed so violently. A few minutes before he was bawling that he was going to die. Now he was being helpful as the aid man was bandaging the wound on his side. Morphine might have helped, of course. The hysteria might have resulted from the release of tension.

We reached the corner of a wide clearing in the woods. Our road continued straight into enemy territory, forming the boundary for the forest which continued left of it. We settled here for the night.

8 October 1944

In continuing the advance our company was deployed with our four platoons abreast. My platoon was on the left flank. Our mission was still the same - to clear the woods of any German outposts or snipers between us and the Siegfried line. Our worst trouble was keeping the platoons and individual men in contact as our line went through woods which varied in density. In thick woods our line would contract so that visual contact between men would be possible; otherwise it would expand in more open woods.

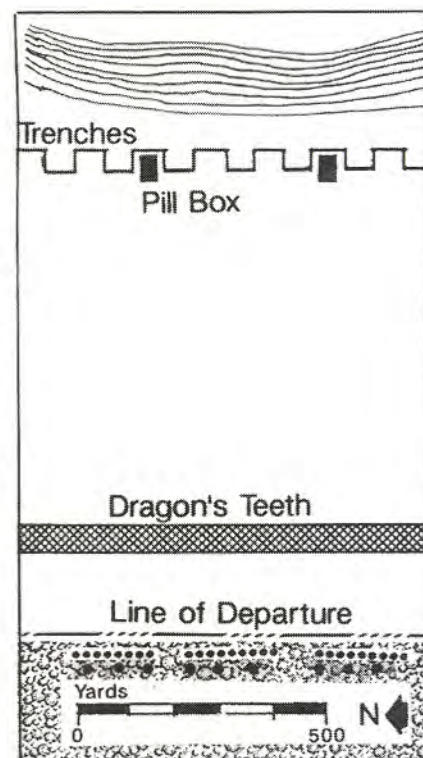
I was surprised to see Captain Topping right behind me, accompanied by a radio man and a man laying out the telephone wire. While everything seemed quiet, the presence of outposts and snipers was still expected.

At one point in fairly open woods, Captain Topping spotted a small hunters' shack to our left front not covered by the length of our lines. He left his men behind and came up to me. "There's a shack to our left. Give me four men and I'll clear it."

I turned to four ammunition carriers, "You four, go with him."

They darted to the house and surrounded it. A few shots from the Captain's M-1 rifle, a strong command, and two Germans came out with their hands up. The Captain sent his two prisoners back to the rear and rejoined us. This man may have been a martinet at the rear area, but he was a real fighting man on the line—and he didn't have to do this.

We reached the outer defenses of the Siegfried line without further incidents. We established a defensive position at the edge of the woods. In front of us was an expanse of clear land which featured a continuous wide band of concrete "dragon's teeth" in the middle ground and scattered pillboxes on the higher ground about 1,000 yards away. The pillboxes were interconnected with running frets of deep trenches. Some of us figured that at least some of the men, if not all, could be housed in the pillboxes, but that the trenches could be manned at the time of our attack. Others thought that the trenches were merely for communication and movement between pillboxes. Still others thought the trenches were continuously manned. Whatever our different impressions might have been, the enemy position seemed formidable to me.



8-16 October. The Siegfried Line near Elsenborn seemed formidable.

Our own defensive position was excellent. We had maps and photomaps of the area; and, for once, I was able coordinate the cross-firing positions of our light machine guns with those of the heavy machine guns of the heavy weapons company and to coordinate the target areas of our 60mm mortars with those of the heavy mortars—all on map overlays.

Our regiment and the 112th were in line, each in a column of battalions. It was rumored that we had some 24 batteries of artillery behind us. The number didn't matter. The effect did. We'd hear the sustained thunder of our artillery guns going off like a long burst from a machine gun. We'd hear the whistling overhead and then see the close impact of a long line of bursts on trenches and pillboxes. Each time it was a joy to watch this display of strength and support. But the pillboxes themselves remained impenetrable, undamaged, and silent.

9 October 1944

Our two regiments were to attack that night on a front 2,000 yard wide, each in a column of battalions. Captain Dulac called his officers together. The company had been assigned a sector which contained two pillboxes. We'd have tank support. What about the "dragon's teeth?" They'd be taken care of as before. The tanks would be with us at the right time. He pointed out the entry points. It was small consolation that we had two companies behind us just in case we couldn't accomplish our mission, but Dulac emphasized the positive. We would capture both pillboxes. To me the first, nearest, pillbox seemed the easier of the two to overcome.

Each platoon leader knew what each platoon was to do. He in turn explained the operation to his own leaders, and the information was passed down to the last man. Almost everyone had a map overlay of the operation, and Dulac's enthusiasm filtered down.

For some reason the attack was called off. It was postponed. We were told we'd be going to the rear soon for a dry-run of the operation—"Don't lose the map overlays."

10-15 October 1944

A white-haired colonel came riding atop a tank near our area. The word spread out that Colonel "Flash Gordon" was among us. He

may have been old, but he was young in spirit. He cautiously worked his way to the view. "So that's a pillbox," he said.

He wanted to see if he could destroy one with his artillery fire. Working with a radio man, he sent his orders back with assurance. His first round was a phosphorus one so he could see where it landed. His third round hit right atop the pillbox. He tried armor piercing ammunition next—try what he may and with deadly accuracy, he could not cause an effective dent in the pillbox. He gave up with good grace.

16 October 1944

We were relieved from the "dragon teeth" area still under the belief that we would attack through this area at a later date.

We arrived at a small city (it might have been Elsenborn) late at dusk. Information came down to us that Father Cummins was to say Mass at the local church that evening. I borrowed a flashlight, knowing I'd need it to get to the church and back. As far as I could tell in the shadows, it was a fairly big church of modified Gothic design. I opened the door to find almost equal darkness, only two candles burned at the altar. The pointed-arch windows were boarded and blacked-out. Using my flashlight I walked up an aisle to reach a spot a few rows back from the altar railing, hearing the echo of my steps in the vastness. There were chair-kneeler combinations instead of pews. I found an empty place near the aisle.

It was only after I had placed my steel helmet on the seat and laid my rifle on the floor that I realized how I must look—the same appearance all the other soldiers had. I was loaded with ammunition, even with an extra bandoleer, with two hand grenades on my chest and wearing the muddy clothes I'd worn for weeks. It was something else besides the appearance that bothered me. It was the attitude for violence that I (and all the others) had brought into the House of God!

Mass began in the aura of the two candles. Father Cummins reminded us that we could take Communion without confession if we would say to ourselves and mean the words: "Thy will be done." This, between a prayer and the absolution he would give us. We were to go to confession under better conditions and opportunities. It seemed so simple, but was it really?

17–20 October 1944

This was the period when I thought we'd dry-run our attack through the "dragon teeth" area. Not a word was said about it. We trained a bit and the worst to expect was an eruption from the brass among us.

We were now in farming country—with wide open fields and gentle slopes. It was a peaceful environment. We relaxed and laughed a bit. About a hundred of us squeezed our way into an isolated barn in a field. A small U.S.O. unit consisting of a young girl singer, a young man singer, a comedian and a magician, entertained us for an hour or so. The pretty girl didn't have to sing. When was the last time we'd seen one? Among the young man's songs were a couple from "Oklahoma" which I'd seen on Broadway two nights before I boarded the troop ship. I heard the songs, but I was a million miles away.

The comedian was having his fun when we all heard the familiar whistle of an incoming artillery round. The immediate reaction was for everyone to duck in place. Looking out an open door, I saw it hit 200 yards away, scaring a couple of grazing cows. The comedian released the tension by saying something about someone making a racket hanging pictures on the wall. A good laugh and the show went on.

The Red Cross coffee wagon came by, and we each received a doughnut, coffee and a smile. The frustrating part was not being able to talk with the American girl without pulling rank over my men.

My men kept me busy censoring mail. They all knew what they couldn't say, so it was only a matter of checking. It would have been easier to send them unread, but one or two were spot checked out of every bag elsewhere. Pvt. Jamison wrote to his father, an Army Colonel. I doubted that anyone else knew his dad was among the brass. Jamison was a good soldier, if a bit on the quiet side.

21–25 October 1944

As we were marching to our new position in a column of two's, we met a similar column coming toward us on the road. Someone said it was F Company. I shot a hopeful question at the head of their column, "Is Lieutenant McFeatters with you?"

"Yeah, back," was the answer.

I started searching from face to face as they rushed past me. Finally, “McFeatters!”

“Hey, Peña!” He’d been watching for me also.

We fell out of our columns in the middle of the road and started laughing and pounding each other’s shoulders. We agreed that we were both lucky bastards and that we were both looking good. Rough-time? Not too bad. We only had time for levities. Our columns had cleared each other. “I’ll look for you; maybe we can squeeze in a bull session,” he yelled as we both ran to catch up with our platoons. Our acquaintance had started out so badly; now we could hardly wait to see each other again.

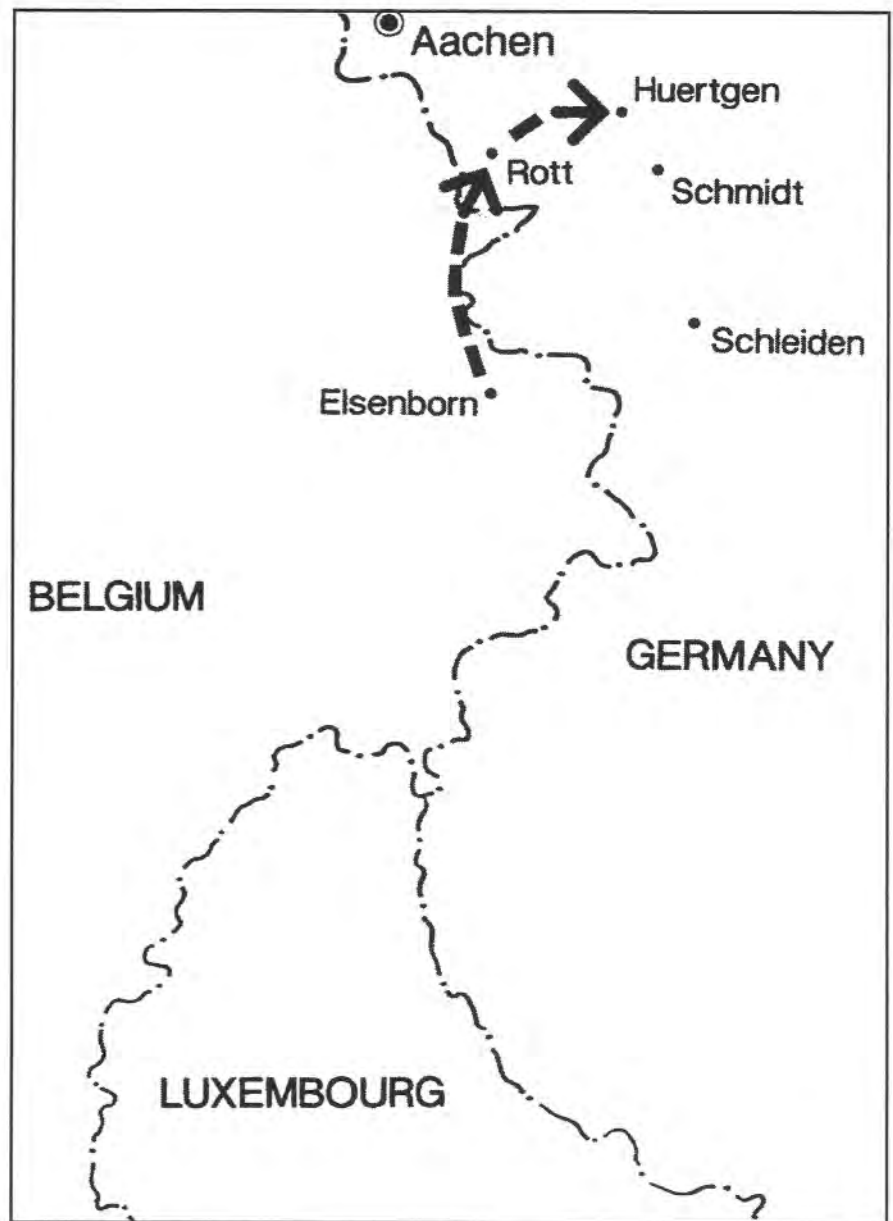
We replaced some reserve unit within our division sector, but it wasn’t on the edge of the “dragon’s teeth.” Our defensive position was fairly quiet. Every night a small German observation plane flew low over our position, reportedly taking photographs. Everyone called it “Bed Check Charlie.” Occasionally at night we’d hear the rumble and see the silhouette of a buzz-bomb going over our position. Rumored destination: Leige. They looked like a small, awkward plane. Once, the motor sound of one stopped, seemingly directly overhead. We waited for its crash and explosion in our rear area, but the tell-tale sound never came. The men in our rear knew nothing about it—it remained a mystery.

I wanted to change underwear and started to bathe in the stream behind us, but the weather and the water were so cold that I began shivering. I put on my clean long handles and dirty clothes as quickly as I could.

Dulac picked me up on his way to visit the company next to us. He talked mostly with the artillery forward observer (FO) who gave him all kinds of reasons why we didn’t have a FO of our own. On the way back Dulac said that the casualty rate of FO’s was very high—at least when they were with our company.

Father Cummins said Mass for a small group of us in the woods. His sermon was a tongue lashing at our poor camouflage discipline. He’d seen our position, he said, and he’d found nothing that looked like effective camouflage.

Huertgen Forest



Huertgen Forest

26 October 1944

The division moved to an assembly area east of Rott, Germany. At this point one officer from each company in our battalion was selected to reconnoiter the area of the company his own company was to relieve. Dulac selected me to go with the advance party. Lieutenant Gossner of another company would be leading the battalion in a column of companies toward the front line, so he rode in the front seat with the driver to learn the route, while the rest of us piled into the back of the truck.

After becoming acquainted with the part of the line we were to occupy, I made notes on the disposition of our platoons. It would involve a simple exchange of platoons. By the time we rejoined our companies, they had been trucked to a forward assembly area, and they were digging slit trenches in a thickly wooded area on one side of the road. We passed the word around for the men to check the scattered locations of their leaders and vice versa to expedite assembly at 4 o'clock the next morning. As it began getting dark I realized that the only way I would find my gear and rifle in the morning was to place them within easy reach, in or out of my slit trench. The night was pitch black!

27 October 1944

When we awoke, the visual conditions were much worse than I had anticipated. The effect was that of being completely blind with the eyes wide open. I groped around for my gear and rifle. The order was given to fall-in on the road. We were no more than 30 yards from the road. Some men had difficulty finding their gear and weapons at the time squad leaders began calling them. Complete frustration set in. In their blindness, men would fall into someone's slit trench or run into trees. After a few turns in this serious game of blind man's bluff, all sense of direction was lost. Leaders kept calling their unit designations cautiously trying to avoid extra loud sounds while providing directions toward themselves.

This situation was the same in all four company areas. Some units found their way to the road sooner than others. Voice calls from



27 Oct. Firebreaks in the forest were mistaken for roads at night.

those on the road provided some direction. Each man had to hold onto something belonging to the man in front of him. The blind were leading the blind, the leaders falling into trenches while extending their arms to avoid trees.

The time schedule had not allowed for this hour lost in forming the column on the road, which would have taken only a matter of ten minutes during daylight, if this had been possible. The black, tall forest, hugging the road closely, broke overhead, revealing a slightly less dark, starless, overcast sky. This view was the only way one could tell he was on the road.

At long last, when all four companies were in a long column of two's on the dark road, Gossner began leading the march. The first company in the column was his rifle company. M Company followed with its heavy machine guns, then our own company and the other rifle company followed at the rear. I never knew why Gossner had started at such a fast pace. Was it because we were behind schedule? Was it because his company was lighter in equipment when compared to M Company? Soon the accordion effect began—the running to catch up with the man in front and then the sudden stopping after running into him in the black void. One couldn't see his hand in front of his face, much less his feet on the uneven road. Men stumbled and fell with their equipment. They cursed this rat race openly and loudly.

It wasn't long before the column, or rather a large portion of it, came to a complete halt. M Company's commander, Captain Harry Kemp, came back; I was called up the column by Dulac. The conference, in low tones, brought out the fact that we had lost contact with the leading company. Could I lead the column to our new area? What about the other officers who had been with me in the advance party? They had admitted not knowing the route. I said that I had only a vague idea of the route, but I could try. So I found myself where the column had stopped, at a "Y" in the road which I could distinguish only by looking overhead at the sky. I decided to lead down the right fork. I established a slower pace commensurate to the pace of men carrying heavy machine guns now immediately behind me. If these men could take the pace so could the rest. At another fork in the road, I again took the one toward the right. There were no sign posts to be seen; no flashlights could be used if there had been any. I was going by half-remembered impressions, trusting to luck.

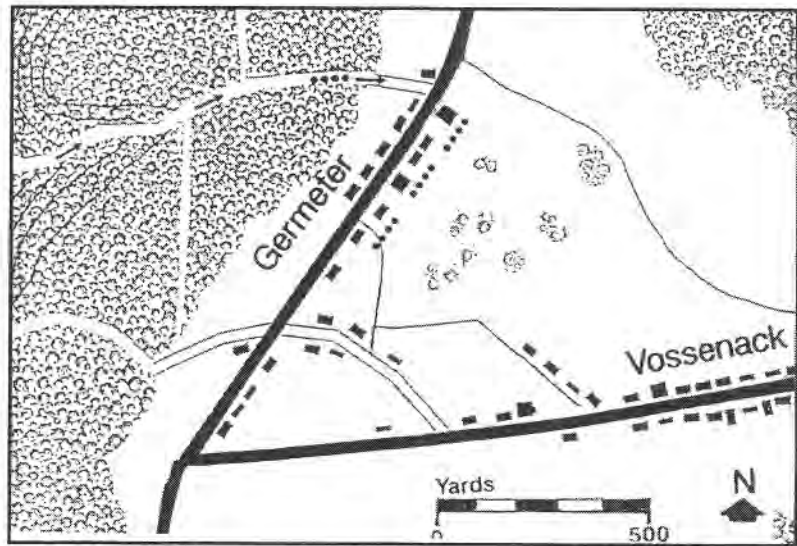
I heard the rippling of a stream to our right. Yes, I remembered the stream. I remembered crossing it. Now to find the bridge. Still looking up, I now saw two breaks in the forest: one led right toward the water but no bridge, the other to the left ran parallel to the stream. I chose the left road in the sky hoping to find the bridge further upstream. It took me 20 yards to confirm my doubt that I had mistaken a firebreak for the road. The ground underfoot felt different. I halted and started to double back. Just then I heard a jeep coming from the opposite side of the stream. It came across a submerged bridge and ordered the nearest portion of the column to break off and to cross. (The bridge had been a concrete slab ankle deep under water, which I had not noticed riding in the truck and which I had not seen in the darkness.) Our immediate destination, the battalion CP, was only a quarter of a mile away—a short distance considering the many miles we had marched. Major Topping (recently promoted from Captain) was in the jeep. I knew enough to expect gratitude for bringing the lost part of the battalion this far, but I did not expect the threat Major Topping was to make. He broke the discipline of the combat zone silence with his loud voice.

“Lieutenant Peña, we were supposed to complete our relief by 6 o’clock under the cover of darkness. We’re way behind schedule. If there is one man killed during this relief, I’ll hold you to blame!! I’ll have you court-martialled and sent back to the States!”

With this, his driver turned his jeep and crossed the bridge with water lapping at its wheels. I was stunned. ME to blame? The man didn’t know the whole story. Perhaps I should have refused to take the lead. Perhaps I should have charted the route myself, but that hadn’t been included in my orders.

I joined the company’s column. As we began to see daylight, I started to worry about the consequence. My prayer was answered by a thick fog which did not lift till 11 o’clock, long after the relief had been safely accomplished.

Our company’s new position in relieving elements of the 39th Regiment of the 9th Division was at Germeter. This village consisted of 12 or 14 houses typically lining both sides of the road running north and then northeast to Huertgen, a large but similar village which gave its name to part of the forest in that area. Germeter was about two miles from Huertgen. East and southeast of Germeter,



27 October. We relieved an outfit at Germeter and faced toward Vossenack.

only about a mile away was the still larger village of Vossenack. In fact, their two roads met below Germeter at a 45 degree angle. Our company position protected the road to Huertgen to the north and partially faced Vossenack to the east. My own weapons platoon occupied a house and a barn on the east side of the road. The machine guns covered the road, and the mortar emplacements were in the back yard.

At night the men took turns at a few guard positions, two men at each; Collins and I took turns at being awake. The normal guard period was two hours. No one wanted to stand guard with Reger. Night guard with him was a nerve-wracking ordeal. He was an extrovert at the rear but very nervous at the front. Jamison, the Colonel's son, said calmly that he'd take Reger on.

Collins respected my two-hour sleeping period except when Reger and Jamison were on guard. Reger made everyone, even Collins nervous. Collins woke me up with "Reger says he saw a patrol on the Vossenack side. I can't see anything. You come look."

I went to their post at the barn window. Reger whispered excitedly that he'd seen three men dash from that group of tree trunks to that other group. I looked and saw nothing more suspicious than tree shadows. Jamison said he hadn't seen anything move.

"O.K., Reger, you're both on guard. You both keep looking. If you see something that looks like a patrol, point it out to Jamison and then shoot; but if you do, we'd better find some German blood out there in the morning."

Reger did have the maddening effect of putting people on edge. Collins summed it up: "He makes us all nervous as hell."

28 October 1944

Last night Dulac sent a reconnaissance patrol lead by Stumer of the 1st platoon. It had come back before Reger's guard period. They found only small German outposts in the woods north of us.

The masonry house we occupied was ramshackle enough already, but a single artillery round burst right outside of it, shaking things loose, breaking the few pieces of window glass left, and scattering debris inside. We all heard it coming a split second before it hit and crouched against the stone walls. Everyone was shaken up, but only one of the men was injured—a minor cut on the hand.

Several of us went through an unoccupied house nearby. The original German occupants had left in a hurry. Some things were undisturbed, but the general disarray was evidence that soldiers (probably ours) had ransacked the house for valuables. A statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary was enshrined on top of a dresser. Religious pictures were everywhere. These people were devout Catholics, it seemed. I found a black rosary and took it with me. It made me uneasy to stay here for long.

Dulac told us that the next day we would clear the woods of all German outposts to secure a line of departure on both sides of the road toward Huertgen. Dulac sent another reconnaissance patrol out to see if the outpost condition had changed. No, it hadn't.

29 October 1944

The entire battalion attacked through the forest early in the morning. We were to move to the high ground half a mile north of Germeter. During the attack a single American fighter plane, a sleek P-47, made a couple of low passes coming from our rear. I was in a fire-break lane, otherwise it would have been difficult to see it from within the thick forest. I wondered if he knew whom he was striking on the first pass. On the second pass we all ducked when he dropped

a big object we expected to explode within our line—since it didn't explode, we guessed it was an empty gasoline pod or a dud.



27 October. We relieved an outfit at Germeter and faced toward Vossenack.

Collins had charge of our two machine guns attached to the 1st platoon. I followed the 2nd platoon uselessly. The German outposts had already been spotted by reconnaissance patrols and were easily overcome. When I came up to one of them, the fighting was over. What was left in the wake was a pitiful sight. The bodies of the three dead Germans didn't bother me; it was the sight of a wounded German boy, looking not over 17 years old, crying for his mother. This was war. I shouldn't allow myself the luxury of compassion. Trzaska, our medic, came up in his easy manner and began taking care of him. He stopped crying, but I couldn't erase the picture of his poor frightened face for a long time.

The new line placed the 1st platoon east of the road in the woods, with our machine guns attached to it. The bald hill, west of the road, had a sawmill, open shed, and a house. The house, particularly, had a commanding view over the 500-yard squarish clearing to our front. Our mortar section was located in this area below the crest of the hill with an observation post at the house. The 2nd and 3rd platoons were in the forward slope of a wooded draw to our left. The company CP was in a small house toward the rear of the line and on the road.

30 October 1944

It rained all day from time to time. That night one of my men shot himself in the leg while trying to get his carbine into his sleeping bag with him. I never believed he had done it on purpose. He was a small, weak man, but he had always performed as well as the others.

A reconnaissance patrol from the 2nd platoon found a strong enemy outpost. They ran into trouble and barely got back intact.

31 October 1944

To reach the 2nd platoon position to our left the safest route was through the woods some 50 yards behind the hill. An enemy gun, which we couldn't quiet with our mortars, covered the open space between us and the 2nd platoon line. I was coming back from the 2nd platoon, walking leisurely through the woods. Suddenly I came up to a uniformed German man sitting against a tree. I almost shot him before I realized he was dead—from the fracas a few days ago. I would have felt ridiculous shooting a dead man. This wasn't the first time I'd walked through these woods; I was surprised I hadn't run into him before.

1 November 1944

Dulac called his officers late in the afternoon. He was eager to announce the attack orders for the next day. He prefaced the plans by saying that the main attack would be launched toward Vossenack, Kommerscheidt and Schmidt—all to our southeast. Our regiment would attack toward Huertgen, partly as a feint and to protect the Germeter-Huertgen road. In our feint we would make a racket to draw enemy troops about to be committed elsewhere. In fact, the main attack to the southeast could be a feint in the bigger picture. After we were given the plan of attack and our orders, Dulac asked me to stay behind. After we were dismissed, he walked me out of the CP and complained that I had not kept in close touch with the company CP. He said he wanted to know his company officers better. I was relieved that my offense was not more serious.

He asked me what I thought of the plan of attack. To me it was the best coordinated plan I had seen so far. The over-lays for the rolling fire (artillery and 81mm mortars) were excellent.

Dulac always liked to know the “big picture.” He confided in me, as if it were top secret, that he thought our real objective was to capture the Roer dams! The thought stunned me. My inexperience caused me to wonder how one captures a dam, but Dulac’s enthusiasm indicated that someone knew how.

Our battalion’s objective was to clear the forest this side of Huertgen itself. Our company was to attack northward from its position. No one would attack through the clearing to our front since this would be suicidal. The 1st platoon would attack along the right side of the road and the other two platoons, through the woods on our left. We had an artillery forward observer with us who would raise the artillery fire in front as the attack progressed. This officer showed us the patterns of artillery and heavy mortar fire on an overlay of our map. Our own mortars would cover the front of the 2nd and 3rd platoons initially on a time sequence and then wait for a flare-gun to be shot into the clearing as a signal to fire straight in front of the advancing line. We had walkie-talkie radios, but we couldn’t depend on them. We also had a field telephone line from our observation point at the house to a point near our mortars at the rear—a distance of 75 yards.

The plans were complete in every detail, and with Dulac’s enthusiasm, no flaws were evident. The worst foreseen was overcoming the line of strong points immediately opposite our line, particularly those on our left which reconnaissance patrols had discovered.

Lieutenant Hooven, our executive officer and second-in-command, wished us luck in tomorrow’s attack and happily left on a 72-hour pass to Paris. He and a sergeant, both having the most combat time, were among the first to go to Paris under new orders for such passes on a rotation basis.

2 November 1944

At 8 o’clock in the morning our artillery started pounding the enemy position. Indeed we would announce our attack with a big racket! At 9 o’clock our rifle platoons began the movement forward. The sounds of the initial volleys of rifle fire were evidence of the resistance. Our mortars were busy firing according to plan. The artillery fire was lifted to more advanced targets.

The enemy artillery started firing at our sawmill position—an obvious location for some of our activity. I jumped into the hole in which I had located the rear field phone. Jamison and Reger, regularly ammunition carriers, were in charge of the phone. The hole itself was some seven by twelve feet in size and six feet deep—originally it had been dug by the sawmill people as a dry trash pit. When we heard the whistling of the incoming artillery, we crouched low against the earthen walls. It was almost as if the Germans knew exactly where the trash pit was located. In quick succession the rounds came in: one, ear-ringing noise; two, closer even with our fingers to our ears; three, close enough to splatter us with dirt; four, earth-shaking and more dirt. The deafening noise was enough to leave us in shock. The thought of one of them landing IN the hole was completely unnerving.

I looked at Jamison and Reger. They were visibly shaking. I grabbed the phone and turned the handle. “This is Item, this is Item. Can you hear me?”

Again, again. No response. The wire could be broken, I thought or else the two observers were out of action at the house. I turned the phone over to Reger. “Here, you try it.”

Reger couldn’t say the words nor go through the motions. I took it and gave it to Jamison. “Try it.”

Jamison had difficulty with the ritual. He stuttered at first. Then he said it loud and clear. “This is Item. This is Item. Can you hear me?”

Back to Reger. “Try it again.” He began quavering, but effective enough, “This is Item, This is Item...”

I left them with the order, “Keep taking turns. I’ll check the wire. We must be in touch with the observation post.” I was hoping to keep them busy. I didn’t know what else to do.

I ran to the sawmill. I found one of the observers there. “They’re shooting 88s at the house.” (88’s were different from other artillery. They didn’t have the warning whistle.) “Stroud got hurt. I brought him back here. He’s now on his way to the aid station.”

“It’s almost time for the flare signal. We’ve got to be there to see it.” Franklin said he’d go up to the house.

“Let’s go,” I said.

The house had, in fact, been battered. One round, among many, had exploded a hole in the concrete floor, offering us a quick way to the cellar if we had to use it—although its safety was questionable. Franklin and I took cautious positions by windows and waited for the flare-signal. The phone was dead—I'd forgotten to check the line. It'd be easy enough to run back when the signal came.

The approximate time came and passed without a flare signal in sight. I hadn't known Franklin well, but I knew that he wasn't afraid. An unexpected round came in. It hit another part of the house. Franklin joked about the way they were destroying German property. Later a whistler came in and hit in front of the house. We both held our places, trusting the thick stone walls. He looked up and smiled, "They can miss too."

We talked about the situation—the sputtering machine gun across from us, still active, meant that our men had not reached that point. But why no flare? We were putting too much importance on this signal. An hour had passed—or so it seemed. "Will you be all right here? I'll send someone to replace me," I said anxious to find out what was going on.

"Sure," he answered. "If it gets rough, there's always the cellar."

I went to the sawmill and sent someone up to him.

Dulac came to the sawmill. He'd just come from the 1st platoon area. That platoon had advanced up to a point where they were stopped by a barbed-wire barricade and a mine field covered by machine gun fire—in fact, by several barricades and mine fields.

Dulac said he wanted to go to the 2nd and 3rd platoon area to our left. I told him to take the rear route because the machine gun was covering the open space which he wanted to cross. He calmly ignored my warning. With him were "Pop" Johnstone, our acting first sergeant, and Dallas Elwood, our communication sergeant. All three started walking leisurely across the open space.

When they were half way across, the machine gun opened fire with a burst. All three fell to the ground. Someone was hit. The other two were helping him back to the sawmill. It was Captain Dulac! Johnstone and Elwood were carrying him between them. Once at the sawmill, they laid him down on the ground, and our medic took

Dulac's shoe off.

"You've got a million dollar wound, Captain Dulac. A clean hole through the meaty part of the heal," our medic said smiling.

Dulac didn't feel like joking—quite the opposite. His eyes were flooded with tears. He turned to me and said, "I hate like hell to leave the company in such a mess. Johnstone can fill you in on the situation at the 1st platoon. You're the senior officer here - you're in command now."

I'd been bending over Dulac; I straightened up at the impact of his words. Trzaska, our aid man, had finished, and Dulac stood up on one foot. I ordered two men to take him to the aid station. Dulac protested that he could make it himself, that I needed the men. I insisted, saying that they'd be back in no time.

Johnstone was a big framed man—the picture of a big Irish cop. He certainly was no stranger, but I didn't know him very well; nor did I know Elwood very well. I realized that I had been too interested in my own platoon to get to know the men in the company headquarters and their work.

What about the 1st platoon? Johnstone said that one squad had managed to cross the first wire barricade only to lose men at a mine field. Portions of the other two squads had crossed with the same results, only made worse by machine gun and mortar fire. Dulac had called the men back, and they were holding fast in position. The platoon lost a third of its men in dead and wounded.

Major Topping came up to the sawmill while Johnstone was telling me about the 1st platoon. Major Topping wanted to know the situation. I told him the little I knew, adding that I was now going to the 2nd and 3rd platoon area as Dulac had intended to do. He wanted to see the location of the troublesome machine gun. I pointed it out.

"We'll have to get rid of that gun," he said. Clark overheard him. "I'll get that gun for you, Lieutenant!" he said eagerly.

"How are you going to get it?" I asked.

"Just give me a BAR and load me up with ammunition."

"O.K."



*Sgt. George "Pop" Johnstone,
First Sergeant.*

In no time at all, with a couple of men helping him cram ammunition inside his shirt, he was ready.

"Wish me luck," he smiled as he ran taking the wooded route.

"Good luck, and be careful."

Major Topping decided to wait and watch. Clark worked his way along the edge of the woods until he caught sight of the gun emplacement at a close range. He was in enemy territory. He caught the gun emplacement by surprise by out-flanking it. We heard the distinct sluggish bursts of his automatic rifle—put-put-put-put. The machine gun answered his fire with rapid spry bursts—purrrp-purrrp. Now they were both firing. Weapon for weapon, he was one man against a team of two to five men. The two firing sounds alternated, then only Clark's fire continued. He'd known well to take plenty of ammunition. The machine gun was silenced!

When the results were evident—we had been watching intently—Major Topping was elated. "What is that man's name? I'm putting him up for a Silver Star!" I gave him Clark's name, rank and platoon. He left.

Clark came back exhausted and exhilarated. He gave us the details which agreed with what we had thought we'd actually seen. I thanked him and congratulated him about the Major's intentions.

I asked Johnstone and Elwood to join me in finding the left platoons. We came to the vicinity of a former enemy strong-hold. We saw two of our men's bodies and then further on, six enemy bodies. Everything was quiet. Further on we found twelve of our men. Where were the rest of two platoons? They didn't know. Up ahead perhaps. I told them to follow us.

Up further we found groups of two, four, or six of our men. None knew the location of the rest of their platoons. What about their platoon leaders? They didn't know. Each felt they were up ahead. At one point we had found enough men to make some sort of line. I told them to dig in and wait for us and took four men with me. The forest was quiet and seemingly unoccupied. I still believed we could find the main body of two platoons, yet we were now in no-man's land. Finally we heard the sound of chopping wood and voices. Were they German voices? We couldn't tell. We moved cautiously until we recognized our language and men in our uniform.

When someone saw us, they called their executive officer to come meet us. What outfit was this? He told me. Had they seen any of our company men? No. I noticed they were digging their position facing southwest. I asked to see his company commander. He was a mean man, quite the opposite of his exec.

I told the company commander that our company had not reached its objective that afternoon, and that if his mission was to protect our rear, he was facing the wrong way because we were NOT where we were supposed to be. I tried to show him on my map that he had his back toward the enemy territory. He wouldn't listen.

"Battalion told me to dig-in here for the night and here I'll stay," he insisted.

I asked him to check by radio with his battalion and for them to check with ours. No, he wouldn't.

As we walked away, his exec was apologizing for his commander, saying he was hard-headed.

"Look," I said to him, "He won't listen to me. You heard the situation. It's true. Your rear is exposed. You have him check with our battalion. I've got to get back."

(Late that night his battalion commander called him and ordered him to turn around and attack toward a more defensive position. If he had bothered to check while I was there, he would have saved himself a lot of trouble.)

We walked back, now knowing for sure we were in no-man's land. When we reached the small line, I left some sergeant in charge and told him to hold their position and that we hadn't found any more of our men. He had about twenty-four men with him now—what was left of two platoons with some eighty men at original strength.

By the time we got back to the sawmill, it was getting dark, and a message was there for Johnstone and me to report to battalion headquarters a 9 o'clock that night. Johnstone began his check on our company strength, checking on the present and the missing in each unit, sending messengers for the information he didn't have. In handling the company's affairs he was efficient and considerate. The men called him "Pop," but all this time he'd been outside of the realm of my platoon, and I couldn't call him anything but Johnstone for the present.

The 3rd platoon leader, Lieutenant McCormick, who had been commissioned in the field, had left the battle scene dazed. He had drifted to the aid station. The doctor had diagnosed his case as acute combat fatigue. (This documented diagnosis saved him later from the charge of desertion at a court-martial. He served with distinction in another company the rest of the war.) The 2nd platoon leader had been wounded and evacuated.

Among the many casualties was a man who had recently been hospitalized and who shot himself in the toe with no witnesses to his "accident." The number of casualties was frightening—most of them wounded, few dead. Our artillery forward observer was wounded early in the attack. With the key officers and sergeants on our left gone, the remaining few men had wandered aimlessly, although the worst was over.

At the battalion CP, Major Topping introduced me to First Lieutenant Bruce Paul, saying that he would take over the company and that I was to help him, since I was aware of the immediate situation. Lieutenant Paul had just returned to his company from a hospital in England. He had been weapons platoon leader before he was wounded in the Normandy hedgerow area.

Major Topping said that our battalion objective for tomorrow was to find the 1st battalion in the forest and join them in completing a circular position. He didn't mention the rumor regarding the capture of that battalion's headquarters since their rear had been unprotected. Our company would take the lead. (Here I would go again—the blind leading the blind—but this time during daylight hours.) F Company would dig into a position which would protect our supply line, at least part of the way.

I glanced at the headlines in the STARS And STRIPES, the Army newspaper. They blared the fact that the 28th Division was attacking through Huertgen Forest. They seemed to announce to the Germans something which might otherwise have escaped their notice. Perhaps the whole operation was indeed a feint to attract German attention and fire power. Lieutenant Paul was a slim young man with a bit of flair to his personality. He was sporting a blond mustache he'd grown in the hospital. When I asked him where he'd been wounded, he grinned and said that shrapnel had hit him in an embarrassing location—his left buttock.



Capt. Bruce Paul, Company Commander.

I should not have been amazed at the ease with which Lieutenant Paul assumed command. Back at our company area he had a pleasant reunion with those few of his friends left—particularly Collins, his former platoon sergeant.

Collins commented, "Everything will be all right now. Lieutenant Paul is back."

Johnstone later told me that Major Topping had ordered him to put me in for a promotion. "To captain, sir? We already have a company commander."

"Well, no. I meant to first lieutenant."

I had been a first lieutenant for a least a year and a half, but since we hid our bars under our collar, Major Topping was not aware of my rank. Nevertheless, I appreciated his gesture.

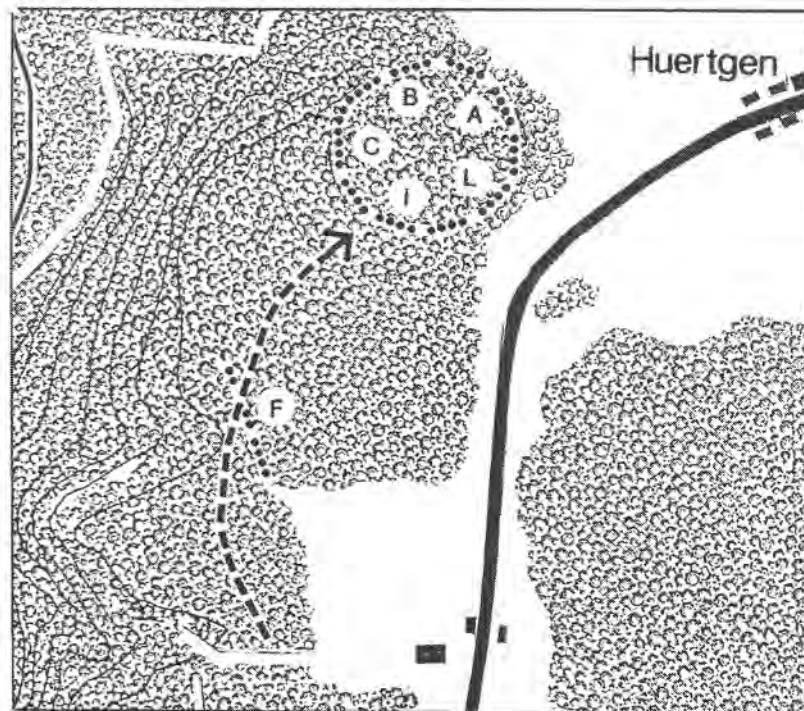
3 November 1944

While we were waiting for the 1st platoon (what was left of it) I took Major Topping to our forward group on our left. As I led the way, I crouched low across a doubtful open space, passing quickly out of habit. Not the brave Major Topping. He walked tall, taller than most, and leisurely. The man had no use for precaution for himself. (Wasn't this the same man who had threatened to send me to the States if he caught my men without their steel helmets?)

When our column was organized, we started our trek through the forest. Lieutenant Paul, Elwood with the radio on his back, and I were at the head. I had the map of the area and I was in charge of leading the column to the position of the 1st battalion marked on the map as somewhere in the forest southwest of Huertgen. At the start I recognized some landmarks in relation to the clearing I knew so well. We came to F Company's position. They were digging in. Even though I knew I couldn't pause, I asked one of their men where Lt. McFeatters was. "Around here, someplace," was the answer.

"Tell him Lieutenant Peña passed through here."

I heard my name called from close by. I turned and recognized the source. The man, half way deep in his foxhole, flashed a smile and waved. I waved back. He had been my 1st platoon sergeant for that



3 Nov. Our objective was to find the 1st Battalion in the forest and complete a circular position.

first day and night when I joined the company six weeks ago—how very long ago that seemed.

Once we left F Company's area, we were in unknown territory. The character of the forest was changing. There was more underbrush, shorter views—at times we were hemmed in to a trail with walls of underbrush. Elwood chose one of these times to test his back-pack radio in a full voice. "This is Item. This is Item. Do you hear me? Over."

If we were looking for an ambush this was one way of inviting it. And then, "This is Item. I hear you loud and clear. I hear you loud and clear. Over and out."

This was too much!

I turned to Elwood and said in a low tone that if he wanted to test that damn radio again, he'd have to go toward the rear of the column.

By now, one tree, one bush, looked like any other. Looking for green moss on the north side of tree trunks was futile in this thick forest. I didn't think we were lost yet, I told Paul. I thought we were going generally in the right direction, but it had gotten more difficult to tell on the map where we were. Major Topping was right up there with us, behind the 1st platoon. From time to time he'd come up, we'd pause, and I'd point out our approximate location on the map of the 1st battalion. But then we had only the approximate location. Somehow we'd have to find it without attracting the enemy's attention. We were not deployed for action,

As things turned out, the Germans themselves led us to the "lost" battalion. We heard the fire of German burp guns nearby to our right and then the answering rifle shots from the 1st battalion. The light intensity of the fire indicated that only a small German patrol was involved. Someone from our column, probably Major Topping, fired three single shots from his M-1 rifle. He peeled the company behind us and advanced to the right and reached our objective—no thanks to my sense of direction. I had no built-in compass.

We completed the circular position and dug in. Paul now knew as much about the situation as I did. But he asked me to stick with him. Hooven, our exec, was still on his pass to Paris. Sharing the CP with Johnstone, Elwood, and Paul, I began to know them better. I began calling Johnstone "Pop" like the rest of the men who trusted him. Paul was just as daring as Dulac, but he was more accessible.

At dusk we received a barrage of artillery fire from the direction of Huertgen. This was followed by an attack of strong German combat patrols hitting our line at different points. If they had expected to find a soft spot as before, they didn't. In the weak light they were elusive targets moving among the trees and bushes. Our men were prone to be trigger-happy—to continue firing at unseen targets long after they were gone, so the order to cease firing had to be given to conserve ammunition.

I don't know how Bernardo found us that night. Perhaps messengers had been sent back during the day to establish the shortest trail from our position to F Company's. Close to midnight he came loaded down, as was his assistant, Milton Westgate, and whatever men we had in the kitchen area. Each man had a package rack on his back. They carried water, K-rations, ammunition, cigarettes, mail, and



27 October–7 November. Fighting took place in the dense forest and not on the open road to Huertgen.

the small waxed cubes of cooking fuel. Bernardo also brought in official papers addressed to Johnstone and Paul and took back Johnstone's status reports to battalion headquarters.

Their round trip was a hazardous one. Loaded as they were, they couldn't afford to run into a patrol in ambush. They were to make the trip nightly while we were in this position.

4-5 November 1944

Artillery fire came at odd times during the day, a round or two, but always at dawn and before dusk attacks were made by combat patrol units. We had dug and covered our holes for protection against artillery and the rain, but most of them made poor places from which to fight. For one, they offered limited sight lines to our moving targets, and so we also moved from tree to tree. Who wouldn't move after hearing a bullet snap the bark off a tree a few inches above one's head without seeing who shot it?

Hearing a German scream at a distance after being hit was not disturbing, but when I heard a man standing near me scream and yell hysterically, "I've been hit! I've been hit!" I could feel the demoralizing effect on our line. He was still hysterical and holding his left bloody hand at the wrist when I went over to him and pulled him down low. "Shut up! You're not hurt that bad!" I slapped him, and he stopped.

A bullet had creased his fingers as he held his rifle in firing position. The bullet had barely missed hitting his head! He found he could still move his fingers, and the aid man came and bandaged him up.

Afraid? of course, I was—apprehensive. Who wasn't? In the thick brush there were few places in which Germans ran exposed. It seemed to me that we were more exposed than they were, and in a defensive position it should have been the other way around. We should have dug fighting foxholes.

6 November 1944

In the morning, the same daybreak ritual. At noon, Major Topping told us that we'd be moving out at 3 o'clock. Orders spread for us to pack up and be ready to fall-in and move out on time. When we were all assembled, ready to start moving, an intensive barrage of

artillery began bursting among us. No one had to say "take cover." Men jumped in all directions toward the nearest holes. (Someone told me later that Germans had jumped into some of our holes and had to be routed out during the barrage.)

It seemed as if a German observer in the woods had "pressed the button" at just the right time.

The barrage was not quite over before Major Topping came to me in turn with, "We've got to move forward. Do you think you can organize your men again?"

"We can try."

By the time the squad leaders found their men, some wounded, and sent them to their original holes, the orders came down to stay in place. The German combat patrol harassment was light at dusk. Bernardo, in his nightly supply runs, had been bringing us news of the trouble the 112th was having at Kommerscheidt and Schmidt; but it all seemed so far away.

7 November 1944

A battalion of the 12th Infantry Regiment (4th Division) relieved us during the day. Five days in this surrounded position plus the previous day's experience had made us cautious. We talked in low tones and made some attempt at camouflaging our foxholes. The new outfit came with a different attitude which made me nervous and anxious to leave them. Their loud talk and their setting out of blankets and shelter halves to dry as so much laundry, was most disturbing. Either they were a brand new outfit or we had become overly-cautious.

We got out of there in a hurry before the commotion brought another barrage of artillery. Our three companies couldn't have mustered but approximately 150 men between them, the size of one full strength company—including a total of six or seven company officers.

At an assembly area west of Germeter I managed to shave and clean up. Some of our men did the same. Our spirits were beginning to rise. Reger at the rear began to clown as he always did. For some time I had been worried about Jamison. He looked terribly shaken. I told Jamison to report to Captain (Dr.) Shiffman at the aid station and

to tell him I had sent him. I felt certain that Captain Shiffman would diagnose his condition as combat fatigue, understanding that I had sent him with good reason. Trzaska told Jamison how to reach the station.

We were joking by the side of the road when the battalion executive officer drove up in his jeep in a tremendous hurry. He called me to the jeep and told me to assemble the men. He said that some vehicles would be coming soon to pick us up and take us to a point of departure to clear and hold a new front line. He drove away quickly.

The news ended my hopes for a breathing spell. I did not want to communicate my own disappointment to the men. I announced the orders as impersonally as I had received them. "Not again!" was the reaction.

"Come on, come on. We don't have time to lose," and I told them to pass the orders on as I looked for Paul.

As we were loading the vehicles, Jamison came back. "Captain Shiffman wasn't there. They gave me two aspirins and sent me back." He had gone to another unit's aid station. "Come on, jump in," I said, and we were off.

We unloaded the trucks at a certain point and formed a column of two's to be guided by a staff officer to a designated place short of our objective. After marching for a couple of hours, someone decided that we were lost. Rather than break radio silence, we settled in a wooded draw while there was still light to dig in for the night.

It started snowing! A light flurry. I wasn't familiar with snow until I had reached College, and a snow fall was still an exciting experience to me. Pop and Paul kidded me about my excitement and warned me that I'd get to hate snow in our present situation.

8 November 1944

Major Topping had his staff searching all night for our lost battalion, and they found us in the morning.

Major Topping now led the way. We were to clear the forest on the northern slope of the Kall River Valley. The Kall River was actually a shallow stream and only 8 to 10 feet wide. The objective was vague; actually it was to reach the bridge on the trail between Vossenack and Kommerscheidt.

There were a few Germans on this side of the stream, mostly snipers. Major Topping spotted one and shot him, adding one more notch on his M-1 rifle. (He was the only one I knew to notch the wood stock of his rifle, and he had about a dozen notches.) As we advanced a sniper shot him in the arm. The sniper was shot out of a tree, but Major Topping was furious. He would not leave the unit. An aid man bandaged his arm into a sling, and he kept going. We reached a position near the bridge at around 5:30 that evening and began to dig in for the night into a defensive position. Our company unit was nearest the stone masonry bridge. Reconnaissance patrols were sent to locate the enemy. They found a German outpost beyond the bridge on our side. There were also German units on both sides of the bridge on the south side of the stream.

When Major Topping reached the aid station, we heard, he put up quite an argument and stayed in command until he could be replaced. With a bandaged arm he stayed at his headquarters in control of the battalion. We had to admit that this truculent man was a damn good front line officer.

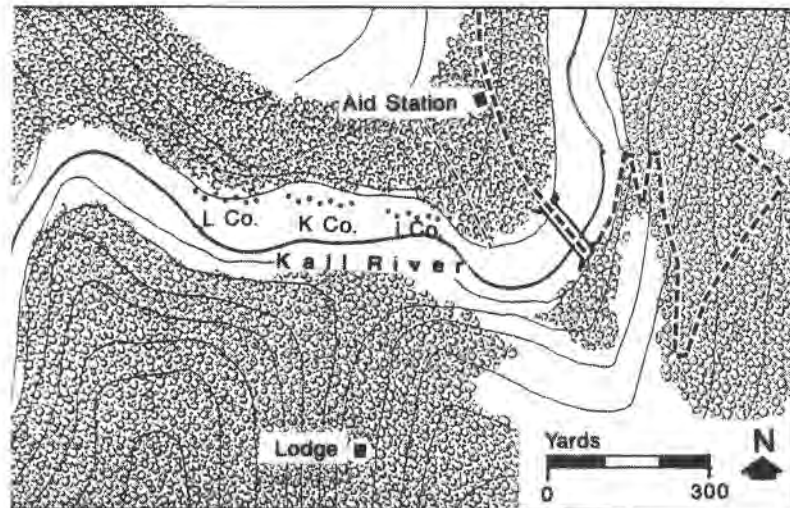
Hooven rejoined our company as executive officer that evening, coming in with Westgate and the supplies. I took over my old weapons platoon—what was left of it.

9 November 1944

Across the stream, half hidden in the woods, we could see a hunting lodge flying a red cross flag.

Paul sent a small reconnaissance patrol again to cover this side of the stream. The patrol found the German outpost men chopping wood with all the assurance of safety. Corporal Frank Smith, “Smitty”, had lead the patrol but had not fired a shot since his mission had been one of reconnaissance. Now back, Smitty eagerly asked Paul to let him choose three men for a combat patrol—the Germans were sitting ducks. Paul approved the plan. Smitty scurried off and cleaned out the outpost. They had caught the Germans away from their weapons and in a fairly open area. Smitty showed courage and initiative. A short, vital young man, he’d be well worth watching.

All three companies (I, K and L) had dug in on the flat ground the old river bed formed where the river narrowed to a stream. Our



8-18 Nov. German patrols held the Aid Station to the left rear of our position at the Kall River

companies had their separate identity; however, they were perceived visually as one company unit, small as it was. In the absence of a battalion commander in the field, (we were so accustomed to having Major Topping among us) the three company commanders would reach a consensus and act on it.

Each company took turns sending a three-man patrol to contact our nearest division unit (either some engineer group or elements of the 110th) along the stream some 500 yards away. This patrol operated every hour on the hour during daylight hours to make sure the Germans would not cross the stream in force and isolate us.

A short, round officer, Brigadier General Davis was escorted to our area. His mission was to cross the bridge and to contact the 112th Regiment at Kommerscheidt with verbal orders to withdraw across the bridge to our side. (Our own battalion mission then became clear: to cover the withdrawal of the trapped regiment.) While withdrawal orders could be given by radio, a radio message could alert the enemy if intercepted and decoded.

The General was told that while our side of the bridge was fairly secure, German units covered the bridge from the other side. He said he'd give it a try and asked for a platoon reinforced by a light machine gun.

Paul asked me to organize such a platoon from our company and to take my orders from the General. The platoon turned out to be our whole company less a dozen men. Before we started the General asked me a question which I was expected to answer with pride: "Is that your platoon, Lieutenant?"

Of course I was proud of our men, but my answer disturbed the General: "Yes, sir, but it is also nearly my whole company." I wondered if division headquarters realized how decimated we were.

We started through the woods toward the bridge. Halfway there, we were spotted and we began receiving light mortar fire. Immediately, we scattered and threw ourselves to the ground. When the volley was over and I found that no one was hurt, I also found smiles on everyone's face—the men could now say that a General could hit the ground as quickly as anybody.

We continued and reached the bridge. I pointed out that we would have to run across the bridge since we knew it to be covered by fire from the opposite side. The General decided that the crossing would be difficult in broad daylight. He would go back and recommend another solution to the problem. We went back to our battalion area and delivered the General safely to his escort patrol. As individuals we were not fully aware of the intensive fighting that had occurred in the capture of Kommerscheidt and Schmidt and of the terrifying counterattacks which had resulted first in the loss of Schmidt and now in the loss of Kommerscheidt. The combat unit now included two battalions of the 112th Regiment, one battalion from the 110th Regiment, two companies of tanks and a detachment of tank destroyers. At full strength these units involved as many as 1500 men. Now the remnants of these units were surrounded on three sides. The bridge was not their only means and direction of withdrawal, but it was the most easily identified.

Since the withdrawal would come that night, a white cotton engineer's tape was hung from tree to tree in our area to guide the men in the dark. This tape was attached to a tree one yard away from our three-man hole. During the night I was on guard for two hours and slept four, and so on. The entire combat unit passed by our hold during one of those four-hour periods. It had consisted of less than 350 men—this out of a possible 1500!

10 November 1944

Paul asked me to be his executive officer.

"But what about Lt. Hooven?" I responded. Paul said that Lt. Hooven had been with I Company since 1942 and that he had been passed over at least twice when as executive officer, he should have inherited the company. He was being kicked upstairs. They had found a place for him at battalion. Of course, I was delighted to be his exec. We dug our CP hole bigger, roofed it with logs, shelter halves and pine branches, and floored it with more branches. We didn't know how long we would be at this location, but the rain was a constant problem. Try sleeping sitting down with legs outstretched and your back against a wet dirt wall with a constant drip no matter where you move.

An officer in an American uniform walked into our area from the direction of the bridge. He introduced himself as Father Madden, Catholic Chaplain of the 112th. He had been ordered by the Germans to tell us to surrender since we were surrounded. We knew we were out on a limb, 500 yards away from the nearest unit, but behind our position on the wooded slope was a flat, open plateau leading to Vossenack which was in our regiment's hands. This plateau-ridge offered us some security. Paul radioed the demand to Major Topping, still our battalion commander. Topping's answer was, "Hell no, you're not surrounded. We'll answer their demand with artillery fire."

Father Madden admitted not knowing the tactical situation. He and a doctor had stayed with the wounded when their aid station was captured. He said he had to return to the station since his agreement with the Germans included his surrender in return for the safe conduct of 15 ambulances to enter and leave with the American wounded that night. He went back with our negative answer. A forward observer (FO) for the artillery joined us, and he spotted the German position across the stream from us. He radioed his orders back and placed one round in enemy territory. He adjusted his range and ordered, "Fire for effect." The barrage started going out. Unfortunately, he had not accounted for the height of the trees in our area and had not called for high angle fire. The low angle fire caused tree bursts in our area! Many of our men were out of their holes to watch the fireworks. The order to cease firing was quickly

radioed back, but the damage had been done. A couple of the men were wounded; one man was killed instantly. From then on, high angle fire was always included in the orders.

The man who had been killed had dropped beside the hole shared by Jamison and Reger. This triggered both of them. Collins came to me saying that he didn't know what to do with them; Jamison was laughing completely out of control, and Reger was crying. I had suspected that Jamison was near the breaking point when I had sent him to the aid station. I asked our aid man, Trzaska, to do what he could for Jamison and to send him to the aid station. I thought Reger's crying would taper off. How could I presume to diagnose one as combat fatigue and the other as cowardice? Reger came to me completely distraught. He was crying and pouring out a thousand words a minute, as if I were holding a pistol to his head. I sent him to the aid station also. Had both of them gone beyond the point of recovery? I didn't know. Father Cummins came to our area, blessed us and gave us absolution. This scared the non-Catholics who took this to mean the kiss of death.

11 November 1944

Early in the morning we were surprised to see four Americans coming from the direction of the bridge. They were running. Two of them with leg wounds were hobbling and were being sustained by the other two. We recognized one of the latter as Father Madden.

When they reached us we asked Father Madden what had happened. He poured out his answer between gasps for breath: "The Germans had agreed to allow fifteen American ambulances to come to the aid station and pick up the wounded. Last night the ambulances came in and left loaded with the wounded—all but the fifteenth one, which was to return with these men now with me and a few others. When the last ambulance was to leave, the Germans stopped it and sent it back empty. They said that these men were walking wounded and could not be evacuated to our lines. We insisted that we had counted on the last ambulance to carry the walking wounded, but they would hear no more of it. Well, since they didn't stick to the bargain, I felt I needn't stick to my part of it. When the Germans left the station for a while, we four sneaked out and ran for it. The doctor stayed with the other men who could walk but not run."

The Germans had not fired at them when they were out of the protection of the woods. After a while, Father Madden and his men felt rested enough to continue to our rear and to safety.

At our CP dug-out I became aware of Jim Wright as our new radio man. Dallas Elwood had carried it before him. Wright had been a recent addition to our company. He had been in the Air Force at a base near Paris. His work there had involved changing the front line positions daily on a big map as information for pilots. Wright had been bored with his job of plotting the front line and had the urge to be on the front line itself. He had asked for a transfer and had been assigned to us.

Conditions had been comfortable back at his air base. Here, we were cold and wet most of the time, eating K-rations which we heated over smoky fuel cubes, living in damp holes in the ground—to say nothing of the hazards of the infantry. I asked him if he was sorry now he'd transferred.

"Hell no," he answered. "I wanted to be in the thick of action. Back there I felt like an uncomfortable 4-F." Wright could have been a good college fraternity young man. He was intelligent and had an infectious enthusiasm, coupled with a good sense of humor. He knew his radio work well and had worked unruffled under pressure in getting the artillery to cease fire yesterday.

12 November 1944

From time to time we'd catch a glimpse of a German soldier in the wooded slope to our front across the stream, and we'd fire without much success.

While our artillery sent out a harassing round once in a while, we were not receiving enemy artillery—this seemed odd. Things were quiet except for the few patrols we sent out and the occasional mortar fire we received from our left.

I rediscovered my pocket-size edition of Thurber's MIDDLE-AGE MAN ON A FLYING TRAPEZE which I carried in my knapsack along with my razor and other such small items. I reread one of the humorous stories and laughed to myself. Paul came into the dug-out and I reread the story to him. We were both in hysterics when Pop arrived. His first reaction was that we had developed acute

combat fatigue! We had to explain before he would laugh with us.

Pop, Paul and I were beginning to be the best of friends. We'd share our letters from home and discuss our families and girl friends. Paul's father was a military man; Pop's father was a city mayor.

Paul pulled a sly trick on me, and I answered with a comic's dismayed reply, "You are some bud-dy." From then on, my name became "Buddy" to Pop, Paul and Westgate—except on official occasions.

13 November 1944

Westgate brought in our K-rations, supplies, and ammunition every night in a "weasel." With no roads to our rear, the jeeps sank into the muddy field. The weasel had tracks, such as a small tank had, which could ride over the mud—even these tracks had difficulty at times with the icy conditions which followed. (Westgate replaced Bernardo who was a casualty during one of these weasel supply runs.)

14 November 1944

Late in the afternoon, radio man Wright had taken his folding shovel and gone a short distance from our immediate area to dig a hole and relieve himself. While there, either a small mortar round or a concussion grenade exploded extremely close to him. He had not been wounded, but the explosion left him deaf—temporarily, he thought.

He came to Paul laughing and explained what had happened to him. He shouted, "Lieutenant, I can't hear a damned thing! Not a single thing. Will this go away in a little while?" Paul shouted back in the same humor with motions to wait. Paul asked Trzaska to look at Wright in the lingering light. Trzaska reported that he couldn't tell right off. Perhaps it would be best to wait till morning to give the condition time to change and to be able to see better. Wright was told in motions and written notes to go to his hole and wait till morning. Still uncommunicative, he reported, "I can't hear a damned thing."



Sgt. Milton Westgate, Supply Sergeant.

15 November 1944

Early in the morning Trzaska reported to Paul that as far as he could tell both of Wright's ear drums had been damaged beyond repair. Only a doctor could tell with certainty. Wright was to be sent to our aid station immediately. He came to say goodbye. He looked haggard. The dead silence had kept him awake all night, he said. He was sober now, but his face flashed one last bit of cheer as he left—not hearing, not quite understanding, Paul hoped the doctors might be able to help him. The three of us were going to miss him. We tried to dispel the gloom by discussing advanced hearing aids.

At midmorning Collins came running to Paul saying that two German soldiers had crossed the stream at some narrow stretch to our right front. They had come carrying a big Red Cross flag. Paul told Collins to stop them in their tracks. The news spread quickly up and down our line. Company commanders shouted at the men to keep down in their semi-camouflaged holes to prevent the Germans from discerning the extent of our line. They were already deep in our position. Our six or seven company officers went down the slope to meet the Germans.

One of them was a young, boyish-looking lieutenant—small and thin, and erect with pride. Although his dress uniform was foreign, it reminded me of our Texas A & M first class uniform. His blouse was decorated with battle ribbons. His black boots were newly polished. He even wore gloves and carried a swagger stick. His whole appearance was as if he were ready to inspect the troops. The other German was a sergeant, an older man of about twenty-four years. His uniform was of much lower quality but equally as immaculate and similarly decorated with battle ribbons.

In contrast, we looked like a bunch of slobs. Our uniforms and combat boots were muddy; our faces were unshaven and black with the soot of our cooking fuel. It was obvious that we'd been living in the mud, in the field. The Germans had obviously just come from some clean house.

The German sergeant acted as interpreter most of the time, although one of K Company's officers, Lieutenant Edward Tropp, spoke German fairly fluently. What did they want? They said that the hunting lodge to our front was their aid station and that they had three American wounded there. They were being taken care of, but

they wanted to exchange them for German wounded. We had no wounded to exchange, we said. If we had had some, they'd been sent back to hospitals long ago.

The Germans were in a talkative mood. They offered to exchange cigarettes. We did. They had harsh Egyptian cigarettes. They asked why we didn't surrender now, since they would win the war. Their confidence was insulting. Just then we spotted a flight of our bombers high in the sky headed deeper into Germany. One of our group pointed toward the planes with, "Those are ours, where are yours?" The German sergeant smiled and pointed with pride to an Iron Cross on his chest saying that yes, he had experienced the ferocity of our planes earlier at Normandy. The lieutenant added that they were soon to uncover a secret weapon which would render our Air Force useless. It was impossible to be angry with them just because they thought they would win the war, but the lieutenant's arrogance was a bit irritating. They went back across the stream. Orders were given to stop them before they penetrated our line of staggered holes, should they come back again. The order was quite useless, really, because only an unobservant military man could not perceive the scope of our short line.

16 November 1944

The same two Germans with the Red Cross flag came over to our line again. This time they wanted to exchange prisoners. We had no German prisoners to exchange. Following the same leisurely pattern established the day before, the lieutenant commented on the fact that this part of the forest was called "Deer Field." In peacetime, he had come here with his father and friends to hunt deer. One of our group couldn't help observing with a chuckle that things were different now; we were both hunting down men, not deer. After a few other pleasantries, they left. The thought occurred to me that this was a gentlemen's war.

17 November 1944

Here came the two Germans again. By this time we were losing patience. There was something suspicious about their visits. What did they want now? They wanted to exchange the dead. They were told it was not possible to exchange the dead without penetrating each other's position. It was out of the question. L Company's

Captain Fossum told them they were not to cross the stream again. The Germans went back seemingly not understanding our belligerent attitude. Still, no enemy artillery was hitting us. Were these visits some form of delaying tactic?

The weather was bitter cold, and the snow turned to ice. The stream, however, was not frozen. Our water supply had run out. Two of our men volunteered to fill our G.I. cans at the stream which was exposed to enemy fire. There was some mention of nominating these men for bronze stars for their courageous action.

After being on K-rations for so long, we ate less and less of them, leaving stacks of them unopened in our dug-out. I decided to make a cup of stew out of some of them—anything to make them more appetizing. The night before I had dreamt of a smorgasbord with huge platters of hot food. The concoction consisted of potted meat, potted eggs, crackers, beef broth powder and what not. I shared my mishmash with Paul. I enjoyed it, but it made Paul sick—or at least he pretended to be.

18 November 1944

Despite the fact that the Germans had been told not to cross to our side again, they came once more shortly before noon. This time they were more convincing. They said that they had seen our men take water from the stream. They had not shot at them, realizing we were out of water. The clincher was that some of our dead and some of their dead were IN the shallow part of the stream, upstream. If we continued to drink this water, we'd surely get sick.

They proposed a truce during which the dead in and near the stream could be removed and exchanged. The consensus of the three commanders finally agreed with the Germans on a truce, but only for one hour—between twelve noon and one o'clock. The Germans protested that this length of time was too short and too soon, but at our insistence, they agreed. Our work detail of men was organized quickly and was ready to begin the job at noon. Before they left, the Germans asked if one of our officers would like to visit our American wounded at their aid station during this hour. Our German-speaking Tropp volunteered and left with them, understanding that he'd be blindfolded beyond the stream until they reached the lodge.

The truce was well underway before the news reached battalion headquarters indirectly by way of our artillery observer. Major Jim McCoy, our new battalion commander, was angry with the news. He called Paul on the radio, "There'll be NO truce with the Germans until Armistice Day! And to show my disapproval, I'm ordering a TOT on their position immediately." (A TOT meant "Time on Target" involving all the artillery battalions he had at his disposal, firing at the same time.) The word was flashed to our detail to drop everything and run back and to alarm the German detail.

The TOT was still detonating when the German sergeant, who was near the stream, ran to us. Since the company commanders were too embarrassed, I was told to go and talk to him and to explain our commander's action. The sergeant's face was drained of color. I explained over his agitation that our battalion commander had not approved our truce and that the TOT was his answer.

"But why not? Our commandant approved our decision," he argued.

"Our commandant feels it was his decision to make, not ours."

Still not understanding, he asked, "Do you realize that we have your Lieutenant Tropp with us?"

"Yes, we know that," I answered helplessly. He ran back toward the stream as the explosions were diminishing.

Our group of officers got together bemoaning the sad state of affairs we had created. We regretted losing Tropp most of all. Just then Tropp came running. We brightened again and were eager to hear his story.

Yes, he had been at the lodge and visited with the three American wounded. None had complained of bad treatment. Tropp had noticed that the lodge was not only an aid station but a command post as well. When our artillery rounds had begun to explode to everyone's surprise, the German officers had given him two alternatives: (1) to run for his life through the barrage, or, (2) to wait out the barrage and remain as their prisoner. He had chosen the first alternative, but having been blindfolded going to the lodge, he had lost time finding his way back. He had escaped injury miraculously; and, although it had been a terrifying experience for him, the Germans got the worst of it.

After a while the German lieutenant and the sergeant came over for a complete explanation. We were expecting them and had arrived at a decision. The company commanders agreed to take the offensive. They repeated what I had told the sergeant and added that according to the Geneva Convention, an aid station could not be closer than 1,000 yards from the front line (I'd never read the Geneva rules). Their aid station was surely closer than that. Tropp made no mention of our knowing its double use as a CP. He told them that we had ordered a barrage of artillery aimed at destroying the lodge the very next day at noon. They had approximately 22 hours to move the wounded to a rear station. The Germans had expected an apologetic explanation; they received a demand instead. They knew we were serious in our intentions and left with a grimace.

Toward evening we received a message that we would be relieved late that night by elements of the 8th Infantry Division. When our relief came, we instructed the new commander to be certain to call for artillery fire on the lodge at noon, and should the Germans come over again, to have them met and dismissed by an enlisted man since they knew all our officers. In this way we hoped to keep the Germans unaware of the change in our line.

That night we had to march through the frozen plowed field to our rear. Our steps were never secure in the hard uneven ground. The road made by the weasel was not much better. The march was not long but very exhausting. Finally we reached a line of trucks waiting for us. I sat up front with the driver of one of the trucks. The driver was very apprehensive of being so close to the front. He started a straight monologue as an outlet for his nervous tension. I answered his few questions with grunts, wishing that he'd leave me alone. I pretended to sleep. I couldn't believe I was actually leaving the Huertgen Forest area alive. There were so few of us leaving. Instead of feeling happy and relieved, I was numb and speechless. I couldn't even find the thought to thank God. It seemed as if ages had passed since we had arrived at this place.

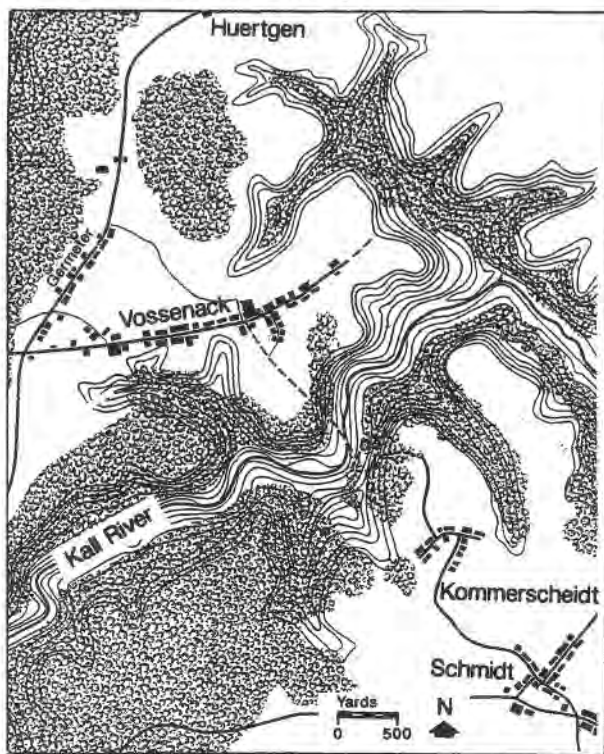
19 November 1944

Our trucks stopped at our rear kitchen area for our first hot meal in 24 days. Our cooks had gone all out in preparing a superb breakfast—including oatmeal, scrambled eggs, bacon, bread, jelly,

and coffee. There was a subdued exhilaration over the meal. I wondered if anybody else besides myself had experienced a similar emotional reaction on leaving Huertgen Forest. Knowing that Pop had twice the combat time I had, I felt him out for a comparison to his previous experience. His manner of understatement assured me I had not created an emotional exaggeration of the total campaign: "Buddy, that was a rough one."

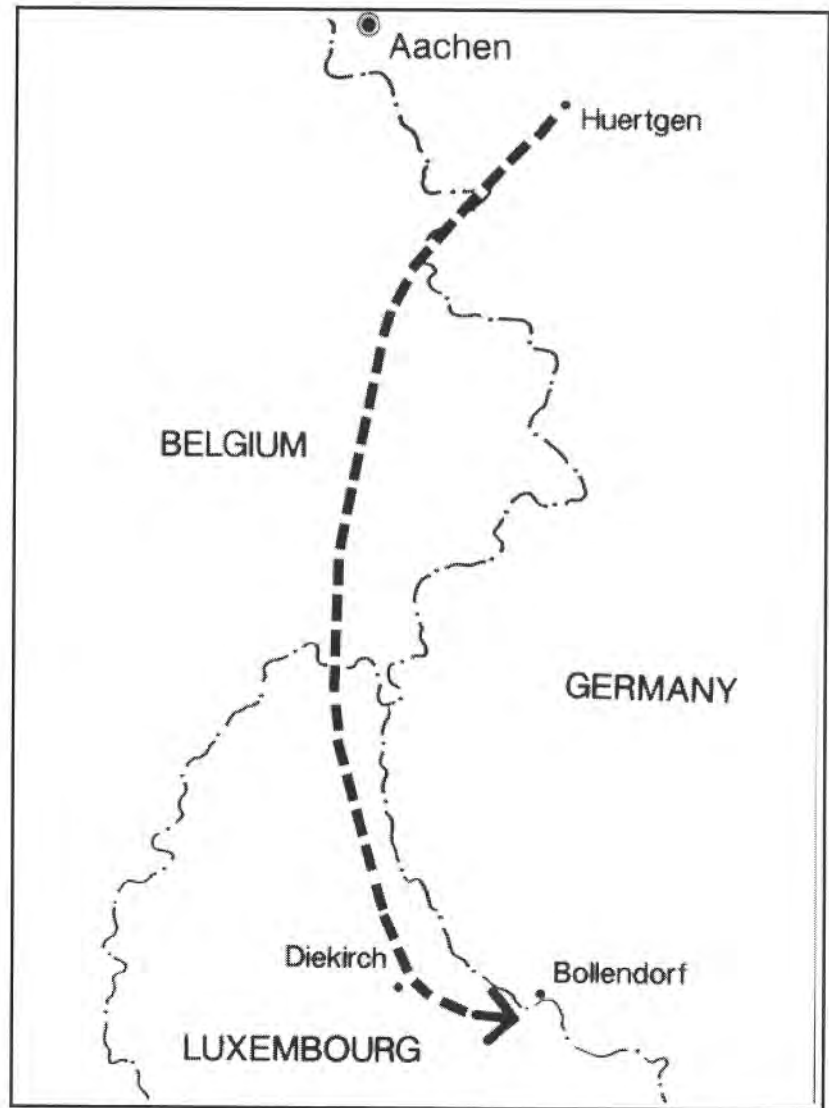
(Vossenack is approximately 12 air miles northwest from Schleiden—where I left the outfit 3 1/2 months later.)

Shortly after breakfast I lost everything I'd eaten. Captain Shiffman, our battalion doctor, was in the area. I asked him about my illness. He said it was nothing to worry about. After the long diet of K-rations, the breakfast had been too much and too rich for my stomach. Half the men had the same trouble. We had to break-in our digestive systems slowly.



27 Oct.–18 Nov. The difficult terrain and the lack of good roads for tanks favored the German defense of Schmidt.

The Quiet Front



The Quiet Front

We entrucked again and headed south toward our new sector which was supposed to be very inactive. We couldn't have driven more than 150 miles, but it took us most of the day to get to our destination. Our convoy couldn't move at a fast rate of speed through the winding roads in the hilly terrain. The scenery was beautiful, and at times I felt like a regular tourist. For half the trip we were in Belgium, for the last half, in Luxembourg.

At dusk we relieved some company in the 121st Regiment. A lieutenant and a sergeant were left behind with us for a couple of hours to orient us on our new position. The lieutenant turned out to be Ray Cure, a former Texas Aggie football player, class of 1941. He was the first Aggie I'd met overseas. We left the amenities of talking about our college ties until the last. The CP dug-out we occupied was well built with a roof of logs and equipped with a shelter half at the opening so that we could light a candle inside under blackout conditions.

Cure turned over a map to us showing the dispositions of our groups of men along the Our River. (This is the same river I had crossed to join our company two months previously but 25 miles downstream from that first position near Sevenig. The line here had been stabilized with little or no change during all this time.) The map showed that our men formed strong points, sort of advanced outposts, about 100-200 yards or more apart. These outposts were sometimes joined by a pattern of anti-personnel mines and trip-wire booby traps. Previous outfits had not recorded their additions to this pattern. Cure warned us about walking too far toward the river between outposts because we might run into our own mines or traps.

We were at the right flank of our division, east of Beaufort, where the river-boundary between Luxembourg and Germany dipped deeply into our line which ended at Bollendorf. I was uneasy about this penetrating piece of land. If the Germans were to attack through the deep point, they could easily pinch off our forward position.

This was indeed a quiet area, Cure said. Even though the area was fairly wooded, the Germans could be seen playing ball on their side, and they could see us. No one bothered to shoot each other.

After a few words about our college days, Cure and the sergeant left. What a strange and distant world all this seemed from that of college days. I enjoyed reminiscing with Pop and Paul about the people, places and things Cure and I had talked about so briefly.

20 November 1944

Paul developed a painful rash around his waist and believed it was caused by the constant wearing of dirty clothes or by the equally constant cartridge belt. When he checked with Captain Shiffman, he was told he had a case of shingles, a disease of the nerves. He was told to avoid stress! The doctor sent him to the rear for a few days and gave him some medication.

Westgate and Berlin, our mess sergeant, began bringing up hot meals. With only two jeeps, it took them a long time to drop the marmite cans near each outpost location.

I never found out where Westgate had found the nineteen phones and the wire which connected our company CP to platoon CP's and then to the forward outposts. Our communication lines were quickly established. They were particularly important at night to check during the two-hour guard duty periods. The phone system was a sophisticated version of one we played with as boys: Two empty cans connected by a taut string between two trees. We used whistle signals with this type of phone system, as opposed to the bell signal of the field phones. Sometimes an outpost would not answer; was he asleep, captured or what? The answer came, "No, I'm not asleep. I was stifling your whistle. Whistle softer. Do you want to wake the Germans?" Whistles at the receiving end did carry dangerously in the stillness of the night.

21 November 1944

Word reached Major McCoy that Germans were being seen but not shot. From now on, he ordered, every German seen across the front line (the river) was to be fired at. They could play ball if they wanted to provide us with live targets. "Every German we kill now will be one less to shoot at us on our way to Berlin."

The orders went on to call for fighting foxholes at our outposts which had only dug-outs. Reconnaissance patrols would be sent out occasionally. We would also present the Germans a "show of fire",

now being planned. If this had previously been a quiet rest area for the Germans, it would no longer be such whenever we could do something about it. Our own line was not to be a rest area, not with 24-hour watches and all this; however, we would rotate every five days on the line with five days at a rear area.

We received two officers, Lieutenants Bellows and Carey, and some enlisted men as replacements. Paul and I had been the only company officers for so long, it seemed odd to deal indirectly with the platoon sergeants.

22 November 1944

My last letter to George Dimke was returned marked, "Addressee Deceased," dated and signed by his company commander. Such a short notice—and so final. George was dead! I decided to take a walk in the woods by myself. I wanted to recall the good times we shared to offset the shock of the news.

In going from one outpost to some other, I decided to take a short cut through the wooded slope at the turn of the river. Cure's warning of unmarked mine fields and booby traps crossed my mind only briefly. The trail looked clear enough. Half-way between the outposts my foot felt the tug of a wire, too late. SNAP! I reacted by throwing myself down-slope and trying to break my fall with the butt of my rifle as best I could. The explosion which followed left me stunned, but not hurt. I was grateful, but dismayed and ashamed. The booby trap had almost trapped a booby.

The momentary delay and the shrapnel made it clear that an American hand grenade had been tied to the bottom of a tree. My down-slope fall had placed me out of the spray of shrapnel. I went on, angry at myself but more apprehensive. I told the men at the outpost about the explosion they heard, and I had to admit it to Pop that I was a damned fool for trying to take a short cut.

23 November 1944

This morning we had our "show of fire." Every weapon in the battalion—artillery, mortars, machine guns and rifles—was fired during a period of a few minutes. Most fired aimlessly across the river, but they fired. I doubted that the Germans were impressed with our fire power, but it did get the new men acquainted with the noise.

24 November 1944

Westgate had found a .45 gun for me—which I was unauthorized to carry—and I test-tried it at an isolated place with several others. Someone in the group had a German Leuger. When I compared the firing of both guns, it was evident to me that the Leuger was lighter and far superior. I had thought we had the best weapons, but the Germans had their dreaded 88's, their sophisticated burp guns, and their Leugers. Our "grease-monkey" automatics looked like something made in a plumbing shop compared to their burp guns.

25 November 1944

Paul returned from the rear area with his shingles much better. In the middle of the afternoon we were relieved, and trucks took us to the village of Beaufort. The village had a square surrounded by some of its most important buildings. One of these was a three-story school house. Here is where most of the men were housed. An empty house vacated by German sympathizers became our CP.

Paul had the good idea of renting rooms for the officers at the inn by the square. The innkeeper welcomed us and offered us the only three rooms the inn contained on its second floor. The two new officers, Bellows and Carey, doubled up in one room, Paul and I each had a small room to ourselves.

The innkeeper's wife spoke a few words of English. She was more fluent in a combination of French and German. As spokesman, I asked her for hot water for baths for all four of us. The single bathroom upstairs had only a cold water tap. When she understood despite the language barrier, she cheerfully started preparing kettles of hot water. She carried these up the narrow, steep staircase designed merely for access to the second floor, not for ease of passage or for elegance. We offered to help her during the series of baths, but she wouldn't hear of it.

The bedrooms had no heat source and were chilly; but the beds were soft as clouds. Instead of blankets, there were warm feather ticks which fluffed high over us. These feather ticks were like bed-sized pillows with seams only at the edges. I dated them back to such fairy tales as the "Princess and the Pea." What luxury to sleep in a bed with clean linen and in an orderly room untouched by war! What pleasure to renew the custom of sleeping without one's outer

clothes! In our dug-outs we may have taken our boots off to massage our feet, but we always slept fully clothed.

26 November 1944

In the morning I was reluctant to leave the warm bed. There was the rush to dress quickly in the chilly room and the dash downstairs to the blazing fireplace in the dining room. The intimate bar room at the entrance was closed for business for the duration of the war. The commotion in the small kitchen was full of happy sounds. A young girl helped the innkeeper's wife serve breakfast. The ersatz coffee was less than tasteful. We would have to bring her our rations of powdered coffee and sugar. I felt civilized for the first time in ages. These people were warm and friendly aside from their eagerness to serve us.

At the CP house, Westgate confronted me as Executive Officer with the task of working together to account for all the serial-numbered materiel we had lost during the past months. Good Lord! I showed my ignorance in thinking that this sort of accounting was necessary only in State-side Army training camps where I was accustomed to report even for every round of rifle ammunition expended on guard duty. I had assumed that, under battle conditions, materiel was expendable without having to report to supply headquarters the loss of compasses, watches, rifles, guns, binoculars, etc. Who lost it? When? Where? There were forms to fill out and sign. We would have to work with issue and casualty lists. We began the paper work which took stretches of days and nights out of this rest period. At one point we accounted for all the .45 guns, lost and in service—all except one. In our confusion, we looked and looked, checked and double-checked. The missing gun finally turned up as the one I was wearing! I admired Westgate as the most resourceful supply sergeant I'd know.

27 November 1944

The directive at Huertgen from headquarters for everyone to massage his feet at night and change to dry socks was not enough warning for the epidemic of "trench foot" which befell many of our men. The rain and cold season which began even before Huertgen Forest and the battle conditions which encouraged sleeping with our boots on, began to take their toll at Beaufort. We

re-discovered trench foot, a disease well-known during World War I. Walking was painful. The toes were particularly affected and, in extreme cases, had to be amputated. Rest was the only cure. The doctor sat the lighter cases with their legs horizontal and evacuated the extreme ones.

Our innkeeper served us a bottle of the local wine with great pride. Pointing to the noble family name on the label, he suggested we look at the castle from which the wine came. The castle stood approximately a mile away from the cobblestone streets of Beaufort. A paved highway passed a few yards away from the moat of this beautiful Romanesque relic, probably dating back to the 10th century. It was a small jewel of architecture, complete with slit windows and circular towers—some topped with battlements, others with simple coned spires. Obviously it was closed for the non-tourist season. The noble family now occupied a Grand Chateau built in the 17th century to the rear in the forest. Across from the castle on the highway was a lone, small hotel of modern design, built on a small patch of land cut away from the vertical rock face behind. Its small lobby had an extraordinarily large picture window which framed the view of the castle. We were in picturesque Luxembourg at the wrong time. (Today, a parking lot for tourists replaces the small hotel.)

28 November 1944

The company supplied stationery and the men wrote letters—not long ones, but many of them. With four officers to censor them, we each took a platoon and helped each other to get the job done. I took my old weapons platoon which I still claimed as my own. I depended on the older heads to help the new replacements in interpreting the simple instructions about what not to write. Never did I have to cut out classified information. There was one letter written by one of my original group which worried me. Under censorship rules it was entirely correct, but I had never seen anyone express himself to his wife so fully about the terrors of war. Some of it was exaggerated. Reluctantly I took him aside. “I’ve signed your letter to your wife. It passes censorship, and you can mail it. Now I’m worried about your wife when she reads it. It’s none of my business. You can tell me to go to hell, but can’t you see that she can do nothing to help you and she’ll worry herself sick if she loves you. Don’t you think you should tone it down a bit?” He

agreed and thanked me. He rewrote the letter saying that this war was not child's play but emphasized his love for her and their children.

29 November 1944

During the day I visited a small chapel. Only a couple of civilians were there. It had pews instead of chairs; it was too small for processions. It was too populated with saints' pictures and statues, some of which I did not recognize, to suit my taste, but this did not concern me as I prayed.

The innkeeper's wife was happy as a result of her dealing with the local butcher. She was going to serve us steaks for dinner. In her kitchen I saw some foreign sausage and asked about it. She said it was blood wurst—for their dinner. I was so fascinated by it that she asked if we would prefer it to steaks. Definitely no! Exotic food could wait. Good old steaks were rare indeed.

Westgate and I were still working on the survey report. We had to sandwich it in at times we were both free. Some of the missing items dated back to fighting at Gathemo and Elbeuf long before I had joined the company, but Westgate had a fantastic memory.

30 November 1944

At the platoon area someone had discovered a housewife who would bake open-faced apple pies for a small amount of money and a small amount of sugar. Our cooks were kept busy dispensing rations of sugar. The pies had concentric rows of apple slices sparsely sprinkled with sugar and were poor substitutes for the American variety, BUT they were pies!

1 December 1944

As Exec I had to pay the company—I had learned the job in the States. Here the money was in Army issued local currency, and it would have been a doubly complicated job if the finance officer had not computed the amounts both in dollars and in the local currency. At the end, every penny checked out. It was like dealing with play money in "Monopoly."

Our company clerk was very adept at answering questions and handling the transactions of sending money home. My established

allotment sent most of my pay (\$130.00) directly to my home bank. The pocket money I was paid in the field had accumulated to a larger amount than I needed. I got rid of a portion of it by sending an extra allotment to my bank for five \$50.00 war bonds. There were so few opportunities to spend money. Many of the men did the same thing.

The young girl who helped the innkeeper's wife stayed unusually late because of our last dinner. The wife asked me if I would walk the girl home with my flashlight. Under blackout conditions the village was pitch black in the streets. I would, of course. The girl was no great beauty, but there was something fine and respectable which gave her face an inner glow. Like the innkeeper's wife, she had a certain aplomb with which one could communicate easily, notwithstanding the language barrier. As we walked down the sloped cobblestone street, we talked as if she'd been my blind date at a dance. I enjoyed every minute of the way. At her door she thanked me and wished me good fortune. She would not be at the inn for our early departure. On the way back I thought that these were good people one would want to visit after the war. The officers kidded me, envious about my date.

2 December 1944

We paid our innkeeper generously and with much regret, they saw us leave. This time we were to march to our sector on the line. We formed our column of twos in the square at sunrise and went cross-country to reach another road by the shortest distance. The woods were scattered in patches through the serene, open countryside.

At some length we passed through a grove of cleanly kept woods. At the head of the column, Paul and I spied a most incongruous object—a formal, gold headed, black walking cane stuck erect into the ground. We managed to side track it at some distance and passed the word back, “booby trap.” A short distance away, Paul ordered the usual ten minute break. Instead of resting, four of us ran back for a closer look at the walking cane. We were seized by the curiosity that killed many a cat. We had no time to study the deactivation if it were really a booby trap. We could think of nothing but up-turning it. We had no rope, nothing with which we could handle it at some distance. A grenade would only make a racket and might not satisfy

our curiosity. The woods were so clean we found only a few small rocks and sticks to throw at the walking cane. Our aim was miserable. The company was leaving and we had to run back, never to know the secret of the gold headed walking cane in the forest.

We reached the paved road we were seeking, and as we continued, a few Jerry rounds of artillery came in without targets. We took them as a warning not to linger. We came to the fork in the road where the company we were relieving was supposed to have a man ready to guide us through a village to our new sector. To wait was exasperating. Our photomap showed two villages nearby. We agreed that Paul would take the right fork to one village and I would take the left to the other. We went alone. My road was half-way up a wooded hill, and the village was farther down than I thought. I was tired by the time I saw a roof top below me on my left. I decided to stop to catch my breath and sat on the stone retaining wall. I could see the road ahead turn abruptly down hill. It'd be only a matter of minutes before I could inquire at the village regarding our guide.

I was still sitting there when I heard heavy agitated footsteps from the direction I'd just come. When he cleared the trees in the curve in the road, I recognized Pop, running with full equipment. I got up and went toward him. His face was blanched; his eyes were wide open with concern. "Let's get the hell out of here," he panted loudly. "That village below is in Jerry hands!" We went back at a fast pace. Pop said, "I thought we'd lost you when the guide showed up late and told us that the road led to a German-held town." Pop could have sent a company runner, but in his anxiety for my safety had struck out by himself.

By the time we reached Paul, the company was pocketed in the front line. He was relieved to see us, discussing the matter seriously and then laughing about it. I joked about the fact that this proved I had absolutely no sense of direction; but, of course, Paul could have chosen the left fork just as easily as I had.

3 December 1944

Here our position had more of the semblance of a defense line. There were more two-man foxholes and less outposts with several men. The holes were closer than at the previous position—many within view of

each other—and these were near the ridge on the forward slope of an old dike on our side of the river. The river was in plain view from the top of the dike through the loosely scattered trees. Our CP was another dug-out, half buried in the flat land behind the front line.

It rained most of the day, causing us to slither about and fall to our knees and elbows. We were accustomed to living in the mud, but it was disconcerting to get our uniforms so muddy after only a week—not knowing when the next change of clothes might come. The last change of clothing had had to last us over a month. When the mud would dry, we'd flake or powder it off. It was difficult to keep our rifles and other weapons clean. This was our constant preoccupation.

4 December 1944

The day was fairly clear, but the mud was still all around us. I was very surprised to see two young Air Force officers arrive at our CP. I envied them their clean and creased uniforms, complete with fleece-lined jackets and go-to-hell caps. These were comfort symbols. I didn't notice whether they were pilots, navigators or something else. I was more impressed by their friendliness. They were full of good will, and it was easy to respond in kind. One of the officers introduced himself, "I'm Lieutenant Eakin and this my friend, Lieutenant Snyder. We wondered what the front line looked like from the ground and now, with a few days leave, we have gotten this far." This was not the same urge with which Jim Wright had transferred from the Air Force to our company, but I was sympathetic toward their curiosity. I replied that not much was going on now, but they were welcome to look around. "Exactly where is the German line?" one of them asked.

"You can see a part of it from the top of the dike. Our men are on the forward slope." The 2nd Platoon sergeant had overheard our conversation. He had come to see Pop at the CP.

"There's a fine spot in my platoon area, Lieutenant. Let me take them there," the sergeant said with such eagerness that it would have been difficult to refuse him.

"O.K.," I agreed. "But be careful." How could I possibly explain an Air Force casualty on our line? "Just follow him," I told the young officers. "He'll bring you back here." Off they went.

A short while later they came back. I was disgusted at their muddied condition! "Now we can say we've seen the front line," one of the officers said, pleased but tired from the run down-hill. With a clean white handkerchief, the other officer was trying to rid his hands, jacket front, and trouser knees of the sticky clay.

"Well, I wish I could say that I'd seen Paris instead," I countered, helplessly looking about for something for them to use to wipe off the mud. The only thing I could offer them was my dirty olive drab handkerchief. They passed it to each other and gave up the job unconcerned, "We'll clean up when we get back to the rear," one said amiably.

"Let the stuff dry. It'll come off easier," I advised them, as they left wishing me good luck.

When they were out of earshot, the sergeant burst out laughing: "The fancy dudes wanted a show, and I gave them one!" He had exaggerated the situation, worked up toward the ridge and crawled over the ridge ostensibly "to avoid the dangerous silhouette." He had whispered as he had pointed out the enemy locations across the river. They had been all eyes and ears.

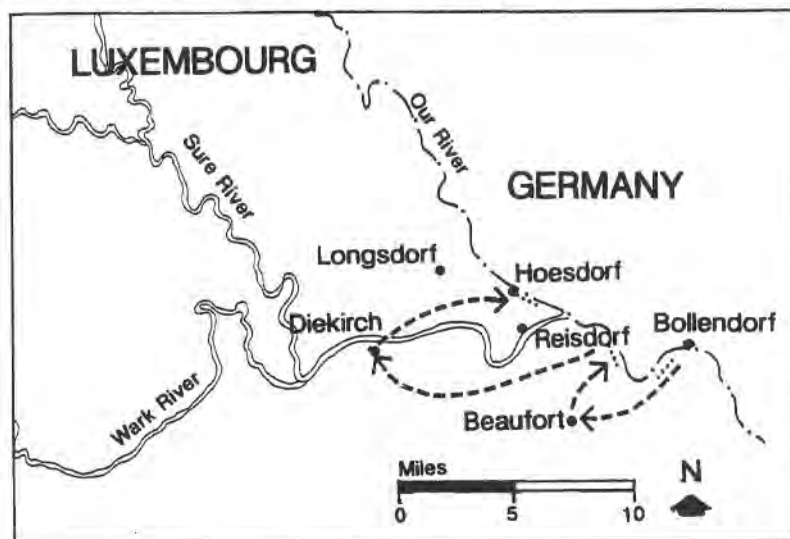
I admonished him. "That was a dirty trick to play on a couple of nice guys working for us up there"—pointing to the sky. "But, Lieutenant, they'd be disappointed. These guys just asked for it," he insisted as if they had innocently asked for a cream pie in the face. The sergeant was a good soldier, and I couldn't be angry with him for long. Soon I was chuckling myself. Perhaps the young officers had indeed enjoyed their thrill.

5 December 1944

We were on C rations—slightly better than K rations. Morale was high enough, I thought, when Stumer came to complain that his (1st) platoon had received all the unpopular, wartime cigarette brands (such as Chelsea) long enough. The other platoons were having their share of Chesterfields, Lucky Strikes and Camels. It was time the 1st Platoon received at least their share of these. Sure, I'd check on the fairness of the distribution.

I had quit smoking at Huertgen Forest because the desire to smoke during watch duty at night had become unbearable. A lighted

cigarette could be hand-cupped to hide its glow, but lighting it with a Zippo lighter was another matter. Smoking at night was prohibited for safety reasons, but the regulation was not rigidly enforced—still it was a matter of self-discipline. I substituted caramels for cigarettes during the transition. I would trade the cigarettes in the K rations, or the occasional package ration I received, for caramels. Those men about me kept me more than well-supplied with candy. Paul sometimes referred to me as the “caramel kid.” In reality we were all “chocolate soldiers,” but the G.I. hard chocolate ration was a meal in itself and was used for trading only when we were well fed.



19 November–16 December: Front line duty was alternated with rest periods at towns near the front.

6 December 1944

So far our 3rd battalion had had two companies on the line and one at Beaufort. Now we were relieved by a company of the 2nd battalion and our whole battalion went on regimental reserve at Diekirch for five days. We marched to a point at which we could entruck and took the scenic route to Diekirch, 7 air miles to the west northwest of Beaufort yet only 4 air miles to the nearest point on the line because of the southeasterly course of the Our River.

We spent most of the day getting there and situated. Diekirch was no small village such as Beaufort; it was a town which could boast

of two or three small but luxurious hotels by most standards. The battalion and company CP's were scattered about town. Our men were grouped in unoccupied homes and buildings, and the officers roomed at the hotels. Our company kitchen with its portable range units was set up and operating in no time at all. A warehouse was used as our battalion supply depot.

7 December 1944

The routine was established, as near as the circumstances allowed, to match that of a training camp back in the States. Reveille was at the usual ungodly early hour, followed by roll call and breakfast. There was some instruction and drill but not much.

Major McCoy was an impressive figure—taller than most and as big as a football player. He inspected our kitchen, and I accompanied him. He found it to be “disgraceful.” He demanded spit and polish conditions by the next day. I set the kitchen personnel to working at it immediately. It was an almost impossible job since meals had to continue to be prepared. How this reminded me of the white glove inspections at Camp Roberts! This kind of inspection was made on all company weapons. Many of us received the impression that we would spend our rest time standing inspections. In this respect I preferred duty on the front line to the irksome stress imposed by these inspections.

8 December 1944

The kitchen personnel worked most of the previous day and night scrubbing the kitchen and its cooking ranges and utensils for the morning's inspection. Months of neglect and battle conditions had to be overcome. Major McCoy's inspection revealed a few deficiencies I had overlooked. He was less than pleased, but our kitchen passed the inspection.

Inspections continued on haircuts, polished boots, uniforms and equipment. Westgate was kept busy supplying the missing items. We trusted one of the men for our haircuts.

Our hotel, the Hotel Des Ardennes, was located near the center of town, occupying an important corner. The interior design was clearly of the 1930 vintage with lots of chrome. The high quality materials—marble, chrome, and glass, were limited to the lobby

and the ballroom; the rooms were small and simple. The lobby had a huge plate glass window which enlarged the space. This luxurious environment (or so it seemed) raised my spirits in appreciation of a human existence.

Someone found a printing shop which sold little Christmas cards. Some were specially printed in English saying, "Christmas Greetings From Luxembourg the Smallest Country in the Allied Group." Others said merely "Ein Gluckliches Neues Jahr," beside a small snow scene. I bought some of both kinds.

In my letters to my family and to my friends I had always indicated my location as "Somewhere in France"—even when I was in Belgium or Germany. I felt that France had the connotation of being a safe place, and I saw no reason to worry my family and friends by indications that I was at the front. But Luxembourg had been a quiet area for months, and I knew no one would be alarmed in receiving my Christmas cards with greetings from Luxembourg. I enclosed a small card with each letter I wrote.

9 December 1944

Paul told us of the plans which the battalion had made for that evening's entertainment. He spoke with anticipation of a formal dinner for the battalion officers and of a dance which was to follow. We would have our clean shirts and trousers pressed at the hotel and wear these with ties and polished boots. Marlene Dietrich was to highlight the evening. She would attend the dinner and then entertain the enlisted men at a make-shift recreation hall.

I was listless in preparing for that evening. I reasoned that the dinner was a duty, and it was not clear with whom we would dance nor who would provide the music. I remembered I had an army locker somewhere this side of the Atlantic. Westgate found it among the company baggage. It was like finding some lost precious possession. In it I found my very own shirt and trousers, and, of more value, my heavy short coat. I also found three ties, and I recalled the foolish feeling I had when I packed them. I'd share the ties with Paul and one of the officers.

We received our liquor ration—a bottle of Five-Star Hennessy, rare indeed.

The dinner was to be at the smaller hotel down the street, the dance, at our own hotel. We dared not be late. When we arrived Major McCoy confined all the battalion officers in one room and gave us our instructions. He said, "Across the hall is a roomful of American nurses. We've gone through a lot of red tape to get them here. Those nurses are from a forward hospital unit. They work hard, day and night. They haven't relaxed in months. They are not all beauties, but tonight I don't want to see a single wallflower. I want you to see that they all have a good time. Now go across the hall and meet them."

Paul was called to the hotel lobby on some company business, and I followed the group across the hall. Between moving figures, a familiar face: "Marge Hamby!" "Bill!" She recognized me. I shoved my way to her, embraced and kissed her. Tapping me on the shoulder was Marge's sidekick, Babs Morrison! I kissed her also. We were all three overwhelmed. They had me sit between them in a big overstuffed arm chair with both girls on the wide arms. We couldn't speak or answer fast enough.

I had dated Marge at Fort Ord three or four times. The last time, she had told me that she and Babs were going on maneuvers but to call her in two weeks. When I called the nurse's quarters, I was told she'd been transferred on secret orders—this meant going overseas.

I was still sitting with my arms around the two girls when Paul came into the room. I didn't notice his amazement. (Later he told me he had thought that I was surely a fast worker to have cornered TWO pretty girls in so short a time!) I called him and introduced him. We made it a foursome and walked to the dining room. Marge and I were certainly not in love, but for the moment I was ecstatic.

At dinner we had a round table in front of the main table with Marlene Dietrich as the guest of honor. Miss Dietrich looked a bit older than I remembered her in the movies, and she seemed tired from travelling, but then with us she was not on-stage. She was evidently saving herself for the performance later. Still, her glamour permeated the room. Our table was full of high-jinx, and we bemoaned the fact that we couldn't see her beautiful legs under the floor-length table cloth.

The dance was a complete success. The orchestra had been picked from the regimental band, and it played ever so familiar dance music.

It wasn't easy to hold on to Marge since there were more officers than nurses, but she always came back to me. Paul lost track of Babs.

We were drinking our Hennessey in a concoction suggested by our waiter, and we all got high. But, I was sober enough to resent the boasting of one of our drunken new company officers. He had not yet been involved in fighting action, and yet he identified himself with the past "glory" of the company. Pop should be at this table, not him.

I took Marge to meet Pop in the lobby where he was on duty at a desk. After I explained to Pop the circumstance of our meeting, Pop waved me aside, wanting to talk to Marge alone. I couldn't hear. Marge and I put our coats on to go out for some fresh air. When we were alone she kissed me impulsively and unexpectedly enough for me to ask, "What's behind that?" She said, "Pop told me to give you an extra kiss, that you've had it rough."

By the time we said goodnight it was very late. The girls would leave early in the morning.

10 December 1944

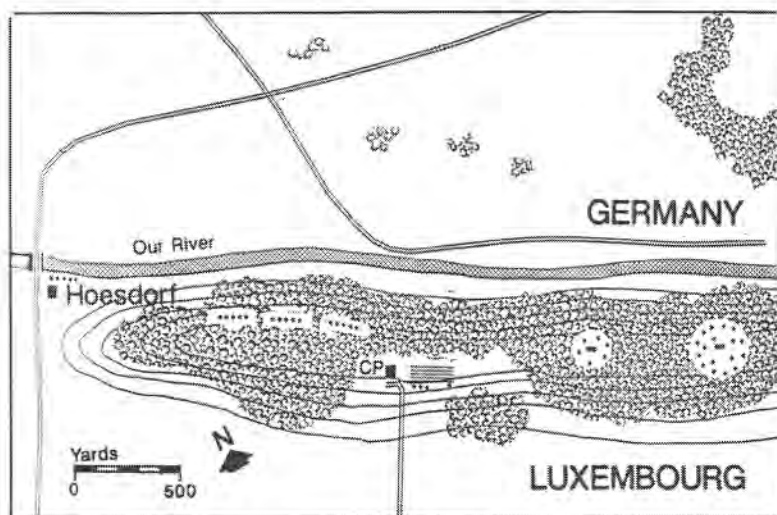
The war realities faced us once again, but this time with a softened contrast—the checking of equipment, the last minute censoring of mail, the preparing to trade places with the 1st Battalion on the line in front of us the next morning. Some of the men complained that we had not had five full days at Diekirch. I rationalized that we'd spent most of the first day travelling away from the line.

Paul received orders to send a squad of eight men the next day to Longsdorf, a small village a couple of miles back from the Our River, our front line. They would be reinforced with a heavy machine gun squad. This strong point was to keep contact with E Company on our left flank at another small village a mile away.

Lieutenant Colonel James E. Rudder was now our regimental commander. During the Huertgen Forest days his 2nd Ranger Battalion had been attached to our regiment. We now speculated that we were in for some changes to match his veteran D-day organization.

11 December 1944

We entrucked early in the morning and headed east toward the Our River. Just before we reached the town of Reisdorf, we turned to



11–18 December: 1 Company at Hoesdorf.

the northeast at a farm house which was to be our kitchen location as well as the location for the Cannon Company. We detrucked at the bottom of the ridge running parallel to the river and walked up to our position.

Our company position extended approximately two miles—with E Company to our left and some units of the 60th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 9th Armored Division to our right.

Again the length of our sector allowed for nothing more than strong points or outposts located many yards apart. By now we had accepted this alarm system, this type of position, as normal for this quiet sector in Luxembourg. At our left flank, near Hoesdorf, we had some eighteen men under a recent officer replacement including a light machine gun squad and Sergeant Huber with a .50 caliber machine gun which covered a bridge across the river. These men were isolated from a platoon unit to their right in something resembling more of a defensive position with foxholes on the forward slope of the hill. Still further to the right were two strong points of six to twenty men each. The company CP was near the center and to the rear of the line in a farm house on the reverse slope of the ridge. Our mortar section and one machine gun squad were located adjacent to the CP.

Westgate and Berlin, our mess sergeant, used our two jeeps to drop off the hot morning and evening meals and supplies.

12 December 1944

We were notified that a Ranger Platoon was being organized. This platoon would consist of carefully selected men who would be specially trained and held in reserve for specific missions requiring the teamwork of courageous men. Clark, who had been recommended by Major Topping for a Silver Star, had been selected to join the Ranger Platoon. It was his prerogative to accept or reject the assignment. Yes, this was the same Clark whose bad record had preceded him when he joined my platoon. Clark turned down the honor.

I talked to him about it. He said, "Lieutenant, I know it's an honor to be selected to this new fighting unit. The fact that the special missions will be dangerous doesn't bother me—they would be exciting. But when I joined this outfit I was alone in the world. The guys in my section, in this company, accepted me and became my friends. I can't leave them now." Although I had hoped he would have accepted the assignment, I understood his reasoning all too well.

13 December 1944

The weather was cold and the mornings were foggy, but all this was not much cause for complaining. There was that consoling relief of not being bothered by those rear area inspections.

Our farm house was a small one, built with thick stone-masonry walls and equipped with a cellar. From outside the building we had a partial view of the flat land below to our rear. To our right (facing the front) was a small parcel of flat tilled land surrounded by woods.

Our two furthest right outposts had small log huts in the woods built by previous outfits on this line. These huts offered some protection from inclement weather and were occupied at night. Our group of men covering the bridge could take refuge from the weather in a small house. Our telephone lines from the company CP reached each outpost location.

The days were full of activity and allowed loud bickering among the men at the outposts. The nights were dark and still—permitting only whispers. Late at night we received the report from one of the outposts that tracked vehicles, such as tanks, were heard moving on the other side of the river. Such sounds carried for miles. In turn our CP repeated the report to battalion headquarters without much alarm.

14 December 1944

On orders from battalion our company selected three men to be sent immediately to a rest center at Clervaux approximately 40 miles to the north of our position yet only 10 miles from the front line. If a brochure had been available, it would have advertised the many relaxation opportunities at the rest center. Even though Stumer was looking much less haggard now than right after the Huertgen days, I was glad he was selected. In fact, I knew that all three sergeants well deserved the rest period.

One of our men casually reported having challenged an unknown American officer in our area. The officer had said he was from E Company and that he was checking a telephone line. A quick check with E Company revealed the fact that none of their officers had been in our area. The word went out for tighter security measures. The "officer" could have been, and probably was, a spy.

15 December 1944

It was true that artillery forward observers had a high casualty rate. When our Infantry officers called for artillery fire, there was confusion and delay in hitting targets because the orders for artillery fire were different from those orders we were accustomed to give for mortar fire. To remedy this situation our battalion company officers were assembled in our area for instruction and practice in ordering artillery fire.

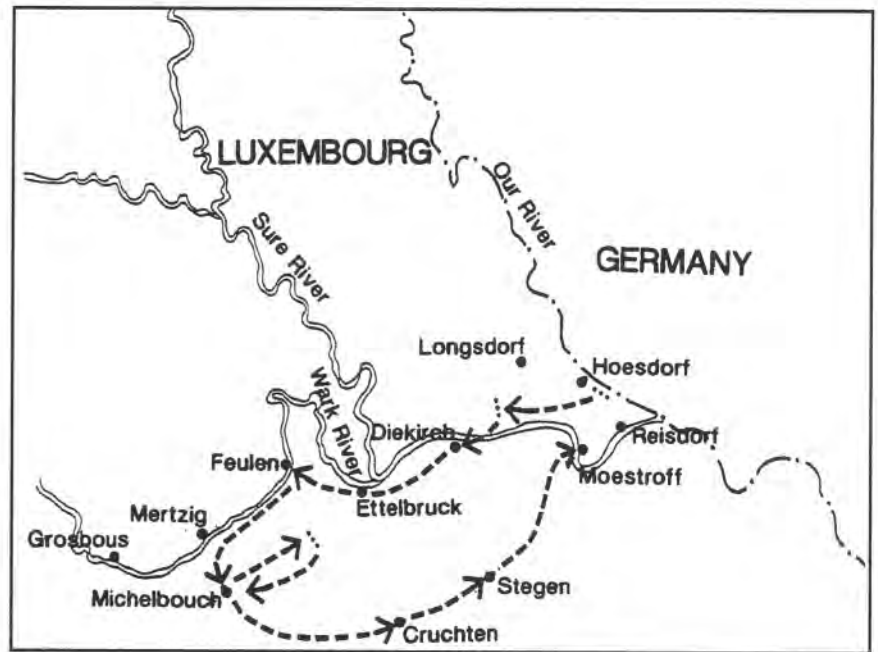
From our forward slope position, the panoramic view toward an open space on the slope across the river was excellent for this type of target practice. This landscape spread out in front of us contained a cross-road, hay stacks, dung hills, and small groves of trees which could be used as practice targets. Our instructor, an artillery colonel, went over the procedure and special lingo. For a demonstration, he radioed his orders for a single round aimed at the cross-road. The round exploded 100 yards beyond and to the right of his target. With the skill of years of experience he radioed his corrections and hit his target with the next round. Then he had all his guns zero-in on the cross-road as a reference point and "fired for effect"—which meant a concentration of rounds on the target.

Each officer in turn was then given a different target and allotted a certain number of rounds within which he was supposed to hit his

target. I acquitted myself reasonably well by hitting my target, but I felt sorry for one officer who got rattled and never did hit his—even with rounds beyond his limit. We peppered the German countryside, and I wondered what the Germans thought we were doing.

This was to be our last day on the line. The next morning we were to be relieved by L Company, and our company would go in reserve at the village of Moestroff similar to the time we spent at Beaufort.

The Bulge



The Bulge

16 December 1944

Just before daybreak we began receiving the heaviest artillery and mortar barrage I had ever experienced. We ran down to the cellar of our small farmhouse just in time to realize that the Germans had this house marked as a target. Four rounds exploded in quick succession shaking the earth with their thunderous concussion—as if marking the four corners of the house. We were silent during the short intervals, half expecting the next round to be a direct hit. Confident in their accuracy, the Germans moved their fire to other targets. We left the cellar to check our phone network. The line to the strongpoint at the bridge was dead.

I could not believe that the Germans had stored up so much fire power. My first naïve reaction had been to think that the Germans were retaliating for our target practice fire of the previous day—we had goaded the Germans into action in this quiet sector. The fire was to continue intermittently for another 15 minutes.

Mess Sergeant Ed Berlin and a driver careened their jeep into our CP area to drop our morning rations. While these were being unloaded, Berlin reported that the German radio had boasted last night of being in Paris by Christmas. He'd didn't know whether or not this was pure propaganda, but now it looked as if the Germans were serious about it. These two men jumped back into their jeep and left as fast as they had arrived—headed toward the strongpoint at the bridge.

(They never reached their destination. As they neared the house at high speed, they were hit by German rifle fire, killing the driver and causing the jeep to run crazily off the road and into the ditch. Although wounded, Berlin was able to escape through the woods. A farm family treated his wounds and hid him until he could be reached by Americans. All this he wrote to us months later from a hospital in England. Our eighteen men at the house by the bridge had evidently been surprised and captured quietly just before the start of the artillery barrage.)

The outpost to our left front reported that the Germans were laying a smoke screen on the river, trying to hide their crossing in small boats at some point to their right. The outposts to our right front then reported that the Germans were infiltrating their left flank, but they

could not locate them exactly—there was such a wide uncovered space between our strongpoints.

Just then the first platoon from L Company arrived at our CP on the hillside. They had come to relieve us for our switch in position. Paul decided to commit this platoon to try to plug up the vast hole between our strongpoints. Paul told the lieutenant that we didn't know exactly where the Germans were now, but that they were headed in our direction. The lieutenant and his platoon sergeant deployed their platoon and advanced to our right front. Paul and I joined them since we knew the terrain.

The platoon had not advanced over 30 yards when we received the splattering of German rifle fire. We all hit the ground and took cover behind tree trunks. The lieutenant and his sergeant started their men advancing, calling their names, a couple at a time. They'd fire, jump to their feet, and run a few yards before hitting the ground again. The sergeant exposed himself while giving orders and he dropped to the ground when a bullet hit him. The lieutenant was nearby, and he immediately ran to the sergeant's body. As he knelt by the body to check the wounds, he was shot down—probably by the same Jerry who still commanded that particular line of fire. Within a minute, the platoon had lost its two top leaders.

Paul told me to take the left end. He'd take the right end of the line. We'd advance the men between us. The men responded to our orders: "You over there, move!"; "Fire before you jump!" It was hard work; Paul and I were earning our pay. The line moved forward. The racket we made, and not the accuracy of our fire, encouraged the Germans to withdraw hastily.

At a certain point, Paul halted the line and posted guards. He had left one of the squad leaders in charge and started the men digging foxholes. Paul and I left them there and went back to the CP.

The second platoon of L Company had just arrived at our CP. They were a welcome sight. Our 6-man strongpoint at our right front had called in that they were surrounded and running out of ammunition. Paul quickly told the platoon leader the situation, and we led the platoon to try to rescue our embattled outpost. It was a long distance away, and we arrived too late. Twenty-two Germans were at the scene of the hut in the woods. They all returned our fire. When one

of them was quickly wounded, another started to put on a Red Cross chest banner. He was shot in the act. Had he really been a medic? I never found out. He had not acted as a non-combatant. The other twenty surrendered all too easily. Paul sent for a jeep to take the German weapons to battalion and arranged to send the prisoners to the rear.

The body of one of our men was near the hut, together with two other dead Germans. We left six men from our own company to man the outpost anew.

The third platoon of L Company had been committed elsewhere. Now a message from Captain Fossum called for his other two platoons with us to join him at an extension of our right flank. I was sorry to see them leave us.

The outpost to the left front of our CP had been the observation point for our artillery practice the previous day. One man at that particular spot phoned-in the report that five trucks loaded with German soldiers had just cleared the crest of the opposite open slope and were headed toward the crossroad we had used as a reference point during our artillery practice. There had been a slight delay when his platoon leader, Lieutenant Carey, decided to connect the man's line to our CP phone for Paul to receive the progress report directly. The man screamed for artillery fire at the crossroads, anticipating the trucks' arrival at that point. Paul rang the battalion phone and quickly ordered the "fire for effect." Battalion in turn ordered the fire at the zeroed-in point. The relay of the order was taking valuable seconds. The man at the outpost was frantic—"The first two trucks passed the crossroads, and the column is stopped! Fire! Fire!" The first truck driver realized he should have turned at the crossroad to his right toward the bridge. Rather than getting off the road into a muddy field, he was going to move his column in reverse.

At long last, it seemed, we heard the thunder of our guns and the whistle of our "out-going mail." We heard the explosions of the first volley. The man at the outpost phone was delirious: "Bullseye! Pieces of trucks are flying in all directions! It's just like in the movies! The Germans are scattering. Fire again." The second and third volleys were automatic, although Paul was in constant communication with battalion switching from one phone to another.

The Germans had made an obvious and serious mistake. Those Jerries not killed or wounded were completely disorganized. For the present our morale was high.

Our 2nd platoon at our right flank had a terrific fight on their front. Luckily, they had the support of two heavy machine guns that had come up that morning for a training exercise. After it was over, Sergeant Edward Parks reported that their front was littered with German dead. But now, his men needed fresh ammunition and supplies before nightfall. Collins volunteered to take a jeep load of ammunition to them. He ran into enemy fire, but through his courage and ingenuity, he was able to deliver the ammunition. Battalion called for a report. Exhilarated, Paul reported that "We're racking them and stacking them till they're climbing over their own dead!" Westgate came up with our rations and ammunition and with the news that Berlin and his jeep had never gotten back to the kitchen area.

17 December 1944

Again at dawn we were barraged but with fewer rounds of artillery fire than yesterday. This was a prelude to another attack. The first rounds caught us out from cover at the CP and mortar section area. One man was killed instantly. He had been one of two telephone wire men from battalion. He was tall and around 24 years old. His partner was short and younger, around 18 or 19 years old. Their job had thrown them together. They bickered constantly; however, their relationship had been one of a protective older brother to a dependent younger one. By the time the firing ceased, we saw the younger man anxiously examining his partner's shredded and dusty clothes, seeking his wounds as if he could stop the life from flowing from this ragged body. When he realized his partner was dead, he held the body in his arms and sobbed. Our medic, Trzaska, tried to examine the body, hoping he could still be of some help, but the young man shouted Trzaska away, wanting no one to touch his partner. Trzaska lost his off-hand, even jolly, manner—his medically oriented detachment. The ordeal of separating the partners left a morose stamp on his face. Paul told me that he felt that Trzaska was near his breaking point and that he would send him to aid station duty at the first opportunity. He had had more than his share of front line duty.

The Germans took their time in crossing the river under the cover of smoke. The crossing itself might have limited the size of their force, for it seemed that their units were only of platoon size—about 30 men. It was near noon before two of our outposts reported one such unit infiltrating between them. With one outpost reporting the enemy so many yards to their right and the other, so many yards to their left, we could estimate the route of the enemy. Their direction would bring the Germans out of the woods at the end of the tilled garden patch of ground 100 yards to the right of our farmhouse. Our mortars started firing. With our target moving so quickly, the situation was critical. The normally mild Lieutenant Bellows, weapons platoon leader, ran forward with a load of rifle grenades and began firing for tree bursts.

Collins rushed our remaining machine gun and a few riflemen to the end of our patch by a fence. Our three mortars were firing away furiously according to phoned directions from the outposts. Our machine gun firing kept the Germans from coming out of the woods. Our mortars kept exploding in their midst. I was never so proud of Baker and his mortar section. They could change their range in an instant in these anxious moments and continued the steady series of volleys. The Germans were repulsed, disorganized. They hadn't found the weak spot they expected—not this time.

Sergeant Parks and our 2nd platoon outpost at our right flank with about 20 men had repulsed another fierce attack. Now they needed ammunition and replacements for their casualties. Paul assembled a small group of men, expecting to run into Germans on the way. We arrived at the outpost without incident and left them our only machine gun and a couple of men. This unit was in good spirits, but as we left them, I wondered how long they could hold out in their isolated position.

Late in the afternoon, Paul and I were outside our hillside CP from where we had a broad vista. Suddenly, "My God! What was that?" I asked. A single German plane flew directly above us and to our rear, arching back and forth over our frontline to show off its speed and the fact it had no propellers! Paul knew this to be the new German jet plane. I had never heard of jet planes. If the Germans intended to intimidate me with their technology, they succeeded.

Westgate and his driver came up with our K rations and ammunition. He told us that Lieutenant Schmidt, our battalion MP in charge of prisoners of war, and his driver had been found dead in their truck off the road between Diekirch and Bettendorf—their truck sprayed with burp gun bullets. This meant that at least some Germans had infiltrated to our rear.

Major McCoy called that night to say that we were to hold our position at all costs. Battalion was aware of our loss of the strongpoint at the bridge. The words “hold at all costs” were foreboding. Could we hold out tomorrow as well as we had these last two days? We had had the help of the two L Company platoons the first day. Now we had only our diminished company.

18 December 1944

The day began quietly enough with no artillery barrage, but the silence was more ominous than reassuring. The Germans again attacked our 2nd platoon outpost, this time with a superior force which eventually surrounded it. Parks and his platoon with the heavy and light machine gunners all fought long and valiantly, taking their share of casualties, wounded and killed. When their ammunition ran out before the enemy would let go, they were captured.

By noon, a man, who had escaped capture, was exhausted and out of breath when he gave the grim report to Paul that the outpost was gone. A sad pall covered the few of us left at the Company CP.

But now, our small six-man outpost on our right front called that they were being surrounded. This had happened before, two days previous. We quickly assembled ten men from our CP area, including some of the mortar men, and rushed to this outpost, and tried to break through to our men there. Again, the outpost was too far away. By the time we came near it, we began answering the fire of a larger force than ours. At first the odds were not obvious, but soon the barking of orders by the German leader driving his men became evidence that we were being outflanked. Paul said, “Let’s get the hell out of here,” and we began to withdraw, firing as we went. Oddly enough, the Germans did not pursue us. We slipped away from them and returned to the CP.

A short while later we had some notion that these Germans would try to infiltrate to our right and then follow the woods on the hillside

to our CP. I assembled a few men and went through the suspected wooded area but found no signs of the Germans below the point at which we had left them. They had not advanced beyond the ground they had gained. By the time we returned to the CP, it was getting dark.

Battalion called to say that our orders had not changed. We would hold our position at all costs. Now there was real concern hanging in the air of our farmhouse. To us this meant to die fighting if we must. To hold one more day seemed impossible without reinforcements. We could expect none. Whatever gloomy and consoling thought passed my mind, personal surrender was not one of them.

Later in the night, Major McCoy called to tell Paul: "Pick up your marbles and come home." Yes sir! We'd been reprieved. Immediately, and in a jubilant tone, the message went out to our men. Of the 116 men who had held this position and the one at Longsdorf, only 50 men would walk away—and they were happy to do so.

Night of 18 - 19 December 1944

The day had been overcast and cloudy. The night brought a light rain. For weeks now, the ground was never thoroughly dry, and the unpaved roads, churned by jeeps and trucks, had deep ruts with quagmires at the sides.

The order to withdraw had been unexpected, and it brought hope to see another day. As quietly as men can move in the dark, in muffled tones, our company—or what was left of it—started downhill on the slippery road. Occasionally the Germans dropped a harassing round or two away from us.

We were loaded with heavy packs, our gas masks, our weapons and extra ammunition. During the first part of our march, the relief of getting off the ridge was enough to lighten our load, and we were still fresh. At the road junction where our Cannon Company and kitchen had been located, we turned to the right toward Diekirch. I was near the rear of the column, and somewhere on this road Paul received orders concerning our destination. Our route took us through minor roads and trails. We might have marched four miles, five miles or six. My load seemed heavier, and I was close to being overcome by weariness and sleep. I wondered if I could sleep while marching. My mind wandered to letters I could write later. We left

the flat terrain and climbed to higher ground. Finally we reached our new hill. It was a steep one, and the muddy path was so slippery that for every two steps we took we advanced one. When I reached our new line, a road half-way up the hill, I unloaded my pack and went down once again to encourage and help the last few men with the mortars up the hill. Someone said we were relieving the regimental band! Actually it could have been any collection of men from our rear area.

Paul had dispersed the men on the hillside in an arch facing a paved road below us.

Pop, Paul and I dug a hole against a slight embankment where the road was cut lower than the forward slope. It was really just big enough for one man but we were too tired to make it bigger. In the misty rain we huddled together, taking turns at our night watch.

The Germans must have been aware of our location, because soon artillery fire began exploding on our hill. It was then we wished our hole was deeper. One round fell some 25 yards in front of us. It might have been its peculiar impact that forced me to peek instantly over the embankment. Against the black night, I saw a spectacularly beautiful sight—a fountain of lights with a thousand thin sprays arching to a circle from its deadly center. It was a phosphorus round normally used to ascertain visually the point of impact. It was ridiculous to think of beauty at a time like this. Pop and Paul told me as much—but there is a beauty in a black widow spider. I slept at intervals, but soundly enough.

19 December 1944

The misty rain ceased and turned to a light fog in the morning. We began moving about, first cautiously and then with confidence. We could see the top of the roof of a house on our side of the road below and another house across the road. Except for the high grass, or grain, the area was clear with the edge of the forest 100 yards away. We had a good view of the road to Longsdorf, two miles away.

Our jeep brought in the three men we had sent to Clervaux for a rest. We were very glad to see them. Clervaux had been captured two days previously. Our men somehow were able to scrounge for weapons at the rest center, since they had not taken their own with them, and they had managed to sneak through the enemy lines.

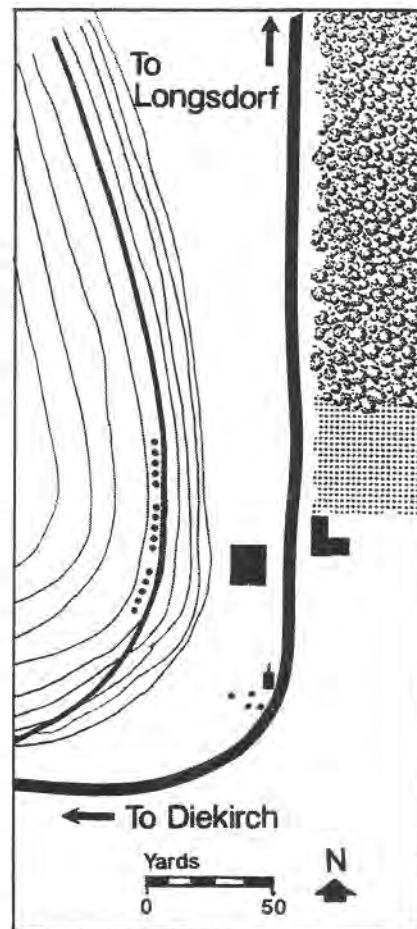
Stumer could not help from laughing when he said, "Don't ever send me to a rest center again. They are not what they are advertised to be. Rest center! Bah!" He appeared to have thrived on the excitement; but most of all, he was glad to be back with his own people.

The morning was otherwise uneventful. Around noon a daring, young partisan came to tell us that there were Germans in the two houses below us. He was the picture of a young adventurer who had devised or pieced together his own uniform, including an American field jacket and a beret. He armed himself with a German burp gun and loaded himself dashing with ammunition. No one understood him at first. He knew only a few English words. We went down to the road for a look at the houses from a distance. It seemed impossible for German soldiers to be in there. We had arrived last night; if they had been there already, they'd surely have fired at us. They could have sneaked in just before dawn. How the partisan knew the Jerries were there, we couldn't find out.

At the turn of the road behind us were two tanks. Paul talked one of the tank commanders into coming up to fire at the houses. The tank fired armor-piercing ammunition at a blank wall and followed with other types of ammunition. This went on for a long time. Still no sign of life, no screams, no firing from the houses. We were all watching casually. The firing continued.

Finally there was some surrender sign from one of the houses. Stumer stood on the road and yelled, "Kommen sie heraus, hande hoch, lauffende nacheinander!", meaning, "Come on out with your hands up, one after another." I had not realized that Stumer spoke German so fluently. We didn't suspect there were that many in those two small houses. They started coming out one at a time in a steady stream—really too fast to count them. There were some 80 of them. Stumer said that the Germans told him that their officer would not surrender. He did come out unexpectedly from the rear of the farthest house and ran through the tall grass. Our men fired at him, but he reached the safety of the woods.

The shocking fact was that these 80 Jerries outnumbered our own company which totaled no more than 50 men. They could have overpowered us in a different tactical situation. We had lost some ground and a lot of men, but our morale couldn't be low, seeing the Germans pay so dearly for their gains.



18–19 Dec. At our brief defensive position two houses were occupied by Germans.

Our partisan hero had assembled other partisan friends. They asked to escort the prisoners to Diekirch, a couple of miles to our rear. We had no men to spare for the job. Perhaps battalion was consulted; regardless, the partisans escorted the prisoners toward Diekirch. I was afraid that the partisans followed no rules of war and that they might shoot the Germans down the road, but a much larger group of partisans would have been required to pull such a stunt over 80 Germans.

Towards twilight we received the order to move to Diekirch where we would receive further directions. We packed our gear—again we were overloaded. We always disconnected and carried our hand phones. A telephone receiver doesn't weigh much, but it's just one more item to carry. In our area, there was a field telephone in its leather case (the size of two thick telephone books and somewhat heavier). It was still connected to some unknown point in enemy or friendly hands; we didn't know which. Pop and I debated taking this field phone, but we decided not to carry it. As we started to move out of our position, the field phone began to ring. Should we go back to answer it? What if it's an enemy call? Can they pin point our position? If it is not the enemy can we really be of help now? The phone kept ringing and ringing. Even at a long distance I could hear it ringing. (Later I found out that it was connected to the battalion CP!)

By the time we reached Diekirch it was in the dark of night, and the city was aglow with fires. Diekirch had just received pin-pointed artillery fire, spotting those buildings we had occupied less than two weeks ago—the main hotel at the corner, the smaller hotel, the warehouse. For such accuracy some spy must have directed the firing.

Our marching column went through the main street at a fast pace, because artillery fire was still exploding intermittently. Passing by these flaming buildings reminded me of the burning of Atlanta in the film, "Gone With the Wind." The burning of these buildings which had been so familiar was a very sad sight.

The new battalion executive officer, Captain Harry Kemp, was waiting down the street. He kept our column moving and directed us quickly to the bridge at the edge of the city. Trucks would be waiting for us on the other side of the river.

I turned for one last look at Diekirch. I had understood that military orders had prescribed that no civilian evacuation could be started

before military movements cleared the city. The intention was to avoid clogging the roads with carts and people which would impede our own military plans. (But an orderly evacuation was indeed made.) And now, I was also sorry for those good people at little Beaufort. What retaliation would the Germans take on those people who had befriended us?

The trucks and other vehicles were indeed waiting for us. We loaded them and drove through the night. I didn't know where we were going. I didn't care. I was too sleepy.

20 December 1944

Sometime after midnight we drove west from Diekirch through Ettlebruck to the small town of Feulen—a distance of some eight miles. Feulen was to be defended by our company. K Company was driven to Merzig, some two and one-half miles southwest of Feulen, and L Company, to Grosbous, two miles west of Merzig. (This was a line of company outposts facing the Bulge area to the north. Bastogne was isolated some 20 miles northwest of Feulen.)

Feulen was empty; its small population had moved out. Our trucks and vehicles unloaded us in the center of the town which we recognized as an intimate cobblestone square. Our CP was established in a house right on this square. Paul dispersed the men mainly toward the east, north and west—a horseshoe defense on the edges of the town. The Wark River bordered the town with its only bridge close to its southern section.

We had two tanks and an anti-tank gun attached to the company. The tanks were located in a wide courtyard, and the gun was placed to cover a road to the northwest. This was the first time that such tanks were attached directly to our company. We also had heavy weapons from M Company and a squad of engineers.

In the morning we could see the quaintness and rural character of Feulen. The narrow, cobblestone streets serpentine without regularity, and were bordered by one and two-story buildings. So far, the town had escaped any war damage, although it had changed foreign hands—first the Germans and then our own. Our own CP farmhouse was typical with its attached barn and its compost heap within a low concrete frame in front of the house. All kitchen wastes were intermixed with straw and left to rot for use as fertilizer in the

fields. Germans had evidently occupied this Luxembourg house. We found parts of a formal German uniform and other paraphernalia in a closet. As a souvenir, I took a small but splendid arm band with a gold embroidered swastika.

Westgate brought us our rations and supplies plus enough wire to connect our 15 phones located on our peripheral defense to our CP. The day was spent checking our foxhole locations and mining the bridge. We were conscious of the fact we were isolated, but for the moment we felt secure that the Germans did not know how far back we had been relocated.

Near noon a battalion jeep hurried into town. At our CP a battalion officer asked anxiously about our disposition and delivered Major McCoy's verbal orders to Paul. Our mission was not to defend the town at all costs. We were, however, to hold out as long as possible, to engage the enemy as they attacked, and delay the capture of the town. At a certain point in the battle, we were to withdraw across the bridge, our only exit, and blow up the bridge behind us. Since we would not be in communication with battalion headquarters, the decision on the time to withdraw was left to Paul's discretion. Battalion headquarters was located at Michelbouch south of K Company's Merzig. We were to contact battalion there for subsequent orders.

The officer was brief and to the point. Paul asked him to stay for a cup of coffee, but he turned down the invitation courteously saying he had to get back to headquarters. It was obvious that he didn't want to stay long. After the officer hurried away, I thought that perhaps we were in a worse spot than I imagined.

Late in the afternoon, the outpost guarding a small road barricade northwest of the town reported, very perplexed, that an American jeep had approached them from out of the forest. Of the four men in the jeep, he said, two of them were obviously Air Force officers with "go-to-hell" caps. Before the jeep reached the outpost, it circled and darted back into the woods. Our guard had not fired at the jeep.

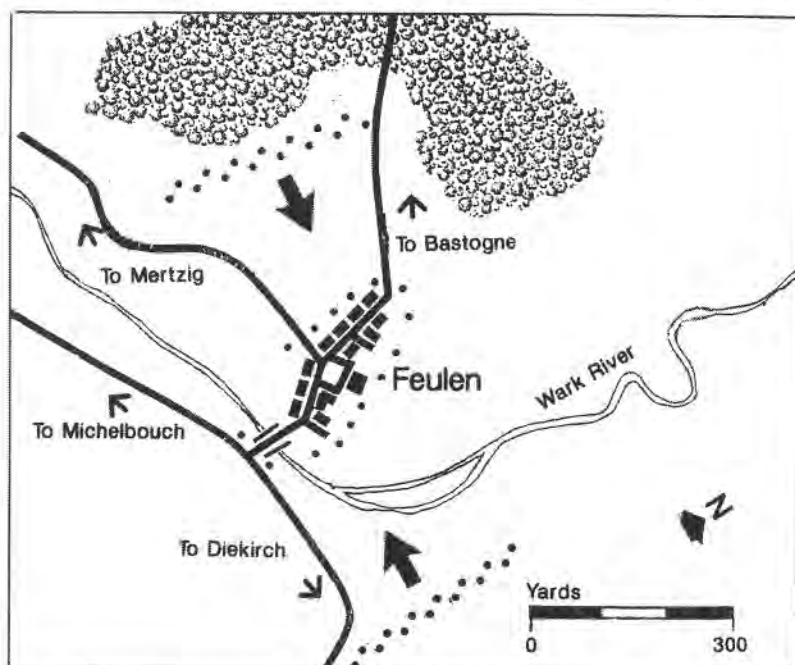
"Those were not Americans," Paul told him. "They were Germans in American uniforms on a reconnaissance mission. Now they know where we are. If they'd been Americans, they'd have come through. And what would Air Force officers be doing up here?" All outposts

were alerted to be on their guard for this type of deception, but the “cat was out of the bag.” The Germans knew where we were.

During the night every outpost reported every hour, taking turns at being off-guard duty. We could expect the attack at any time.

21 December 1944

At daybreak, the Germans began to shell the town. This was the traditional softening-up process before the attack. They would not lift the fire completely until the German troops were ready for their charge into town. The explosions were at times instantly followed by the tinkling of shattering glass. After the initial volleys, the shells



20–21 Dec. The Germans advanced from two directions toward our horseshoe defense of Feulen.

whistled in intermittently. Our outposts to the northwest began to report employed troops advancing over the crest of a rise in the ground. Although the distance was too great for accurate fire, Paul ordered our rifle and mortar fire to slow them down. Soon similar reports came from the eastern outposts. The same attempt was made to slow the southeast advancing troops, which were probably part

of the same unit, totalling a German company—a larger number than ours. At times the Germans appeared to be pinned down, our fire was taking its toll, but their advance continued as well as the shelling of the town.

When the charge from the east began to endanger our southern bridge, our only vehicular exit, Paul gave the order. “We’re pulling out!” The order went through our phone networks to be passed on to the two-man groups without phones. As groups of our men assembled, they would overload some vehicle and take off. The anti-tank gun and its weapons carrier was surely overloaded. Other jeeps and a tank followed. The last jeep was ready to leave except for Paul. I found him in the courtyard with the remaining tank. The tank’s motor would not turn. For all its bulk and strange form, the whirring sound was the same as that of any stalled car. Paul told me that he’d ride the tank out as soon as the motor would start. “You take the others out in the jeep, I’ll follow with the tank,” he said.

I jumped in the crowded jeep and whizzed across the bridge conscious of the rifle fire to the east. We turned right and followed the road by the river. The others were waiting a mile from the bridge. We unloaded and I began to wait anxiously. The Germans were still shelling the town. This was a good sign that the Germans had not rushed in. The minutes seemed to drag. I had an impersonal concern for the tank people, but Paul was with them.

I could wait no longer. I was not alone in my anxiety. Turning to one jeep driver, I said “Let’s go back for Captain Paul.” He hesitated and cast his eyes down. The other jeep driver, Robert “Dick” Dickens, shouted, “Yessir, let’s go!” He whirled his jeep around allowing me just a second to jump in. He floor-boarded the accelerator and drove like a racer. There was no time to lose. Our two engineers were still at the bridge waiting to detonate the TNT charges. The wildest part of the ride was through the winding streets. A shell, exploding behind, missed us.

At the courtyard, the tank’s motor was still whirring without turning. Paul could see my impatience. He told me that he was responsible for this tank and its people attached to our company and that he couldn’t leave them. The decision to abandon and disable the tank rested with the tank commander. There was still hope for the motor to start.



R.L. “Dick” Dickens, company jeep driver.

I now could see the measures already taken to disable the tank at a signal. The gun barrel, for example, had been neatly stuffed with an explosive charge. Something else was ready at the block end of the gun. A critical piece of mechanism was dismantled ready for burial, and so on.

I don't know which I was more worried about: The possibility of a shell landing in the courtyard or the fact that the shells were becoming less frequent. But Paul's casual manner was contagious to the point of being mostly concerned with getting the tank out.

I hadn't known what a happy sound a running motor can make. The motor turned! And after a few accelerating pumps, the tank was ready to move. The men rejoiced and shouted wildly and retraced some of their disablement steps. In a short while the tank was following us through the winding streets. The Germans had not yet reached the bridge. We crossed, and the tank waited for the men who ignited the charges. As we drove down the road we heard the explosion of the bridge. All together now, our group was in a good mood.

When we reached battalion headquarters at Michelbouch, Paul reported to Major McCoy. The CP was a two-story building close to the street and near the center of town. A high stone fence separated the rear courtyard from the street, and the driveway gate joined the fence to a corner of the building. A machine gun guarded the gateway. We waited outside for our orders.

Paul came out with the news that Major McCoy thought the Germans expected us to withdraw this far back. We would fool them. We would advance to a position in front of Michelbouch, southeast of Merzig, closer than where Germans expected to find us. This would provide us with the element of surprise. No one appeared discouraged with the order except for the fact that we would have to march to our position.

Our column was marching loosely up the street when Father Cummins hailed me to him. He said to me, "I don't think that you'll run into any trouble up there; but kneel down, son, and I'll give you absolution." I grasped only the impact of his good charity and knelt on one knee, balancing my pack and supporting myself with my rifle. He said a short prayer. I answered with the words, "Thy Will be done" as he blessed me. I thanked him and ran to catch up with our men.

The distance over which our line would have to extend was approximately 500 yards between the two roads leading back to Michelbouch. Paul placed 15 men at the edge of the woods facing a wide open space, a good position with a good view of the paved road which entered the woods to our right. This was also a good location for the two tanks we still had with us. C Company was in the same woods to the right of this group.

At the left, near the other road (the one we had traveled from Michelbouch), another group of 20 men was located in the woods in a line perpendicular to the road. In the center a group of 15 men, including the mortar men and the company headquarters, was located as a link between the widely separated groups. Both of these groups were in more forward positions than the group on the right to take advantage of the higher terrain. But the fact remained that our line was too thinly stretched.

Only two phone lines could be laid, one to each of the main groups. Our company radio was our means of communication with battalion headquarters. Late in the afternoon battalion inquired about our disposition and added that we could expect our relief by fresh troops soon. We took this bit of news as an attempt to build up our morale. We wanted to believe it and passed it on to our men.

We didn't see any Germans that day. We really didn't expect any, having left them at Feulen two mile away. We settled down for the night.

22 December 1944

When I awoke, the first light of day uncovered the first surprise of the day. A great amount of snow had fallen during the night, particularly outside of our thick forest. The clearings were blanketed with blinding white snow.

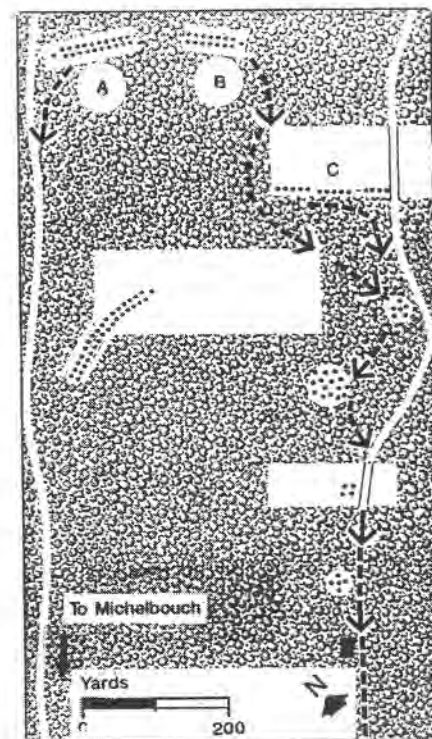
I hadn't recovered from the first surprise when the second one came as an urgent call from battalion. Our battalion CP at Michelbouch was fighting a company of Germans! (The machine gun guard at the gateway had withheld his fire from the advancing column until he was able to identify them as Germans in the weak early light. He released his fire only when the head of the column was within a few yards of his half-hidden position.) We were ordered to move our company toward the road to our left and go to rescue the battalion CP as quickly as possible.

Paul immediately relayed the order to our two groups by phone. Within a few minutes another message from battalion changed the order. The CP had repulsed the attack. We were now to move toward the right and toward C Company to take the other road toward Michelbouch. We were also told to watch for the troops which were to relieve us. Paul tried to contact our left group by phone, but they had already disconnected their phone and moved according to the first order. He was able to contact our right group and gave them the change in orders, asking them to wait for us to join them.

Our small band of not more than 15 men moved through the woods toward our right rear. When we reached the forward corner of the wide clearing, we could see the timber line our men and tanks held. We saw below us the front of the timber line dotted with a hundred black shapes of men contrasted against the snow. These couldn't all be our men. Were they American? The negative answer came the next instant when we saw one of our tanks swerve to the left and then toward the rear with the silhouettes firing after it. There was no telling where our men had gone. Two men were seen riding atop the escaping tank.

Staying within the woods we moved toward the rear, keeping the clearing to our left. Then we cut to the left through the woods toward the road. Our small group moved in a single file with two scouts in front of Paul, Pop and me. As we neared another large clearing, one of the scouts came back to tell us with great excitement that our relief unit was moving from our rear towards us. Their long column was emerging from the opposite side of the clearing. Paul went with him to the edge of the woods to see. The man at the head of the column waved. Paul reluctantly waved back while saying under his breath to the scout, "Walk back slowly. They're Germans!" Paul said he had "walked on eggs" until he was well within the woods and then ran to us. The Germans had trouble recognizing silhouettes also. We each were moving toward our own rear areas.

We moved quickly to avoid a fight with this large German force. Unconsciously I reached into my pocket and found the swastika armband souvenir. What an embarrassing item to carry around in this amorphous situation where we could be overpowered by a large force! I decided to keep it, realizing that the possibility of surrender had crept into my mind, and I was now discarding that possibility.



22 Dec. This map shows the route taken by Group B—the company headquarters group.

When we were sure we had evaded the long German column, we slowed our pace and crept cautiously and silently. Our scouts stopped, and we all listened. We heard voice sounds coming from our right. We moved to cover and waited, not knowing the size of the group approaching us. Six Germans came into view, confident no one else was in the woods. We held our fire on Paul's hand signal which was passed on. Our first shot was not on signal, but the others followed and the firing continued. While we had surprised the Germans, those not hit reacted quickly, prolonging our firing at those running for cover. But the fight was over in a couple of minutes. We didn't wait to see if others were following them and moved quickly on our way.

Soon we were moving cautiously again. Some faint tell-tale sound announced the presence of silent troops in the woods. They must have heard our firing. Paul gave a hand signal to deploy and advance ready to fire. Before a shot was fired we ran into a close group of 15 men with their hands in the air. They were Americans! We had captured our own troops! Our emotions were as mixed as the general situation: Glad to see friendly troops, but angry that they would surrender without a fight.

Paul was stern: "What company do you belong to?" It was either C or B. "Who is in charge?" Nobody. They pointed out a single corporal as the only one not a private. He had not assumed command. Paul tongue-lashed them for a minute in the image of a football coach at the half and then ordered them to unstack their rifles and to join us. These men ran for their rifles, happy to get a second chance. I shared Paul's exasperation, but that could wait. I also shared his semi-concealed satisfaction at the doubling of our forces.

We approached the road we were looking for through the edge of the woods with an expansive clearing to our left. Only the head of our column had reached the winding paved road when we heard loud hobnail footsteps approaching us from our right. Paul gave the signal to take cover. Those of us at the head moved back to hide behind low branched firs and allow whoever was approaching to pass us into the clearing where they would be in plain view. Four Germans walked past us. When they were some 25 yards in the open, Paul signaled for fire. The four of them dropped to the road almost simultaneously. With a certain exhilaration Paul said, "This

is my chance to get a Lueger.” He jumped up and ran to the four fallen men, and I followed him. We searched their belts quickly, but not one man had carried a Lueger.

We resumed our caution on the road heading back to our rear. Our scouts stopped the column. We deployed on both sides of the road. Five Germans passed on the road between our two lines of men. By now every one was always on the alert for signals to fire all at once. We all fired, and one surprised German after the other fell. Two of them had Panzerfausts—German anti-tank bazookas—which we realized we must not leave around. None of us knew how to fire one with any degree of certainty, so we hid them under low snow-laden branches of fir trees.

We had not advanced 25 yards when we heard tanks approaching us on the road. We took cover off the road immediately. I now wished to have one of those Panzerfausts, but it was too late to run back for it. As the first tank turned the curve of the road into view, I shuddered at the sight of the muzzle blasthead on its gun. Obviously, only German tanks were equipped with them or so I thought. But then the lid on the first tank opened unexpectedly, and we all recognized the American uniform on the man who popped half-way out of the tank. Our tension broke into cheers and greetings. “Hey! They’re our tanks!” I hadn’t known that Patton’s tanks were now equipped with muzzle blastheads. (It was the new M-26 tank.) Three other tanks followed. The exhilaration was mutual. The tanks had no infantry support with them, and they were glad to see us. The tank commander told Paul, “We’re going to rendezvous with our troops up ahead. Why don’t you come with us? We can use your support.”

Paul said, “Sure, we’ll go with you. You’re a sight for sore eyes.” We mingled with the tanks and retraced our steps on the road to the front. The tanks not only offered us a great amount of security, they represented our relief by the 80th Infantry Division.

When we reached the Germans that we had searched for Luegers, we found one of the bodies was missing. Evidently he had only been wounded and had walked away. Further up the road, at the edge of the forest, we saw hundreds of small black silhouettes against the snow. For a minute I thought they were Germans because I was not acquainted with the new square poncho that the Third

Army was now wearing. (The Third Army received the newest military issue because General Patton demanded it.) A tank commander reassured me that these were the men they had intended to join. The tank men thanked us, and we headed back to Michelbouch.

At Michelbouch we began to gather our scattered groups and individuals. The "free-for-all" skirmishes had taken their toll, however small in comparison to the price we had extracted from the Germans. When one of our tanks was seen rankling through the streets, everyone of us winced at the sight of a mangled body on the side of the tank, evidently having received the impact of a panzerfaust. Someone said it was our Sergeant Orton's body, and no one questioned the identification. Orton and two others were missing, and they had been last seen atop a tank.

Offsetting our loss of these particular three old timers was the happy rejoining of two men we had believed lost at Feulen. They had been too busy to receive the withdrawal order. When they had found themselves alone and heard the bridge blow up, they escaped along the river to a narrow point at which they could swim across. They told us of the harrowing time they had getting back. They were disgruntled at having been left behind but only too glad to get back.

We entrucked that afternoon and were driven to a regimental assembly area, near Cruchten—where we ate our first hot meal in a long time. We received stacked-up mail and clean socks. Away from the fray, this was a time for reflection—actually more like a letdown after a crisis.

23 December 1944

I ran into someone from F Company. I asked him about McFeatters. I was told that he was missing in action since the fourth day of the Bulge. He had withdrawn his platoon but was trapped as one of the last to leave.

This was a cold day and clear enough for the Air Force to be back at work for someone at the front—not us.

We all griped at the thought of having to entruck at 4 o'clock the next morning to reach a new assembly area at Setgen—just 5 miles south of Diekirch on the Sure River.

24 December 1944

Our battalion of three companies was not much larger than a full strength company—we might have totalled approximately 130 men. Major McCoy was with us as a super-company commander in the field. Our orders, he said, were to take Moestroff on the Sure River that day. The sooner we captured the town, the sooner we could come back to some rear area for Christmas dinner the next day.

We started our advance uphill to the higher terrain. By noon we wearily had reached the high ground west of Moestroff—a steep hill which broke off abruptly to our right. We were able to see for miles down the shallow valley of the Sure River below us. In front of us, a road meandered down to Moestroff. As we started to go down, we heard the movement of tanks below us. We had no bazookas with us. Major McCoy radioed back to headquarters for air support. I was fascinated by the idea of planes bombing the enemy tanks. We waited.

While we waited, we witnessed a full scale attack below us to our right: It was a unit of the 10th Armored Division. A wide, long band of scattered men with a dozen tanks intermingled among them came out of the woods into the fairly flat open space flanking the shallow river. Enemy artillery fire began to scar the landscape with black, earthen asterisks on the white snow. These caused the men to hit the ground momentarily before continuing deliberately. Then they crossed the river and disappeared into the opposite woods. At one time the whole vast space was filled by this moving mass. A motion picture director would have sold his soul to the devil to have a camera at our location. Our own eyes were glued to the spectacle.

One man dropped to the ground and didn't get up. He'd been hit by shrapnel. He lay there motionless. Before long a medic came up and tended to him. Two stretcher bearers carried him back to the rear. He'd been hit on the day before Christmas!

We were extremely cold and moved about, stomping our feet to keep warm. It began to snow anew. The air attack request was never filled. Major McCoy was as impatient as we all were. He tried to talk a lone anti-tank vehicle commander into joining us down the hill. First he disavowed being attached to us; the rest of his answer was almost funny. "I'd like to oblige you, Major, but we can't afford

to expose our vehicle on that road, we're too thin-skinned." Thin-skinned! I pinched myself through my clothing to see if I had any quarter-inch plate to make me thin-skinned.

Major McCoy decided to send one of our company's squads as reconnaissance patrol which could sneak down into town. They took a radio with them. They found the town empty. A priest welcomed them in front of his church and said that the tanks and soldiers had high-tailed it out of town as the powerful attack in the valley bypassed them. The people began to come out of the cellars, happy to see the Americans again. The patrol reported all this. Major McCoy then ordered them to stay in town for the time being and promised to send for them the next day in time for Christmas dinner.

By now it was six o'clock and getting dark. Moestroff was in our hands. We began our trek back. We left the high ground and thick woods behind us. The serious business of marching silenced our column of twos. At first we heard an occasional explosion at a great distance to our rear. Someone was guiding us, maybe Paul, to our destination. I didn't have to worry about that. At the head of our column my footsteps crunched over dry, virgin snow.

Coming down from our high ground we could see the white blanket over many miles of open land, interrupted only by scattered pine trees with snow laden branches dipping to the ground. By the time we passed by these white "Christmas Trees," we realized the vast open space had scaled down their great size—most of them, over 40 feet high. The night was absolutely clear. The whole area had the illusion of daylight, with the pines casting short dark shadows. The full moon had an unusual halo five times the diameter of the moon.

I looked back to see a light amber flare floating above the skyline some two miles to our rear. It was a German flare. In such a bright night, surely it was not necessary to light the area in front of their line. Another flare and then another, and another, each descending slowly on their parachutes and glowing for about six minutes. They continued with as many as five flares in the sky at one time all along their line. I chose to believe that the Germans were celebrating Christmas Eve using their flares as fireworks.

As long as I could place one foot ahead of the other, the weariness encouraged me to think about how I could describe this peaceful

environment in a letter to my folks without intimating I was near the front line. (I was not aware that my two good friends and roommates at Camp Roberts and Fort Ord, Alan Ewing and Boyce England, had both been killed this Christmas Eve somewhere in this tiny country of Luxembourg.)

We reached a large farmhouse, a grand manor, with its grounds enclosed by a high stone fence. The men swarmed the house, finding a few bottles of wine in the cellar and some half-cured hams up the kitchen chimney. When things settled down, I found a vacant corner in an upstairs room filled with sleeping bundles and joined them.

25 December 1944, Christmas Day

The house was crowded with activity; there was no room at the "inn." The only place left for Christmas Mass was the barn, but what could have been more in keeping with the real spirit of Christmas? Father Cummins set up the altar on the wall opposite the huge barn doors which were flung open to enlarge the space. The earthen floor was covered with fresh straw found in the upper levels of the barn. As mass began we could hear the cows and chickens nearby. The Catholic men knelt as just so many shepherds facing the small altar table with its small crucifix and two lighted candles. We were in the Nativity scene itself. The environment of St. Peter's in Rome could not have enriched the ritual more than this barn and these two small flaming candles. After reading the Gospel, Father Cummins limited his sermon to a few remarks on the meaning of Christmas, without its commercial aspects, and on the appropriateness of our setting. "If we were in the States now, people would say we were putting on a show, but you and I know the circumstances." I knew I would never forget this Holy Christmas as long as I lived.

Christmas dinner was almost anticlimactic, but there it was—turkey and all the trimmings. We lined up to be served from marmite cans and ate wherever we could find a place to sit down in the yard. The cooks were careful to leave enough food for the squad which had not returned from Moestroff. When they came they had to gulp their dinner quickly, because we were getting ready to move again. We entrucked and moved toward Schrodweiler to plug a hole in the defensive line. Having arrived at an assembly area behind

the line at dusk, the men were dispersed in the woods to settle down for the night. Our attempts to dig protective slit trenches with our small entrenching tools were futile. The snow covered ground was frozen solid. Paul, Pop and I scraped the loose snow from a spot and pooled our blankets to form one three-person bundle. We each took turns at our night watch and at sticking his head out into the bitter cold.

26 December 1944

After forming a defensive line in the early morning, the task of digging foxholes began. We were supplied with large picks and axes and with sticks of dynamite. Most of the day was spent in digging and blasting holes, but no one was satisfied with the progress made against the frozen ground. Toward evening we were hastily relieved by the 6th Armored Division, and we entrucked again—driving through the freezing night.

27 December 1944

Weary, cold, and hungry for a hot meal, we motored to Libramont. On arrival, our small band was placed at the edge of town in houses forming a defensive line. We were aware that the Germans were not organized immediately to our front, but this was small consolation in our situation. Our night watchers continued on schedule, and with them continued the half hidden tension which accompanied each two-hour night vigil. Would our small group ever be relieved of this constant plugging of holes in our defensive lines?

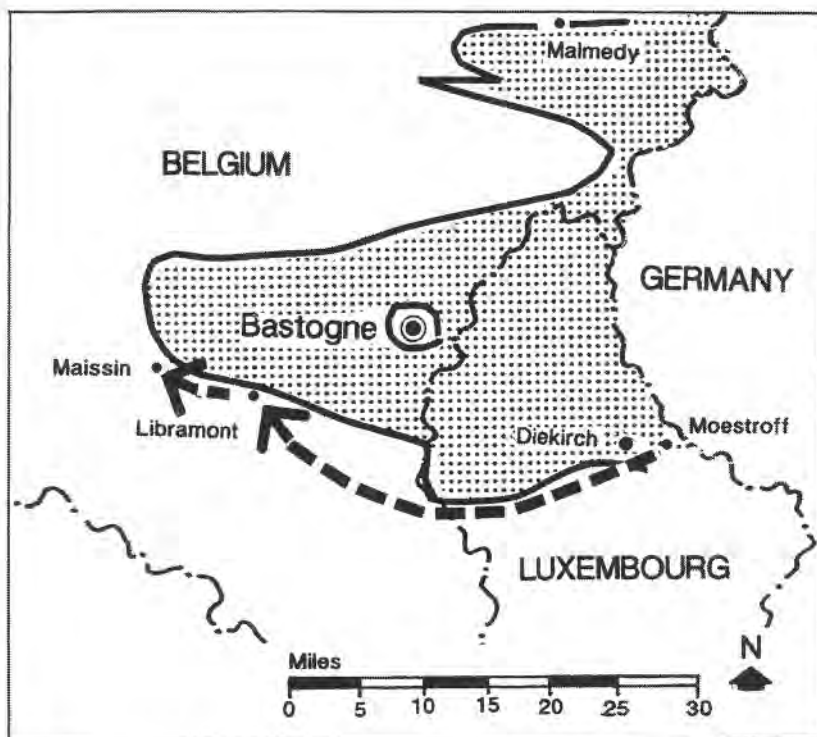
I wrote my first letter home since the start of Bulge. I described a peaceful Christmas and marked it “somewhere in France.”

28 – 31 December 1944

We were supplied with charcoal-like cubes for our stoves to keep one room in each house warm. We were bolstered by some hot meals. We greeted each other with a sincere but unexcited “Happy New Year.” At midnight, the light of a single candle on the table disclosed a half dozen crumpled sleeping figures around the room.



Rare photo of I Company men at Libramont.



25 December–2 January. Christmas at Moestroff, New Year's Day at Libramont and on to Maissin—all locations at the periphery of The Bulge.

1 January 1945, New Year's Day

During the morning I was called to battalion headquarters for a motorized patrol. I wasn't at all eager to receive my orders. Before I left our CP, I asked Paul, "But this is Pay Day. Who's going to pay the men?" It really wasn't a good excuse to get out of heading the patrol. Paul replied, "Don't worry, I'll pay them myself. You go on and have fun, Buddy."

At battalion headquarters I was briefed on the situation. Our left flank was exposed. Some miles away the British had their right flank equally as exposed. The previous day our battalion had sent a motorized contact patrol consisting of 20 men in two half-ton trucks and a jeep equipped with a mounted machine gun. They had to drive into an empty town, which was shelled as they whizzed in, and then turn left at the church, taking the road toward the British unit. Unfortunately, the British outpost at their road block had not

been notified of the patrol's schedule, and they had fired at the leading jeep. Luckily no one was hurt, and the British commander nonchalantly offered the patrol leader a cup of tea to calm his nerves. On their way back the patrol leader was shelled again at the empty town.

I was to lead the same contact patrol with our men starting the next day at noon, and I was advised to speed through the empty town. "Are you sure the British outpost is expecting us?" I asked quite concerned. "Oh yes, we'll see to that," I was told but not entirely convinced.

On the way back to our CP I thought, "What a messy job! The Germans have two chances at hitting us, and the British have one." I wondered how fast we could speed through that blasted town. I stewed over the situation. I wished the patrol had been scheduled for today so that I wouldn't have to think about it for 24 hours; but, otherwise I was glad there would be plenty of time to alert the British outpost, allowing for the complexity of the communication lines.

Sometime in the afternoon Paul received a phone call from battalion headquarters. "We're moving!" He announced. "We're going to set up a roadblock at Massin to the rear."

"But what about my patrol tomorrow? I just barely received my orders?" I was incredulous.

"It's canceled. We'll have to move out in an hour. Trucks will pick us up."

I brightened at my good luck. I didn't have to lead that damn patrol after all that worry. I dove into the hustle of packing as quickly as possible. Hurry up, hurry up and wait as usual. The trucks finally came and drove us some ten miles to Massin—a small town.

It was dark by the time we arrived. We were met by the mayor, and he proceeded to locate our company in occupied houses—six men here, four men there. He knew how many men could be located in each house. The dark night was pierced with the light, however faint, from the doors as they opened to his knock. His authoritative voice was answered with acquiescence in most cases. The language barrier notwithstanding, it was clear to us that he had trouble forcing four men on an elderly woman—who perhaps had known too much of war to be hospitable to Americans in this constantly changing situation.

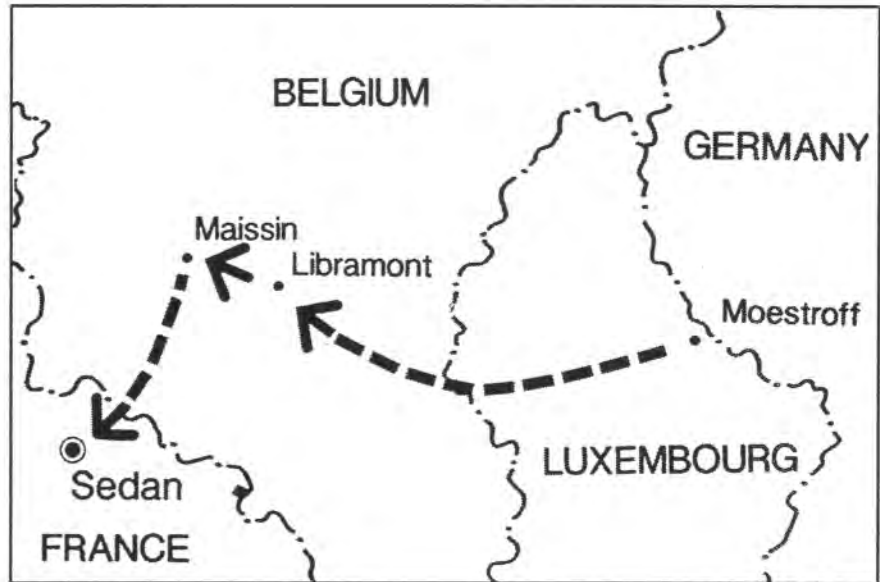
Paul asked for messengers to be sent to the company CP, wherever it would be, to arrange for a night guard on the road. The mayor, or the appointed leader of the town, took us to his own house. He was a congenial farmer, and his house had the typical barn attached. We slept in the kitchen, the warmest room.

2 January 1945

Westgate brought us our rations. We offered to share them with our host, but he refused graciously. I didn't blame him. He prepared a hog's head meticulously and made it look good enough to eat raw. This, we understood, was to last them for some time. We tried to stay out of each other's way in the small house. I actually felt uncouth among these mild mannered people.

They had their two small daughters of eight and nine years sing a series of folk songs. I responded by trying to play "Clair d 'Lune" on their piano, and they generously admired it as being classical music.

Sedan



Sedan

3 January 1945

The guarding of the road block turned out to be a short-term assignment. The rest of the battalion had moved to Sedan, and we entrucked to join them there. As soon as we arrived in Sedan our men were dispersed to guard road blocks and bridges. We couldn't help wondering why we were at Sedan as part of a secondary defense line on the Meuse River. The rumor which made the most sense was the one which conceded that the Germans might still have a division of paratroopers which they could employ in desperation this far back.

Our company CP was located in an empty petite maison—a stately house which pretended grandeur in a scaled-down version. Perched on a steep slope, the house had a commanding view of the city below. Our jeep struggled its way up the snow covered road which led up to and past the house. The staircase to the second floor was graceful even with its tight dimensions. Some of the first floor French doors in the living room were broken, and the cold wind and snow blew in. The house had been stripped of most of its furniture except for a small grand piano in the living room and a few chairs and small tables.

We slept fully clothed, as always, on the second floor.

4 January 1944

The morning was brisk as the company business routine began. A field telephone was installed connecting our CP to battalion headquarters. I toured our guard posts. Our kitchen went into operation to serve hot meals to our scattered units.

Our long delayed Christmas mail and packages reached us. I wondered how many of our Christmas packages had been lost in our recent withdrawal. Actually the package I received had been mailed in time to have reached me by Thanksgiving. It contained an assortment of home-made candies pressure-sealed in cans. The divinity and fudge were as fresh tasting as if made just hours ago.

The Christmas spirit persisted. Snow suddenly appeared as a friend. Someone at the CP found a child's small sled. We took turns at swooping down the long slope. I'd never been on a sled before. It

was only when I was half way down that I screamed, "How do you control this thing?" I was headed straight for the telephone pole at the very bottom. Answers of "Drag your right foot!" came too late. Somehow I tumbled to one side of the pole into a snow bank. Amidst the laughter I kept insisting that sleds were too dangerous for children. It'd been a wild ride!

The kitchen people heated some water, and we three took turns at baths. How long ago was it since I'd taken all my clothes off? It seemed like a year, but actually it was four weeks. "French" baths were not uncommon, but whole baths were a luxury.

Paul decided to tour the guard posts before dark. At one of the posts, two men were frying chicken—a delicacy after so long a fare of field rations—and they insisted on sharing it with Paul.

By the time Paul got back we had received two bottles of champagne as our officer's liquor ration. I couldn't see drinking champagne out of our canteen cups, so I went to the house next door to borrow some glasses. My knock was answered by a beautiful girl (or so she seemed) who couldn't understand me. She invited me in. One of our kitchen men was there speaking Polish with the girl's jolly, stout mother. Our man interpreted for me that I wanted to borrow some glasses and added that I had two bottles of champagne. I couldn't keep my eyes from the girl. Our man went to the kitchen for the glasses. The mother turned to me and laughed, "Ah Monsieur, you get zig-zag!" I misunderstood. She turned to her daughter and repeated the word "zig-zag." The girl tried to explain with motions. I thought: isn't that the word the boys bring back from Paris? She was a lovely girl. Our man came back with the glasses and interpreted, "She said you are going to get drunk." Oh yes, the other word was "zig-zig." I laughed with them at my own misunderstanding. I left, thanking them all the way out.

Pop, Paul and I started drinking slowly, intending to finish only one bottle. I played "Clair d'Lune" on the grand piano, and for an encore I played it again—it was all I could remember aside from a smattering of Rachmanioff's Prelude. We drank the second bottle and turned in for the night. The room whirled around a couple of times before I fell asleep.

5 January 1944

Pop was already up by the time I awoke. I had the hangover I should have expected. Pop offered me a canteen cup of black coffee and bemoaned the fact that we didn't have "A hair of the dog that bit us." Paul was still asleep, bundled in his blanket against the wall. When I felt like facing the world again I woke Paul, but he merely said, "I feel terrible" and didn't budge. I sympathized with him and offered him some coffee. He didn't want any. I decided to let him sleep his hangover away.

The field phone rang. I answered. It was Colonel McCoy! He wanted to speak to Captain Paul. I thought quickly that Paul was in no condition to answer the phone and lied, "Captain Paul is sick, sir."

"Well, what's the matter with him? Have you called the doctor?" his voice boomed out.

"No sir, I haven't."

"Never mind, I'll send Captain Shiffman from here." Colonel McCoy had just been promoted from Major, and I wondered if he had celebrated the occasion. And I wondered if he guessed that Paul had a big hangover. He had seemed overly anxious over Paul's health.

Pop and I knew that Captain Shiffman would tell the Colonel that Paul had some small bug and cover up for us. I told Paul that Shiffman was coming, and he mumbled something.

The jeep that drove into our driveway carried Shiffman AND McCoy! The jig was up. I'd be caught in a lie, and Paul would be reprimanded for drinking himself sick. The doctor examined Paul. McCoy seemed honestly concerned. Shiffman concluded that Paul was a very sick man with a high temperature. He'd have to go to the hospital right away. I could see that if Paul were not sick, he was putting on a very convincing act. Paul could barely walk to the jeep. He was gone, and I still didn't know what to believe. (The chicken he had eaten had been fried in grease found in an old cupboard. Or something else about it must have been the cause for a bad case of food poisoning.)

I took over the command of the company, believing that Paul would be back in a few days after getting over the "flu."

6 - 14 January 1945

Pop knew his job and mine as well. I found routines running smoothly. When I had to make a decision, he'd give me the background on the problem and then ask me in his easy manner, "Well, what do you think, Buddy?" By that time, we both knew the logical answer.

We began receiving replacements—both officers and enlisted men. Our assignments were expanded to include motorized patrols and guarding railroad stations as our company grew in strength. As platoons were placed in reserve, some training was done.

I wasn't worried about Paul; I expected him back most any day. I was busy keeping up with battalion orders in the meantime.

15 January 1945

The day was not unusual, but after dinner I received a phone call to report to the regimental headquarters. This CP was located in a mansion with most of its highborn rooms turned into offices. I was ushered into a spacious room with a huge fireplace. Sitting near the blazing fire, which produced most of the light in the room, was Colonel Rudder, our commander. Lt. Colonel McCoy was chatting with him. I reported as ordered. Colonel Rudder, class of '32, bade me sit down and added, "I understand all three of us are Texas Aggies. When were you at A & M?"

I replied that I was of the class of '42, and the conversation centered around the good old days at college. I could tell that this was an honest attempt to maintain close college ties, but I was having a difficult time with it. I was overawed by the famous Colonel Rudder and was ill at ease with the irascible Colonel McCoy. At a lull, Colonel Rudder said, "I just wanted to meet the other Aggie. There are just the three of us. Colonel McCoy, here, has a mission for you."

McCoy, class of '40, took me to a nearby lighted table and spread out a map. He said that there had been reports from the natives that German paratroopers in American uniforms had landed in a certain forest which he pointed out on the map. There were conflicting reports as to their number. "Your job," he pointed out, "is to find these bastards and 'rack them and stack them like cords of wood' as I-Company has done time and again." He gave me the map.

I asked where the nearest American troops were located in the vicinity. He pointed to locations far away from the large forest area. I was to use two full platoons for the job, and trucks would pick us up the next morning. I was dismissed with a bit of bravado about the good job I was to do.

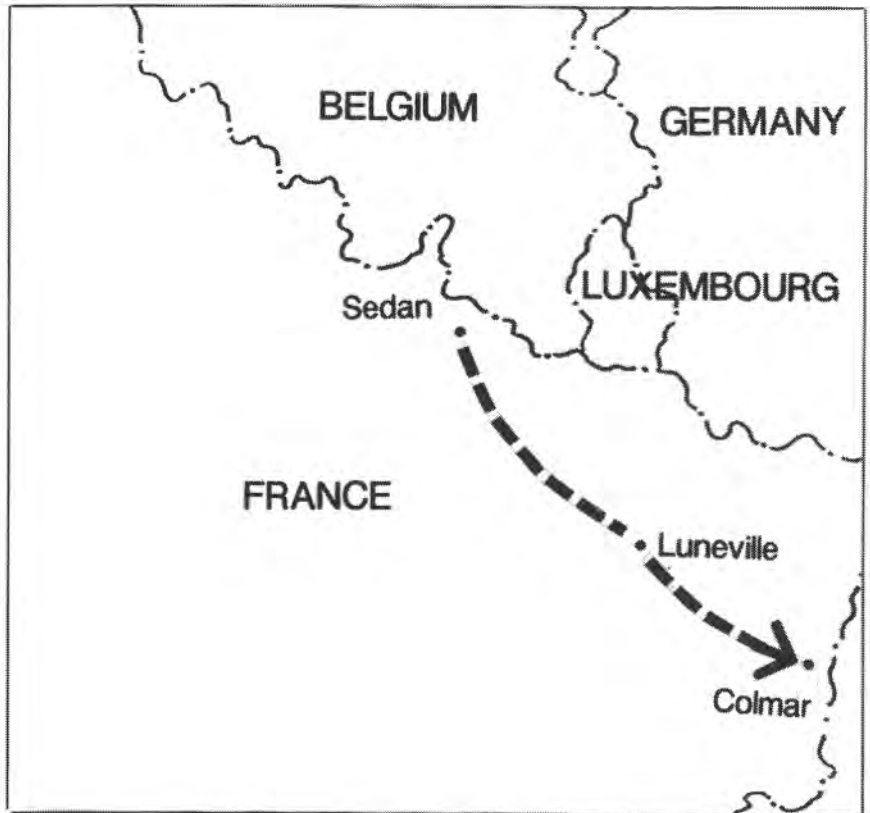
On my way back to our CP I didn't feel like talking to my jeep driver. I thought that if I'd been given this darn fool job because I was the only other Aggie in the battalion, then to hell with this old Aggie spirit stuff. The forest area was immense. The job was apparently a wild goose chase. And if the reports were not true, the idea of shooting American uniformed men without asking questions was as distasteful as cannibalism.

When I got back, I alerted the first and third platoons.

16 January 1945

In the morning the trucks never came. Instead I received a call telling me that we were being relieved and to prepare to move the next day. How many times now had the worst things never happened? But getting out of a wild goose chase, however suspect, was no better than moving out without Paul. Orders came down for us to remove our divisional insignia—the red keystone—from our uniforms, equipment and vehicles. In other words, we were to travel incognito. Wherever we were going was as much a secret to us as to the Germans, and the Germans would not be expecting us back on the line after our losses during the Bulge.

The Way To Colmar



The Way To Colmar

17 January 1945

We boarded "40 or 8" railroad cars and moved out of Sedan. From time to time the train would have comfort stops. Most of the time we kept the two sliding doors closed to keep the cold wind out. Somehow it seemed strangely familiar to be riding these 40 or 8's again. The last time I'd been on such a train as this had been in September—four months, which seemed so very long ago.

18 January 1945

When we arrived at Luneville in northeastern France, some 200 miles from Sedan, trucks drove us 50 miles further to Plainfaing. This small town had kept its medieval look. Our trucks were almost too large to pass under the arched gates in the narrow streets. A battalion officer informed me that we were being held in reserve. Being in reserve was always a welcome novelty to us. Our men were located in houses with such reluctant hosts that I wondered if these people preferred the German occupation to ours. In the evening it started, or rather continued, to snow.

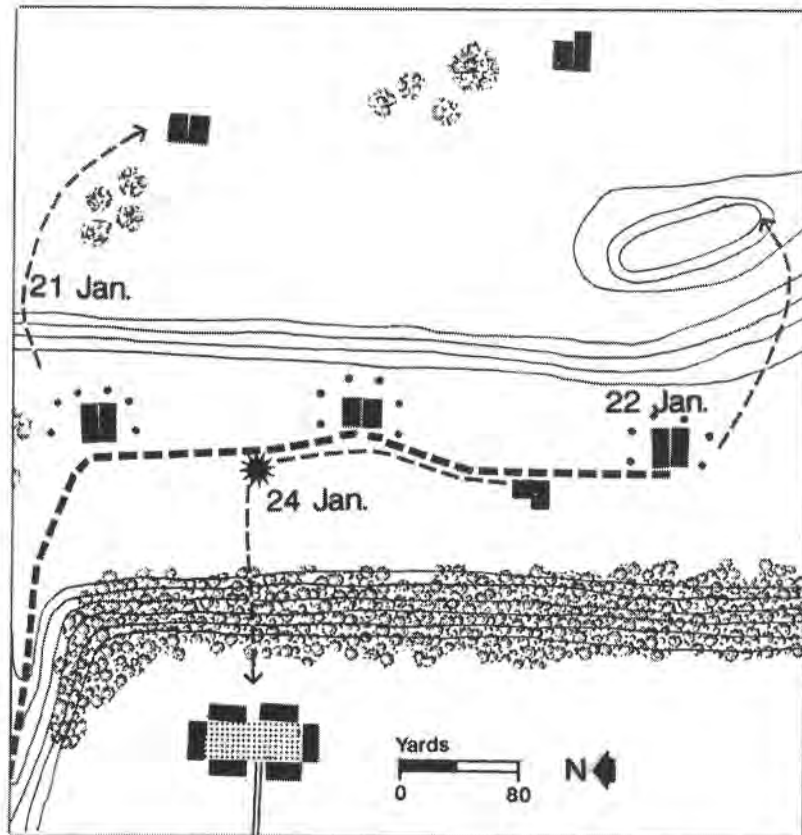
I noticed I had a touch of dysentery, and I asked our aid man for some bismuth. He gave me his own prescription.

19 January 1945

Our period in reserve did not quite last 24 hours. Battalion orders called for us to be ready to march to our assigned area with the mission of relieving our own 2nd Battalion under the protection of darkness. We were ordered to carry our heavy, full field packs as well as extra ammunition, because the only supply road was too exposed for our vehicles to carry our rolls.

Guides from the companies now on the line would meet us at a designated spot to help effect the relief. We began our march to the foothills of the Vosges Mountains, and soon we were staggering under our heavy loads. The stomach cramps of my dysentery didn't help the situation. I had to stop to relieve myself at intervals and then run to catch up with my company. I thought that this was a most inopportune time for me to catch this bug.

A jeep pulled up beside us on the road and dropped off Paul! He seemed fully recovered. I was delighted to have him back with us. Soon he knew as much as I did about our new assignment.



19–24 Jan. Our position near the Vosges Mountains was a line of farm houses on a blanket of snow.

Once we left the road, the snow drifts we encountered added that much more to our fatigue. Our guides met us, and we began dropping off whole platoons at farm houses quite distant from each other, but with a clear view between them. The steep slope behind our position was thickly wooded, but our line was located on a fairly open, high ground or shelf from which we had a commanding view to our front. The Germans occupied scattered houses below us. Their houses, as ours, seemed even more isolated in the open field—projecting out from the white snow blanket which seemed to flatten out the gently sloping terrain.

Our own CP was in a house located behind the line of platoons and nearer to the right flank platoon. The captain of C Company, which we were relieving, stayed with us long enough to acquaint us with the present status. Ours was a defensive position. Our exposed position, accentuated by the snow-covered ground, made it necessary to limit our movement as much as possible during the day—particularly to the left flank platoon on the flat ground. Oddly enough, the farmer at that house had insisted on remaining in residence. The enemy had limited their activity to a few patrols and artillery fire.

Each platoon area had a line of fighting foxholes which could be manned during the day, and each had warning outposts for the night guards. A few rounds of artillery exploded as harassing fire before the captain left us.

Elwood started his wire men working on putting our extra phones to work in our communications network. Paul made sure that the platoons had their outposts in operation. Soon the platoons reported that the men on outpost duty were freezing to death. Paul told them to reduce the guard period so that men could be rotated at shorter intervals.

Here we were, once more on the line, living with that uncertainty of the first night in a defensive position. Someone smiled and said, "Well, we're in harness again."

20 January 1945

The bright daylight brought new problems to the surface. We needed white camouflage clothing. A uniformed man seen against the snow was as contrasting as a fly in a glass of milk. Battalion said they'd send some white bed sheets from which we could improvise white ponchos. We really needed arctic clothing. We needed extra blankets and extra clothing. We wore two pairs of socks, trousers and shirts. This was the coldest weather we had experienced. There was an unanswered question: Which is worse, the freezing weather or the artillery fire?

Mule teams handled by French Moroccans brought in our supplies and rations at night using a mountain trail through the wooded area behind us. These Moroccans were tall blacks whom everyone expected to speak English. They spoke only French. Westgate had quite a time working with them.

We were told that the German radio had welcomed the 28th Division to this Vosges area. Our secret was out. A German patrol had captured a single man on outpost duty last night in a company down the line. The welcome announcement included a taunt about our asking for more punishment than we had received already.

21 January 1945

One German house tantalized us with its smoke from the chimney. We directed our artillery fire on it. While we may have scared the Germans for a spell, we never were able to deliver a direct hit.

Battalion called. S-2 (Intelligence) wanted a German prisoner taken this night. Paul selected the smaller German house closest to the left flank platoon as the most likely place to obtain a prisoner. Then he asked Smitty, now a platoon sergeant, to organize a five-man patrol and instruct them on the best route to take to the house. Smitty decided to lead the patrol himself. As a platoon sergeant, he was responsible for a lot of men, but he wasn't comfortable with that. He performed better with a small patrol where he had more direct control and freedom of action.

The patrol left late that night. We kept in touch with their platoon leader. Time passed slowly; the waiting was an agony. "Have they returned yet?" "No." More waiting. "Were those shots we heard?" "Yes, they came from the house." "Any news from the patrol?" "No." Finally the platoon leader called in. "They're back safely, and they do have two prisoners!" The Jerries were caught asleep, but a third one reached for his rifle and had to be shot. The tension gave way to excitement. The mission was accomplished.

22 January 1945

Intermittent artillery rounds exploded leaving black earth scars in the snow. Their inaccuracy was the only thing for which we were grateful. No rounds hit directly on one of our houses. In spite of this artillery harassment which operated on a sporadic schedule 24 hours a day, we welcomed the daylight hours, for it was the nighttime in which we were more active.

During the afternoon, battalion orders came for a raid on the house opposite the right flank platoon. This combat patrol would consist

of one platoon. Its departure was set for late at night hoping the darkness would provide some protection. Enough white sheets were pooled together to provide each man with a semblance of camouflage.

Colonel McCoy came to our CP that night to follow the course of the patrol. His interest was much more than that of an observer. He checked the preparations and plans to assure himself that the patrol had some chance for success.

The German house in question was some 200 yards away from our line. Going down slope from our location, the patrol would be exposed to view by the Germans. The night had a luminescence which permitted this clear view. Once at the bottom of the slope, the patrol would have the protection of a slight rise in the ground for an additional 50 yards. The last 100 yards would be critical ones since the open white field offered no protection at all. The patrol would have to rush through this distance in the hope of catching the German night guards unawares.

The platoon leader started out at the scheduled time. He was followed by a radio man to keep in contact with our CP at all times. The rush down slope was accomplished quickly enough. When the patrol came within our view, it was obvious that the progress was slowed down by the two-foot deep snow drift. They could have used snow shoes in this predicament. At times a man would step into a snow-hidden hole—perhaps an old shell crater—and almost disappear from view as he fell. They were having troubles enough at this slow pace. How could they possibly rush those last 100 yards? Their white sheets, dirty and wet by now, provided a minimum of camouflage. If we could see them contrasted against the snow, so would the Germans—if they were awake.

And the Germans were awake. When the patrol reached those last 100 yards, the German house became alive with machine gun fire. The element of surprise was gone. Fast movement was impossible. The patrol leader reported the obvious fact that they could not rush their way to the house through the thick snow. His men were exhausted. He could wait and deploy his men, frozen as they were, and attack at a slow rate.

Colonel McCoy weighed the chances and decided to withdraw the patrol. The patrol was ordered back. Now that the Germans were

alerted, the exposed climb up the slope held its danger. A few men at a time scrambled up the slope to the rattling of the machine gun. Artillery fire was directed at the German house to quiet the gun, but it kept firing between explosions.

When the platoon was back, the platoon leader discovered that one of his men had dropped wounded half-way up the slope. When the report came to our CP, McCoy started to order stretcher bearers to go after the wounded man, but the platoon leader disarmed himself and descended the slope. The German machine gun was strangely quiet. But it was expected to open up at any moment. How long did it take to rescue this one man? Suspense has no time limit.

The patrol was not successful in their mission, yet the CP was full of smiles when the platoon leader was reported back with the wounded man.

23 January 1945

Battalion called to tell us that it was our company's turn to send an officer and a non-commissioned officer on a 72 hour pass to Paris—plus travel time. In no time at all Paul and Pop decided that they would go this time. Actually they were the last of the "old guard" left to take advantage of this windfall. With Pop gone, who would act as first sergeant? Their answer came back, "Collins." Collins had been my platoon sergeant when I led the weapons platoon. As many misgivings as I had about both of them being gone at the same time, I couldn't begrudge them something they deserved.

Paul and Pop left at nightfall, and Collins and I took their places in the company. The quiet lull which followed the hullabaloo of their departure was broken by an explosion in the back room. Elwood had been refueling a lantern, which by some mishap had exploded. Elwood had received some burns and cuts in the face. I sent him to the aid station at once. There went our efficient communications sergeant. Our radio man took his place. Now we really had the second string at our company headquarters.

The first one to be tested was our acting communications sergeant. A few rounds of artillery came in while I was talking on the phone with the left flank platoon leader—the furthest away separated by an open area which invited enemy artillery anytime anyone crossed

it. The phone went dead. I turned saying, "The phone line to the 1st Platoon is broken." At this the sergeant jumped to his feet and called two men. "Get the wire. Let's go!" They ran out to do their jobs.

A short time later the half-frozen trio came back. The sergeant proudly reported, "We repaired the old line and laid a new one. Now we have two lines in that artillery alley. Let them try to break both lines at once!" I thanked them and knew that our communications section was in good hands.

When the mule team arrived with the rations and supplies, Collins organized the distribution exhibiting a minimum of his usual gruffness. I never had doubted Collin's personal courage nor his interest in his men's welfare, but at times I felt that his exasperated tone added unnecessary static to his communication with his men. Collins was eager to do his job well.

The routine company business, I was assured, would proceed well in a cooperative spirit.

24 January 1945

Orders from battalion came in to arrange for guides to meet our relief company after dark. So, we were to leave this miserable ice berg! I alerted the platoon leaders to be ready to move their platoons out quickly after their relief arrived. Large concentrations of men would invite enemy artillery. Platoon leaders were to instruct their new counterparts on their local situation as the change was being made. These were routine instructions.

The 1st platoon on the left flank was the first to be relieved. Its platoon leader brought the farmer to our CP. The farmer was very angry. I understood him to say that our men had taken a certain number of wine bottles from his cellar, and he wanted to be paid two thousand francs. I asked the platoon leader if he knew that his men had taken the bottles. He wasn't sure. The arrival of the incoming company commander reminded me of the more important business at hand. The farmer continued his harangue. I lost patience with him and told him that he should be grateful we had allowed him to stay on the battle line. His claim of wine loss could not be of prime importance to me. We were fighting a war. This was communicated in loud English and some French words with many

accompanying gestures. (The platoon leader later told me he had paid the farmer off.)

It didn't take long to go over the existing conditions with the incoming company commander. His company was in the 110th regiment of our own division. He was soon busy establishing phone contact with his platoons as they went into position.

Collins brought in a huge French Moroccan—the head man of the mule team. Collins was exasperated because the black man didn't understand English, but more so because the mule team didn't want to carry back our mortars and machine guns. "Lieutenant, tell him in French that they have to carry our guns back for us," Collins asked me impatiently. My search for words began. Slowly and calmly I pieced my sentences, explaining that we were leaving this place and that our guns were too heavy for our men to carry uphill. The mules would have to carry them. The Moroccan beamed with understanding and with a flow of French, said they wanted to load up as quickly as possible. Yes, Yes. I told Collins to show them where the guns and mortars were, and they both went out.

All of our men were on their way out now. I joined the rear of the column of widely spaced mules. They were going at a fast pace. When the column reached that open space we called artillery alley, an artillery shell whirled in. We threw ourselves to the ground. The explosion came near the center of the column. One mule was killed. One man was slightly wounded. Amid continual loud bursts of French, the load of the dead mule was quickly redistributed and the pace increased to a slow run. The column turned abruptly in the open space toward the steep wooded slope as a short cut—instead of following the established trail with a more gentle ascent up the draw. Each mule skinner grabbed the tail of his mule to help him climb uphill. I had to climb on my own power at the same rate of speed. I dared not lag behind. This short cut was not even a trail. At times the mules would balk at the slope, and I was grateful for the short pauses. I got so accustomed to climbing uphill that when we reached the flat ground above, walking erect seemed unusual and became painful. I found the company assembled at a group of houses and received orders to accompany McCoy to the new area.

The muscles at my groins became so painful that I could walk only in half steps. The company was in good spirits. I asked some of the

old members of the 1st Platoon about the wine incident. They laughed and then pretended to be serious in asking, "What wine bottles?"

I could hardly take a step without pain. I thought, "How can I possibly follow McCoy, with his long strides, at the new area?" Pride would not allow me to suggest that one of our platoon leaders take my place. I went to Dr. Shiffman and explained my predicament. "Is it all right if I give you something for the pain which will put you to sleep?" he asked. "No, I can't sleep. I have to leave right away," I answered. Dr. Shiffman then gave me a shot with a hypodermic needle saying, "This will fix you up." I didn't ask what kind of shot it was, but the effect was magical. After a short while, the pain was gone, and I could walk with relative ease.

Dr. Shiffman told me that one my officers and several of my men were being evacuated with frostbite and trench foot. I wasn't surprised. Bellows was the officer; it was quite a loss.

I left one of the platoon officers in charge of the company; I'd be back or meet them elsewhere. One of the jeep drivers drove me to battalion headquarters. This CP was located in what was once a magnificent estate. The expansive and wooded grounds were fenced, and handsome gate houses guarded the entrances. Deep in the middle of the enclosed forest were two stately houses (or so they seemed in their weak silhouettes against the trees). The lower floor of one house was still full of activity even though the hour was late and most of the packing was completed.

I found a quiet, empty room on the second floor. Picking my way through broken glass and small debris, I propped myself against an exterior wall, avoiding the broken window areas. Before I could sleep, I discovered a possible reason why the room was not popular. In the garden below was a battery of chemical mortars. I went to the window and noticed that the mortars were larger than our 81 mm mortars. These were 4.5 inch mortars capable of delivering high explosives or gas warfare rounds. Now I was uneasy. Surely this location would be a good target for German artillery. At intervals, the battery would fire furiously away, shouting signals and dropping rounds down the tubes as soon as the previous ones had been ejected. I half-dozed only through sheer exhaustion.

Suddenly a bewildering explosion brought me to my feet. A quiet pause followed. I went to the window and guessed that one round had been put in a tube before another had cleared it. This had caused the explosion. No one seemed to be hurt, and the signal shouting resumed above the zooming, hollow sounds of the propellant charges. I went back to sleep.

25 January 1945

In the morning, after I had eaten a K-ration, I visited the larger house. By now, debris was a normal part of my environment, but the ballroom of this mansion was a particularly pitiful sight. The Germans had evidently used it as a headquarters, but I couldn't accurately blame them for all the destruction.

The ballroom was vandalized. Its crystal chandelier had been deliberately cut down and it lay askew in the middle of the parqued floor—with a scattering of glistening crystals in all directions. One leg of the grand piano had been axed, and it stood at an awkward angle, like a wounded thoroughbred animal. What sort of men would avenge themselves against these symbols of beauty and culture? A framed photograph of Hitler was among the broken furniture pieces, but this was certainly no object for pity.

Jeeps took the colonel's advance group to our new area. We were to replace a battalion from the 7th Infantry Regiment (3rd Division) at Osthein in the plains north of Colmar. Our company sector was in the western outskirts of Osthein on an east-west road with foxholes directly in front of the typical row of houses. Our company CP was to be a concrete bunker built by the Germans a few yards behind our line. The company commander I was to relieve said that he would have guides for each platoon to expedite the exchange—particularly because the nights had been very foggy.

To our front was a flat open space interrupted to our left front by a straight tree-lined road that eventually disappeared into the forest. Further to our left, the open space ended at a forest line. Our company sector had an isolated house 150 yards to the front which was manned only during daylight hours. From the church steeple at Osthein one could see Colmar five miles away. This steeple was a favorite target for German 88 guns. I was not anxious to see Colmar from the steeple.

We were driven to Requewihr, the small town to which our companies had been transferred. We began the three-mile march calculated for us to reach our position after dark.

The relief was accomplished as quietly as possible. Elwood had rejoined the company, and he immediately set to work installing our network of phones to platoon and squad leaders. The fog in this plain was so thick that I had trouble finding our own bunker after I had gone only a short distance away. Knowing the password for the night gained new importance.

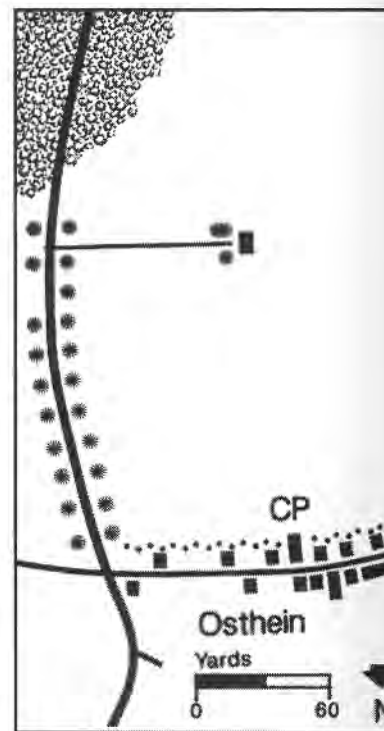
Jerry welcomed us with a pounding of artillery and mortar fire, but our foxholes were deep and our bunker offered us German-built security. We had no casualties. We had been left a map with an overlay of protective mortar fire targets, but I hoped we would not have to use them tonight.

26 January 1945

At daybreak we sent out a squad to the house to our front as an observation post. Next, we designated targets for our 60mm mortars for close-in protective fire. We coordinated these with the 81mm mortars for further out targets. Now I could call mortar fire by a coded designation—such as C-3—and expect reasonable accuracy. This was normal practice, but because of the thick fog, some of our 60mm targets were unusually close to our own line.

We received some replacements, among them Lieutenant Campbell. He had been with I Company before I joined the company and was now returning from the hospital. I assigned him to the 3rd platoon which had no platoon leader. It was often said that a man returning from the hospital had to overcome renewed fears. Collins told me that Campbell didn't seem like the same man, but then who is exactly the same after five long months. Campbell showed absolutely no signs of nervousness, but he was quick to declare the legitimate needs of his new platoon. To me, this indicated that he was concerned for his men, not himself.

Before nightfall, our men at the observation post joined us for the night. The night brought its terrifying fog. We were as quiet as possible; since we could not see for more than a couple of feet, our ears would have to serve us well.



25–29 Jan. Our front was bordered by a tree-lined road and had a single house in view.

Several men on the line called in reports of a German patrol. It was estimated to be near the house to our front. I called battalion for 81mm mortar fire by targets. We heard the explosions. Then we heard a series of bursts from a burp gun . . . perhaps a parting gesture. I called for targets further out.

These plains were ideal as “tank country.” We kept our men alerted for tank movement sounds. This was just something else to add to the apprehensive mood already established by the blinding fog. Collins and I took turns staying awake.

27 January 1945

After the sun burned off the fog, life stirred normally—even cheerfully. My fears that the Germans might have booby-trapped our observation post house were unfounded.

We were accustomed to settling down for the night with little or no movement on our part. Some trigger-happy man might not wait for the response to the password.

28 January 1945

It was shortly before day break when reports began to come in. A Jerry patrol, reported from two or more men on our line, offered opportunities for triangulation to spot their location on my map. I called for 81mm mortar fire on a designated target and alerted all men to be awake and active. More reports began to pour in. They’d give me their own locations, the approximate direction and range. Their conflicting reports indicated that there was more than one patrol. I called for fire on a series of targets on the battalion phone. I had one phone to each ear. The German patrols or units began firing their burp guns and rifles. As the patrols were reported closer, I switched to the phone to our own mortars, indicating targets for them. Our machine guns were cross-firing. Our men were firing their rifles into the fog without visible targets. At this time the bunker door opened and in walked Paul and Pop! “Boy, am I glad to see you!” I said, “Here, come take over.” I called for mortars to lay down fire on the closest line of predetermined targets.

Paul said sleepily, “You know the situation, Buddy. I don’t. You’re doing fine. Pop and I are both dead tired. Wake us up for breakfast.” Exhausted, they lay down on the bunks.

Of course I realized he was right. I kept directing fire using all three phones. The German fire was now reduced to one unit or general direction. The reports indicated that the Germans were retreating, and I began "rolling" our mortar fire out to catch them on the way back. Soon the hectic moments lost their momentum and everything quieted down.

It really had not been much of an attack, but the fog had escalated its proportions. In the daylight only a few dead Germans were found near our observation house. Their wounded were probably carried back . . . unseen in the fog. But I was grateful to know that our defensive system worked well under pressure. Paul and Pop slept on. When they awoke I tried to vent my anger at them, but they countered with stories of the wonderful time they had spent in Paris. With them back, everything seemed normal again.

The night was unusually quiet except for a few harassing rounds which came in. The usual fog indicated a hidden danger.

29 January 1945

In that early hour before daybreak, when it was more difficult to keep awake, we were reactivated by a long burst of our own machine gun with a short burp gun burst mixed in with it. What was up? The report came that two Germans had come in within a few feet of our line. The fog did not have to lift very much before everyone could see the two bodies. These two Germans had been walking arsenals, each with as many guns and grenades as he could carry. Theirs had been a suicidal mission, hoping to do as much damage as possible before they were killed. They may not have planned to come as close as they did, but the fog they depended on for protection had upset their sense of distance. Our half hidden machine gunner had seen their shadowy figures first and fired before they had a chance to spray their fire. What urged these fanatics to their mission?

Paul received battalion orders for a night attack. The unique part of these orders was that I Company would be in battalion reserve. It seemed to us that we were never in reserve in attack orders. Paul asked me to take over the 2nd platoon since it had no platoon leader. I would have preferred the 1st platoon, but it had had a platoon leader for some time and this was not a matter of choice. The attack was toward Colmar with the small town of Houssen as the objective.

The reports from the two lead companies attacking through the forest reminded some of us of Huertgen Forest. When the objective was reached our company remained in reserve in a defensive position. A change in weather and terrain had eliminated the fog.

30 January 1945

Our company sector contained a very small, cabin-sized house which was used as the Company CP. The platoons were dug-in against artillery and mortar fire. The weather was still cold but bearable.

We received a few replacements including a lieutenant who took over the 2nd platoon. Among the replacements were two former members of my original weapons platoon returning from the hospital. One of them was Sergeant William Beasley. He came spreading nonchalant cheer in all directions: "The war will soon be over now that Beasley is back!" I remembered he had left us as a casualty with the same disposition during the first mortar attack I was involved in, way back in early October.

The other returning man was Private Sanford in the mortar section. He also had enjoyed his hospitalization period. By chance, he had run into his brother, a paratrooper, in one of the rear areas. His brother had given Sanford his own carbine. I admired it. This one had a folding stock and a graduated rear sight. Our own carbines had an adjustable sight for only two ranges, and I preferred to carry the heavier M-1 rifle.

31 January 1945

Our position gave us a false sense of security. We did not expect an attack, and we were not receiving much artillery or mortar fire. And since these incoming rounds were so widely spaced, some men left their foxholes for long periods even though they had been cautioned to stick close to their holes.

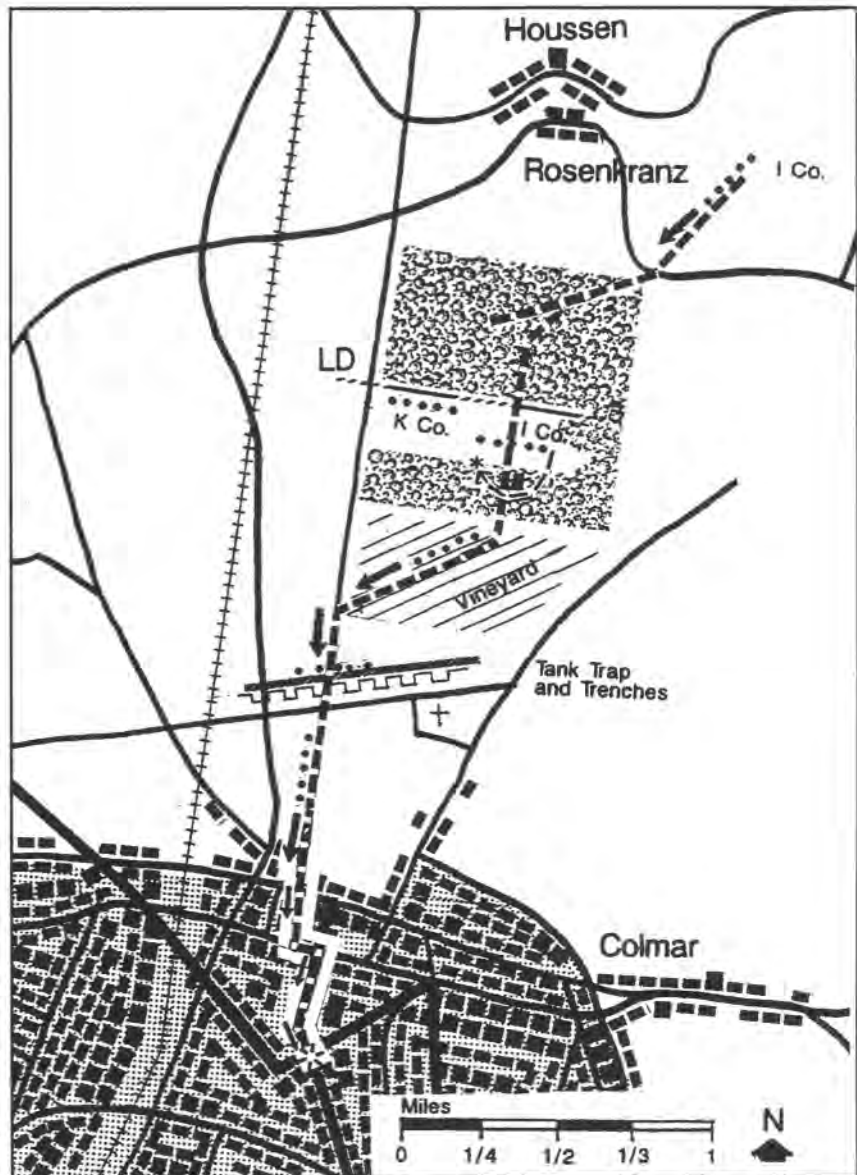
One single mortar shell exploded and wounded Sanford before he could duck into his hole. Why? He had just come back from the hospital! Our aid man tended to him, and he was placed on a stretcher. He was not suffering much pain—the morphine the aid man gave him had begun to take effect. As the stretcher bearers came toward me, I said lightly, "Well, Sanford, there you go again."

He stopped the bearers long enough to hand me his new carbine saying, "Lieutenant, hold on to it 'till I get back."

"I will, and come back soon." I was grateful. Sanford was entrusting me with his prized possession—which he knew I wanted.

That night I manipulated the carbine and thought of breaking it down to clean it before zeroing it in the next day, but something else distracted me and I put it away.

Entering Colmar



Entering Colmar

1 February 1945

This being pay day, I was driven to battalion headquarters to pick up the payroll and our company clerk. Something about the circumstance seemed more officious than usual—at any rate, the process took more time.

Before I left headquarters, I ran into Captain Dulac. He'd just returned from the hospital. I was glad to see him; he'd been an excellent company commander. So much had happened since he left that disastrous day at Huertgen Forest. For one thing, I had transferred my loyalty to Paul as company commander. "Have you received your new assignment?" I asked him.

"Well, they have no company for me, so I'm assigned to the battalion staff, probably as S-2."

When we got back to the company area, the clerk and I set up a small table outdoors. We began paying a squad at a time in order to avoid having too many men away from their foxholes at any one time. This was a slow process. At three o'clock in the afternoon, when we were only half-way through paying the men, an order for a night attack came down to the company. We were going to Colmar! "Leave the company area by 1900 (7:00 p.m.). Attack from the line of departure at 2000 (8:00 p.m.). Maintain radio silence."

There was no time to lose. I picked up the money and threw it in the official bag. I had to return the unpaid portion of the payroll to headquarters. Before I left I remembered to give Stanford's carbine to the company orderly and asked him to clean it for me. I would use it in the night attack. After all the lengthy procedures in obtaining the payroll that morning, I practically dumped the money bag at headquarters and drove as fast as I could back to the company.

The orderly handed me the carbine, and I inspected it superficially. There was no time to zero it now. No matter.

1 – 2 February 1945

At 7:00 o'clock the sky was already dark this winter's evening. The company formed a column of platoons with Paul and the

company headquarters group at the front, and I fell in at the rear. Collins was attached to a tank which was to rendezvous with us later when we would reach a certain highway —since the tank couldn't negotiate through the woods with us.

The line of departure had been established at the edge of the woods facing an open space in the forest to our right front. It would take us some time to arrive at this line, but it seemed feasible to reach it in an hour. Even before I entered the thick woods at the rear of the column, I knew the pitch blackness that lay ahead. The low-toned message was repeated back to me: "Keep in touch with the man in front." The moon had either not come up as yet or its light could not penetrate the thick foliage of the forest. At first the column moved slowly through the trail, like so many blind men, each touching the other. At this rate, we would not reach our line of departure in time. As our eyes readjusted, the light seemed to increase enough to see a few feet ahead. The pace quickened and brought about the dreaded accordion effect—catching up with the man in front and stopping abruptly after bumping against him, followed by low curses. The pace evened out.

The terrible message echoed back to me: "We lost contact!" Movement stopped. I worked my way up to the remaining head of the column. I asked in low tones, "How long ago did you lose contact?"

"I don't know. Ten minutes, maybe. I thought the man was in front of me." By the length of the remaining column, I figured that Paul had certainly no more than two platoons. (Why was I plagued with leading lost men? I was never blessed with a sense of direction.) The column had stopped, not only after losing contact, but also after realizing the trail had vanished.

More quick questions and answers. We concluded that the trail must have angled to the left. "Let's back-track and find the trail." I said, taking the lead. I had spoken as if the trail were a paved road, easily identified. How would I find it in this gloomy forest?

At a likely spot, I turned the column abruptly to the right into what seemed like the lost trail. The luminous dial of my watch told me it was nearly 8:00 o'clock. I dared not move faster for fear I would lose still another part of the column. There was an explosion to our front. We were going in the right direction. We came to the opening

out of the woods. Paul came running toward us. "Where on earth have you been?" I've already committed the men I had." It was shortly after 8 o'clock.

I managed to say that we had been lost, but by now Paul was deploying the latecomers into the spread formation of the rest of the company. The explosion we'd heard was that of a shu mine. One of our men had stepped on one at a protruding edge of the woods to our left. The wounded man calmly awaited the stretcher bearers which would follow us.

Colonel McCoy broke radio silence and asked about I Company's position in slang code. Paul answered similarly that we had left the line of departure at the designated time. McCoy erupted. Forgetting any semblance of code, he said he had not given the order to attack. The other companies were not yet in position. (So, they'd also had trouble in the woods.) We were to hold our position until K Company came up abreast of us on our right.

Paul didn't have to stop our advancing line. A German machine gun to our right front pinned us down in the open on a gentle slope. Paul, Pop and I hit the ground next to Lieutenant Campbell who was a few yards behind his 3rd platoon. The stream of bullets skimmed over the open slope. Several German hand grenades exploded near us. One of Campbell's men seemed to be hit. Campbell anxiously raised his head and shoulders by pushing down on his two hands—for a second only. He half-cried and slumped down, hit by the bullets flying over us. "Where were you hit?" I asked hollowly. He turned over to face up and groaned loudly and rhythmically. I knew how unnerving the sounds of a wounded man were—particularly to new replacements. I reached out and touched his shoulder feeling stupid as I said, "Hold it down, you'll be all right." He breathed heavily a few times and held on to one last breath before he relaxed suddenly. I sought his pulse anxiously at the wrist and felt nothing. Campbell was dead! Paul told me to take over Campbell's platoon. Later, before leaving, I stuck his bayoneted rifle into the ground beside him and attached the bandage from his kit to the top of the rifle stock for the stretcher bearers to find him more easily.

To our front was a house near the edge of the woods. A group of men from our unpinned left flank found a ravine which took them

behind the house and captured some Germans in it. Then they proceeded to the right to fight it out with the machine gun which had pinned us down.

We seemed to be receiving fire from our right rear. Paul radioed McCoy to keep K Company from mistaking us for Jerries. Soon McCoy radioed that K Company was now abreast of us. I told the 3rd platoon sergeant, TSgt. Norman Bayne, that I was replacing Campbell as platoon leader and added that I would need his help in starting the platoon to move—the squads were widely deployed, and some of the men would not know Campbell had been replaced. The platoon advanced at his commands which the men recognized. We went past the ravine and out of the woods.

The platoon was now discernible as a unit. A large vineyard was spread out ahead of us with its wire fence rows parallel to our line of advance. We entered the vineyard with three squad columns abreast separated by several rows. I suppose that it was at this time, when the men could see me working with Bayne, that they accepted my leadership. This was no time for an explanation of the change, if such were needed. I led the squad column on the right and the Bayne, the one on the left, keeping the third column between us. We moved cautiously but at a fairly good rate. Panic seized me momentarily when I thought of the possible location of a German machine gun at the end of one of the long rows. I dismissed the thought as the chance we'd taken for greater speed. There were no such machine guns. When we emptied out of the rows, the highway to Colmar was nearly in front of us.

Once on the highway, other platoons joined behind us, and I understood that Lieutenant Peer had his K Company behind ours. Collins had guided the tank down the highway and joined us.

As we started down the road with Paul and me leading the column, I wasn't surprised to see Colonel McCoy join us for a quick check of our location on the map. He was never far behind us and would join us frequently. He warned us of a possible tank trap and of a running fret of trenches at the outskirts of the city.

Before we came to the trenches, Paul deployed the company into an open formation, and we advanced cautiously—only to find that the trenches were not manned! After jumping over the trenches and



TSgt. Norman Bayne, Third Platoon Sergeant.

advancing about 25 yards, we heard the whooshing of an artillery barrage directly over our heads. Hit the ground! The series of shells exploded directly in front of us. It was our own artillery! With one common thought everyone ran back to the security of the trenches. Another barrage followed. McCoy was shouting at his radio, "Stop that firing! Repeat, stop that firing! Are you trying to kill us?—Yes, we're already that far in!" Two men were wounded,

A bit shaken up—more by the irony of the incident—the men were regrouped, and the advance continued. At the edge of the city, a machine gun was protecting a hastily-built tank barricade. Their gun started firing. We threw ourselves down. Our tank answered their fire. The German crew came out to surrender. This was an encouraging sign.

The street fighting began in earnest. Several Germans were firing bursts from a tall log barricade at a gateway to the military barracks. We fired back, and they disappeared. Exhilarated, a group of us ran to the barricade and vied to reach the top first. From the top, we saw the Germans running down the street. I fired one round. Tried a second. Nothing happened! I cursed Sanford's carbine and asked below for someone's trusty M-1 rifle. The Germans had disappeared into a house before I could aim again. I gave the rifle back and jumped over the barricade. I pulled out my .45; I couldn't trust the carbine. Sergeant Bayne and I designated nameless men to investigate houses and cellars. Paul urged the men to move at a run. Some of the men came up with groups of prisoners. Some Germans insisted on fighting it out before being subdued, wounded, or killed.

The pace slowed down when we reached civilian streets. A German anti-tank gun positioned half-hidden at a street intersection held us up until it could be attacked from the rear. A few snipers tried to hold out from second story windows. At a certain point, McCoy told us we had reached our objective. I never had known what street or avenue had been our objective. Paul instructed our men to enter houses on the right side of the street. McCoy ordered K Company to the left side.

As the men behind us left the sidewalk to go into houses, our lead group entered the small front room of a house only to be met by an irate owner. I could understand only that this civilian wanted no

part of us. One of our men pointed his rifle at the civilian and roared at him to take his wife and daughter to the cellar. The three of them reluctantly grabbed some food items and scurried around a bit before going down the cellar steps. The wife made one or more trips for forgotten items of no interest to us.

The room was dark except for the shaded light from a Victorian stained glass fixture over the round dining table. Someone came in to tell us that he had heard McCoy radio regimental headquarters that our battalion was in position at our objective. He had had to repeat his report because regiment could not believe we had completed our mission ahead of schedule. We'd been the first unit to enter Colmar!

Collins came in enraged and waving a handkerchief-bandaged hand. "Look what those damn bastard Germans did! I'll show 'em they can't do this to me. Those ____." Pacing about he cursed with words I didn't know existed in his extensive vocabulary. I interrupted his ranting: "Calm down, you've got yourself a Purple Heart and at worst, a million-dollar wound. Stop griping and go let the aid man fix it up for you before it gets infected." Collins went to the aid station and was sent back to the rear. Craggy as he was, Collins was a great soldier.

Several of us sat around the table exhausted. We tried to sleep with our heads on our arms. Others propped themselves against the walls. Our front door flung open to reveal early morning light as a young GI came storming in. He asked excitedly, "What outfit is this?"

"I Company," someone volunteered.

"Do you know there's a sniper down and across the street on the second floor? What are you doing about it?" he demanded.

"Nothing. That's beyond our line."

"But he's killing people like you and me! Don't you care?" He was screaming almost hysterically.

Someone answered him. "Listen man, we were at it all night. It's some other outfit's turn." Disgusted with us, he slammed the door behind him as he left.

A tank rattled by shortly afterwards. There was the sound of a huge explosion. We were reactivated. We went to the door to see. A

French-driven tank had been hit by an anti-tank gun. As the tank commander tried to get out, the sniper the young GI had told us about picked him off. A French ambulance came whizzing down the street as if to an auto accident. An aid man got out and climbed the tank. The sniper's bullets dropped him to the ground. A French nurse in coveralls got out of the ambulance. She carried the aid man toward the ambulance where other hands took over. Then she climbed the tank, took the commander out of the turret, and methodically took him off the tank and carried him to the ambulance. She went back into the tank but came back out without comment. The sniper had gallantly spared her. By the time the ambulance left, another tank was ready to advance and point its gun at the sniper's hideout. It boomed away at windows for a while and then led the way for other tanks which followed.

We had watched as impersonally as if the scene were on a movie screen. Dazed, we went back to our table and slept.

One by one we began to move about, still drugged with sleep. Pop was making his daily report to battalion on the company strength. He didn't mark Campbell as KIA, killed in action, even though he had been only a few feet away when Campbell died. Pop had always marked dead casualties as MIA, missing in action, or WIA, wounded in action, until he received confirmation from the medics to soften the blow to some family receiving the War Department telegram.

Later in the day our aid man joined us. I asked him if he had found Campbell's body. "Yes", he answered, "But he wasn't dead. The stretcher bearers took him back to the aid station."

Not dead! I could have sworn that Campbell died beside me. Never again would I trust my own diagnosis. Actually Campbell died in a rear hospital a week later as a result of the wounds he had received.

The stoppage in the carbine bothered me. I disassembled the carbine down to its basic parts. This time I took the trigger housing group apart. Outwardly and assembled, this group of parts had looked clean; disassembled, I found it clogged with the original sticky cosmoline in which it had been packed at the factory! Three of us had owned it and depended on it to save our lives; no one had bothered to clean it properly. I cleaned it meticulously, determined that this carbine would serve me well.

Near nightfall our company moved to the opposite edge of the city to set up a defensive position. We felt safe. The city was ours except for a few German resistance groups. Our men were positioned in houses with a light guard for the night. Our company CP was located in a bakery at a street corner. Across the street was a large convent. We didn't bother to investigate it. The baker and his family welcomed us cheerfully. He broke out a bottle of pink champagne which he said he had hidden from the Germans for this occasion. We toasted the liberation of Colmar. The baker told us that this city was the birthplace of Bartholdi, the sculptor of the Statue of Liberty. We chatted without really comprehending most of the time. We relaxed, and one by one, the headquarters group found floor space to turn in for the night. No guard was set at the doorway. We felt safe.

3 February 1945

In the morning, a priest dressed in his black cassock came from the convent and talked to the baker. The baker then made us understand that there were two dozen German soldiers in the convent cellar who wanted to surrender peaceably. The news came as a shock; suppose these Germans had been a resistance group. They could have played havoc with us the night before without a guard to alert us.

Paul asked me to use a detail of men from the 3rd platoon to get the Germans out of the cellar and send them to battalion headquarters. Sergeant Bayne and half a squad of men joined me, and we followed the priest into the convent. The Germans were in a cellar hidden in the dark, tall crawl space beneath the building. It seemed that the Germans did not trust us and would not come out until they assured themselves that we would not kill them. In the dark space, except for the beam of one flashlight, I wondered if any of them would change their minds. At our "Kommen sie out," the unarmed Germans slowly began to come out.

Once outside, the Germans were lined up in the street, and our men began frisking them for hidden weapons. A group of nuns had followed us, carefully keeping out of our way, each with a look of woe on her face. The nuns spoke to individual German soldiers with great concern receiving silent nods in return. A nun gave one of the Germans her small rosary which he pocketed quickly. One of the nuns spoke English. She pleaded with me not to take their

personal possessions—watches, rings—from the Germans. I was uncomfortable in being cast in the role of a villain. I promised her I wouldn't. I turned to the sergeant and told him of my promise. His answer, "Lieutenant, we'd never do that," didn't convince me; but at least the nun seemed satisfied. The sergeant and his detail marched the prisoners to battalion headquarters.

For sure, tonight, we would post a guard at the CP.

4 February 1945

A cautious small bell called the faithful to Mass. The men and women, invariably dressed in their Sunday black clothes, walked impassively to church. (It was reported later that in another section, even the duel between a resistant sniper and our men did not disturb their unruffled demeanor.) I followed the steady stream of people to the basement of a church. It looked like the basement facilities many churches use as temporary facilities or in over-crowded situations, but here the main facilities above it were empty. The basement was used as a precaution. I suddenly realized I was fully armed, and it bothered me just enough to stand at the rear. I didn't feel any more like a stranger than I did at any strange church where people accepted me as just another Catholic from out of town. The sermon was unimpassioned in tone. The attitude was one of devotion and prayer. Eight or ten hours later, my folks would also be attending Mass, but I doubted that the congregation could be as austere as this one.

After Mass I hurried to our CP. There, the priest from the convent brought in a portly man in civilian clothes and told our baker-host that a German Major wanted to surrender, but only to an American officer of equal rank. The baker conveyed this message to us, adding that the civilian knew where the Major was but would not disclose this information until he was assured of the arrangement.

Paul phoned McCoy and related the conditions for the Major's surrender. McCoy said that he'd be damned if he would come down to our company CP for that purpose. "Tell them that you'll have a jeep drive the Major to my CP." Paul told them that he'd send one of our men with them to bring the Major safely to our CP and that a jeep would be waiting here. The baker relayed this message to the priest, and the three of them jabbered away for some time. Finally, they agreed to the procedure and left with our man to go to the convent.

They returned some twenty minutes later. The portly "civilian" was dressed resplendently in a German uniform! Properly escorted, he rode proudly to our battalion headquarters.

The order to be ready to move out came down from battalion. We fell into the battalion column and marched into the Colmar Forest to the south. After advancing a few miles we reached a bivouac area and dug in for the night.

5 February 1945

The word got around that Father Cummins would say Mass in a quiet spot in the woods and that we would have time to attend before moving out of the area. I found the spot.

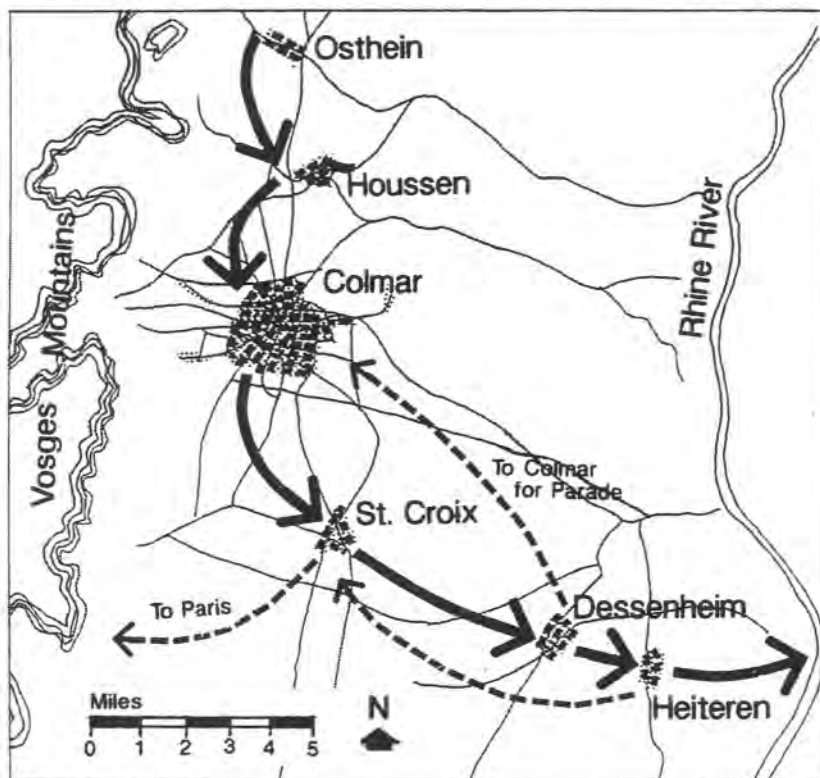
At the time for the sermon Father Cummins was an indignant man. He began, "Last Wednesday I was present at the disgraceful execution of a man of this regiment convicted as a deserter. If the Army wanted to make an example of Private Eddie Slovik to show what happens to cowards, it chose the wrong man. Slovik was not a coward. He was one of the bravest men I've ever met. Before he faced the firing squad he told me, 'Father, I'm getting a break that the fellows up on the line don't get. Here I get to sit with you and I know I'm going to get it. I know I'm going to die in a few minutes. But up there on the line you never know when its coming, and it's that uncertainty that gets you!' But he was not afraid to die. He died courageously. We all know what we're here for. We know our duty. We know that discipline must be maintained but not by making an example of a man like Slovik. We know about that uncertainty and that is why we must place our trust in God . . ." Father Cummins finished his sermon on a religious vein and proceeded calmly with his Mass.

Father Cummins had spoken harshly about the Army's action, and I worried that this sort of talk might get him in trouble with his superiors. When I returned to the company, I asked Paul if he knew anything about this particular execution. Paul said that he had received a copy of Colonel Rudder's message to the regiment on it and that it had been read to the platoons while I'd been at Mass earlier. He gave it to me to read.

In essence, the message stated the hope that Slovik's death would be a lesson to those with doubts about the price that must be paid to

win the war. It disclosed the fact that this was the first execution for desertion in eighty years of American history. So indeed the execution had been intended as a lesson, as an example; but the surprising fact was that this was the first lesson in eighty years!

An officer from battalion gave us the verbal attack order. We were to capture St. Croix enPlains. The plan was on a grand scale for such a small village, but we assumed it was bristling with German rifles. The battalion would attack with a line of companies, supported by tanks from the 12th Armored Division. The attack at 2:15 in the afternoon would be preceded by a barrage of artillery on the village. I was impressed by the meticulous planning, but I was irritated every time the battalion officer would refer to the village as "Saint Crowix" rather than using the French pronunciation. I'd even have preferred the English translation of "Holy Cross" to his English pronunciation. If I were to die here, I shuddered that it might be said that I croaked at Saint Crowix!



26 January–13 February. The drive to the Rhine River.

We advanced through the forest to our designated company sector in the line of departure at the edge of the tree line. I led the 3rd platoon since we still had no replacement for Campbell. Our tanks joined us. This we liked. With the companies in place at the edge of the forest, the artillery barrage began on time. We would have to cross a flat open plain before we reached St. Croix 500 yards away.

When the artillery fire lifted, our wide band of men, interspersed with tanks, advanced over the flat terrain. To keep the enemy pinned down, we and our tanks fired our weapons as we went. I looked to my right and left. What a beautiful sight this organized show of strength was. At St. Croix, now a hundred yards to our front, several houses and barns were burning as a result of the barrage. We rushed those last few yards ready for village fighting. The village was empty except for a few civilians who had left their cellars to douse the fires. "Where are the Germans?" "All gone", they replied. Well, not exactly all: four German soldiers had stayed behind waiting to surrender. These came out of a cellar doubtfully glad to see us. Almost immediately this became known as "The Battle of Dry Run!" It was a good field exercise, but I pitied the poor civilians who were left homeless by the "liberators."

6 February 1945

We marched from St. Croix to Dessenheim some six miles closer to the Rhine River. The battle there was for quarters. Battalion headquarters groups had arrived there earlier in jeeps and spotted the best buildings. We were so weary from walking, there was no fight left in us. Any place would do, just so we were off our feet.

7 February 1945

Conditions were stable enough for me to go back to the finance officer for the unpaid portion of the payroll. It was relatively easy to pick up where I had left off on pay day. Some of the casualties had not been paid, but these were not difficult to account for. There were a few men who I knew were with us, but I couldn't find them. This was the trouble with trying to pay men at another time other than pay day when they hung around to be paid.

After dark we received orders to prepare for a liberation parade in Colmar. Everyone started to clean up as best he could—at least to

remove the mud from his combat uniform. Weapons were expected to pass critical inspection.

8 February 1945

Trucks picked up our battalion to drive us to Colmar. The schedule was tightly planned: The parade through the streets, a ceremonial formation at a "drill" field, and the quick departure to relieve some outfit somewhere. In having to return the remnants of the payroll to the finance officer, I missed the parade through the streets lined with people. I caught up with the company at the ceremonial formation. The open space, lined by four and five story buildings, echoed with the American and French national anthems. But all the brass wasn't in the band; generals in various uniforms formed a long line. Salutes and more salutes. Upon dismissal—the mad rush for trucks.

The trucks drove us in the general direction of St. Croix, past Dessenheim to Heitres several miles closer to the Rhine. We relieved a unit of the 75th Division.

9 February 1945

Our CP was in a small barn. The farmer kept a close eye on his chickens, and we restricted our diet to hot meals from our kitchen. Motorized patrols toward the river disclosed that the Germans had indeed left the French soil. All of France was now in Allied hands. The company was on guard duty, but the conditions were not tense.

10 February 1945

This was my birthday, but it escaped my notice. We had been on the move for so long that routine chores were accomplished with a concern for the next move. Would we follow the Germans across the Rhine? I couldn't believe that we would stay here very long.

11 February 1945

Paul came back from battalion headquarters with no news about our next move. He sat down and said in an off-handed manner, "Buddy, how'd you like to be battalion S-2?"

I stumbled for words while my thoughts ran amuck. Was I slipping as a company officer? Was I being kicked upstairs? "I thought Captain Dulac was S-2. What's with him?"

"His was a temporary assignment. The job calls for a first lieutenant."

"Well, there's no promotion involved. Sure, I'd be in a rear area, but in this battalion that's no great advantage." Ages ago I would have been ecstatic at the prospect of being battalion intelligence officer. Many considered it a soft job.

"The job is open if you want it."

I had to know, "Do you want me to take it?"

"No, McCoy gave me first choice of you, but I want you to make the decision."

So, Paul didn't want me to go. "The hell with it. I'll stick with you."

"Good! I was hoping you'd say that. We've been through too much together to be separated now."

12 February 1945

The question of crossing the Rhine remained unanswered, but we were alerted to our relief. By noon a unit of the French 4th Moroccan Regiment over-ran us—the word "relieved" would have implied order and discipline which were not applicable to the carefree French soldiers. We had spared the farmer his chickens in the interest of better relations. The French arrivals immediately pounced on them. We heard the farmer's frantic objections over the alarmed cackling. By the time we left, the feathers had settled to the ground, and the French were roasting chickens.

Trucks drove us back to St. Croix.

13 February 1945

The natives had good reason to be less than hospitable. We waited for orders to move to a training area. The Rhine crossing was not in the picture.

Paris Leave



Paris Leave

The battalion order was issued for two men from our company to go on a 72-hour pass to Paris. It was my turn! It was also Elwood's turn. We would leave from battalion headquarters in the morning. I didn't want to be caught without enough money so I borrowed some from Pop. He also gave me some money to buy some perfume for him to send to his girlfriend. I was filled with advice from all directions—pick up some cigarettes at the kitchen, they're better than money.

14 February 1945

We arrived at the kitchen area very early. I declared a state of emergency. Elwood and I needed clean clothes, cigarettes, everything. I found my overseas cap, a tie and a pair of trousers in my locker. One of the men gave me his clean shirt . . . approximately my size. Westgate filled my musette bag with cigarettes, C-rations, and extra clothing. I left my carbine with him but carried my .45 and my hunting knife . . . I felt undressed without them. "And don't forget your blanket. It's cold in those trucks." I was on my way to Paris attired as a war-like gypsy.

The truck, which left battalion headquarters, carried the lucky men from the various battalion units. I met Captain Riggs who told me he was a military police officer at battalion headquarters. The only other MP officer I had known was Lt. Schmidt, who had been killed during the Bulge.

We drove most of the daylight hours to Nancy where we met other Paris-bound truckloads at the French Army barracks. The latrines were built with long concrete troughs at floor level with thoughtfully designated foot locations. What ever had happened to toilet manufacturers in France? The Paris-pass operation was a routine one by now . . . Hooven went to Paris as early as November 1st—nevertheless, its efficiency was beginning to impress me as remarkable.

15 February 1945

During the early part of this 190-mile leg to Paris, the tortuous roads held our speed down. At first, we joked and laughed easily. We were all accustomed to the discomforts of riding in trucks. As

the day wore on we began to think that we'd never reach Paris. On stretches of good roads our driver picked up speed almost recklessly. We'd check our discouraging progress at comfort stops. The driver told us he was pushing it as best he could. . . he was just as eager as we were to get there. Who would think that a 190-mile trip could be so exasperating and exhausting? The driver alternated the driving with his assistant.

We ate our rations, notwithstanding the jostling, to break up the monotony. After dark the riders settled down, watchful of the speed. Our bodies ached. Our joints were stiff. We tried without success to sleep. Finally the sounds of the big city brought us to life.

The truck unloaded the officers at 11 o'clock that night at the Hotel Crillon in the Place de la Concorde. Our pass was dated to start in the morning; on Monday morning, three days later, the truck would pick us up.

As we registered, Captain Riggs and I agreed to plan some of our activities together. We'd keep in touch with each other. I was glad to leave the lobby behind an old bell boy carrying my steel helmet, gas mask, musette bag, and blanket roll. He looked so ridiculous carrying my field equipment. It was my equipment which was incongruous.

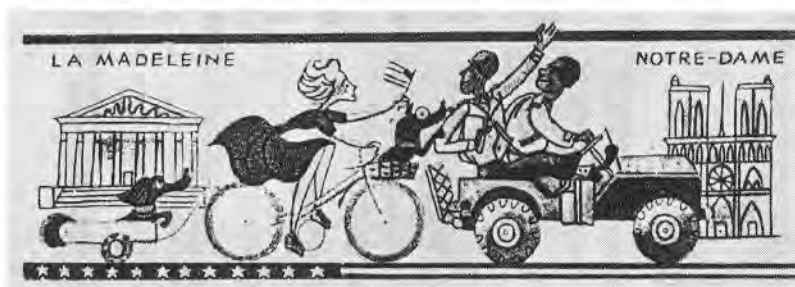
My room was huge and sumptuous with a bathroom to match. Abundance of space, not efficiency, was evident even in the closets. The bathroom featured a 7-foot long bathtub, a generously mirrored lavatory and two types of water closets . . . one of them turned out to be a bidet. My phone rang. It was Riggs: "Either they made a mistake or I'm paying a pittance for a palatial room!" I had been thinking the same thing.

"It's no mistake, I'm in the same splendid fix." We arranged to meet the following afternoon.

I soaked indulgently in a warm bath with enough water to swim in. What a luxury to be immersed in water from head to toes! But the effects of months of living in the dirt were not to be washed away so easily. No amount of soap could release the dirt from the knuckles of my rough and calloused hands. I looked with pleasure at the orderly, simple things reminiscent of home: The picture frames, the drapes, the electric light fixture, the bed with its clean sheets.

16 February 1945

Breakfast at the hotel dining room (practically empty) was more like brunch. The Army supplied this kitchen with some of the same items our own company kitchen received, but the French chefs knew how to transform the same foodstuffs into delicacies. Some of this miracle could be attributed to the service itself and to the environment: The waiter's expertise, the long array of silverware, the white table cloth, the sparkling glasses, the succession of white plates. My self-consciousness created the only discordant note. My indelibly dirty hands didn't belong here, and I couldn't hide them under the table cloth as easily as I could hide my combat boots. I wondered what Paul and Pop were eating out of their mess kits.



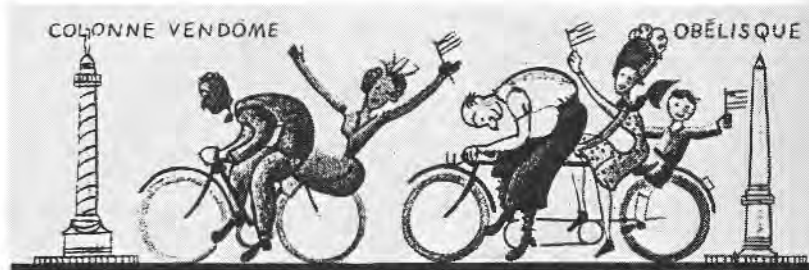
As I stepped out of the hotel, I found a bus about to leave on a guided tour. I decided to take it since it was probably the easiest way to see some of the land marks. The guide was an American of World War I vintage who had decided to stay in Paris. He had a special line of jokes for his soldier audience. We got out of the bus to see Notre Dame (the wondrous Cathedral was smaller than I had imagined it), Napoleon's tomb at Les Invalides, and the Unknown Soldier's tomb under the Arch of Triumph. France revered its soldiers in grandeur—the long dead ones.



There was a minimum of vehicular traffic on the streets because of the scarcity of gasoline. The taxicabs with squeaky horns were replaced by rickshaw-type enclosed cabs pulled by bicycles or motorcycles.



The women wore high heeled shoes, short skirts and big pompadour hairdos. It was an odd look, but then it'd been a long time since I'd seen anything that passed for fashion.



The guide pointed out a few bullet marks in building walls as evidence of the resistance, but fickle Paris suffered far more from wartime neglect than destruction.

Riggs was waiting for me at the Crillon. Together we asked the hall porter to secure us tickets to the Folies-Bergere for that evening. We had dinner at the hotel's dining room. Civilian restaurants were off-limits to us so as not to impinge on civilian food supplies. Riggs had experienced my same discomfiture at breakfast, but now together, we were at ease in the posh surroundings.

Riggs had already discovered the key to the subway system —the name of the train and the name of the destination point. It was easier to find one's way with the Metro than with the New York subways—and they were free to uniformed personnel.

The follies were a soldier's paradise: Beautiful half-naked girls, who made them ogle-eyed and open-mouthed, music, dancing, and comics who made them cry with laughter. This make-believe world made them forget themselves and the war for several hours. No wartime scarcities were evident; on the contrary, one lavish tableaux followed another. The bigger sets used opulent fabrics and materials not seen outside of Hollywood musicals. The costumes were elaborate and exotic, often featuring the nude figure. The feathers, silks and satins, the glitter and glamour, the sensual and the hilarious—they all contributed to the magic spell.

17 February 1945

I went shopping for gifts to send home. The saleslady at the perfume shop told me that perfume must match a woman's personality. Mother's was easy, a light bouquet of flowers. Girls, with whom I corresponded as the occasions permitted, were not too difficult to describe. I guessed that Pop's perfume would go to a flashing eyed brunette. For her I bought some heady scent.

I bought a necklace as a bonus for one of the four girls who would next write the best letter. I ruled out past performance. One beautiful girl consistently wrote about the wartime deprivations, meat coupons, gas rationing and nylons which were so scarce. I had received one of her letters at our dug-out in Huertgen Forest, and I had torn it up in disgust.

A photographer's shop came in view. I had my photograph taken. It would be a reassuring, proof positive item to send home. Cost: Six packs of cigarettes.

I walked aimlessly and soaked up the old world atmosphere.

Again Riggs and I went to the hall porter for tickets. This time for the Casino de Paris. He said we had orchestra seats. The seats were in one of the elevated side boxes at the same level as and near to the girls' runway. The format was very similar to that of the Folies-Bergere. When the girls came out on the runway and played toward the center seats, we had swishes of rear feathers in our faces. We enjoyed it all.

After the show Riggs and I sought an after-hours spot. We found one called Le Ciel. The tall room had church-like, fake gothic arches



Lt. Peña on Paris leave.

and a pulpit. Draught beer was served at long, common tables. Most of the people were Parisians with only a sprinkling of GI's. A "monk" was preaching a "sermon" in French from the pulpit. Every few sentences from the "monk" brought out guffaws from the audience. He spoke too fast for us to understand him, but we were infected by the laughter. Later we followed the crowd up some narrow stairs to a large room with a platform. The room was darkened except for a spotlight on the master of ceremonies. He told us of the beauties we were to see. Using a trick mirror arrangement, the first "beauty" appeared. She was a fat, ugly nude dressed as a Folies girl! Everyone howled at the parody while the MC continued to exalt her "fine" features. Her stringy, blonde hair ineptly decorated with fake flowers was described as her crowning glory. Others followed with the same hilarity. The Queen of Beauties came last. As an added attraction, she revolved clockwise (on a revolving platform below), throwing kisses at us with both hands as she turned upside down—as if standing on her head.

As a finale they had a GI sit in a chair on the platform. Suddenly, the queen of fat beauties seemed to be sitting on the GI's lap, stroking his hair. Of course, he was oblivious to her attentions simply because she was only the product of the mirror arrangement. Our stomachs hurt from laughing at the antics.

The subways ceased operating at midnight. It was now around 2 o'clock in the morning. We hailed a motorcycle cab. The cab driver said he'd drive us to the hotel for a number of francs which we calculated to be \$20.00. This was highway robbery; we weren't that far away. We resented being taken for fools. It was open season on soldier tourists. We walked leisurely back through the deserted quiet streets. After all, walking was now an occupational habit.

18 February 1945

The empty streets were wet with the morning dew. The obelisk at the center of the Place de la Concorde reached up toward a pearl-pink, overcast sky—it marked the spot where Louis XV and Marie Antoinette, among others, were guillotined. A turn to the left brought me in view of La Madeleine two blocks away. This mammoth Greek temple had been converted to a Catholic church. I attended Sunday Mass.



French postcard 1945.

It was a restful morning. After lunch Riggs and I went to the American Bar in the Champs-Elysees. We had thought that this bar would provide some link with the States. It was empty, thoroughly French, and disappointing. We drank our drinks while talking about our homes.

We returned to the hotel in time for me to attend a Sunday Tea Dance sponsored by the USO or Red Cross. There was such a predominance of Air Corps and staff officers in beribboned blouses and pinks that I had to force myself to enter the ballroom. Except for my tie, mine was a rough combat uniform. The American nurses and Red Cross girls were too much an attraction for me to worry about how I looked. I wanted to talk, to dance with an American girl, and if I were lucky, to have her have dinner with me. I spotted a pretty Red Cross girl. We danced and talked. She was very pleasant and laughed easily. Once in a while an Air Corps officer would cut in, but I'd get her back. She was a wonderful tonic; but by the time I asked her to dine with me, she graciously told me she already had a dinner date with the Air Corps officer.

Riggs asked me, "How did you do?"

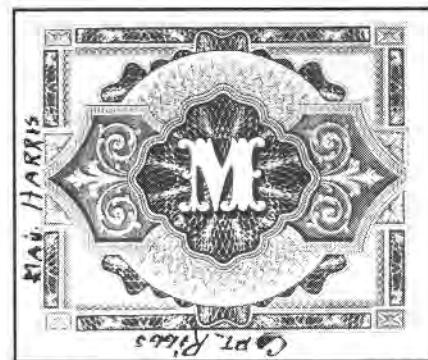
"I had fun, but I struck out. No dinner date."

After dinner Riggs and I went to a bar. This was our last night in Paris. A Major asked to join us. "My name is Harris. I'm an artillery man, and I want to drink with some front line men. All I've seen is rear area personnel. Let's have a party!" Before too many drinks, we were signing German marks for each other commemorating our party.

19 February 1945

The truck picked us up at 10 o'clock in the morning. My hangover had cleared up by then. We drove to some headquarter's building and waited in or near the truck for three hours while the driver tried to find out where we could join our battalion. From time to time he'd come out with a no-progress report. Finally he came out with the report that we were to drive toward Aachen and then to check again at a closer overnight stop for our final destination. Our division was presently entrained from Toul to Aachen.

Goodbye Paris, it was nice seeing you. Our group was full of hijinx as we left Paris—yelling at the girls—and then settling down for a long ride.



German mark. Signed souvenir of the last night in Paris.

We arrived at Rheims shortly after dark. We were to spend the night there. Accommodations were available. My tourist-architect instinct insisted that I find the famous cathedral. My common sense argued that I couldn't see the building in this blacked-out city, even if I could find it. I ended the conflict by joining Riggs and going to a small champagne bar. Rheims claimed to be the champagne capital of the world. At the dingy bar, low quality champagne was served as commonly as beer. We quickly had our fill.

20 February 1945

We drove to some small town in Belgium near Liege where the driver had been told he would obtain information regarding the location of our battalion. (I had hoped that we would stop at Liege, since it was rumored that honest-to-goodness ice cream was available there.) The driver was told that the information was not readily available and that we might just as well plan to spend the rest of the afternoon and the night there. We couldn't agree on whether we or our battalion was lost.

I walked thoughtfully down the main tree-lined avenue. This serene town showed none of the destruction of warfare. The small shops had little to offer me as a passer by.

21 February 1945

We wasted the morning waiting for instructions as to where to proceed to rejoin our battalion. Our driver, goaded by our men, threatened to leave without the long awaited instructions—we'd find our way somehow. Finally the message came in, and we took off.

We passed by Liege (no time for ice cream now) and drove on to Aachen. This was truly a dead city, leveled almost to the ground. We continued south toward Elsenborn, our destination. We stopped briefly at our regimental headquarters for further directions. Now we were among our own people.

I turned red with resentment at the sight of men drinking Coca Colas. I had not seen a Coke in six months. Was it really true that our rear area personnel enjoyed delights our front line men did not? I was going to protest about this on arriving at our company.

We arrived at battalion headquarters at night and were transferred to jeeps which were to take us to our company bivouac areas. The jeep driver dropped Elwood and me off saying that this was the general area in which I Company was located. Pup tents were scattered here and there, but it was too dark to see much. I asked, "Where is I Company's CP?"

"Up ahead, I think," said a voice from a pup tent. Where was ahead in the darkness? Elwood and I walked without direction. Suddenly, at a distance, I saw a walking silhouette with that particular swagger I knew so well. It was Paul. He entered a kitchen tent.

"Buddy! You're back. How on earth did you find us?"

"Well, it was easy. I saw you walking outside and, man, no one walks quite like you!" We all laughed while Paul disclaimed he walked with any peculiarities. Paul's surprise about my finding them really concerned the fact that they had just arrived after a march from Monschau.

The group in the tent included Pop and Westgate. We were glad to see each other. They were drinking Cokes. This crumbled my protest. "Cokes! Where's mine?" I was handed my share of two bottles.

My mail had accumulated while I was gone and included were belated birthday greetings and a dry but edible cake from my aunt. We celebrated my birthday with cake and cokes while I told them about my Paris trip.

"Pop, what color hair does your girl have?" I asked as I gave him the perfume he'd ordered.

"Blond."

Oops, I'd guessed wrong. "Good, this is concocted for blondes who like to live dangerously."

I showed them the necklace I'd bought as the prize in my letter writing contest. "Well, read your mail. Let's get this contest started," I was urged.

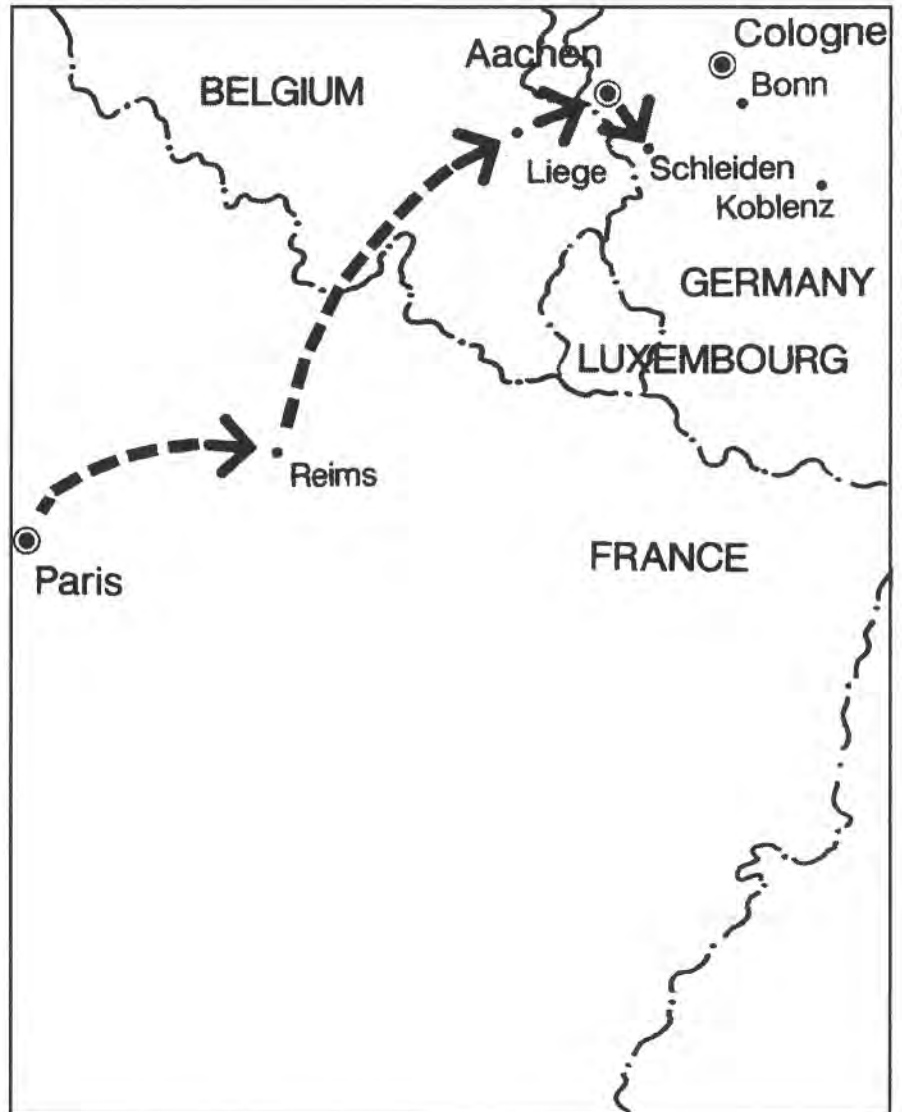
"This one is from Grace. She's now working as a part-time receptionist at a hospital while continuing her voice lessons. Cheerful but non-committal. Not bad. Now Ruth —her dad, a

colonel, has been transferred. Ummm. Yes. Yes. YES. She understands me better. Here's one from Mary Louise. Hometown girl. Uh huh. Uh huh. Good sense of humor. We have more in common. Sorry, no decision from the jury. One entry has yet to arrive." They registered feigned disappointment. (The fourth letter didn't arrive before I left the company, but I was asked at different times about the progress of the contest.)

I started telling of my misadventures in Paris by asking them if they had known before going to Paris what that second toilet fixture was for. I embroidered on my different experiments with this strange fixture to find out the function of the water fountain. The jokes were on me, of course, but I joined them as I watched them double up laughing.

It was good to be back with close friends.

As Far As Schleiden



VHS, 3.5
Microfilm
in color or
black and
white
1/2 inch

up to 100
feet
The length
is variable

As Far As Schleiden

22 February 1945

Paul told me happily that our regiment had received the French Croix de Guerre for the liberation of Colmar. Colonel Rudder and Lieutenant Colonel McCoy had received the decoration for the regiment a couple of days ago.

Around mid-afternoon the order was received directing all men to turn in all their French francs and other foreign currency in exchange for German marks since we would be operating in Germany. The order was sent to our platoons. I set up a small table and I began accepting currency, writing down each man's name and amount he was submitting for exchange. Since this process continued till dusk, I planned to take the money to the finance office the next morning to effect the exchange.

23 February 1945

We were alerted early in the morning to be ready to load trucks, on a shuttle basis, to take us some 10 miles to Bronsfeld, Germany—a 1000 yards from Schleiden. (We were to relieve a unit of the 9th Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Division.) “But what about the bagful of money I have collected for exchange?” I was told by a battalion officer that there'd be no time for me to exchange it now, and that I was to place it in the company safe carried by our kitchen unit for safe keeping. I did as I was told, although I griped about the bad timing of the exchange order. The finance officer and our operations officer were not coordinating their plans.

After the shuttle movement, the relief was effected routinely at dusk. We were warned by the unit leaving that the Germans had had a long time to lay extensive mine fields and to set up many booby-traps. But what struck me as foolishly rash was their location of the kitchen in a farm house not more than 100 yards from our company CP near the front line. Perhaps in their lengthy static situation this kitchen location was considered safe and convenient. Our own kitchen replaced theirs.

We began to receive harassing artillery fire—not too bad. What actually chilled my bones and grated on my nerves were the

occasional bursts of "Screaming Meemies." They were aptly named. These rocket-type mortars were fired from six tubes in close succession and caused a long and loud eerie whining in flight exaggerated by their echoes in the valley of the hills before they exploded on contact. They were very inaccurate on a single target, but they exploded over a large area.

24 February 1945

We received a heavy machine gun from our weapons company, and I supervised its location between our two line companies covering a road to Schleiden.

Paul sent out reconnaissance patrols to spot the enemy positions and mine fields.

25 February 1945

Colonel McCoy came to CP with a plan to capture a small group of houses just north of Schleiden in a night attack. One or two platoons could accomplish the mission if we could clear a path through the mine field in front of us.

That afternoon a group of us, including McCoy, Paul and the platoon leaders, went past our front line, down a reconnoitered road on a wooded slope. From our concealed high position we saw a trail, a path through the low underbrush of the firebreak, which we knew to be perpendicular to the antipersonnel mine field. A quick investigation of the trail revealed a trip wire stretched across the trail. Without knowing what kind of booby-trap lay hidden in the bushes, cutting the wire was as dangerous as stretching it. The mine field started beyond this wire. We eased back quietly to our line.

McCoy's plan was to clear the trail through the mine field so that the platoons could advance in single file before fanning out on the other side of the mine field. To clear the path quickly, long lengths of primer cord could be attached to dummy rifle grenades, which would then be launched from rifles equipped with a rifle grenade adapter. Once three lengths of primer cord were stretched out over the mine field, the rope-like cords could be detonated simultaneously, exploding the mines in the path by sympathetic detonation. Preparations were made to have all this material ready since speed in the dark hours of morning would be required to insure



25-26 Feb. A wooded trail led to minefields at a firebreak.

the success of the raid. The objective was to be reached just before daylight so that any immediate German counter-attack would be exposed in the subsequent light.

26 February 1945

The moon provided some visibility. The two platoons lined up on the road, waiting. The first grenade launched from the rifle did not compensate for the weight of the trailing length of prime cord. It fell short of its intended range. The other two were successful. The lengths of explosive rope were detonated with a loud explosion, creating a narrow path free of mines. The men had been warned of the trip wire, and a man was posted to designate it. The first platoon began its trek. A German machine gun covering the mine field became active. The men hit the ground. Slowly and crouching low, the advancing column continued.

Back at the wooded slope Captain Dulac was very conscious of the time element. "It's going too slow," he said. "Can't you do something about speeding it up? At this pace we'll never make it before dawn." I told him that I'd see what could be done. I joined the column being careful to stay in the path when passing up men. I noted the trip wire location as I went by.

A message was repeated back: "We cleared the mine field. Speed it up." It was easier said than done with machine gun fire forcing us down, and now German potato masher grenades were exploding at our sides. Another message following two explosions up front rippled back: "We've reached another mine field." The column stopped. McCoy decided that to clear the second mine field would take too long a time if we were to reach our objective before dawn. The message from the rear told us to move back. The machine gun continued to spray our column.

The muster back at the slope accounted for all present and wounded except three men. A squad leader reported that these three men were wounded by machine gun fire at the trail. McCoy turned to two stretcher bearers. "Get those wounded men back right away! We can't leave them out there." The platoons were moving back to our area.

One of the medical corpsmen said hesitantly, "We'll go but someone's got to show us where they are."

Disregarding caution when time seemed important I said, "I'll go. Follow me and watch it when I point out a trip wire."

We reached two men on the trail. A corpsman examined one of them. "This one is dead."

I asked the second man, "Where is the third man?"

"Two Germans came and picked him up."

"Why did you let them? Didn't you shoot at them?"

"No, I lost my rifle when I was hit."

"Let's get him out of here. I'll go ahead and lay by the trip wire. Be careful not to trip on it." The corpsmen unfolded their stretcher and I crouched my way toward the wire. I lay on my left side parallel to the narrow trail, stretching my open right hand over the wire and trying to leave the corpsmen room to pass by me.

The first corpsman had just stepped over the wire when the machine gun opened fire. Two steps and they dropped to the ground with the stretcher straddling the wire. I was struck with terror! I expected to see the wire stretched down. Luckily it strung unmoved between the short banded steel legs and the low slung canvas. The machine gun rattled on. The doubly dangerous situation became timeless. The stretcher nearly crowded me out of the path. When all was quiet, I warned the corpsmen to lift the stretcher straight UP and for the rear man to BE SURE to step over the wire. I held my breath while they coordinated their move: "Ready, one, two, three, go!" I got up and followed them.

Everyone was disgruntled with the messy failure of our mission but thankful that we had not continued through the second mine field. Perhaps we should have known they'd laid a secondary mine field. The Germans now had one of our wounded men as a prisoner.

Later that afternoon 20 replacements arrived at our kitchen. They were placed in the basement of the farm house to protect them from the sporadic artillery fire until they could be assigned to platoons. The cooking units of the kitchen and the company safe were on the first floor of this two-story, stone masonry house. The barn typically was attached to the full width of the house and extended out to complete an "L" plan with the house. Our company supply of all

kinds of ammunition was located opposite the well stocked hay loft, and nearest the kitchen.

At dusk a volley of Screaming Meemies shrieked its way toward our kitchen. One rocket exploded on the barn roof, setting the hay below afire. Westgate looked into the barn and saw that there was no time to remove the ammunition boxes. The fire was spreading quickly. The kitchen personnel were alert to the situation and left the building carrying an assortment of articles. The jeep drivers drove their vehicles away. Westgate stuck his head into the cellar and yelled, "Everybody out! Follow me on the double." The 20 replacements streamed out behind Westgate.

By the time a messenger reached our company CP with the announcement, "Our kitchen was hit! It's afire," we could see the red glow to our rear. And then our ammunition dump exploded with a tremendous sound.

No one was hurt, but I had a bad feeling. Then I was struck by the implication—the money and the records in the company safe! Nothing could be done about it in the dark.

27 February 1945

I visited the smoldering ruin. The explosion and the fire had caused the masonry walls to cave into the cellar. I didn't know exactly where the safe had been located. Actually I had time only for a quick glance at the cellar full of rubble up to ground level. We exchanged positions with K Company and went into reserve.

At our reserve area I questioned the kitchen personnel about the exact location of the company safe before the fire so I would know in which area to start the search.

28 February 1945

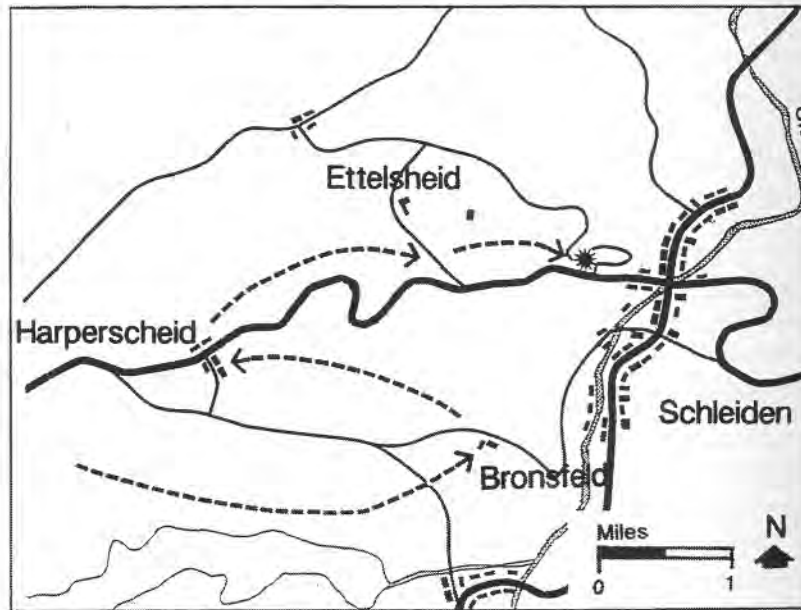
We were relieved by G Company and the company walked a few miles to Harperscheid. I had one of the jeeps take three of us to the burnt out wreckage of the kitchen. We tried moving a few pieces of rubble. It was obvious that it would take a major operation to find the safe under two floors of rubble. Discouraged, we went to Harperscheid to rejoin the company.

1 March 1945

Pay Day. When I went back to the finance officer for the payroll I explained the loss of the money which was to have been exchanged. I was told to submit a claim setting down the circumstances and the amounts of money lost by each man. The finance officer thought that the claim had an excellent chance of being honored.

As I paid each man I asked him if he had turned in money to exchange. This narrowed the list. To those who answered affirmatively, I told them that I would call them later for the amount. From my own experience I knew they needed time to recall the amounts, sometimes involving currency from Luxembourg and Belgium as well as France. I did recall the total value of the money lost, and the separate claims should add up to that total.

Westgate brought in a new fleece-lined jacket and a pair of baggy windproof trousers. He said that the Army Supply was scattering these for field testing purposes. When I discovered the jacket was my size, I told Westgate that I'd be glad to be the Guinea pig—especially with the fleece-lined jacket in the bargain. The weather was cold and rainy.



23 February–3 March. Front line duty at Bronsfeld was followed by a reserve status at harpersshield—then back to front line duty at Ettlesheid.

2 March 1945

A company of our regiment relieved us and our company walked a couple of miles up front to Ettelscheid—on the high ground above and west of Schleiden located in the valley of the Olef River. This defensive position held a key post even with no German attack eminent. Guards were placed on identified mine fields to our front. Our company CP was in a house on the wooded slope hidden enough from enemy observation to allow us to use a candle at night. German artillery continued to harass us, but not with any degree of ferocity.

3 March 1945

I began calling a few men at a time to tell me the number of francs each had given me to exchange. I trusted them. When one would say, "It might have been more, but I doubt it," I'd reply, "Well, if the total claimed is less than the total I remember, I'll call you again."

It had been raining most of the chilly morning. Around noon, Paul received battalion orders to alert a platoon to go into Schleiden. Following the platoon would be a unit of engineers to clear the road of land mines and later the houses of booby-traps. A tank would follow in the rear.

While these preparations were being made, I continued my paperwork on the money claim. I began to feel like a soldier of the Chair-borne Infantry.

Colonel McCoy came to our CP. He said that there were good reasons to believe that the Germans had withdrawn from Schleiden. The bridge across the Olef River had been blown up. Our men were to ascertain the Germans' withdrawal and the condition of the bridge. Schleiden would be a key town in the crossing of the Olef River.

The 3rd Platoon was selected for this patrol. McCoy made certain that the platoon leader would have a 300 radio and a telephone to keep in constant communication with our CP. The platoon began to move out, leaving a thin black telephone wire behind as a trail. The platoon leader reported their progress. McCoy hung on to every report. They finally reported having reached the town. "Where are you now?"

"We're in a house. The engineers are removing booby-traps. The town is infested with them." The platoon leader switched to the telephone. "Our radio went out. We're not hearing you. We're receiving artillery and mortar fire."

"We'll send you another radio," Paul told him.

"Good, just follow the telephone wire to get here. Otherwise you might enter a house not cleared by —" Suddenly the phone went dead. We guessed that artillery fire had cut the wire line somewhere. Colonel McCoy said, "Now they'll need a new radio AND a new telephone line."

Paul took action. "I'll take them myself. Elwood, we're taking a radio to those men, and get three men with plenty of wire ready to leave right away."

I popped up with, "I'll go with you," and picked up my helmet and my carbine.

Pop smiled at me and inquired, "Lieutenant," (not Buddy because the Colonel was present), "haven't you learned that you don't volunteer in the Army?"

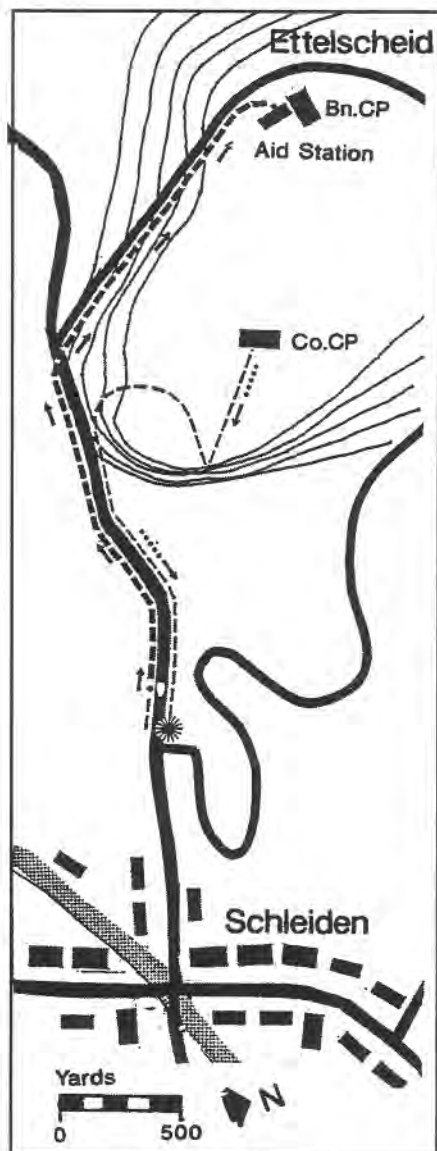
I knew he meant that I shouldn't go, but I dismissed him with, "Ah, heck, I'll be back in a couple of hours. Frankly, I need a break from this paper work." I hadn't received all the individual claims.

There was still about an hour of light left in this misty afternoon. We left the CP and started walking on a short cut to reach the paved road to Schleiden at the bottom of our high ground. After a while we decided that we had veered too much to the left. We looked down on the road from the top of a cliff. We decided to back-track and reach the road easier to our right. After we retraced our steps across a flat clearing, one of our guards was astonished. "Didn't you just come out of that clearing?"

"Yes, we lost our way."

"My God! You just went through a mine field! I'm patrolling this area to keep guys out of it."

We were shaken up by the news. Our luck had held out. We reached the road below us and found the wire we were to follow. It was



3 March. Our mission to Schleiden was delayed.

getting dark now, Elwood tested the wire back to the CP and found it clear of any breaks. New wire was now being unrolled from one of the spools.

I took the lead. Paul and Elwood followed me and the wire men were at the rear. An artillery round exploded far away from us, but this reminded Paul to insist on keeping 10 paces between each of us, since the artillery fire was being aimed at the road.

It was cold, but I took my left wool glove off so that I could feel the wire as I followed it on the hard-topped road. About fifteen hundred yards further, we came upon a jeep and a tank. A mine had blown off one of the tracks of the tank. The tank men were working on it in the dark. They were cursing a blue streak. "Those damn engineers were supposed to have cleared this—road, but just look at this — mess!"

Paul told them that the other tank had reached the town with our men but this was no consolation to the tank men. "Well, they didn't remove ALL the mines. Those lousy —!" We bypassed them and kept going.

A hundred yards further on from the tank, I came across a large tree branch which spanned the road. It had evidently been blown from the tree on the right by an artillery shell—after our men had passed through here. The wire at the left of the road went under the tall leafy portion of the branch. I could release the wire and jump across, but this would mean scrambling in the dark on the other side looking for the thin wire again. I tried to extricate the wire from under the branches by tugging the wire to the left. I was doing this when I must have stepped off the hard-top onto the muddy shoulder. An ear-splitting explosion below numbed me as I felt myself rising, head bowed, in the air! What WAS it?

I fell flat on my back in what seemed a slit hole. My feet were tingling afire. I was too shocked to yell—to speak. I tried to raise myself on my elbows but I couldn't. I was perpendicular with my head nearest the road. I heard Paul's voice. "Buddy, are you all right?"

I found my own voice. "I don't know. My feet! Do I have my feet?" My knees were equally as painful.

"I can't see in the dark," Paul said helplessly. Paul and Elwood pulled me onto the road by grabbing me under my armpits. "I still

can't see well, but I think I see your feet."

Paul shouted at one of the wire men, "Run get the jeep by the tank!" I had no strength to move, but I had the assurance that Paul knew what to do.

(The thought flashed in my mind: I must not cry out like some men I'd seen hit and go into hysteria.) I gritted my teeth to withstand the pain. The wire man returned running. "The jeep won't come up. They say there are mines up here. They want us to take him back there."

Paul cursed and then said, "Let's use an arm carry." The group pulled me up vertically while Elwood and another man placed me in a locked-arm chair. I now felt enough strength to extend my arms over their shoulders. In the rush to get back quickly, one man stumbled and fell. Several arms caught me.

Elwood said, "I'll carry him piggy-back." The others helped to load me, and Elwood rushed me to the jeep. They sat me on the seat with my feet over the turned-down windshield. I could see the outline of my feet. My left combat boot was off, but I had both feet.

Paul took off his belt and placed a tourniquet on my right thigh. He then took off my belt and placed another tourniquet on my other thigh. "I'll hold this one tight. Can you hold the other?" I could. He managed to sit sideways beside me, holding on the back of the seat with his left hand. As the jeep started moving Paul turned to Elwood, "Wait for me here. I'll be back."

I started shivering as if chilled—making it more difficult to speak through my clenched teeth. I'd never thought I'd be a wounded casualty. I knew our casualties were sent to the aid station, but I didn't know or remember what happened to them after that. Paul had been a casualty. I asked him, "What happens next?"

"They'll treat you at the aid station and then send you to a hospital. Buddy, they'll take good care of you." He almost didn't finish the sentence. I heard him curse softly, "Damn it," as his hand tightened on my shoulder. It was my turn to reassure him: "Don't worry, Paul. I'm all right. Really." Regaining his composure, Paul told me to release my tourniquet for a minute.

Our jeep left the hard-topped road and started climbing a muddy, narrow road which turned round and up to the rear of the hill. The slow speed was determined by the dim light of the jeep's cat eyes. Half-way up the hill we met another jeep coming down. We stopped, hugging the side of the hill to allow the other jeep to pass cautiously on the narrow road. Paul recognized the men in the jeep and told them he was taking me to the aid station and would return to complete his assignment immediately after that. I felt a tinge of guilt to have delayed the mission.

As we continued up the narrow road, the jeep slid dangerously to the edge. The left rear wheel spun uselessly in mid air. The driver's assistant jumped from the rear seat to the road for safety. With the jeep half-balanced over the precipice, I remained as passive as the pain would allow me. I couldn't believe that lightning could strike me twice. With Paul's and the assistant's help in pushing, the driver maneuvered the jeep back on the road. The driver admitted he couldn't see the road without the full headlights and instructed his assistant to walk two yards ahead of the jeep the rest of the way.

At the station the corpsmen transferred me to a stretcher with Paul insisting that they be careful. "Thank you, Paul," I managed to say.

"I have to get back, but you'll be okay now." He turned, jumped on the jeep, and was gone.

The large room in the house used as an aid station had a pool of light in the middle and shadowy corners. As I was carried in, a familiar figure stepped toward the light. It was Trzaska, the aid man who had once been assigned to our company. He had that friendly smile I remembered. "Well, look who's here. They finally got Lieutenant Peña. It was about time." I acknowledged his greeting by merely calling his name, "Trzaska."

The only other familiar face was that of the dental officer. "Where is Captain Shiffman?" I asked him.

"He's away on temporary duty. Captain Davis is substituting for him. He'll tend to you." While I was there I could not transfer my confidence from Shiffman to Davis. I created an awkward situation by directing my questions to the dental officer who would turn to Davis for answers. I felt ill tempered—just something else to control.

“Did the tourniquets help?” I asked.

“Not really. They aren’t necessary in a large percentage of cases. An explosion or hot metal often sears off the flow of blood.”

Dr. Davis bathed my naked feet with warm water. If he gave me a hypodermic of morphine, I didn’t feel the needle. My left foot had the pain of a hundred needle jabs. My toes on this foot looked like bloody fingers but I was not alarmed at the sight. My right ankle had a bloody gash. My left hand was black with powder marks and three fingers bore a red slash. My knees were hurting so badly that I asked if they were broken. “I don’t think so.”

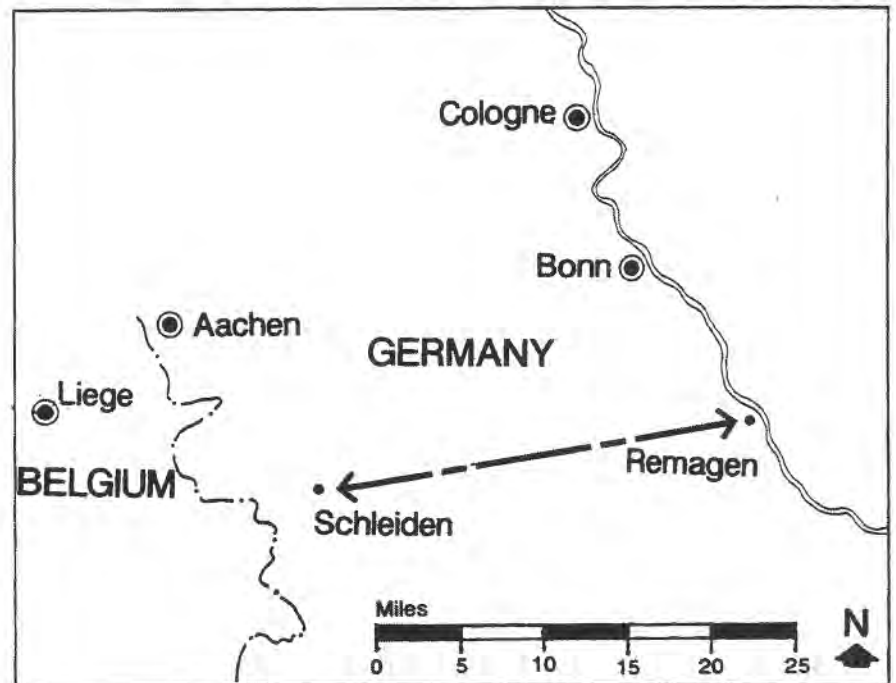
After Dr. Davis had splinted my fingers and wrapped my feet with gauze, he told me, “We’ll wait a while to see if another casualty comes in—so that the jeep won’t go back half empty.” The blanket ends were folded over me and pinned.

I was offered a cup of hot coffee. I refused it with a short “No.” I remembered my first-aid lesson—in a case of shock give the patient a stimulant. “I changed my mind. I’ll take that cup of coffee.”

I recalled the many times Westgate and I had listed lost serial numbered equipment as being left at the aid station. I asked Trzaska to call Westgate to come for my equipment. Westgate got to the station in no time. He looked me over. “You all right, Buddy?”

“Yes. Here’s my watch.” (It was 9 o’clock.) “There’s my .45. The fleece lined jacket is in good shape. You could get someone else to finish the field test.” Westgate smiled when I mentioned the jacket. Perhaps he was thinking I was overly concerned with the test. He asked if he could do anything for me. “No, but tell Pop I left the claim papers for the lost money on the table. Someone else is going to have to finish it.” (Pop had come to the aid station, but he remained in an adjoining room—preferring not to face me with the inevitable “I told you not to volunteer” statement, however unspoken. The next day he went to pick up my helmet and my carbine from the ditch where I had dropped them.) When no other casualty showed up, my stretcher was tied to the rack on an aid jeep, and we headed toward the rear.

Epilogue



Epilogue

As soon as I was able, I wrote to Paul and Pop from the field hospital to assure them that I was fine—that, although I'd lost my left foot, the doctor managed to save my right one. It was easy to add something else funny right after a shot of morphine.

Four days later, on March the 7th, the forward units of the fast-moving 9th Armored Division captured the intact bridge over the Rhine River at Remagen—a mere 35 miles east of Schleiden. This crossing acted as an open floodgate for the Allied advance and certainly shortened the war. Even those of us in hospital cots were heartened by the news.

Weeks later, when censorship was lifted, I received a friendly letter from our company mail clerk. He wrote, with a ring of authority, that I had been the very last casualty in I Company. Battalion orders had pulled our platoon out of Schleiden the day after I left, and that had been the last day of combat for I Company. From then on, it was occupation duty for the rest of the war.

I was shipped to my final destination through eight hospitals in 27 days. When I finally arrived at Bushnell Hospital in Brigham City, Utah, on the 30th of March, I wrote to Paul. In no time at all, I received my first visitors: Paul's grandparents, his uncle, and aunt who lived in nearby Salt Lake City. And they brought me a huge box of caramels for "The Caramel Kid!"

Bruce Paul went on to fight in the Korean War. He became active in the Army Reserves and retired as a Colonel in 1969.

George "Pop" Johnstone became Police Chief in Guttenberg, New Jersey. Milton Westgate, resourceful as ever, operated two garment factories in the Poconos area in Pennsylvania.

Frank McFeatters is buried in the American cemetery in Luxembourg. Dallas Elwood returned to Iowa and established a successful meat packing company.

Wilfred Dulac returned to Lebanon, New Hampshire, to establish a building construction materials business, now run by his son since Dulac's retirement.



L to R: Capt. Paul, Lt. Snipes, Lt. Toepel, Lt. Carey on occupation duty.

Correction

Caption on Page 10 should read:

Lt. Peña and dinner companion Margaret Shears, Corporal, USMC, May 10, 1944

Caption on Page 52 should read:

29 October. The batallion attacked north to secure a line of departure.

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View of Schleiden Today

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After returning from overseas, Peña spent two years in Army hospitals and received a hospital promotion to Captain. Separated from the service, he enrolled at Texas A & M College to finish his fifth year leading to a degree in Architecture. He joined the architectural firm of Caudill Rowlett Scott, later CRSS, in 1948 and became the firm's fourth partner in 1949. He pioneered in the practice and theory of Architectural Programming and co-authored his seminal book, *Problem Seeking*, in 1969—on its fourth edition in 2000. He retired from practice but remains a consultant in programming.

