

My War
The Family Version
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Contents

ENLISTING	3
BASIC TRAINING	4
OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL	7
CAMP VAN DORN	11
RACE RIOTS	16
ACTING DEFENSE COUNCIL	17
BOREDOM	18
LOUISIANA MANEUVERS	19
BACK TO CAMP VAN DORN	21
GOING OVERSEAS	22
GREAT BRITAIN	24
GETTING READY FOR D-DAY	28
JOINING THE 2 ND DIVISION	30
GETTING TO NORMANDY	31
FIGHTING IN THE BOGAGE COUNTRY	32
THE "WONDERFUL" RED CROSS	35
PATROLS AND OTHER KINDS OF FUN	37
DIVERSIONARY ATTACK FOR HILL 192	40
BREAKING OUT OF THE BEACHHEAD	43
HILL 192	44
<i>2ND BN IS CITED FOR NORMANDY ATTACK</i>	47
FROM THE ST. LO HIGHWAY TO TINCHEBRAY	49
BREST	53
<i>THE STORY OF BREST--OF GUNS, RUINS AND DEATH</i>	60
ACROSS FRANCE TO BELGIUM	63
THE SIGFRIED LINE	64
THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE	70
CHASING THE GERMANS AGAIN	75
GAY PAREE, FINALLY	78
INTO GERMANY	79
BACK TO THE HOSPITAL	82
GERMANY:	84
WHERE NO ONE WAS A NAZI AND EVERYONE HATED HITLER	84
ON TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA	87
MEDALS AND AWARDS	94
<i>Close</i>	95
PHOTO ARCHIVE	96

ENLISTING

I enlisted in the United States Army on September 18, 1942 in Detroit, Michigan. I was employed as a clerk in the metallurgical lab at Detroit Diesel Engine, a part of General Motors, and was given three days before I had to be sworn in. I thought I was enlisting in the Cavalry (as an owner of two horses, I had done a lot of riding and played some indoor polo) but when I put my hand down I found out I had just joined the Infantry.

I spent about a week at Ft. Custer in Battle Creek, Michigan, getting uniforms and learning a little bit about close order drill. One day we had a barracks inspection we didn't pass and had to spend all day and most of the night cleaning everything we could reach. We even cleaned the exposed rafters by standing on each other's shoulders. I learned later that nobody ever passed his first barracks inspection. This was one way the Army let you know who was the boss. A short time later, I boarded another troop train heading south and rode it for two days, not knowing where we were going. The Army was real good about things like that, they wouldn't tell you what you were doing until you were finished doing it. We heard all kinds of rumors as to where we would end up. Someone came up with the initials FTM and, as it turned out, he was right. We stopped at Ft. McClellan, Alabama on Sept. 26, 1942. I would spend the next three months taking basic training as a member of Co. B., 25th Bn., Branch Immaterial Replacement Training Center. The three months changed to six weeks.

BASIC TRAINING

Our indoctrination started immediately. We were ordered to fall out with full field packs and we didn't even know what a full field pack was. We found out soon enough. We spent a week making them up several times a day, along with doing close order drill and the manual of arms. My Drill Sergeant was a Regular Army Staff Sergeant who had been at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese bombed it. He stood about five feet five inches tall but was tough as nails, with a voice that could be heard all over the camp. If anyone goofed up he would have the whole platoon fall out with full field packs and march us up and down the nearest mountain. We trained every day, rain or shine, and would come in from the field so tired that we would just fall on our cots without taking our gear off. We would only have about thirty minutes to get ready for chow so we didn't get to lie there very long.

I can remember going to the movies in the camp. The theater was in what was probably the biggest building there and was as hot as could be, especially when it was full of GIs. The movies weren't very good; they were mostly worn out old westerns. The food was pretty monotonous, too. For breakfast we usually had SOS or scrambled powdered eggs with grits and fatty bacon. Lunch consisted of a thick slice of bologna between two slices of dry bread, a peanut butter sandwich and an orange or an apple. Dinner was anyone's guess but it was mostly ground meat of some sort- meat loaf, hamburgers, fried Spam or salmon patties. Everything was washed down with lots of coffee. I never went away hungry but I also don't recall being overfed.

Basic training was all right. We got lots of exercise and the food wasn't all that bad; actually any food was okay. We were working so hard from 0530 until taps that we stayed hungry all of the time. Seems I spent most of my money on candy bars. I managed to spend some time at the Service Club trying to act grown up by drinking 3.2 beer. I heard that you couldn't be a "man" unless you drank beer and smoked, so I started smoking, too. Time off was a rare thing but I did manage to get to Birmingham a few times. I had met a girl at the USO there whose family raised horses and they invited me out to ride, which I enjoyed very much.

The thing I liked best about basic was the rifle range, where we really did a lot of shooting. I could really shoot a rifle, in fact I never did get a "Maggie's Drawers" when I was on the rifle range. Maggie's Drawers was a big red flag that the men in the target pits waved when you completely missed the target, which most of the other men seemed to do. I earned a commendation because I seemed to

know much more than the rest did about rifles. In fact, they put me in charge of four other men for instruction in the correct care of a rifle. There was a pretty good reason for this. My Dad started taking my brothers and me hunting with him when we reached twelve or thirteen years of age. He had an old single shot .22, a Steven's Crackshot, that we could use while he used a 12-gauge shotgun. We learned to shoot by practicing on crows and squirrels and an occasional turtle. When I was in high school I built a fifty-foot rifle range in our basement with a heavy metal plate mounted at an angle above a large box of sand so that the bullets would bounce down. That is where most of the neighborhood kids learned to shoot. That is also where I learned the importance of keeping my rifle clean. Dad said if I couldn't keep it clean, I couldn't shoot it anymore.

I've heard people say how lost and lonesome they were when they went into the service. We stayed so busy that we didn't have time to get lonesome. We stayed busy doing calisthenics, close order drill, weapons training and reading everything from manuals on military courtesy to how to conduct a combat patrol. I was good at close order drill and the manual of arms. I bugged my Corporal so much about the manual of arms that he threatened to promote me just to get rid of me. Some of us got together and formed a squad that could do all of the fancy drills that you see the special drill teams doing today; tossing the rifles back and forth, the Queen Anne Salute, and so on.

I remember going into Anniston one Saturday. It was a very pretty, small town close to Ft. McClellan, and a typical military town. There was nothing much to do except walk around looking in the windows of the tattoo parlors and beer joints. Almost everything was off limits to us. I bought a pint of Paul Jones whiskey to take back to camp with me. It was forbidden to bring alcohol into the camp so I stuck it inside my shirt and walked kind of bent over so it wouldn't show. I got it back to the barracks and was going to share it with a couple of friends. We took one taste and almost gagged. You could see where the bottom of the bottle had been cut and glued back together. God only knows what was in it. I didn't want it to go to waste so I mentioned to the sergeant that I had a present for him. I told him I had left it in my field pack and for him to help himself. He tipped it up and drank about a fourth of it in one swallow, grinned all over the place and told me how good it was. Things eased a whole lot for our squad after that. Here is a typical day in basic training:

0530 Reveille.

0600 Breakfast.

0630 Clean up company area.

0700 March about two miles out to our training area. Here we practiced close order drill, listened to lectures and were instructed in practical combat.

- 1130 March back to camp.
- 1200 Noon chow and mail call.
- 1300 March back to training area for more lectures and instructions.
- 1630 Return to camp.
- 1705 Stand Retreat in OD uniforms, with rifle and bayonet.
- 1730 Evening chow.
- 1800 Free time (spent practicing the manual of arms and studying).
- 2100 Lights out.

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday we were up at 0400 in order to be at the rifle range by 0500.

OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL

Before the end of basic training my Company Commander recommended me for OCS and I accepted. I attended an Officer Candidate Preparatory School for four weeks, which meant a lot more studying. After completing that course, I was promoted to Corporal and then waited for the next school to open at Ft. Benning, Georgia. My appointment finally came and I boarded another troop train going to Columbus, Georgia. It seemed as if we did nothing but start, stop, backup and wait for other trains but I finally arrived at the Main Post at Ft. Benning. It was New Year's Day, 1943.

I was assigned to the Eighteenth Co., First Student Training Regiment, Main Post, and Ft. Benning. One of the first things they had us do was fall in and start yelling "Yee, Ha!" as loud as we could. We did this for our entire stay at Benning; it was supposed to put a commanding tone in our voice and increase our sound projection. I guess it worked because it got so that I could bellow with the best of them. Other troops must have thought we were crazy standing out there hollering all the time. We had a lot of field training at OCS but we also had a lot of classroom work, some of which was held outdoors in the field. For example, if we needed to work on the effects of machine guns used for enfilading fire from a fixed position below the crest of a hill, we went to the range used for that purpose. We spent an hour or so sitting on bleachers while instructors lectured us on the exercise and told us how to solve it. We then moved over to the range and took turns practicing what we were supposed to have just learned. We were graded on several points such as understanding the situation, setting up the weapon, use of the proper ballistic trajectory for that weapon and finally, whether or not you could hit the target.

One day we were working on this very sort of exercise. I was in command of a machine gun squad and we were almost the last ones to analyze, set up and fire. I watched what the others had done and no one had come anywhere near the assigned target. I climbed to the top of the hill, found our target area and estimated it to be about 900 yards, went back to the crew, who had just set up the tripod and told them to mount and load the gun as fast as they could. I moved off to the side where I could see the barrel and had them elevate the gun just enough to clear the top of the ridge. I then went behind the gun and lined it up where I knew the target area to be and told them to commence firing for effect without taking the usual practice shots. We covered the target area like a blanket and this so impressed the instructors that they told the Colonel, who then came out to congratulate us on our great speed and accuracy. I didn't bother to tell them that I hadn't used all the formulas they gave me, that I just got

lucky with a little Kentucky Windage.

We fired all kinds of weapons at OCS, even the 37mm antitank gun, which was a lot of fun. Instead of wasting 37mm ammunition on students, they inserted a long, 22caliber barrel inside the 37mm barrel so that we could fire the much less expensive 22 bullet. This was used on a 1000-inch range where we would toss breadcrumbs from our lunch sandwiches to attract the sparrows and then use them for target practice. Later we used regular 37mm ammunition on simulated tank targets on a regular-sized range. The range had little railroad tracks running back and forth across the impact area. The pit crews would turn a small cart loose on it, to run back and forth across the range. After all the practice we had on birds, those targets were a cinch.

OCS was a lot of hard work. When you weren't out in the field working on problems you were hitting the books and I mean really hitting the books. We would come in from the field around 1630, get cleaned up for mess at 1730 and then spend the rest of the night, until lights out, studying. It must have paid off for here are some of the grades I got while I was there:

WEAPON	GRADE	SCORE
M1 Rifle	A	Expert
Light Machine Gun	A	Expert
Heavy Machine Gun	A	Expert
B.A.R.	A	1 st Class
60mm & 81mm Mortar	B	4 out of 5 Hits
37mm Antitank Gun	B	Expert

OTHER GRADES WERE:

MAP READING	A
SCOUTING AND PATROLLING	B
TRAINING OF AN INDIVIDUAL SOLDIER	A
BAYONET	A
HAND GRENADE	A

I also tied for BEST SOLDIER in our barracks, which was voted on by all of the candidates.

I went to Columbus, Georgia twice but it wasn't much fun. We didn't have any money to spend, anyway, so I just walked around with some friends looking at all the other GIs doing the same thing we were doing. There was nothing going on at the USO, just a few guys sitting around writing letters. We managed to have a confrontation or two with the Paratroopers who, incidentally, were training right across the road from us on the Main Post. It usually didn't amount to too much, a lot of pushing and shoving and very little actual fist swinging. No one was hurt seriously. I did manage to break one obnoxious guy's arm while I was at OCS. We had been practicing hand to hand combat and were doing some judo throws. He kept getting rougher and rougher and I told him if he didn't ease off a little I was going to hurt him, but he didn't believe me. When he tried another hard throw I turned it around and threw him instead and broke his elbow in the process. Little things like that kept life interesting.

A couple of the things I remember about Ft. Benning was how hot it could get in the Spring and that funny looking red clay soil. I was used to good soft black Michigan dirt and this stuff just didn't look right. It was not only the wrong color it was hard as the devil to dig a foxhole in. We did everything from river crossings on ropes or boats, to night patrols, to learning how to report to your new Commanding Officer (wear gloves and leave your calling card on a small silver tray.) We also learned how to inspect a kitchen. You made sure everything was clean, then you checked the dishwasher to see if it was hot enough. Some poor guy on KP would be standing there with parboiled hands, then you would stick your hand in the water and tell him it wasn't hot enough. The secret was to keep your fingers tight together or otherwise you would scald the hell out of them. We dug foxholes one day then got down in them and let some tanks run over us to show us how safe they were. They had to dig four men out of their foxholes because the walls had collapsed. I ended up being a firm believer in foxholes, though.

The Drill Sergeants kept telling us how sorry we were and that we weren't ever going to make it but when the local tailors started coming out around the middle of March to measure us for Officer's Class A uniforms (dress greens and pinks), we figured we had passed. I received my commission on April 1, 1943 and my orders to report to the 99th Division at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi just as soon as I had a ten-day leave at home. The next night we had a big party in Atlanta. I must have had a good time because I sure ended up with a hangover. My plane to Detroit left early the next morning. It was a 21 passenger DC-3 that flew at about 7500 feet and caught all of the thermals. The more that airplane bounced around the sicker I got, but I have never been air sick since. We finally arrived and believe me I was really glad to get back on the ground. It was a clear, cold day and it felt good to be home again. I enjoyed my leave but there wasn't very much to do. Both of my brothers were already in the service. My older brother Grant enlisted in the Coast Guard before I joined the Army and my younger brother Philip was in the Air Corps by the time I had leave. All of my friends were gone to the service and I was the only kid left on the block.

CAMP VAN DORN

When my leave was up I took a flight from Chicago to New Orleans. We were delayed about an hour and half with engine trouble but eventually got off the ground. They served steak with all the trimmings for dinner between Chicago and Memphis, Tennessee then landed in New Orleans on time at 1200. This flight was a real smooth one. My cousin Bernice's husband, Walter McDonald, an M.D. and an officer in the Medical Corps, met me at the airport and took me back to their place. I woke Bernice up and we talked until 0230. We went to church the next morning and then took a drive around the city. Then they treated me to dinner at the Hotel Monteleone, down in the French Quarter. My bus left for camp at 1715 but it stopped in Baton Rouge on the way, so I didn't get to check in at Camp Van Dorn until after 2230. The first thing I had to do was report to the Regimental Adjutant the next morning where I was assigned to a Heavy Weapons Company, Company H, 394th Infantry, 99th Division. I didn't do much the rest of the day, just kind of looked the place over, although there wasn't much to look at. I guess it was a typical wartime Army Post, no trees, very little grass and lots of whitewashed rocks that told you where you could or could not walk. I was assigned to a BOQ and directed to my Company Headquarters. After evening mess a few of us decided to go to a show and had no sooner walked out of the door when the Adjutant informed us that the Colonel wanted to see us. Well, he saw us all right. He ordered us out into the field immediately. You see, the Division went on maneuvers from Monday morning until Friday or Saturday night and we were supposed to have gone out with them. We were in kind of a spot. We only had our dress uniforms with us. The rest of our belongings were still at the Railway Express office and wouldn't be delivered until the next day. We went around borrowing clothes from other officers until we had enough to wear for the rest of the week. They took me out to my Company in a jeep at 2200 Monday night. Tuesday I didn't do much of anything except stand around and get in everybody's way. Wednesday I was an Umpire with a jeep and a messenger. I umpired platoon tactical problems Thursday and Friday. We marched back to camp Saturday night; twelve miles in two hours and forty minutes.

The next Monday they told me that I had been appointed Company Supply Officer, a duty that all Junior Company Officers got saddled with. A couple of weeks later I was transferred to Battalion Headquarters Company and assigned to an Ammunition and Pioneer platoon. This platoon was made up of a bunch of Pennsylvania coal miners and our job was to be sort of an engineer platoon. We would build log roads through swamps, construct small bridges, blow trees and stumps out of the way and generally make it easier for the rest of the Battalion to advance.

We used a lot of TNT and dynamite and I got to be quite an explosives expert with the help of my coal miners. The dynamite came in real handy at one point. I kept a bottle of whisky in my quarters and although I didn't drink that much, the bottle kept coming up empty. I found out that my orderly was drinking it while I was gone. I also found out that he was deathly afraid of dynamite. I started keeping a case of dynamite under my bed and that is where I would put my whiskey bottle. I was never short any more whiskey as long as I was there. Now that I think about it, I never had company in my room either. We eventually used up all of the dynamite but I kept the empty case and if there was something I didn't want people to mess with I would just put it in that empty case. Everyone left it alone.

Just thinking about that BOQ and my quarters makes me want to go somewhere out in the open. Our rooms were almost like monk's cells. Bare walls, a small window without curtains, a single cot, a small mirror, a hanging rack for your uniform and room for your footlocker at the end of the bed. The Army didn't even furnish coat hangers. There was no air-conditioning then and I didn't have a fan. It got so hot at night that I usually slept in a puddle of sweat and I got up many a night to cool off in the shower then try to go back to sleep. I have been trying to remember what it was like at Camp Van Dorn. What really sticks in my mind is that it was a case of work like a dog all week long looking forward to the weekend and then having absolutely nowhere to go on Saturday or Sunday.

Camp Van Dorn was a brand new military base. All the buildings were painted frame structures that gave you the feeling that they would all fall down six months after the war, which they probably did. Our nearest town was Centerville, Mississippi where there was nothing much for soldiers to do. The main street was about two blocks long and it had a population of about 800 or 900 people. On the weekend it had about a thousand soldiers per block and only two taxis to go anywhere else in. If you wanted to see anything different you had to go all the way to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I went to New Orleans one weekend to visit a friend who had been in OCS with me but failed to graduate, whose father was some kind of a big shot in the city. They had a beautiful home on the edge of town and had another house on Lake Pontchartrain. It was actually on a big canal that ran into the lake. Attached to the back of the house was a huge boat house and inside was a sixty-foot yacht, painted all gray because they had loaned it to the Coast Guard for the duration of the war. They also had a Chris Craft speed boat that we got to play with. You must remember that this was long before water skis. We used an aquaplane, a board somewhat like a real short toboggan, attached to the boat by a very long rope. There was another rope fastened to the front of the board that you held on to when you stood up on the aquaplane. Everything else was much like water skiing today. We spent most of our time trying to get back up after we had fallen off. We also tried out the French Quarter while we were there, which was nothing like it is today. There were lots of good restaurants and quite a few bars and it was a lot quieter than it is today. We went to the Court of Two Sisters for dinner and it was terrific.

I got the itch to buy a car and give up waiting for overcrowded busses. 1943 wasn't a good year to be looking for a car because anything that would run was getting to be real scarce. I got in touch with Walter and Bernice in New Orleans to see if they could help me out and he said he would see if his Motor Sergeant could find me something. I got a letter from him a week or so later saying they had located an old Plymouth that I could buy for \$300. A couple of buddies said they would go down to New Orleans with me the next weekend to check out the car and help me drive it back to Camp Van Dorn. It must have looked okay because I coughed up the money for it even though the tires were smooth and the gas tank was empty. Remember, this was 1943 and they just weren't building cars anymore. If you could find a car that would just start, you grabbed it. I must mention that it was very dark in the garage where the car was stored and we really didn't get a very good look at it. This was gas-

rationing time and gas was also hard to get but Walter found some ration stamps for me and we started back to Mississippi. We were about an hour out of town when it started to rain and I mean coming down like cats and dogs. That is when we found out the windshield wipers were the old time vacuum system and didn't work. That is also when we found out that the car was allergic to water. It started missing badly and we limped back to Camp Van Dorn at about 10 mph. I never did take that car anywhere except around the camp or into Centerville. I was afraid to go much further than that with it because the tires were so bad. It was such a disreputable looking thing that I was asked to remove it from in front of the BOQ. I must admit it looked much better when it was parked in that dark garage back in New Orleans and it looked like a wreck parked in front of quarters in dear old Camp Van Dorn.

I guess that is where I started to really grow up. Up to then everything had been a lot of hard work but also a lot of fun. I was a real "old" 20 years of age and it began to dawn on me the kind of responsibility I had. Thank God for understanding platoon sergeants. I helped to design and build a combat firing course, to be used with live ammunition, while I was there. We dug pits and then built pop-up targets that could be controlled by pull ropes from the pits. A soldier started running the course and, when he got into range, the pit man would pull the rope that activated the target and a paper enemy jumped up in front of him. Sometimes there would be two targets at a time. It worked quite well.

RACE RIOTS

The last week in May 1943, Camp Van Dorn had a taste of what combat might really be like or at least what we thought it might be like. Most of the officers, and a lot of the enlisted men, would be off on the weekends. Several of us had gone to Baton Rouge for the weekend when we were hurriedly contacted by the Military Police and told to report back to camp immediately, just like in the movies. A Company of black soldiers who had been transferred to our camp from Arizona was rioting. A black regiment had been having a lot of discipline problems, so the Top Brass decided to break up the unit and send the companies to various parts of the country to mix in with the white troops. They arrived Saturday morning and were trying to take over the whole camp. A group of them went to the supply room, threw the white supply sergeant out in the street, and started taking all the weapons and ammunition. Some of them got into Centerville and began beating up on all the white soldiers they could find. I was Battalion Gas Officer, having been to Chemical Warfare School. Regimental Headquarters had me report to the motor pool, where I was driven to the air strip so that I could be flown over the area and see if it would be feasible to drop tear gas on them. As it turned out I didn't have to. The white troops surrounded them with machine guns and mortars with orders to shoot to kill and that halted them, for the time being. They rioted two more times with much the same results. Those that got into town were a little harder to catch. Some MPs, patrolling in a jeep with a mounted 30 caliber machine gun, caught about a dozen of them whipping two GIs, fired a burst over their heads and that stopped that part of the mutiny. They were placed in a restricted area and I never heard what happened to them.

The local people told us a story of what happened the last time some blacks started to riot. The deputy sheriff caught one of them, tied a rope around his neck and dragged him up and down Main Street behind a car. That ended that riot. That sounds like something out of a novel but it was told to me as fact, so I guess it really took place.

ACTING DEFENSE COUNCIL

I was appointed defense council to serve on Summary courts-martial. Picture that! My legal training consisted of reading a couple of detective stories. This duty was always shoved off on a junior officer that didn't know any better and rarely had any training for it. Most of the cases were pretty cut and dried, though. They were for relatively minor offenses where the men readily admitted their guilt and took their punishment as a matter of course. It usually amounted to a loss of one grade in rank and one month's pay and allowances. I had served on about two dozen of these cases and dutifully lost all of them. Then one day a staff sergeant asked me to take his case. He was accused of insubordination and refusing a direct order from an officer. I knew the sergeant and it just didn't sound like something he would do. It seems that the officer had provoked an argument with the sergeant and the sergeant told him to "go to hell." The officer ordered him to apologize and the sergeant refused to do it. Then the officer pressed charges for a court-martial. I was able to find some men who had witnessed the incident and it was one case that the Defense Council won. I was told a short while later that I would no longer have to serve as Defense Council. It was also hinted that I wasn't supposed to have won that case.

BOREDOM

Life was dragging on slowly at Camp Van Dorn. One of our big thrills was going to the Officer's Club. It had a bar about ten feet long, two ping pong tables, a couple of card tables and some chairs. As I recall it was also painted a rather bilious green and, don't forget, this was Mississippi in the summertime before air-conditioning. The one good thing about the club was that the drinks were cheap, but that was when two beers would put me to sleep. If you were lucky, you might find an old magazine or paper back book that some Major finally got through looking at. By the time it passed down to us junior officers half of the pages would be missing. I would usually have better luck borrowing books from the NCO club.

Things were staying pretty quiet around the camp. There was a lot of drilling and lectures for the men, with an occasional weekend in Baton Rouge. About this time a directive came down telling us that an officer could transfer, in grade, to another branch of the service. Three of us decided that we didn't want to be in this outfit anymore and filed a request for transfer to the Air Corps. We had heard that they served a lot better chow and besides it was a lot more glamorous. We also heard that we wouldn't have to walk so much. Our request was approved and we left on a Friday to go to Barksdale Field near Shreveport, Louisiana to see if we could pass the Air Corps physical. We arrived after lunch and spent the afternoon looking around town. We also went to the base supply room hoping to pick up some of those fancy Air Corps coveralls. They didn't have any coveralls but what they did have more than made up for it. There were a bunch of very pretty girls working in supply and we immediately talked our way into an invitation to a big party they were having that night. We had a great time at the party and didn't get back to the base until after 0600 Saturday morning. My physical was scheduled for 0800, so I just had time to shave and shower and that was about all. I did okay until I had to take the depth perception test. That is where you pull two strings and try to line up two little blocks about twenty five feet away from you. I didn't do well on that one, which probably kept me from becoming a pilot. I did, however, qualify for navigator or bombardier. I eventually got my papers back saying that I had passed the physical for the Air Corps but I never did hear anything from Washington about my transfer. It was probably a good thing, at least I came back alive with the Infantry. Thirty years later I fulfilled my ambition to fly a plane by getting my private pilot's license.

LOUISIANA MANEUVERS

The latter part of July, I was placed on temporary duty with Co.G, 410th Regiment, 103rd Infantry Division as part of an Umpire Group to work with them through their summer maneuvers. These were held in southwest Louisiana, about twenty miles southwest of Leesville, close to the Texas border. About all they had down there were pine trees, with some open areas of pasture and hay fields. It wasn't bad duty as they assigned two officers to work together with a jeep and driver, and it lasted for almost three months. We would run around all day, marking people dead or wounded, then go back to a nice bivouac area to spend the night. Sometimes we were able to take off on Friday afternoon for a long weekend and go to Port Arthur, Texas, although there wasn't much to do there, as this was an oil refining and ship building town. At least we got away from the Army for a while. It was in Port Arthur that I first learned to appreciate seafood. There was a restaurant a few miles away in Sabine Pass that served such great seafood that I can almost taste it right now.

While umpiring, I heard that one of the unit commanders was complaining because he wanted smoke shells fired to conceal the movement of his troops and the artillery couldn't, or wouldn't, fire any. They said they would just have to pretend that there was smoke out there. His question was, "How could you pretend you had smoke when the enemy was sitting there two or three hundred yards away watching your every move?" The umpires couldn't run over and tell everyone to close their eyes for thirty minutes while the other troops changed position.

So..... I, being an "expert" on explosives and such, came up with a great idea. I would not only give him smoke, I would also give him air-burst artillery. First, I wired several white phosphorus grenades on a string about a hundred yards long between the two lines of troops and had them attached to electric detonators so that I could blow two or three at a time. This would provide the smoke. Next I took a bunch of 1/4 pound blocks of TNT and attached blasting caps with two to three inch fuses to them. I held a block of TNT over my shoulder and while a man lighted the fuse. Then I threw it as high and as far as I could. It worked beautifully. As we activated the detonators, the phosphorus grenades blew, sending great clouds of white smoke rolling across the fields. I was the hit of the maneuvers until someone started hollering "fire." The pasture had caught on fire and they had to call off the maneuvers so that everyone could come and put it out. I really don't know what they were so upset about. It only burned about twenty acres and everyone had a good time playing "fireman" instead of "soldier" for a little while.

We had been in those Louisiana woods for just a few weeks when we were awakened one morning, not with a bugle, but with the most God-awful squealing you ever heard. It seems that during the night a very large razorback hog had gotten into the garbage sump, which was a 6 x 6 x 6 foot hole in the ground, and he couldn't get out. Needless to say, it was decided that we would have roast pork cooked on a spit over an open fire (we didn't have any other way of cooking it anyway.) We took turns turning that sucker all day long and finally figured it was done enough to eat. That was probably the worst tasting meat I've ever eaten. It tasted like cooked shoe leather that had been soaked in turpentine. That old hog had been living on pine cones from those turpentine pine trees.

Another interesting thing I saw in the Louisiana woods was a logging operation and this was long before chain saws. There were about forty loggers working in pairs. Two men would stand on either side of a tree and start pulling on a seven or eight foot crosscut saw. When that tree fell they would just move on to the next one. As a result, trees were scattered all over the place, pointing in all different directions. It looked as though someone had dropped a bunch of large toothpicks. The loggers all had a long-necked bottle stuck in their hip pockets that I first thought was something to drink. I found out later that the bottles were full of turpentine. When the saw would start to stick, because of all the pitch from the trees, they would sprinkle some turpentine on the blade and go back to cutting.

Off to one side was a narrow gauge railroad track and sitting on the track was a steam operated crane with a boom about twenty feet long that had a long steel cable attached to it. On the end of the cable was a set of hooks, which looked like large ice tongs. They used horses to pull these tongs over to the logs. What caught my attention about the operation was watching the horses that pulled the hooks over to the logs. They were short-coupled and stocky, carrying a minimum of harness, just a set of traces with a collar and belly band. It was the damndest thing you ever saw to watch those horses work their way through the jumble of felled trees. The driver, using a long set of reins, walked the horse up to a pile of logs. If he wanted a log on the other side of the pile, he slapped the reins and the horse jumped almost straight up and over the logs. They looked like a bunch of grasshoppers out there. When they found the log they wanted they hooked the tongs on to it and the little crane pulled them out to be loaded on flat cars. I'll swear that those horses, from a standing start, could jump right over a man. At least that is what it looked like to me. I heard later that they also used mules in this operation.

BACK TO CAMP VAN DORN

Maneuvers were finally over around the last of October and I returned once more to Camp Van Dorn. Nothing much happened for a while, but I do remember one time when I was told to put on a demonstration for Division Staff. We were to show how to blow trees down to block tank and truck traffic. We were also supposed to show how infantrymen could attack tanks with Molotov Cocktails. We rigged some old truck bodies to look like tanks, then proceeded to blow up all the trees in the area, including some very near the top brass. I was using a PA system and in my gentlest tones exhorted my A & P platoon to blow those "so and so" enemy tanks to hell. I thought I had done quite well until the Colonel sent me a reprimand for using foul language in front of the troops. I often wondered if he ever commanded a platoon and heard some of their conversations.

Going to OCS was more than just learning how to be a soldier. They instilled in us a feeling that you couldn't quit, couldn't show weakness. You were an OFFICER and had to do everything your men did and even more. You sometimes broke your ass trying to do it. The reason I mention this is that we tried to instill those same feelings in our men. At Camp Van Dorn I was teaching a hand to hand combat course to some new recruits and I had one that didn't want to participate. He said that he just couldn't do that. Instead of having him court martialed I had two big burly men pick him up by his shoulders and ankles, hold him as high as they could off the ground, then drop him. We did this four or five times until he decided to join us for the rest of the exercise. He turned out to be a pretty good soldier.

GOING OVERSEAS

We soon received word that they were calling for volunteers to go overseas, so I applied and was accepted. After a one-week leave at home, I caught a train for Ft. Meade, Maryland, where I would be processed to ship out for Europe. I had only been at Ft. Meade for a few days and was laying down in my bunk, reading, one Monday morning when I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. I turned around and there stood my brother, Grant. He was stationed somewhere in Virginia or the Carolinas with the Coast Guard and Mother had written him that I was at Ft. Meade, so he came up to see me. That was quite a surprise. We didn't see one another again for over two years.

I managed to get to New York City while I was waiting to go overseas. I took the train late Saturday afternoon and got to New York just about dark. I really didn't know where to go or what to do but I do remember walking around Times Square. The sidewalks were crowded with people going in every direction and I was propositioned about three times per block while I was walking. I'm sure I must have eaten something, somewhere, but I don't remember it. I do recall ending up in a real nice nightclub. There weren't many people in there even though it was a Saturday night. I had already finished a couple of drinks when the waiter came around and said they were getting ready to close and if I wanted another drink I had better order it now. I ordered about six more bourbon and cokes and had them all sitting on the table in front of me. There were two ladies sitting across from my table watching me try to drink all those highballs. I wasn't a very experienced drinker and after about four of them I was just about blotto. I was supposed to catch an early morning train back to camp so I hadn't tried to get a place to stay. They knew that I couldn't make it to the train station so they took me home with them in a cab. I can remember stopping in front of a very exclusive looking apartment, with a uniformed doorman, on Park Avenue. The three of them helped me upstairs and put me on the couch where I immediately fell asleep. I found out the next day that one of those ladies was the wife of Charlie Barnett, one of the Big Band leaders of our day, and that was his apartment.

It wasn't long before we were ready to leave Ft. Meade for our ship. We assembled at the rail siding and boarded the troop train that would take us back to New York City. There were several cars full of enlisted men and two cars full of officers. Sitting across the aisle from me, and one seat back was a 2nd Lt. that I knew but didn't like too much. He started to cry, saying that he didn't want to leave his

wife and children. I knew he wasn't married and told him to shut up because he was disturbing everyone else. He just kept getting louder and louder until I finally got up and gave him a good punch in the mouth to shut him up. I hit him harder than I meant to and he bounced over the guy sitting next to him and cut the top of his head on the window latch. The medics came in to fix him up and shaved off all of the hair on one side of his head. He not only had acted like an idiot, now he looked like one. At least he stayed quiet for the rest of the trip. We arrived in New York City late that day and unloaded near the docks. Our ship was the *SS Aquatania*, a retired British passenger liner that had been brought back into service because of the war. We were assigned to a stateroom that must have been designed for a midget but now would hold three full-sized officers, one on each side of the room on a cot and one on the floor in between them. One of my roommates was so prone to seasickness that he immediately hit the sack and stayed there until we docked five days later.

We left New York during the night so I didn't get to see the Statue of Liberty and because of our speed we sailed alone instead of going in a convoy. We were routed through the North Atlantic sea-lanes and at this time of the year the weather was bad. I remember standing on the bridge, which was located five decks up, one night in some rough seas. The waves broke over the bow, which completely disappeared and then splashed all over us. We had one submarine scare but we ran off and left him. The food on board was pretty sad. They only fed us two meals a day, breakfast and another meal later in the day. I didn't do too bad, though, because I managed to eat what my roommates couldn't and keep it all down. I got to where I actually liked cold fried eggs, cold fried fish and cold toast for breakfast. All the bad weather did for me was increase my appetite. The bad part was watching everything slide back forth on the table when the ship rolled.

GREAT BRITAIN

Five days after we left New York we dropped anchor in the Firth of Forth, Scotland. It was the prettiest sight you could imagine. The blue water and sky and the green mountains made it look like a calendar picture. We off-loaded on tenders that brought us to the dock where Scottish women met us, who served us sandwiches and hot tea. The tea tasted pretty good but was a little too sweet for me. The sandwiches were very thin with little bit of meat paste on them and didn't have much taste to them, due to the wartime shortages, I'm sure. We stayed at a British Army base that night in Scotland and then boarded a train the next morning to head south.

We spent the next night in another British Military camp that looked like something out of Dickens; very dingy, austere, brick buildings. It was being used as a replacement depot for American troops and we were restricted to the immediate area for a day or two while we were being processed. The weather was cold and rainy and there wasn't much to do while we waited except go to an American basketball game. That was not a high point of my visit to England. If you can imagine a small gym packed to the rafters with GIs who hadn't had a shower for awhile and all of them wearing wet, wool uniforms, then you get the picture. A couple of us went to a nearby pub one night but we didn't enjoy it. It was as dark and dreary as the camp and the beer matched the atmosphere. Not only that, the local Englishmen wouldn't even talk to us. They acted as though they were angry because we were over there.

After a few days I received my orders to proceed to Pembroke Dock, South Wales and report to the 28th Infantry Division. I was listed as a Casual Officer and was assigned to C Company, 110th Infantry Regiment. We were quartered in an old military post, which sat on a bluff overlooking the harbor. The BOQ was in a long red brick building. My room was fairly nice but, being England, had no heat in it. This was the middle of winter and it snowed occasionally. The room had a broken window and snow would blow in through the window and cover my bed. I was told that they didn't have any glass to fix it with so I just stuffed it full of rags and that worked fine. The Officer's Club was just so-so. It had a piano, a couple of dartboards and a bar. It also had a nice fireplace and was the warmest place around. You can guess where we spent most of our spare time.

Our camp was located on a bluff overlooking the harbor where there was an American PBY base and we could watch the planes when they came back from sub patrols on the Atlantic and the

Mediterranean oceans. They sometimes brought us oranges from Spain, which weren't very big but sure tasted good. One day I was watching the harbor when a PBY was coming in for a landing. He must have had the bottom shot out of his plane, because he landed as close to shore as he could, and as soon as his forward movement started to slow down, he sank. We watched the crew crawl out on the wings so that the boats could pick them up. It looked like they all got out okay.

We started training very hard out in the countryside around Pembroke. We worked on small unit maneuvers starting with squads, then platoon, company and, finally battalion strength. The fields we trained in were small, with rock wall fences four or five feet high all around them. Every time we used the tanks or trucks, part of someone's fence got knocked down and the farmer would come out and raise hell with us. There was a military unit that did nothing but run around paying off angry farmers for the wheel ruts, scared cows and missing chickens. I never did find out what happened to all those chickens. I have a feeling the farmers ate them. If you have ever seen "All Creatures Great and Small" on PBS, you will have some idea what the farms looked like. All of the buildings were of stone and the ground always muddy. The girls made quite a sight, all bundled up, wearing muddy knee boots, with cheeks and noses extremely red from the cold winter wind and they all seemed to be shoveling manure. Not too appealing.

The weather was very bitter, with lots of wind and cold rain. We made an overnight march once in that kind of weather. It was a steady downpour and so cold. We had marched up north over the moors, with our bedrolls and field kitchens following us in 2 1/2ton trucks. We didn't stop until well after dark and by then the trucks had gotten lost. However, we did have full field packs so the enlisted men at least had one blanket and a shelter half with them. Officers carried a musette bag with just the bare essentials in it, like dry socks and some K-rations. The rain was still coming down and we were trying to dig slit trenches so that we could get out of the wind and try to get some sleep. The dirt was only about three or four inches deep, then there was solid rock. We dug as much as we could and piled it up around the upper part of the slit trench. You see, we were on a little bit of a slope and we figured that water would just run around the sod we had stacked up. It sounded like a great idea until you tried to lay down and found that you were practically in a bathtub. The water was running under the dirt and on top of the rock. All we had done was help it run easier by removing some of the dirt.

Everyone was pretty miserable until I remembered that we had our gas masks with us. Gas masks, at that time, had a gas cape with them made out of some sort of plastic material. It was impervious to liquids so that it would keep the gas droplets off of you. I told the men to put their capes on to keep the rain off and it worked just fine. It was still cold so I lit up my trusty Zippo lighter to provide some heat inside the cape and pretty soon you could see dim lights flickering, like luminaries, all over the side of the hill. Our trucks finally found us and those idiots ended up serving our evening meal at 0200 in the morning. In the meantime we had lost a couple of men and didn't find them until daylight. They had walked down the hill and fallen off of a cliff where they landed on a small ledge about fifteen feet below, just barely missing another drop of about sixty feet. I don't think they did any more exploring on their own again after dark.

With the idea of promoting more understanding between the British and American forces, Sheaf Headquarters ordered us to swap some of our troops with each other. We sent a small, hand picked group of men to a Scottish regiment and got some of the biggest, brawniest guys you ever saw in return. They were members of the famous Black Watch Regiment and each of them was over six feet tall. All wore kilts and contrary to popular belief, wore a jockey-like pair of shorts underneath. The reason we had to improve relations was that we were having problems with the British civilians, not the military. Their favorite saying about Americans was that "they are overpaid, oversexed and over here." They didn't appreciate us going into their stores and we got the cold shoulder in their pubs.

Some of us were invited to a dance at one of the hotels in Pembroke one Saturday night, where they were serving sandwiches and tea. Naturally someone managed to sneak in some whiskey and it wasn't long before the party started to loosen up and get real friendly. We noticed some Englishmen, both military and civilians, looking in the windows and someone suggested, in the spirit of good relations that we invite them in. It seemed that things were going along smoothly, then the British started to cut in on our dates while we were dancing but wouldn't let us cut back in on them. Pretty soon the fists started flying and some of the furniture started to come apart. I ended up on the bandstand and was having a good time banging people on the head as they went by. I'm not too sure what I hit them with but when it was over all I had left was the neck of a guitar in my hands.

I enjoyed Pembroke for other reasons, though. It had a large, 11th century castle that I wandered through whenever I had the chance. It was right out of "King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table" with its turrets, battlements, courtyards and moat. The walls were extremely high and thick, and as far as I could tell, the castle had never been taken by force. I saw a few other ruined castles while I was in Wales but never had the time to explore them.

GETTING READY FOR D-DAY

We were training constantly now and didn't have much time off to do anything else. Walter McDonald, my cousin's husband, had come to England with his medical unit and was stationed somewhere north of London. I managed to get a couple of days off one weekend and went up to see him. I remember giving him my officer's Class A cap. It was one of those stiff brimmed ones that I didn't care much for. It was too hard to take care of packed away in a Val Pak or stuffed into my duffel bag. He was glad to get it and I was glad to get in out of my luggage. He was very lonesome and spent the whole weekend telling me how much he missed being back home with Bernice.

In the spring of 1944 I thought I would like to transfer to the Rangers, which were comparable to the British Commandos. I went through all the channels I could find but didn't have any luck. I was told that it took six months to complete the training and they didn't think there was time enough for me to do it. Now that I think about it, I don't believe I would have liked climbing those cliffs on the beach at Pont du Hoc anyway. Those Rangers took a whipping there.

I finally made a trip to London. It looked strange to see all those barrage balloons floating over the city and I never did understand what good they did. The bombers just flew over the tops of them and dropped their bombs anyway. I went to a big, fancy hotel for dinner and all they could serve was a small piece of fish and potatoes with peas. They didn't have any coffee, just tea. That was a big disappointment. There was another 2nd Lt. with me and we thought we would go out and see the sites in London. The only problem was that we were in a total blackout and couldn't see a thing. We did get over to Picadilly Circus and it was packed with people. You couldn't see them but you sure knew they were there. If someone wasn't trying to pick your pocket, someone else was patting your butt. Later that night we were having drinks in a pub when the air raid sirens went off. Naturally we had to go outside to see what was going on. There were tracers from the AA guns crisscrossing all over the sky and you could hear the airplane engines roaring in the night. All of a sudden we started to hear a pretty tinkling sound, like broken glass, falling in the street. We found out later that it was shrapnel from the bursting AA shells. An air raid warden came by and made us get off the street, so we spent the next hour or so in the London Underground.

It was well into spring now and although we didn't know when D-Day was, we knew it was getting closer and closer. When I got back to Wales we started amphibious training at a place called Slapton Sands near the town of Torquay, on the south coast of England. We began working with the Navy and their LCVPs. We loaded thirty men in the LCVP and went out off the beach about a half-mile. We circled around and around until half of the men got seasick, then we turned and headed, wide open, for the beach. Those craft were designed to run up on the beach, drop their ramps so the soldiers or vehicles could get off, then go into reverse and pull themselves back into deeper water. When they did this the props dug a big, deep hole in the sand. Soon the whole bottom of the landing area was covered with holes, some of which were six to eight feet deep. If the LCVP stopped too far out and dropped his ramp over one of these holes, whoever came off the boat first would go in over his head. We had two or three men drown this way before they were finally told to go all the way in to the beach. We assaulted the beaches in this manner without any live ammunition in our weapons. When everyone had made a successful beach assault we marched inland a few hundred yards, turned around and, using live ammunition, fired out toward the sea.

We had an officer named Kelly, from Boston, in our unit who was a big, overbearing, S.O.B. He was always telling everyone else what to do and how to do it. He even told you to hum when we were trying to sing harmony in the Officers Club. He evidently was the same way with his platoon because one day when we were assaulting toward the sea with live ammo, someone started putting a few rifle rounds right at his foxhole. Then three mortar shells dropped practically in his lap. Everyone said it was an accident but he transferred out as soon as he could and we never saw him again.

Rumor had it that the 28th was scheduled to make the D-Day landing but was pulled out because we had lost a large number of men while practicing our amphibious landings, during a bad storm on the English Channel. I heard years later that a couple of German E boats had gotten in the middle of an early morning exercise and shot up and sank several of the LSTs and LCVPs. A lot of our troops were drowned.

JOINING THE 2nd DIVISION

I was still being carried as a surplus officer in the 28th Division but was released from them when orders came for me to report to the 23rd Infantry, 2nd Division. Actually the 2nd Division joined me at Pembroke Dock. The 28th Division moved out and the 2nd Division moved in. I just stayed put. I heard later that the 28th was scheduled to make the D-Day landing but was pulled out because of the loss of so many men off Slapton Sands.

The 2nd had only been there for a short while when we moved to the south of England into a large tent city. We were restricted to the camp, which was very congested and, just to keep the men busy, we did a lot of close order drill and calisthenics. It was the latter part of May '44 and everyone was talking about D-Day now and it seemed as if it was almost here. I then moved to Bournemouth, on the south coast, to await boarding orders along with several other casual officers.

It was very boring sitting around with nothing to do, so two other 2nd Lieutenants and I thought we would do some sightseeing. We didn't get very far until we found a Turkish bath that was open for business and decided we needed to take one. We went in and had the full treatment, the steam bath, the cold dip, the massage and then all three of us fell asleep for a couple of hours. When we woke up we got dressed and went back to our quarters. Oops, we walked right into an inspection formation. We were only about fifteen minutes late but that didn't make any difference. The Commanding Officer was mad, mad, mad! We were told to report to him after formation to explain where we had been. We reported and told him we had fallen asleep and didn't hear the formation being called. He said that was no excuse for missing the formation and that we stood a very good chance of facing charges. I told him that I wasn't offering it as an excuse but as a reason. It must have worked because all he did was confine us to quarters until we boarded our ships. That was great. We missed all the details and our friends brought us anything we needed, like scotch, coal and extra food.

Everyone knew that D-Day was close but obviously no one knew what day it would be. We finally started boarding our ship on June 3rd. The ship was pretty crowded but we didn't mind too much, thinking we would only be on it for a few hours. Those few hours stretched into three days. We just sat in the harbor waiting for them to say "go" and finally they did.

GETTING TO NORMANDY

When we got out into the British Channel there were boats of all kinds and sizes as far as you could see. Most of them were towing a barrage balloon for protection against low flying aircraft but I never did see a German plane on the way across the Channel. As we got closer to the French coast we could hear shellfire and most of it seemed to be coming from our Navy. We were too far out to see very much, though. After the sun went down we started moving closer to the shore. We were the reserve division on the landing at Omaha Red Beach and followed the 1st and 29th Divisions ashore. Elements of our Division started landing around 0300 on June 7th on the beach in front of the little village of San Laurent sur Mer. They had to fight their way past a German bunker with an 88mm gun in it. I got to the beach when it was daylight and there were still a lot of tracer bullets flying around but most of the fighting had moved a little way inland by now.

A short way in from the beach we came across fields planted with upright posts. They were ten or fifteen feet tall with wires strung between them. The Germans placed the posts there so that our gliders would crash. They also put Teller mines on top of some of them to explode when the gliders hit them. I was attached to Regimental reserve and still didn't have anything to do but sit in a foxhole and contemplate the war. Four days later, on June 11th, I was assigned to E Company, 2nd Battalion and reported to Captain Smith. I was given the 2nd platoon, replacing Lt. Alex Touchstone who had been wounded while they were moving up through the Cerisy Forest.

FIGHTING IN THE BOCAGE COUNTRY

The next day our Battalion was told to move south to the road that went from Bayeux to St. Lo, through the village of Berigny. The Germans had been using this road to move their troops laterally in front of us. We were to hold positions above the road to prevent them from doing this while the rest of the Regiment started the attack on Hill 192. This hill was the highest point in this sector. From it you could see the town of St. Lo toward the southwest, the beaches of Normandy toward the north and to the south and the southeast you had a commanding view of all the German defenses.

We started out from our location in the Cerisy Forest about mid-morning and began moving south, then a little bit toward the west. We had been told to watch out for snipers and, sure enough, it wasn't long before we started getting some rifle fire from the trees ahead. A patrol was sent to check it out and after some more small arms fire, things got quiet again. We started moving and it was so still you could hear insects buzzing and birds chirping. It didn't even sound like a war. It was almost like walking through the woods, hunting squirrels. Move slowly and watch the trees.

We reached the eastern edge of Berigny where we could cover the road and were told to halt there and dig in. Our platoon position was in a rectangular field with its longest axis running north and south and facing west. This was the bocage or hedgerow country of France. The hedgerow surrounding our field was about five feet high. Another field was in front of us with a fairly low hedgerow around it and just beyond that was a farmyard with a few outbuildings and a large barn. I found out later it was a barn and house combined. The family lived in one end of the building and the animals stayed in the other. The buildings were all vacant at this time because the Germans had moved all of the civilians out of the area back behind their lines. From our platoon positions we could see the town to the left, the most prominent building being the church. To our front we could see the barn and by standing on the hedgerow we could see about 1000 yards to where the Germans were supposed to be. On our right front we could see the southern slope of Hill 192, which was held by the enemy.

June didn't seem like summer in France. At least not the summers I was used to. It was cool at night and just a little warmer in the daytime. The temperature caused it to be very foggy in the morning and sometimes it could get real spooky. You could hear German tanks or trucks moving on the other side of the creek but you couldn't see anything for the foggy mist. Things seemed to move softly in the fog. It reminded me of an impressionist painting. This was the middle of June and everything was so peaceful and quiet. If you hadn't heard an occasional mortar or burp gun, you wouldn't believe that a war was being fought. You could hear the artillery firing but it was always off in the distance.

We had a sad thing happen about this time. We had been under attack by the Germans and Lt. Allen, the 3rd platoon leader, had gone out to check his outposts. As Allen was returning he happened to go by the foxhole of a replacement that had just joined us who heard someone coming and, without checking, turned around and fired, killing Lt. Allen. Later we almost lost the 3rd platoon sergeant, John Brodie, the same way. He and another man were on a short recon patrol and on the way back to our lines started to get some fire from the Germans. He jumped over a hedgerow and almost jumped on top of one of his own men, who swung his submachine gun around to shoot, but couldn't because Brodie was practically standing on top of him.

Nighttime was a lot different than daylight. Patrols were more active then and someone was always setting off a trip wire, which exploded a grenade or sent up a flare. I hated to see a flare at night unless it was one of our own. They lit everything up with a kind of flat light that would be so bright you could read a map by it. The secret to surviving a flare was to keep absolutely still. Any movement at all stood out like a sore thumb. Usually both sides started firing flares, mortars and artillery around daybreak. I assume that this was to break up any attacks by the enemy and to try and catch night patrols going back to their lines.

We didn't do an awful lot of sleeping at night. I took a four-man patrol out once to try to locate some mortar positions that were giving us some fire. We moved very slowly, for two reasons. One, so we wouldn't make any noise, and two, so we wouldn't walk into an enemy outpost. We went around two German outposts without any problems and actually got all the way back to their kitchen area. One of the cooks came out and dumped a pan of water about three feet from where I was laying. We never did locate the mortars but we did spot a towed 88, which I reported when we got back. We fired some artillery into that area but I don't know if we got the gun because I never did go back to that particular spot. I tried to stay off night patrols as much as I could. They were much too scary and besides, I like to see what I'm shooting at.

I had a good bunch of guys in my platoon and we were gradually getting used to one another. My Platoon Sergeant was named Jacks, a tall Texan who never had much to say. He was old Regular Army and would never call me anything but Lieutenant or Sir. We spent a few nights together in the same foxhole and he loosened up some. I must have gained his respect because one time when we had gotten some replacements in and one of them kept bugging me about something, I don't recall what, Sgt. Jacks happened to overhear him. Jacks took hold of the guy's arm, dragged him about 20 feet away and told him, nose to nose, "Never, I mean never, bother the Lieutenant again. He has more important things to do than listen to you complain and the next time it happens you'll be one sorry soldier." It was nice to have friends like that.

Remember, I said we could see part of the Bayeaux-St. Lo road? The one part we could see well from the left side of our platoon area had a small bridge crossing it. We saw Germans running across the road there, moving from right to left, but by the time we could see them and get a shot off, they would be across the road and down in a ditch where we couldn't hit them. I noticed that I could see the ditch they were coming through if I stood up behind a tree that was growing in the hedgerow on the right side of our platoon area. I had a great idea. Our First Sergeant, Clarence Umberger, was a big hulking man who could shoot better than anyone in the whole regiment. He had been the National Kelly Match Champion for years. I had Sgt. Umberger go to the left side where he could see the creek and road and I went to the right side of the tree. I had a pair of binoculars and Umberger had a Springfield '03 rifle with a scope on it. We each had a walkie-talkie radio and when I spotted a German in the ditch getting ready to run across the road I radioed Umberger and told him to fire. The German and the bullet would get there at the same time. He shot nine Germans before they had sense enough to quit.

THE "WONDERFUL" RED CROSS

The war was more like a game at this point. We were young and healthy and thought that nothing could ever hurt us. I was probably more alive and aware of what was going on around me than at any other time in my life. I was having a lot of fun doing what I was doing. After all, I had a whole platoon that would do anything I told them to do. Very heady stuff.

It seems that we were always getting some artillery or mortar rounds dropped on us. Usually three or four and then they would quit. I had gone back from my platoon position to the rear of the company CP to shave and try to clean up a little. The process didn't amount to much, just a small mirror stuck in a tree and some cold water in your helmet. I was just getting started when I heard some rounds coming in. I jumped for the nearest slit trench and almost made it when they hit. A large piece of shrapnel slapped me across the knee. It could have taken my leg off but it didn't even tear my pants. My knee, however, swelled up like a grapefruit. That little episode got me a few days in an Army hospital and my first Purple Heart. It was June 14, 1944.

Something happened at the hospital that has soured me on the Red Cross ever since. I didn't have any toilet articles or, for that matter, much of anything else with me. I needed to wash and shave and brush my teeth. When I asked the lady from the Red Cross if she would let me have some of the things I needed, she said I would have to pay for them. I was under the impression that those things were donated to the Red Cross for the servicemen. It really teed me off and I told her what she could do with them. Besides I didn't have any money with me. I managed to borrow what I needed from the other guys in the ward and got by until I caught up with my own things back in my company.

I met a tank officer while I was in the hospital in Normandy. He told me that he had made three landings on Omaha Beach. The first two were in tanks that were supposed to float and didn't and the last was in an LST. The floating tanks were strange looking vehicles. They had a large canvas doughnut around them, filled with air, which was designed to keep them afloat. The only problem was they weren't bullet proof. The tank officer's first tank was hit during the landing and sank. He got back to the LCT and got another tank, which was also hit and sunk. That time he was wounded slightly and had to go back to England to the hospital. The reason he was in this hospital was to have his bandages checked. He told me about something that I have never heard of since. He said that we had some vehicles that were equipped with a device that could lower or raise the tire pressure while the vehicle was moving. They lowered the pressure when they were in deep sand on the beaches then inflated the tires again when they got to solid ground. Also, if they were punctured, you could just keep pumping air into them and keep on rolling. After a few days lying on a hospital cot with hot packs on my knee I was released and sent back to my Company. I had enjoyed the rest and the better food but I was glad to get back where I belonged.

PATROLS AND OTHER KINDS OF FUN

Our lines had been static for a few weeks while they were building up the beachhead with troops and supplies. We hadn't lost many men although we were actively patrolling in front of our positions; the Germans were doing the same. It got to be a game between us to see who could get away with what. We went through the farm buildings on the edge of Berigny in the daytime looking for chickens or eggs and the Germans would cover the same ground at night looking for the same things. One day I took a patrol to check out a farmhouse beyond our left flank. It was more a case of looking for food than it was looking for Germans. Most of the family's possessions were still in the house but it had been ransacked pretty well, probably by some Germans. The furniture, dishes, pictures and clothes were still there scattered everywhere. Even the bedding. There was one full sized bed with drapes all around it with a real thick comforter still on it. The whole place had a musty smell as though it was full of damp wool. The only food we found was a small string of onions hanging from a rafter. We took them and they were delicious.

One day I took a radioman and an SCR 300 radio (carried in a big backpack) and climbed up inside of the barn that was out in front of us. The barn had a slate roof and some of the slates were missing up near the top. We were up in the barn, practically hanging from the rafters, spotting for Regimental Artillery. We could see the German positions and had spotted some mortar emplacements and a self-propelled gun. I started calling fire in on the targets but our batteries would only fire one gun at a time. We had been up there forty-five minutes or so when I heard a burp gun firing up through the floor. A German patrol had gotten into the barn and was looking for us. They probably guessed that someone was spotting artillery fire from up in the top of the barn. The thing that saved us was that they had started firing up through the ceiling at the other end of the barn. I told the radioman to jump out of the window. He did but he left so quickly that he forgot the radio. I didn't want the Germans to get it so I grabbed the straps, threw it over my shoulder and jumped after him into the barnyard. I was lucky. If I hadn't landed in a pile of manure, I probably would have broken my back. Anyway, we got back to our lines without them seeing us. I grabbed a rifle grenade launcher and began firing some grenades into the barn through the windows. I doubt that I hit anything because I checked the barn the next day and didn't see anything to indicate that anyone had been hit.

Things remained fairly quiet for a while. I wanted to see if I could get down to the creek that ran just in front of the German lines. I skirted around the town and went down beside the road toward the spot where Umberger had shot all those Germans that I had spotted for him. There was a low, four feet high hedgerow that ran beside the road. I got all the way down the creek and saw a machine gun nest with two men in it. Then I climbed over the hedgerow and started back toward our lines when an 88 started firing at me. One round hit just in front of me. I jumped back over the hedgerow and started running. They fired again and missed. I was really turning it on now, jumping back and forth over that hedgerow, until I could get back to town and get behind a building. It must have been a single shot piece with a lousy crew. I was a pretty good runner in high school but I never heard of anyone outrunning an 88.

We had been complaining that the German Schmiezer machine pistol was better than anything we had. It fired so fast it sounded like someone tearing a piece of cloth. It could fire 30 rounds in the time it takes to say "burp" and that is the kind of a sound it made. To even things up somewhat we were issued Thompson submachine guns. They didn't fire as fast as the "burp gun" but they did give us some automatic small arms fire. We got two per squad. Then someone came up with an idea to help the carbine. Officers were issued a 30caliber carbine instead of the old 45 Colt automatic. It had a clip that held 15 rounds and someone had the smart idea to tape two clips together side by side so that when one clip was empty all you had to do was turn it over and insert the other end and keep on firing. That saved a lot time when you were in a hurry. The carbine had a little switch on it you could turn for single shots or semi-automatic fire. We always left them on semi-automatic so that all you had to do was keep pulling the trigger. Some of the guys were able to work on the sears a little bit and make them fully automatic. This was dangerous, though, because they would go off accidentally if you dropped them.

We were still eating a lot of K-rations and C-rations, which really got monotonous. We had scrounged all of the onions and other food we could find in the farmhouses near us. All of the French civilians had been evacuated and were either behind our lines or the German lines and there was nothing planted in their gardens. One day a cow wandered into our field and it was almost like an old movie cartoon. Everybody stopped talking and everything got very still. Two men crept around behind the cow and then started moving slowly toward the rest of us, enclosing the cow in a big circle. They caught her, made a lasso out of some tent ropes and led her back into the woods. About thirty minutes later they came back carrying a handful of steaks with them. It didn't take long to get a fire going and to start roasting some of those steaks. I don't know when anything tasted so good. One guy found an iron pot

and put it on the fire. Then he put a little of everything he could find into the pot. There was the fresh beef, of course, plus onions, turnips, canned bacon (out of some 10 in 1 rations), and whatever anyone else donated. The cook fire happened to be right beside his foxhole so he didn't have to go far to tend it. We started getting some incoming mortars and everyone hit the foxholes. The shelling continued for quite some time and no one was moving around. No one, that is, except one nut. He got out of his foxhole and was sitting on top of the ground saying he wanted to go home (who didn't). I had a couple of guys grab him and drag him back into a slit trench where we could hold him until he could be sent back to the Battalion aid station. By then, he had gone completely crazy. While all this was going on I happened to look over at the stewpot and I wish I'd had a camera. All you could see was this guy's hand sticking up out of the foxhole holding a spoon, and stirring the stew while we were getting the hell blown out of us by German mortars. The stew made it okay and tasted just fine.

We invited some of the officers from Battalion over for a steak dinner later that night. We still had a lot of meat left so they brought me one of the hindquarters, which I hung in the tree over my very elaborate foxhole. I dug this foxhole into the hedgerow and made it big enough for two men to get down in. It had a place for candles, so we could read at night, and places to stack a few personal possessions, such as a book to read, extra K-rations and toilet paper, a real prized commodity. During the night we started getting a lot of artillery fire from the German lines. It must have lasted two or three hours and didn't stop until daybreak. The shelling was so intense that it seemed like one continuous explosion. We weren't too bad off, though, dug in like we were. It would've taken a direct hit to do us any real harm. When daylight finally came and the firing stopped, we crawled out to see what kind of damage we had taken. The only thing of any consequence that was damaged was my hindquarter of beef. All that was left of it was a little piece of hock, all burned and black looking. The rest was completely gone.

DIVERSIONARY ATTACK FOR HILL 192

On July 11th the Division was assigned the task of trying to take Hill 192 again. E Company was to attack toward the west through the village of Berigny. We were to cross a large open field, which sloped gently down to the creek, then up the other side to the enemy positions. I think the move was designed to tie up the German troops more than anything else while the rest of the Division attacked Hill 192. We were told that we would be working with tanks on this attack and just before daylight a company of Sherman tanks pulled up to our rear. My platoon was given three tanks with telephones mounted on the rear so we could talk to the tank commander. We moved to the sunken road that ran north and south through Berigny. Just to the north of the barn was a large gate, opening into the field leading down to the creek. We assembled in the road and waited for the signal to jump off. Artillery bursts rolled up and down Hill 192 in front of the rest of the Division, but we couldn't tell what was going on over there. We had some business of our own to take care of. This was my first big battle and while I really wasn't scared I was a little nervous about doing the right thing in front of my men.

We didn't have any artillery barrage in front of us but we did have it on call if we needed it. I started my platoon through the gate and into the field with one squad behind each tank. The first squad and their tank went through, then headed down toward the creek bottom. I followed with the second squad and a tank and the rest were to follow behind me. The first tank started drawing a lot of small arms fire but kept on going. The tank I was with started following him then began to veer to the right toward a big hedgerow. I tried to talk to the tank commander on the telephone but it must have had a short in it because all I could get was static. By now the first tank had reached the creek and was starting to go across but he never made it. He went belly deep in the soft, marshy ground about fifty feet from the hedgerow that ran east and west. My tank kept going to the right and ran into the same hedgerow but we were only about halfway down the field. The third tank was late starting out and when he saw what happened to the first two tanks he just made a circle and came back out of the field and into the sunken road.

The second squad got all bunched up behind our tank, while I was trying to talk to the tank commander. Then we started getting some mortar rounds dropping in behind us. Two or three would hit, then a pause, then two or three more and they kept getting closer and closer. When we hit the dirt beside the tank I saw a Teller mine about a foot away from the tank track. If the tank had hit, it would have blown us all to hell. The mortars kept coming in and I knew someone had to be spotting for them up close but I didn't know where he was. Another mortar hit practically beside us. Sgt. Harkins, the squad leader in front of me, was badly hit. Shrapnel put a hole where his wristwatch used to be. A large piece of shrapnel took off most of his face and left him with just one eye and part of his nose. It also hit him in the ribs and legs. One piece skipped across my back and split my web belt down the middle. Two or three other men were also wounded from that same burst. The only place I could see that would hold an observer was the steeple on the church about three hundred yards away which had a window up near the top with four panes of glass in it. I was carrying an M1 rifle and, taking aim at the crosspiece, fired all eight rounds and shattered the window. The mortar fire stopped and a few days later we found a dead German in the church tower. He had been hit in the face with rifle fire.

I knew that we couldn't go back the way we had come into the field because of all the machine gun fire we were getting. I had the men crawl over the hedgerow and into the next field, which had a grain crop in it that was about two feet high. Using this and the hedgerow for cover we managed to get everyone out except Sgt. Harkins. We all thought he was dead but about thirty minutes after we got back to the sunken road he crawled through the gate. The medics did what they could for him with first aid packs but he didn't make it. Once we got Harkins out of the gate, I had a chance to take a breather. My knee was bothering me some and this was the first chance I'd had to look at it. I guess I banged it up again crawling out of that field. My pant leg looked as though someone had used a paper punch on it. There were five bullet holes in it right at the knee from the machine gun fire coming up the hill. I saw several men lying in the field, dead. By the time we were able to get them out a few days later their skin looked like black leather.

We still had some men down at the creek with that stuck tank. I grabbed four or five men, one with a B.A.R., and Sgt. Jacks and I started back down the hedgerow we had used earlier. Jacks was right behind me as we crawled through the grass. When rifle fire started hitting the ground right beside me he reached up and cut my binocular case off my belt, figuring that some sniper thought I might an officer and was trying to hit me. We got about halfway down to the creek again and from this spot I could see the eastern slope of Hill 192. We saw American troops attacking up the side of the hill and we also saw German troops moving a machine gun into position to fire at them. Even though it was at extreme range, I had the B.A.R. man start firing and that broke up the machine gun attack on our men. We stayed there, picking up targets of opportunity for awhile. That is, if you saw something that looked like it might hold a German, you shot at it. Shortly afterward, the men who survived the attack to the creek with the tank started making their way back out. We ended the day in the same place we started, but with seven or eight men killed and a few more than that wounded, plus one tank lost. I imagine that our action did help tie up German troops that otherwise might have been used to defend Hill 192. War was not so much fun anymore. It looked different when some of your men got killed and you got a real good look at what shrapnel can do to a human being.

BREAKING OUT OF THE BEACHHEAD

We were still having a lot of problems trying to get the tanks through the hedgerows. The Germans positioned their machine gun nests set in the corners of the fields so they could cover both fields to their front and thereby give each other covering fire. The usual way a tank entered a field was to drive over the hedgerow. When they did, the tank pitched up exposing the belly, which was not heavily protected. One German with a Panzerfaust (bazooka) could knock out a tank by waiting until it pitched up, then shoot it in the belly. Some combat engineer back on the beach came up with an idea that changed all this. He took some of the German beach barricades, which were made of large angle iron, cut them off at a sharp angle and, welding several of them together, attached them to the front of the tank. It made a large saw-toothed contraption that looked very menacing and it worked. Instead of riding up over the hedgerow, the tank now plowed right through it. They tried all kinds of ideas, including using TNT satchel charges to blast holes in the hedgerows, but nothing worked as well as those sawtooths.

We stayed in this area for a few more days, then moved over to the bottom of Hill 192 for the big breakthrough out of the beachhead. While we waited for orders to start our next attack, we got word that we would be served a hot breakfast, which sounded great. It would be a welcome change from all of the K-rations we had been eating. The morning this wonderful event was to take place started out with heavily overcast, then it began to rain, but we were still going to have that hot, cooked breakfast. Try to imagine, if you can, someone serving hotcakes, scrambled eggs and coffee out of those large Army aluminum cans while standing out in the open during a rain that was coming down like a monsoon. The cans holding the hotcakes were half full of water by the time I got up to them. The scrambled eggs were all floating in our mess kits and the butter was so hard you couldn't spread it. The only really potable item was the coffee, which needed to be diluted anyway.

HILL 192

We assembled on the back slope of Hill 192 during the night, then moved to positions on the forward slope early in the morning. It had once been heavily wooded but artillery had shattered most of the trees. We were well dug in; using some of the old German positions with logs, in most cases, over the top of our foxholes. Our attack plan called for our artillery to fire high explosive impact shells ahead of us for several hundred yards. After twenty to thirty minutes of this, the artillery lifted and the tanks attacked through the hedgerows, (remember the sawtooth front ends) tearing big holes in them so the infantry could get through. While the tanks were out there, the artillery fired T.O.T. (time on target) rounds. These were air bursts that exploded above the ground and kept the enemy pinned down. Then the tanks would return to our lines and we would jump off.

Both sides were firing artillery now and a lot of enemy shells landed in our area. We were supposed to have jumped off at daybreak but that time passed without any orders to attack. I was getting a little impatient and

decided to go back to the Company CP between rounds to see what I could find out. On the way, I passed one of the bigger foxholes that held about six men. It had taken a direct hit and was torn all to bits along with the guys in it. One man was still alive but he had been wounded in the lower abdomen and it looked as if someone had hit him with an ax right between the legs.

It seems that some kind of a snafu on our flanks was holding us up. We got the word to move out, finally, and the first two platoons started out across the St. Lo highway. That was the easy part. I had the reserve platoon, still back up on the side of the hill, and could see what kind of opposition they encountered. Every hedgerow was full of machine gun emplacements, which made crossing those fields almost impossible. We had to knock them out with mortars or bazookas then go on to the next field and do it all over again. I was using binoculars and saw one of our officers get hit (all officers wore a vertical stripe on the back of their helmets). When I came across him later I saw that he had been hit right between the eyes.

Progress was very slow but we were at least moving south, driving the Germans out of their foxholes and killing them as they ran to the next field. Our company moved about three hundred yards and was getting a lot of casualties. Captain Smith told me to take my platoon and attack through the first two platoons. Going straight down the middle would have put my men under direct fire from positions about a thousand yards ahead, so I took them down the right side of our company area which had plenty of cover for most of the way. We caught up with the rest of the company and started moving out to their front. One of my squad leaders went kind of crazy and started running toward the Germans, firing as he went, until he got ahead of us by two or three fields. Don't get the wrong idea, he wasn't nuts, he was just angry. I called to tell him to hold up until we could reach him but he couldn't hear me, so I told Sgt. Jacks to keep the men moving while I went to see if I could catch up with the guy. I was moving through a cut in the hedgerow into the next field and saw a wide gate in the hedgerow to my left. Looking through it I could see a large group of Germans, all bunched up, running toward some woods on our left flank. I knew I had a B.A.R. man on that flank so I started hollering for him to look out for them. I began firing at the enemy from where I was, putting four clips from my M1 into them as fast as I could pull the trigger. I saw a couple of them stagger and fall. The Germans grabbed their fallen comrades and ran around the corner of the hedgerow. When they turned the corner, the B.A.R. man was waiting for them with his gun propped in the fork of a tree. He dropped them all.

About two fields further down, I finally caught up with the squad leader and got him to stop. He must have scared the hell out of the Germans because they were all gone. We got reorganized and started moving again but it was getting late in the day, so we didn't go too much farther. It was 1700 when we finally stopped. I was told to take a head count and see how many men we had left. We had started the day with 232 enlisted men and 7 officers plus a heavy weapons section of 32 men. When I counted noses that night I could only find 32 enlisted men and two officers (Executive Officer, Dan Manning and myself.) Our Company Commander, Captain Smith, had been sent to Battalion Headquarters when the Battalion Executive Officer got wounded. Two officers were killed and two wounded. Out of the original 264 enlisted men 232 were killed, wounded or missing. It was July 26, the day that most of us qualified for the Combat Infantry Badge.

We spent a very restless night. We were exhausted, extremely under strength and were expecting the enemy to counter-attack all night long. We got a lot of artillery and mortar fire but that was all. The enemy was on the run and we kept moving right after them, meeting only sporadic resistance. When they did stop to fight they were tough as ever and we still suffered a lot of casualties. We continued to attack through the towns of St. Jean de Baisants, Etouvy and Vire.

Taken from issue no. 20, dated Wed. 31 January 1945 of the *INVADER*, a newsletter of the 23rd.

2ND BN IS CITED FOR NORMANDY ATTACK

General Robertson today announced a commendation for the Second Bn. for "outstanding performance of duty in combat operations against a highly trained and tenacious enemy during a three day period from 26 July to 28 July, 1944 of the Normandy Campaign."

The citation reads: Acting as the spearhead of a 23rd Infantry drive to the south, the 2nd Bn. crossed the St. Lo highway shortly after 0600 on 26 July and took up the attack in a column of companies with Co. E in the assault. Although intense concentrations from Division artillery preceded the attack, assault elements received heavy enemy artillery fire soon after crossing the Berigny-St. Lo highway, designated as the Line of Departure.

Pushing on through the heavy barrage, Co. E encountered fierce machine-gun, mortar and small arms fire when leading platoons neared the enemy MLR a few hundred yards from the highway. Here the enemy had machine-gun emplacements, expertly camouflaged and well protected from both artillery and small arms fire, in the corners of every hedgerow.

Co E engaged the enemy in a heavy firefight, but was unable to advance until Co. F approached the area from the left rear and also engaged the enemy. During this firefight both companies were again subjected to heavy concentrations of artillery which inflicted a number of casualties since there was no time to dig in. With the aid of a company of tanks, however, the battalion pressed on, breached the MLR and closed with the enemy in vicious hand-to-hand fighting. During this stage of the battle rifle companies fought without the support of machine-guns and mortars, so close was the fighting. Finally, resistance slackened slightly and the advance rolled on. Shortly after noon the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Raymond B. Marlin (who recently rec'd the DSC from Gen. Marshall for this action), was wounded, but his executive officer, Maj. Louis F. Hamele, immediately assumed command and displayed remarkable coolness and excellent judgment in a critical situation.

The attack gained momentum during the afternoon in spite of continuous machine-gun, mortar and small arms fire from the well entrenched enemy. Late in the afternoon it was evident that the enemy was making a general withdrawal but sizable delaying parties were left to slow the battalion's advance. Companies E & F stopped for the night on the edge of Notre Dame d'Elle, after advancing more than a mile in the face of fanatical resistance from the elements of the Third German Paratroop Division. An estimated 350 prisoners, 33 enemy machine-guns, 4 anti-tank guns and innumerable anti-tank rocket launchers and small arms were captured in the zone of advance. Under a nerve-shattering artillery barrage, the already battered battalion re-organized for the night. Co. E, after sustaining 70 casualties, four of whom were Officers, was relieved by Co. G.

During early hours of darkness, the enemy succeeded in maneuvering about until Co. F was virtually cut off from other friendly troops. Contact was maintained throughout the night only by radio.

Attacking at 0800 the following morning, Companies E & G soon released pressure on Co. F, as the attack swept through Notre Dame d'Elle and south towards St. Jean des Baisants. On 28 July St. Jean des Baisants fell to the First and Second Battalions as the enemy reeled backward in disorganized retreat. This three-day attack broke the back of organized German resistance in the sector and paved the way for the drive across the Vire river several days later.

Without the unceasing pressure which the Second Battalion, 23rd Infantry, applied in the face of heavy casualties, difficult terrain, and fanatical enemy resistance, the seizure of the objective would have undoubtedly been delayed and made with an increased cost in men and material.

Author's note:

There is a marked discrepancy in the number of casualties I show coming off Hill 192 and what the above article shows. I know that when I counted noses late that afternoon we only had 32 men and two officers left in our company area. All I can assume is that the other men had gotten mixed up with F and G Companies (or had stayed back behind a hedgerow) and didn't return to us until the next morning in time for the Morning Report.

FROM THE ST. LO HIGHWAY TO TINCHEBRAY

The 2nd Division was the left flank unit for the American Armed Forces and E Company was the left flank company between the American and British armies. We were supposed to keep each other in sight so that our flanks wouldn't be left open. We hadn't been in touch with them for some time so I took a jeep and driver and went looking for them. I couldn't find any sign of the British where the map said they should have been. I kept looking farther and farther back and finally located them about two miles to the rear. I discovered that at 1600 they all stopped for tea. Their tents were all pitched and orderlies were setting up the canvas bathtubs for the officers. Now that's the way to run a war. I couldn't believe they stopped for tea and baths while we got our butts blown off. It was during this time that Dan Manning was promoted to Captain and was now the Company Commander. I made First Lieutenant and Executive Officer. I was also awarded the Bronze Star.

We were moving south through a thick woods full of immense trees that had a lot of American parachutes still hanging up in them. The local people told us that the Germans killed most of those Americans while they were hanging in their chutes. Shortly after that we were moving down a dirt road when, all of a sudden, a jeep roared up with three men in it coming from the enemy lines. They had a 50-caliber machine gun mounted on the jeep but they were all wearing civilian clothes. It turned out they were members of the OSS and had been working with the French underground. We also saw some women that had been caught by the townspeople for collaborating with the Germans. Their heads were shaved and some had been smeared with something black, which might have been grease or tar.

Our line of attack changed to the southeast, toward the town of Tinchebray, where the Germans were still fighting hard. We moved through some fields trying to get to the junction of a couple of sunken roads. We managed to get to them, all right, but when we started to move out again we began getting a lot of machine gun fire. I dropped to the ground, along with two or three other men, and we inched our way up to a hedgerow that had been cut down by the Germans to improve their field of fire. It couldn't have been over a foot high, but it was better than nothing.

We were in a real predicament. The hedgerow ran completely out, we couldn't move forward and we couldn't move backward for the same reason. The Germans fired directly into the hedgerow, but it

was too thick for the bullets to penetrate. Then they raised their fire, gradually cutting the top off the hedgerow, scattering dust and dirt all over us. It is miracle we weren't killed. I expected them to start dropping mortars on us at any minute, but they didn't. We must have stayed there for close to an hour before the rest of the company could knock out the machine gun. Believe me, it was a great relief to get out of that one. The musette bag on my back was all cut to ribbons from the bullets.

We got into a really heavy firefight shortly after this and I attempted to make contact with our assault platoons over the radio. The walkie-talkies worked pretty well but didn't have much range. I kept hearing someone talking on the radio in German and as long as he was using that frequency, I couldn't talk to my platoon leaders. I figured the Germans had captured some of our radios and were using ours instead of their own. Anyway, I cussed him out real good and told him to get off the air so I could talk. I was a little agitated and probably used some rough language. Would you believe I got a message a few days later telling me not to swear over the radio; it was against the law? Someone back in Division didn't have anything else better to do than monitor radio traffic and just happened to pick me up. I wish he had been there with me when I was trying to use that radio. He might have cussed a little, too. I never did figure out how they knew it was me.

We were still working our way southeast, around Vire, and ran into heavy resistance in front of the town of Truttemer le Gran. We took the town, then moved on to Tinchebray. The 23rd circled the city while the 38th Infantry went in and captured it. This was just about the end of the great breakthrough from the beachhead. We had created what was later called the Vire-Falaise pocket, where thousands of German troops and material were captured. It was August 15, the day after my 22nd birthday. We spent three days in this area taking a break and getting our weapons back in shape. We also received a bunch of replacements at this time, although we had been getting some all through this campaign. In fact, so many had passed through our company it was getting difficult to remember their names. While we were at Tinchebray, the USO put on a show for us. It was held in a large field with the stage at one end and the men all seated on the ground in front of it. The USO told us that Dinah Shore was appearing on stage but you couldn't tell it from where we managed to sit. The rear echelon troops had taken all of the best seats up close to the front and all the rifle company men had to sit wherever they could, way back in the rear. We used binoculars to see what the performers looked like. If we hadn't had them we couldn't have even seen the stage.

Later that day we received what was called a NAAFI ration. This was a liquor ration the British issued to their officers each month. We got three pints of Scotch and three quarts of Gin. In addition to that, we got bottles of Champagne, le Orange, Cognac, Armagnac, some 3 Star Hennessy brandy, Calvados (which is the regional drink of Normandy, made from apple cider which has been distilled about three times) and some hard apple cider. We thought that as long as we had all of this liquor we ought to have a party for the officers and non-coms. We poured everything but the scotch and gin into a great big washtub, stirred it up good and invited everyone to use their canteen cups and have as much as they wanted. It was a rather loud and boisterous party. One of the sergeants ended up sitting on top of his pup tent, howling at the moon like a coyote. Someone said he was part Indian and thought he was calling his ancestors. Another one grabbed his rifle and said he was going to shoot somebody. We never did figure out who he had in mind.

Our company area had a stone farmhouse in it that still had all of the furniture and I told everyone that I was going to sleep in a bed for a change. I didn't care where anyone else ended up, the bed was mine. In the meantime, it was around 0500 and the party was finally winding down. I thought it was time to try out my bed, so I pulled off my uniform down to my shorts and started to lie down. That bed started to spin like a top and then the room tried to catch up with it. I figured that maybe if I went to the latrine I would feel better. To get there you had to walk down a path in front of the farmhouse, across the lane leading to the barnyard, then up about a three-foot embankment. The latrine belonged to the French family who owned the farm and was just a trench dug into the dirt with a kind of trellis over the top covered with vines. I made it all the way up the embankment only to fall into that damned latrine. I stayed there for about thirty minutes, hanging on by my elbows and hollering my lungs out for someone to come help me. Someone finally did and thank God there was a water trough handy. The fact is, I spent most of the rest of the night in that water trough.

While we were at Tinchebray we noticed a Frenchman sneaking through the orchard carrying something under his arm. We followed him until he stopped at a pile of firewood and watched him shove what he was carrying under the pile, turn and leave the field quickly. As soon as he had gone and couldn't see us, we ran over to find what he had hidden. It turned out to be a small cask of Calvados. It is a very potent whiskey. We had used it in our Zippo lighters for lighter fluid and it burned great. You could drink it if you were careful and drank it slowly. That little cask held some of the worst Calvados we had ever tasted. I wonder now if that Frenchman hadn't doctored it up a little and let us watch him hide it, knowing that we would find it.

The mail finally caught up with us and I really lucked out. I had a bunch of letters plus a couple of boxes from home. Mail call was really important to us even if we tried not to show our disappointment when we didn't get any. One of my boxes was full of homemade cookies and a cake, neither of which lasted very long. The other one had more cookies, mostly broken, a can of Borden's condensed milk and a bottle of bourbon whiskey that Dad had stuck in there for me. It didn't last very long either. Let me explain about the Borden's milk. If you boiled it in water, then let it cool, it turned into a real smooth caramel topping, which we ate with a spoon. Delicious.

BREST

Our three-day rest was over. We got orders to load up the trucks and start a long move to the Brittany peninsula to take part in the attack on the city of Brest, which began on August 25, 1944. A funny thing happened on the way to Brest. When we got to France we were issued French invasion money. It was legal tender but they only issued it in denominations up to 100-franc notes. One of the sergeants had "found" a large quantity of 1000-franc bills and had been told that they were no good and that he wouldn't be able to cash them anywhere. A thousand francs were equal to about twenty dollars. The sergeant had also acquired the soldier's chronic ailment known as the GIs (diarrhea.) He had run out of toilet paper and was using the 1000-franc notes as a substitute. Later that day we passed through a small hamlet that had a little bar and cafe, where some of us stopped to see if they had anything besides calvados. They did and the sergeant offered to pay with one of those bills, thinking that they wouldn't take them. Much to his surprise, they took the bill and offered to exchange the rest of his 1000-franc notes for smaller ones. He spent the rest of the night retracing his route trying to find all of his emergency stops and recover his "toilet paper." I never did hear how much he was able to find.

There were three divisions attacking Brest. The 29th was to attack from the northwest, the 8th from the north and the 2nd from the northeast. Our route ran beside the Landerneau River and the closer we got to the city, the heavier the fighting became. We were moving in a long column down a road that ran sideways below the crest of a hill where there were lots of trees and cover. The road ran down to the end of the hill then angled off to the right with a ravine on the left-hand side. As the lead troops got to the ravine they started getting machine gun and 88 fire, which stopped us cold. I saw a lieutenant jump up on his jeep to direct traffic. He was waving both arms trying to get things moving again when an 88 shell hit him in the left shoulder. It took his arm off and spun him around like a top. He was probably dead before he hit the ground. I took a head count after we had stopped for the day, and came up short one staff sergeant. I knew that I had seen him earlier when we were going through an apple orchard, so I said that I would go back and try to find him. He was in the apple orchard all right. He evidently had been walking by one of the trees when a tree burst hit just about head high. The sergeant didn't seem to have a scratch on him but all the bones in his head were gone. A shell fragment had gone in one side of his head and out the other, taking all of the bone with it. He looked like a big deflated basketball.

We weren't able to move very fast in our advance to the city of Brest. Our company Command Post was in a sunken road in an old German CP that had been dug into the side of the embankment. It was "L" shaped and quite roomy once you got inside. The only thing wrong with it was that the opening faced the German lines, but we decided to use it anyway. Things were quiet one evening, so Dan and I invited some of the company officers over to sample the rest of the scotch and gin left over from our big party in Tinchebray. The next day we were taking a little nap in front of the CP, with Dan on one side of the doorway and me on the other, sitting in the sun facing the German lines. All of sudden, both of us woke up in the middle of the road and there, spinning around between us, was a big artillery shell. We had a weapons section in the field in front of us and they told us later they had seen the shell come over, very slowly, spinning end over end. It had hit the side of the embankment, smashing the field telephone that was between us, and the shock of the impact had knocked us down into the road. We called an A&P platoon to come and blow up the shell and get it out of our way. They stuck a block of TNT on it and hit the plunger but all it did was blow the nose off. It was packed full of sand. I was lucky one more time. There was a small town called Pyrotechnie de St. Nicholas near Brest where there was a large ammunition plant. The Germans were running it, but made a mistake by using French labor. The Frenchmen were leaving out the explosives and substituting sand instead.

I had been having a toothache for some time now and while it was quiet I thought I would go back to the aid station and have it fixed. Talk about fun, the dentist didn't have any electricity for his drill. Instead he had one that he pumped with his foot while he drilled on my tooth. It felt like he was using a hammer and chisel.

We kept progressing toward Brest, capturing suburbs as we went. This time I managed to sleep in a couple of beds without having them spin around on me. I found a couple of things I ought to tell you about, I guess. One was a diamond stickpin shaped like a coiled snake. The head was a diamond that was about the 3/8ths of an inch across, set in soft gold. With it were two earrings, also made of gold, shaped like a musical clef and each one had six diamonds in it about the size of a kitchen match head. I stuck the stickpin through the earrings and then stuck them all on the inside of my shirt pocket. I know they were real diamonds and gold because I had asked one of my men, who had worked in his father's jewelry store, to look at them for me. He said they were real. A couple of days later I woke up in the morning to find that my shirt pocket had been cut off with a razor and the diamonds were gone.

The other things I found were some guns in a blown-out house. There was one that looked like an old pirate's pistol. The barrel and trigger mechanism was all rusted out but the entire pistol was covered in finely wrought heavy sterling silver, covering the whole exterior from the muzzle to the butt. Also, there was a pair of cap and ball dueling pistols with octagonal barrels. One of them had a bad sear and would not work but the other one was all right. There was also a box of caps, a powder horn and a shot horn with them. We figured that they were about 48 caliber because a 45 caliber bullet just fell down the barrel and a 50 caliber was too big for it. We took a 45 caliber slug, wrapped it in toilet paper and rammed it down the barrel on top of the powder out of three 45 cartridges. Then we stacked some boards up against a brick wall and Sergeant Umberger fired it at a knothole down near the bottom. He hit about an inch below his target and the bullet went through the boards, glanced off a rock and took about three bricks off the top of the wall.

We were getting closer to the city wall now but had been stopped at a broad ravine that we couldn't cross because of the pillboxes on the other side. We attacked them several times but hadn't made any headway. Our Battalion Supply Officer had gotten us some bangalore torpedoes to help us breach a bunch of barbed wire the Germans had strung out in front of their positions. Bangalore torpedoes were long pieces of pipe filled with explosives that you stuck together and pushed out in front of you. We slid them under the barbed wire and they could be as long as you wanted them. All you had to do was attach another one at the end and keep pushing. They used a fairly short fuse, just about long enough to let you get out of the way. You pulled the igniter and ducked and it would blow that barbed wire away.

One morning we got to watch a tremendous air bombardment of the city. It seemed as if there were thousands of planes in the sky, B-17s, B-24s, P-47s and some P-38s. Two of the P-38s dropped down and began to strafe an anti-aircraft position. When they pulled up, one of them flew through a small cloud at about 7000 feet. As he came out through the cloud he took the tail off a B-17 that was right on top of it. It split the P-38 in two and killed the pilot. We watched as the tail of the B-17 started spinning down. Soon something popped out of it and a chute opened. It was the tail gunner. The pilots of the B-17 lost all of the tail controls but they were still able to fly the plane in a flat circle by using the engines. It looked like a leaf falling. We counted the men as they came out of the rear and opened their chutes. There should have been ten of them but we only counted eight parachutes. When the plane hit the ground it landed on top of the pillboxes we had been trying to take and covered them up with dirt. Later on we found the flight deck of the B-17 intact behind one of the pillboxes. The pilots were found later, after Brest had fallen, in a German military hospital out in the bay. One had a broken leg and both suffered from burns but otherwise they were okay. I heard later that the Germans had shot all of the other men as they came down in their parachutes.

We finally got into the city and it was classic house-to-house fighting. The streets were covered by fire from German snipers, machine gun nests and towed 88s, which made it really rough. Somebody got smart, though, and came up with the idea of going through the walls from house to house instead of using the streets. It worked pretty well and we managed to occupy several city blocks this way without the Germans knowing how far we had advanced. It was slow going. We were moving down a long hall through the basement of some sort of commercial building that connected it to the next building when we came to a locked door. It had a little opening about head high, with a small wooden door in it, like something you might have seen in a prohibition speakeasy. We stood there discussing how to get the door unlocked when the little window opened and a potato masher grenade dropped out at our feet. One of the men grabbed it and shoved it back through the window, where it exploded. We never did get that door opened, so we didn't see what happened to the guy on the other side.

It was very difficult trying to use artillery in the city. The guns had to be elevated at such an angle that you couldn't control their impact area, so we mostly used mortars. We really had some good observation posts for them up in the tall buildings. Our route of attack was to the west along the top of a high embankment. Down at the bottom were rail yards and up at the top was a long street leading into the heart of the city. We saw what appeared to be a French policeman; at least he was wearing a policeman's uniform, helping German soldiers to cross the street. When he thought things were clear he waved two or three of them across. We dropped a mortar round practically in his back pocket and blew him over a low iron fence, then dropped another one and blew him back out into the street. No more Germans crossed that street for a while.

On September 8th I took a runner and a radioman and started moving into a city block that was triangular in shape with the long side parallel to the embankment and rail yards. We got all the way out to the end of the block and came to an eleven-story building, went up to the top floor but found we couldn't use it. It had a bunch of rooms used for storage and no way to see out. We went back down to the tenth floor, which was a lot better. We could see the railroad tracks from the south windows and to the west, we could see the streets running to the center of the city. We took our time and, staying well back from the windows, started picking off enemy soldiers down in the rail yard. I saw a German coming up a concrete stairway to the top of the embankment and shot him in the head. His helmet flew off and he flopped all the way down the stairway.

We had been up there for about an hour, sniping at the Germans and trying to call fire information to our mortar squads when a couple of new guys joined us. One was an artillery observer who had just arrived from the States, so I tried to tell him some of the facts of life in a combat situation. I told him I didn't care what he did as long as he stayed completely away from the windows. He didn't pay any attention to what I just told him. The next thing I knew, he was leaning out the window trying to shoot a German with his carbine. One of the other guys grabbed him by the collar, threw him back into the room but he managed to leave the curtain flapping out of the window. Before I could do anything about the curtain, a shot came in the window, hitting a white ceramic elephant ashtray sitting on the table in front of me. It split and flew into my left arm. The blood started running down my arm so I went out to the hallway by the stairwell and started to take my clothes off to see how bad it was. I was wearing coveralls over my pants and shirt and had to drop my pistol belt before I could get them off.

My radioman came out with me and while we were standing there trying to stop the bleeding, I heard someone coming up the stairs. A German paratrooper was climbing up the stairs, carrying a sniper rifle, so I told my radioman to shoot him. He had his carbine pointed at the German but wouldn't pull the trigger. We made the German come up to where we were while I got my clothes back on. The longer he stood there, the madder I got. To this day, I don't know why I didn't shoot him myself, but I didn't. I guess it's a lot harder to shoot someone standing three feet away from you than twenty feet away. Instead I kicked him down ten flights of stairs and I mean that literally. When we got to the ground floor he wasn't in very good shape. We started to crawl through the holes in the walls of the buildings to get back to the Battalion CP and the aid station. About every fifteen or twenty feet, I banged him over the head with a board. He would fall down and I would kick him back up on his feet. When we finally got back to the CP, I shoved him up against a wall and told an MP to watch him for me. The MP picked up his Thompson submachine gun and when the German saw him do that he fainted dead away. He must have thought the MP was going to shoot him.

It was in Brest that my old platoon sergeant, Sgt. Jacks, got shot by a sniper. He was hit in the throat and bled to death. We got the sniper and I took the pistol that the sniper was carrying and still have it, a Mauser-Werk 7.65. We finally took the city of Brest on Sept. 18, 1944 and had a chance to relax for a while. It seemed funny to walk around and not hear the sound of gunfire.

I was getting quite a collection of pistols by now. Most of them were 25 caliber automatics and weren't much good. The safeties were bad on them and they would go off too easily. There was one I got in a rather unusual way. We were moving through some houses and came upon a German officer in bed with a French woman. We were taking him out of the room, in his long underwear, when one of our men saw the woman sliding her hand up under the pillow. He grabbed her by the hair and pulled her out of the bed, reached under the pillow and took out another 25 automatic and gave it to me.

One day one of our men found a real automatic gun. It was a 20mm anti-aircraft gun fitted with a shoulder stock so that it could be hand fired. It had a five round clip that fed from the top and a bipod at the muzzle end of the barrel. You had to be in the prone position to fire it and when you did, it backed you up about a foot each time it fired. Another of the strange weapons we found was a small tank. It was only about three feet high and maybe six or eight feet long. It sat back in a kind of tunnel, facing the road, and was remote controlled. They were going to use it against trucks or tanks because it was filled with explosives, although we never did hear of one of them being used.

*An article from the Monday, Sept. 25, 1944 issue of the **Stars and Stripes**:*

THE STORY OF BREST--OF GUNS, RUINS AND DEATH

It took no expert knowledge to estimate the destruction of Brest; the city was virtually 100 percent destroyed when the Germans formally surrendered it at 1500 hours last Tuesday; there was hardly a building that was not gutted. The Brest campaign was almost lost sight of in the broad perspective. Brest just wasn't "good copy" compared with the airborne, the invasion of Holland and the denting of the Siegfried Line. But it was a hell of a tough operation for all that. Major General Troy H. Middleton, VIII Corps commander, whose troops reduced the city, said of the defenses guarding France's second-largest port that in his military experience he had never seen anything quite as good. The entire operation lasted three weeks and four days, during which approximately 37,000 prisoners were captured--a figure which supported early estimates that some 50,000 enemy troops had taken refuge in the Old City on the tip of the Brittany peninsula.

The defense of Fortress Brest was almost a last-bullet, last-man job under the direction of 56-year Lt. Gen. Hermann B. Ramke. Taken with Ramke were three other general officers--Kroh, Mosel and Rousch--and Adm. Kahler, second in command. Three divisions were entirely erased from the German Army troop list--the 266th, 343rd and Second Paratroops. Three battle-hardened American divisions accomplished this mission--the Second Infantry, the Eighth Infantry and 29th Infantry, plus Task Force B, which early mopped up the Plougastet Peninsula.

At the jump-off the Eighth Division attacked from the north, the Second from the east and the 29th from the west. When the Eighth reached the city proper, it was pinched off by divisions on either flank and was diverted to the Crozon Peninsula, where the defenders, almost to the finale, had five big-gun batteries throwing periodical harassing fire on the Second Division, in the eastern outskirts of Brest, and the 29th, attacking through Recouvrance across the Penfield River from the Old City. Ramke had refused surrender terms twice. Hitler had ordered him to hold out for four months).

When Gen. Middleton, saying of Brest that it was a total wreck and would have to rise again, explained to Ramke that the Americans were turning the city over to the French the following day, The arrogant Nazi stated: "They are getting nothing." Brest was a tough nut to crack., The Second Division, for example, moved from its point of departure approximately 3,000 yards to within 150 yards of the Old City wall, built in 1680. Bloodiest strong point encountered by this outfit was Hill 105, taken in a sneak maneuver under cover of early morning fog and supported by strong artillery and mortar fire.

As a matter of fact, artillery was our trump card. It was fearful. And the dogfaces were grateful, for throughout their progress, hedgerow tactics up to the street fighting, they themselves faced terrific fire from Kraut artillery that always had the advantage of observation. Looking back on some of the defense approaches to the city, it seems incredible that the Yanks were able to occupy them at all. The Germans used every type of gun available. They used flak guns against personnel to a great extent. Contrary to popular belief, most German artillery in this operation was not mobile. They had some SP guns, some horse-drawn. But in the main the positions were fixed. There was evidence that many had been planned for defense against invasion from the sea, then converted. Nearly all German guns had a 360 degree traverse; even mortars were placed on fixed turntables. The rail yards were a rusty mess, the rolling stock junk. Vessels were sunk near the breakwater. A big viaduct was blown to hell as SS troops entered the outskirts. The submarine pens, built of reinforced concrete 15 feet thick, were full of debris.

One U-boat was partially submerged in the bay. The peninsula was a labyrinth of tunnels. Here was a huge hospital with five entrances housing 14,000 wounded with an operating theater and German nurses in attendance. The sub pens had an amazing amount of supplies: Food for six to 12 months stacked from floor to ceiling over many acres; thousands of boxes of cigars; tons of chocolate; blankets with sachets between the layers to make them smell sweet; in the field they live in their filth without seeming to care; they don't bother to use a shovel; THEY STINK.

The Old Wall surrounding Brest was 20 meters thick, 25 meters high. You should have seen our 155's tearing into it. On the south and facing the docks it was honeycombed with tunnels blasted out of the solid rock a long time ago by the French. One tunnel with two entrances was a hospital in which were 806 enemy wounded plus eight Americans, two of whom were Air Corps officers. Here was food for 21 days including fresh lemons (from Spain) and canned strawberries.

Over on the Crozon Peninsula was another German hospital. The little town of Le Fret was cleared of civilians and turned into a hospital town, with every inch of housing space made use of. Here were 1,300 wounded. Here also were some prostitutes.

Brest was formally surrendered by Col. Erich Pietzonka, commander of the Seventh Paratroop Regiment, in a ceremony at Woodrow Wilson Place. Under this square was a great dugout, 70 feet down, in which were the remnants of the soldiers who fought for Ramke, Hitler and Brest. There were a couple of hundred of them and they were sullen. The whole damn thing was pretty grim.

ACROSS FRANCE TO BELGIUM

After a few days rest outside the city we loaded up for the trip across France to Belgium. It was a strange feeling to drive at night with the lights on and to camp at night without worrying about fires. We drove through Paris but we were on the outskirts of the city and didn't get to see much of the Paris we had heard so much about. Our route took us northeast of Paris into Belgium to the German border.

Somewhere in my travels I had liberated a German staff car and took it with us in the convoy. It was a low slung, two-seater Opel with a real long hood. It must have had 12 cylinders, although I had never looked to see. We had been taking turns driving it in the convoy when it started to rain quite hard. One of the other officers, who had been riding a German motorcycle, asked if he could load his motorcycle in a truck and drive the car for a while. I said okay and thought no more about it. A short while later the whole convoy stopped and when I went to see what had happened, I found the Opel sitting in the middle of a Treadway bridge with no wheels under it. Treadway bridges were made for high axle military vehicles and had a high steel ridge down the center. The guy driving the Opel didn't see the bridge and hit it doing about 45 mph, which took both axles out from under it. They just pushed the rest of the car off into the river and we kept going.

The trip across France was rather pleasant. Everything seemed quite normal. The towns were not crowded or destroyed and the people just went on about their business. The shops and cafes were open, although neither had much in them in the way of goods for sale. The farmers worked their fields with whatever draft animals they had. Sometimes it was horses, mostly it was oxen. There really wasn't much evidence that a war was being fought. However, the closer we got to Germany the more grim everything became. Even though there were no shell holes or blown up houses, things just started to look more ominous.

THE SIGFRIED LINE

The Division finally reached Belgium and moved into positions just east of St. Vith, on Sept. 30, 1944, with the 23rd Infantry on the right flank. This was a real quiet sector for the most part, which was good because we were spread out all over the place. We relieved units of the 28th Division and our company was assigned an area inside the German border. We occupied several German pillboxes that didn't do us an awful lot of good because they were all facing the wrong way, but it was interesting. We actually saw the German pillboxes and dragon-tooth tank obstacles, which had appeared in the pictures we used to see in *Life* magazine. Pretty grim looking. Our Division was slowly being brought back up to strength with replacements of officers and enlisted men. We could see the German positions from the pillboxes and I know they could see us since we occupied the forward slope of the hill, in full view of the enemy. Everything we did had to be done at night and in the daylight we just stayed in our foxholes.

If you stuck your head out someone took a shot at you. I remember one guy who wouldn't stay put. He would jump up out of his foxhole and run over to the next one for a visit. We found out later why they never did hit him. We were facing real old, untrained Germans that you normally wouldn't find in a front line unit. We weren't aware they didn't know how to shoot, though, so we tried to stay down as much as possible.

Standing outside my pillbox, where our CP was, around 0200 one morning, all of a sudden, what looked like a flare started rising in the northeast sky. Instead of turning white and falling, like a flare normally did, it just kept on going up. I called another man out to look at it with me. It went straight up into the sky until it disappeared. We saw more of these as time went on and later discovered they were the V2 rockets Germany was firing at London. It was about this time that we also started to see the V1 rocket plane, the so-called buzz bomb. They sounded like an outboard motor running without a muffler, except that they made a throbbing sound. They didn't fly very high and were really easy to see. The Germans aimed the V1s at Liege, Antwerp and London. I was in Liege one day, standing in the rear of a bar, when one of the V1s hit right down the street. A tremendous explosion blew the glass in from the front windows. It was a good thing I was in the rear of the bar. Those that were up near the front door were all cut up from the flying glass.

We held our positions near St. Vith for about a month. It wasn't easy because we were completely exposed to the enemy, making it very difficult to get food and ammunition up to our lines. All supplies moved at night. It helped that every once in awhile we could send some of the men back to a rest area in the town of Vielsalm. There the men could get a hot shower, some clean clothes, hot food and, if they were lucky, see a USO show. I never did get to see one of the shows. I did get a doughnut once, though, from my "old friends," the Red Cross. WOW. I found out later that *we* supplied the ingredients and the manpower to make them. Our cooks did all the work while the Red Cross ladies only passed them out. I'm surprised they didn't charge us for one!

We got word the Division was pulling back to straighten up our lines. We were sure glad we were finally getting to move. This would get us out of that "sitting duck" situation we had been in for so long. Before we left the pillboxes, however, the engineers "fixed" them so that the German couldn't use them again. They brought up tons of explosives and packed them inside each pillbox. There was case after case of TNT and a new explosive that I'd never seen before. It was called Composition C or Plastique. You could wrap it around a post or a girder and it would stick there, just like putty, which made it very ease to use. I'd had some experience with explosives so I stayed and watched them place some of it. The engineers stacked a whole lot of TNT in the pillbox and packed some of the Composition C into the corners and around the top of the wall, then stick a cap in it and wire it to be exploded later. We moved back to our new positions during the night and that's when the engineers blew the charges. Talk about a fireworks display. I saw pieces of concrete twenty feet square take off up in the air. They blew forty-three pillboxes that night and I have often wondered what the German soldiers thought when they saw all that stuff going up. They must have thought the entire Allied army was coming after them.

Our new positions were really great. We had dugouts made of logs with dirt piled on top and dug-in kitchens so that we could finally have some hot food and get off the K-rations. How good it felt to walk into a room in which you could stand up for a change. In our platoon positions out front, trenches connected the squads so they wouldn't be exposed to enemy fire.

Things had loosened up quite a bit now so I was able to do some prowling around and got back to Liege a few times. I acquired a Belgian manufactured German P-35 automatic. It looked just like a Colt 45, except it was 9mm or 38 caliber and it was the only pistol that I was really shoot. I could hit a German helmet as far as I could see it and keep it rolling. I went to Liege one day to find a cobbler and had him make me a shoulder holster for it.

Our quarters in the line were getting quite plush. I found an 8-drop German switchboard and my wire sergeant, A. G. Hale, rigged it so that the company CP was connected to all of the platoons and outposts. Now that we had a switchboard we could talk to everyone at the same time. The only thing we lacked was electric lights. I heard that one of the Ordnance companies in the rear had some generators they would swap for electric motors, so we traded around and came up with two big motors. Then two other officers and I set out on a procurement mission. We checked everywhere for thirty miles around but couldn't find those apes and ended up in the little town of La Roche, Belgium. It was quite picturesque, with a river running beside a road that went through town.

There was a AAA hotel right on the edge of town where we stopped and asked the manager if he could fix dinner for us later that day. He said he could and to leave the menu up to him. Then we went on into town to check out the bars and the female inhabitants. One of the places where we stopped was a hotel that had a bar with some very nice people in it. The lady that ran the hotel told us some of the things that had happened when the Germans occupied the town. It seems that the hotel was a way station for escaping prisoners of war, particularly Allied pilots. The hotel was very old and with lots of passageways between the walls, like something out of an old mystery movie. The Germans ran through the hotel looking for POWs while the hotel staff kept them moving in and out of the rooms and through the hidden passages. They never lost one man to the Germans.

The town of La Roche had its own castle perched on top of a very steep hill right in the middle of town, where it overlooked the approaches to the city by both the road and the river. Most of the early castles were built by so-called robber barons that extracted a toll from anyone traveling up or down the river. That is why this castle was built. The only way into the castle was by means of an extremely narrow path, which only accommodated two men walking abreast or one man on a horse. The entire path upward ran along the side of the castle wall which was full of arrow slits, covering the path. When you reached the top you had to go through what is called a barbican, a narrow room with doors at either end, set in a tower. Actually, there were two of these rooms, much like a set of locks in a canal. You could see the slots in the walls where the portcullis used to be. Shortly after entering the castle, there was a room off to one side that was the largest in the castle. It was not really very big but it had enough room to ride a horse into it. It was probably the great hall even though it was on rather small scale. By the way, 900 A. D. was when this castle was built. Beyond the great hall was an open courtyard, surrounded by castle battlements and turrets

. Standing on top of the battlements one could see for miles in every direction. We found a spiral stairway near one of the outer walls that descended into the bowels of the castle. It was narrow and dark, but we had flashlights so we went on down. I didn't think we would ever reach the bottom but we eventually did and entered a large cave with an iron gate at the far end, which opened to the outside. We were told that if someone displeased the Baron, he would have him chained in this room. Then water from the river would be diverted through the room, drowning the unlucky "guest." I'm not sure if this was a fairy tale or not but it definitely looked possible. Another unusual thing about this castle was the wall construction. The castle was constructed of small pieces of flint or shale laid flat, one piece stacked on top of the other, instead of the large blocks of stone that I had seen in English castles. You would have thought that a man could climb up the side of the wall very easily but I'm sure the arrow slits deterred any would be climbers.

We finally went back to the hotel for our dinner and it was superb. I don't recall everything we ate. I do remember being served freshly caught trout from the river behind the hotel, and some beer that the proprietor had managed to keep hidden from the Germans for the last four or five years. When we finished our meal he prepared *crepe suzettes* at the table and flamed them with brandy. I was really impressed. When we left we gave him the two electric motors and headed back to our company. We managed to acquire a generator some time later. Apparently an artillery outfit came up short one day. Oh well, they would've been glad to know it went for a good cause.

The weather was turning colder every day now. We had been in winter uniforms for some time and we really needed them. The overcoat and gloves were all right but combat boots did not keep our feet dry in all that cold, wet snow. We finally received overshoes and some of the men were issued shoepacs, which helped a great deal. I wore heavy overshoes; I hated them. The snow was getting deep and the roads had turned to ice in most places. One day while I was riding in the back seat of a jeep on a very icy road, one of the vehicles in front slid sideways. Our driver hit his brakes (bad move) and slid into the back of the other truck. The officer in the front seat flew up, hit his mouth on the top of the windshield and knocked out all his front teeth. That little fender bender earned him a Purple Heart. I got a letter from him several years later and he told me that he had also broken his arm, which I didn't know at the time of the incident.

Back to the routine of war in our quiet sector. About all we were getting now from the enemy were a few mortar rounds and some patrols that didn't seem to amount to much. We were still able to go back to Vielsalm on a rotation basis to get cleaned up and rest a little. We billeted in the homes of civilians and were not too sure how much to trust them. Although several of the women were married to German soldiers they really never gave us any trouble.

The company planned an officers' party and everyone wanted to dress up for a change. I got out my Class A uniform and hung it from a shelf on the side wall of the bedroom. My contribution to the party was two bottles of champagne, which I placed on the shelf above my uniform. Each room in the house was equipped with its own small iron stove for heat. My stove sat next to that shelf. While I was out, the woman who owned the house came in and started a roaring fire to warm the room. You can imagine what happened to the champagne. It exploded all over my uniform. It stunk like a wino and I ended up wearing my ODs to the party.

We had been in our new positions for about two months and thought we might get to spend the winter here, which wouldn't have been bad at all. But we were ordered to move out of the area and go north a short ways, just beyond the 99th Division, my old outfit from Camp Van Dorn. We would then begin an attack on the Roer River dams. The 106th Division was the outfit that replaced us in the line. One officer and a few non-coms from each company stayed to help them get settled. I was among those chosen. We were amazed at what we saw when they arrived. Half of them weren't wearing their helmets. They carried more baseball bats than rifles (maybe they were going to club the Germans to death), built fires out in the open and drove around with their headlights on. We showed them how to set up their aiming stakes and fields of fire for their guns, but they acted like they'd never heard any of it before. The 106th wouldn't listen to us, so we said "adios" and went on our way.

THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

We reported back to our units up north in an area just east of Elsenborn and got ready to move to the dams. The 23rd was the reserve regiment following the 9th and 38th to a road junction at a place called Wehlereschied, which was later named "Heartbreak Crossroad." It was heavily defended and took a long time to overcome. This was the middle of December and there was a lot of snow on the ground; it was unbearably cold. We found out later it was one of the worst recorded winters in years.

We bivouaced alongside a road in the woods, waiting for word to advance, on the morning of December 16th around 0500 when we heard there was heavy fighting just to the east of us. Figuring that the 99th Division could handle the trouble to the east, we got everyone up and battle ready so we could move on through the 9th Infantry in the attack on the dams. We started taking a lot of artillery fire and things began to get a little hairy. We had moved to set up a line of defense to the east, near the town of Krinkelt when, suddenly, we were fighting in every direction. I took some men with me and moved to the top of a small hill overlooking Krinkelt where, through my field glasses I could see enemy troops moving through the town. They were about a thousand yards away so we couldn't do much with small arms fire. I went back down the hill behind me and found three towed 3-inch guns, pulled by jeeps, and had the drivers bring them up to the back slope up the hill.

By now there were all kinds of vehicles moving down the road into Krinkelt. We saw a crossroads in the center of town, flanked by three or four houses to the left. We set up the three guns (one had a sight that wouldn't work because it was full of water, so we bore-sighted it just like we used to shooting sparrows back in Ft. Benning) to fire at the crossroads. When a truck passed the first house, we fired all three guns. The enemy vehicle and our shells got to the crossroads at about the same time. When there were enough disabled trucks piled up in the juncture to block it, we started firing at the rear of their column.

In a short while we had a lot of fire power with us; seven self-propelled 75mm guns, the three 3-inch guns, a rifle platoon on the forward slope of the hill with machine guns on either flank and a section of 60 mm mortars behind them. After we stopped the column at the crossroads, the German troops started massing for an attack up the hill. They were at the bottom of a wide snow covered field and we could clearly see each man. I guessed about two or three hundred men were coming up the hill after us. When they got within about fifty yards of us, the lieutenant in front of me, Emil Solberg, stood up and hollered "komrad," thinking that they might surrender. When he did that the German officer leading the attack up that slope pulled up his burp gun and started to fire. Solberg dropped back down to the ground and all of his men opened up on the Germans. The machine guns started working them over on the front side and mortars caught them in the rear. We also had some 81mm mortars, the 3-inch guns and SP 75s firing high explosives into them. Not a single German got out of that field alive.

In the meantime, German tanks maneuvered around the stalled vehicles on the road below us. Because I was in such a great position, I ended up calling for fire from our regimental artillery, division artillery and some of the 240mm guns from Corp., along with the mobile guns I had behind me. Talk about a thrill. We were knocking tanks silly down in the town. I remember one in particular that was trying to turn around. We hit it with a shot from a tank destroyer right where the turret meets the body of the tank. It flipped the turret off like you would the cap on a beer bottle. This stuff went on all day long. A plane strafed us, but we couldn't even tell whose it because of the overcast conditions. It must have been German, though, because they told us that our aircraft couldn't fly due to the bad weather. The weather didn't keep the Luftwaffe from shooting up our kitchen area.

Nobody got any sleep that night. Troops were moving all night long and because it was dark we couldn't tell a friend from a foe. Our men shot at anything that moved in front of them. I don't know how many counter attacks we had on our positions but they just didn't seem to stop. Tanks were the most frightening, although we didn't get any direct tank attacks. We were at the top of the hill and there was too much snow and ice for them to make it up the steep incline.

I found a column of troops from my old regiment, the 394th, 99th Division, that was wandering around lost (there must have 200 of them) and led them back through our lines. A lot of them had lost their rifles but we found enough lying on the ground to arm them and get them back in the fight. A few nights later we made a withdrawal at night to consolidate and straighten up our lines. It reminded me of some epic war movie; troops plodding along, tired as hell and looking like Bill Mauldin's "Joe," jeeps and 1/2 tons slipping and sliding in the mud, shell bursts going off everywhere, flares lighting up the sky so that you were afraid to move. I have never been so scared in my life, as were most of us, but that did no keep us from shooting Germans. I never could understand soldiers that would drop their weapons and give up.

We were really tired but managed to get to the high ground west of Krinkelt, where we decided to stop. The Germans kept coming at us all night long and into the next day, but were never able to get through our lines. One of our squads was dug in behind a long rocky hedgerow and started hearing voices on the other side of it. They thought at first they were Americans, but then figured out it was German being spoken. They lobbed a whole bunch of grenades over the hedgerow killing or wounding the whole group.

The tank attacks picked up now followed by infantry. We could handle the infantry all right but those tanks were something else. If you have never been there, it is hard to imagine what a tank looks like when it is pointing its 88 right at your foxhole. I'm not sure whether they were Tiger Royales or Panthers, it didn't make any difference, they were all too big. If you were close enough to the tank it was okay because they couldn't depress the gun enough to fire into the foxhole. They really couldn't hurt you if you stayed down in your hole. One guy grabbed a gas can and jumped into his foxhole. When the tank ran over his foxhole he jumped back up, poured the gasoline over the air intakes and set it on fire with a grenade.

It is impossible to recall everything that happened during this time. We had been fighting constantly for several days and nights now, shifting back and forth to stop enemy attacks. We finally started to move back toward Elsenborn Ridge, which put us on higher ground, making it easier to defend. The ground was frozen so hard we couldn't use shovels to dig our foxholes and had to use TNT to blow holes in the ground. The Germans were still trying to break through our lines but still were unable to do so. They tried tank attack after tank attack, followed by infantry, but we stopped them cold every time. It is hard to believe the slaughter that took place. The ground was littered with

dismembered bodies, mostly Germans, and destroyed vehicles of all types.

CHASING THE GERMANS AGAIN

We held our position for a few more weeks. Near the middle of January 1945, the 23rd was formed into a Regimental Combat Team, along with the 1st Division, with the objective of taking the Ondeval-Ifeldingen Pass, which would open up the road net into St. Vith for the 7th Armored Division. We started the attack from Elsenborn, heading south, in the middle of a blizzard. The country was open for the most part, with gently rolling fields, which meant that we, as the attackers, would normally be out in the open most of the time in full view of the German defenders.

The weather, even though it was extremely harsh, was in our favor this time. If we couldn't see the enemy, then they couldn't see us either. The snow was blowing and in some places was waist deep. One day our command post was in the basement of a house on the edge of a small village. The house sat on the slope of a hill. It was made of stone with windows set at ground level where we could see. It was snowing heavily when we heard a buzz bomb coming in our direction. I looked out and saw it flying at about 500 feet as it sailed almost directly over the house, hitting the side of the hill behind us. Dust flew everywhere with the explosion as it shook the house, but caused no major damage.

I haven't mentioned a good friend of mine named Lt. Jim Patton. He was from Memphis, Tennessee and was just the kind of a character you need in wartime. His great sense of humor helped relieve the tension a lot of times. I never saw Jim drink any water. He carried only red wine in his canteen. Maybe that's what gave him such a good sense of humor; he was sloshed half of the time. Anyway, Jim had been with the company since he joined us as a replacement back in Normandy after Hill 192. In the attack on St. Vith during the blizzard, Jim's platoon was moving up on the right flank, passing through a farmyard which had a few scattered trees. He was standing beside one of the trees when a shell hit the top of the tree. The tree burst splattered Jim with shrapnel. I got there just after he was hit and helped the medic get his stretcher up on a jeep. The snow was falling pretty hard while Jim was laying on top of the jeep, with half of his clothes off and first aid packs all over him. True to form, he was laughing his head off, saying he was going back to warm Memphis while the rest of us jerks froze our asses off over here. We sure missed him after he left.

It took us about a week to run the Germans out of the pass. The 23rd Infantry received a Presidential Unit Citation for this action. We held the pass while the 7th Armored started coming through it. I went to St. Vith a few days later, on Feb.11, 1945, and found my cousin, Bob Coe. That's a story all by itself. It was kind of funny trying to catch up with him. I saw some men from his division and asked them where he might be. I told them that he was in the 7th Armored Band and they gave me a bunch of directions, which I tried to follow. I hitchhiked a ride to his division headquarters in the rear. When I got there they told me he was back up near the front playing in a show, so I went back up to the front. When I got there they said he was back in another town in the rear. So off I went again in search of my cousin. This time, they told me he was up at one of the battalions playing in a show and was going someplace else later to play at a dance. I finally found him and where do you think he was? In a little town about two miles from where I started in the first place!

GAY PAREE, FINALLY

When I got back to Elsenborn I was informed that I was up for a three-day leave in Paris. I managed to scrape a few francs together, found my old Val Pac and dug out my Class A uniform. I climbed in the back of a 2 1/2 ton truck, along with some other guys, for the ride to Paris. It was bitter cold so we put some sand in the bottom of a steel helmet, poured gasoline on it and set it on fire. It wasn't very pretty but it did provide a little heat for us. When we got to Paris we looked like a bunch of Negroes from all of the gasoline smoke.

We all headed for the hotel where we were to be billeted as fast as we could. I don't remember its name but it was elegant. Three of us had a giant suite with a bathroom that must have been twenty feet long and a tub you could almost swim in. After we got cleaned up, we left the hotel to see some of the sights of Gay Paree. The streets were full of people bustling about and an awful lot of them were GIs. We stopped at the first bar we came to and ordered some cold beer and I can't remember anything tasting so good. We walked around and gawked at all the famous sights most of the afternoon and evening. In the short time we were there, we saw the Folies Bergere, ate everything we could find and managed to get into two big nightclubs, the Bal Tabarin and the Club Lido. Seeing the Folies was strange. They showed us several skits that were just like the burlesque shows we used to see back in Detroit, but it was all in French. This was sure different than being on the front lines. We all had a great time but finally had to leave.

INTO GERMANY

When we got back to the Division we found that we had taken Heartbreak Crossroad again and it was easier than it had been the first time. I'm still glad I missed it the second time. We continued to chase the Germans back through the forest, and the weather was still making it difficult. The pockets of resistance we ran into were hard to dig out, although the Germans seemed to be getting demoralized by now. We would come up on a strong point that was putting up a fight and we clobbered it with automatic fire, mortars and artillery if we could call on some. Sometimes, if we stopped shelling for a while, the Germans would sneak out and leave the area.

A couple of unusual things happened about this time. We were moving through a heavily wooded area late in the day, in about two feet of snow. We had chased the Germans out of a semi-permanent bivouac area and thought we might use it ourselves. I went down into one of the bunkers that had been dug into the ground, covered with logs and dirt. It had a long shelf down one side of it that served as a sleeping bench, which accommodated about eight men. We had sleeping bags with us, so I threw mine up there and crawled into it for the night. A couple of other guys did the same. We were so exhausted and glad to think about laying down, we just conked right out. Our body heat must have melted some of the ice above us, or maybe water just ran in on top of us, because when we woke up in the morning we couldn't move. The water had frozen on top of the sleeping bags and sealed us in. I was able to get one arm out and chop my way loose and then chop the others out.

Another strange thing was when we caught a tank trying to sneak down a road through the woods. A couple of our men crawled up on its blind side and hit it with a bazooka. It exploded some of the ammo inside the tank and blew off the turret. When we got up to the tank we found body parts hanging in the trees. The bazooka fire must have blown the whole crew into little pieces, straight out of the top of the tank. Kind of messy. In that same section of the woods, we saw an L-5 artillery spotter plane flying over us, looking for targets. The pilot was flying so slow and low into a strong wind that he appeared to be sitting on top of a large tree. The Germans started firing an 88 at him but they were using something besides anti-aircraft ammo. The L-5 pilot could see the enemy gun position and when they fired, he maneuvered from side to side, avoiding the shells. The Germans fired and fired and never hit him.

We had been moving hard one day and stopped just before dark to set up our command post. Dan Manning and I had finished our K-rations and were sitting there talking when we heard a plane flying low over our heads. In just a matter of minutes we heard it crash into the woods behind us. I told our driver to get the jeep and we all went looking for the plane. He crashed in the woods about a half a mile behind us. The plane broke up some as it hit the trees, tearing the wings off, but luckily didn't catch on fire. It was a bomber, probably a B-25 and the only person left in it was the pilot. The pilot's head had hit the instrument panel so many times that his face looked like a swollen pumpkin. The medics got there just as we did, got him out and put him on a stretcher. He was wearing flight boots, you know the kind, those big, fleece lined ones. I sure would have liked a pair of those to keep my feet warm, but he wouldn't turn them loose.

Late one afternoon I was leaning up against a large tree, smoking a cigarette, and watching a medical corps Weasel (a small tracked vehicle) run back and forth over a snow covered clearing that was about 100 to 150 feet square. I don't know if the driver was checking to see if there were any mines hidden in the snow or just packing it down some for the rest of the vehicles. The Weasel drove out and the ambulances started to pull in to park for the night. The first one drove in about forty feet and hit a mine. The engine blew completely out of it and came over and hit my tree. If I hadn't been on the rear side of the tree it would have hit me. I woke up about 100 yards down the road, covered with snow. They said that I had a concussion and was just wandering back and forth in the road. The war was getting to be a real drag now. It was cold, we weren't getting any sleep and we were still eating a lot of K-rations. Hot food was a rarity and the weather was taking its toll on everyone. We had lots of colds and diarrhea, but kept moving. Having been in front line combat since September, many of us wondered how much more we could take without getting killed. Morale was definitely declining, especially in the brutal harshness of winter.

BACK TO THE HOSPITAL

I started having trouble with an old infection on my back. They said it was from tick bites I got back in Normandy. Two sore spots on either side of my spine wouldn't heal because my cartridge belt kept shifting all the time. They just kept getting worse. The battalion medics said I would have to be sent back to the hospital and get something to stop the infection. They sent me to a big Army hospital all the way back to the Cherbourg peninsula. The medics gave me a P.O.B. (Penicillin, oil and beeswax) injection every three hours in the butt with a syringe that looked as big as a grease gun. I think the cure was worse than the infection. I had been there about a week and ran into Walter McDonald, cousin Bernice's husband, again. He was doing all right but was still very homesick. I asked him if he wanted to take that piece of bullet out of my arm but he said that they did that type of surgery with a pocketknife. I told him to forget it.

While I was in the hospital a hypnotist came to entertain us. I never thought I could be hypnotized but, boy, was I wrong. I sat in a chair and he started talking to me while swinging something on a string in front of my face. He told me to put my hand on top of my head, which I did, and then told me I wouldn't be able to take my hand down until he said so. I really strained to get it down but I couldn't do it. He finally told me to take it down and it practically flew off my head. I remember one peculiar thing about being hypnotized; it got very quiet, so much so that you could hear insects buzzing outside. It was very peaceful and I felt as if I was just drifting along.

The next victim was a paratrooper in the ward with us. The hypnotist told the paratrooper that he was in plane getting ready to jump. He said that the door was open and when the green light came on he was to jump. He held up a flashlight and told him it was the green light and the guy jumped off his bed just as if it had been a plane. The hypnotist pulled a good one on another guy who swore he couldn't be hypnotized. He put him under and told him that when he woke up he would have a great urge to go to the latrine. As he walked down the aisle to leave the ward, he would discover that he had a rock in his boot. The farther he walked the more his foot would hurt and the more urgent would be his trip to the latrine. The hypnotist then told the nonbeliever he wouldn't remember any of this until he clapped his hands, then he woke the guy up. He sat there for a minute or so, telling everyone that he hadn't been hypnotized, then got up and started walking out of the ward. He went about 10 feet and started limping, then bent over and started to unlace his boot but jerked up straight and headed for the door again. He ended up hopping on one foot as fast as he could while he was trying to get his boot off. He made it out of the door but I don't think he made it to latrine in time.

Remember the dueling pistols, the pirate gun and the P-35 automatic I mentioned earlier? Well, I asked another officer to look after them for me while I was in the hospital and you can guess what happened. I never saw them again; they just disappeared.

Before I was able to return to the 2nd Division I had to go through a replacement depot. For a while I thought I was going to be sent to another Division, but I kept raising hell until they said I could go back to my old outfit. The trip back to the front was through Aachen, Germany, an ancient city that had been torn all to bits. The division had crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge about five miles below Remagen. I joined them after that and followed the assault battalions through Germany.

GERMANY:
WHERE NO ONE WAS A NAZI AND EVERYONE HATED HITLER

I'm not sure just where I actually caught up with the 2nd, but when I did, I found out E Company had a new Executive Officer. The Battalion Exec met me at company headquarters and asked me if I would like to be the Transportation Officer in Regimental Service Company. That would also make me the Executive Officer of that company. Naturally, I said yes. It was a real relief to be someplace where people weren't trying to shoot at me all of the time. I was starting to get a little nervous up at the front. I had been in combat for over ten months now and I wasn't sure when the shell with my name on it might come up. Now, I wouldn't be walking anymore, either. I would always have a place to sleep and, the real bonus, hot food.

I recall going through a long valley where the Air Corps had caught a large column of German troops. They probably hit the front and rear at the same time to bottle them up, then started working over the middle. There were about two miles of dead bodies, both men and horses, and all kinds of equipment. It was total destruction.

Our front line troops were now mounted on tanks or half-tracks or anything else they could find with wheels and were chasing the Germans as fast as they could. We would go like hell for a while, then get stopped by a small pocket of troops. The call would go out for mortars or SP guns to knock out the pocket, and then we started all over again. The division reached the Weser river and crossed it with boats, then pontoon bridges. We stopped right after dark one night, alongside a railroad station. Everyone figured that there had been a big battle somewhere nearby because the stench of dead bodies was so bad. We found out what it was after daylight the next day. We had stopped beside a concentration camp of some sort. There was a high barbed wire fence with gun towers at the corners and a bunch of wooden barracks inside. I didn't go into the camp but I could see dead bodies stacked up everywhere, wearing black and white striped clothes. They looked like they had all starved to death.

We stopped another day at what looked to be a baronial manor right out of the Middle Ages. There was a large square area completely enclosed by a wall about twelve feet high. You entered through a gateway that had a very thick wooden door in it. The buildings inside were all built around the wall and were actually part of the wall. The manor house was more or less in the center of the front wall and across from it were the farm buildings where they kept their hay, feed and animals. Storerooms and servant quarters were on the side walls. In the center were some fruit trees and gardens and there was a small pond at one end. It looked like a fortified homestead, for the people and animals to live in, with the farm's fields located all around it. We started going through the place and came upon two young women, approximately thirteen to fifteen years old, in the pig barn. They were wearing yellow armbands on their sleeves and said they were Jews from Poland. They had been eating and living with the pigs and wouldn't take our word for it when we said they could leave. As far as I know they just stayed there.

I don't remember too much about the house itself except that it looked like a museum. It was spotless, with everything very highly polished. There were all kinds of mounted heads and horns on the walls and you could see where weapons had been taken down from their wall mounts, probably some of those we found in the garden. There was a large trunk in one of the lower rooms and when it was opened we found that it was full of things that they were probably getting ready to hide. What caught our eye to start with was a bunch of knives lying on a cloth. There must have been thirty or forty of them. I picked up one that was quite unique. It was actually two knives in one sheath, which was made of bone and decorated with sleighs and reindeer. It had come from Finland and could have been a war souvenir sent home by the owner of the manor. Underneath the cloth we found several cameras. I was always curious to know what was beneath the cameras but I had to leave and never did find out.

Our Regimental Ammo Officer, Warrant Officer Myers, told the Germans living there to turn in all their guns and they told him they didn't have any. Myers started poking around outside and found a place where the dirt had been freshly turned. When he asked them about it, they turned very pale and said they didn't know what it was. He got a shovel and started digging and when he hit something hard some women started to cry and carry on. He pulled out a package wrapped in a tarp and when it was unrolled a whole bunch of shotguns and sporting rifles fell out. He had an M.P. come and take the weapons and the people back to division headquarters.

We were still moving east, heading rapidly for Leipzig, traveling through hilly country, approaching the towns of Leuna and Merseberg. This was where Hitler had some of his synthetic gasoline and rubber plants. The lead elements of the division were still riding on tanks and trucks. We reached this part of Germany in daylight and as soon as we came out of the hills into the flat land just west of Merseberg, anti-aircraft batteries opened up and knocked out our lead vehicles. You couldn't move anything at all in the daytime. Every time we tried it they clobbered us with those anti-aircraft guns. We found that there were thousands of them put there to protect the factories from air raids. The Germans depressed the barrels and were using them against ground troops instead of airplanes. As they were all flat trajectory weapons, they couldn't do us much harm if we could get behind anything at all. The assault companies finally moved against them at night and took them that way.

Most of the batteries we saw were operated by remote control. A central fire control would have about four batteries that they could fire all at once. How good it felt to stay back and be out of the line of fire for a change. Service Company waited until the area was secure then moved in and set up headquarters. The attack proceeded into Leipzig with quite a bit of resistance but nothing major like we had just gone through. The parts of the city that I saw were not torn up as much as some of the others had been. As I was driving into the city, I saw a large German flag hanging on the balcony of a big building. It was a Reich Maritime battle flag and I ran inside and up the stairs to the balcony and took it down. It had one bullet hole in it.

We moved east of Leipzig to the Mulde River and waited for the Russians to arrive. The Germans were all trying to get back to our side of the river because they didn't want the Russians to get them. The American forces, however, would only take the German soldiers to our side of the river. All of the civilians had to be sent back for the Russians. We can see now what a big mistake that was. We stayed at the Mulde for a very short time and then we were ordered to make a long fast motor march, south, then east, into Czechoslovakia. We didn't run into any opposition and when we traveled at night we moved under blackout conditions, which meant some slow driving, but in the daylight we really hauled it.

ON TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

As we moved through the Sudetenland you could tell which were the Czechs and which were the Germans. The Czechs were going crazy with joy. We moved in to take Pilzen on May 7th and learned that the Germans were surrendering to the Allied Powers. Pilzen was a great city. The people were dancing in the streets and passing out all kinds of food and drink. Their most popular drink was called slivovitz and, like calvados, it would knock your hat off. While we were in Pilzen, the Russians were in Prague and we sort of divided the distance between the two cities. As usual, they didn't keep up their side of the bargain. Two other officers and I were driving around the American sector east of Pilzen one day and came upon a small village where the people were all out in the street with some Russian troops, celebrating the end of the war. They were too far west of the Russian zone, in our territory, but...the war was over and they were supposed to be our allies. I don't think the Czechs liked the Russians very much, but they sure did like us Americans. They couldn't do enough for us. Many of them spoke English and it seems they all had a cousin in Chicago. Anyway, we stopped and joined the party. They were drinking potato vodka out of great big glasses and would fill a glass to the top, hand it to you and motion for you to drink it all down at once. I tried but didn't get but about a third of it down. One of the other guys drank the entire glass full and then heaved it all right back up again. That was strong stuff.

The following story was told to me by an officer who said he had witnessed it. It took place at a checkpoint between Pilzen and Prague. Some American GIs and some Russians were trying to talk to each other when one of the Russians reached over and took the wristwatch off the arm of one of the Americans. When the GI asked him to give it back, he wouldn't do it. A Russian officer was standing there watching the whole thing and when the soldier refused to return the watch, the officer took out his pistol and shot him dead. The GI got his watch back.

While we were in Pilzen, (actually we were in a small town outside of Pilzen, named Domazlice and were using the German air field as our base) I was asked if I would like to go through the local prison. It was a large building, shaped like the spokes of a wheel. It had five floors above ground and another three below ground. Some of the cells were quite large, like holding tanks, and were filled with German women, most of whom had worked at the German air base. Many of the smaller cells were jammed with men. They were so full a person would have a hard time trying to sit down. Then the next cell might be empty. When I asked our guide why, he answered that the Germans had treated the Czechs that way. Outside, between the spokes of the cellblocks, were open areas where the prisoners could exercise. A Czech guard, swinging a whip, was standing in the center of a group of Germans making them trot around in a circle. They took us down to the lower levels, to the very bottom and believe me, it was very cold and damp down there. The halls were lined with cells that had solid steel doors with only two small openings in them. One at the bottom could be opened to slide a food dish through and one up higher in the door so that the guards could see the prisoner. They opened one of the windows and showed us what was inside. There was a naked man chained hand and foot to the wall and there was no way he could sit or lay down. When I asked the guard why he was like that, they said he was a member of the SS that had run the prison when it was full of Czechs and that they were only doing to him what he had done to them.

We sat up headquarters at a German airfield on the edge of Domazlice, just outside of Pilzen. There were all types of German aircraft around, parked in revetments so the bomb blasts wouldn't damage them. Most of them were intact, too. I guess they just ran out of gasoline and couldn't fly them anymore. There was one that was very peculiar looking. It was rather small and had no propeller. Someone said later that it was one of Germany's first jets. There was a story going around that some Air Corps pilots were at the airport checking out the German planes. One of the American pilots tried to fly a German ME 109 but he crashed shortly after takeoff. They said that the Germans had messed up the controls so that it couldn't be flown.

While we were at Domazlice we thought we would have a big party and I volunteered to haul the beer. I went into Pilsen to the only brewery that was still operating to see what I could find. I guess I informally opened that brewery to the public. A big ramp went down to the basement level where you could back a truck up to the dock and load the beer. The dock had what looked like railroad tracks running across it coming out of a doorway that was covered by a large piece of canvas. This was where they rolled the huge casks of beer out. There was a giant man standing on the dock with a mallet in his hand and as the cask rolled by he knocked a large bung in the end of it. Everyone lined up and filled any container they could find with beer, using everything from water cans to helmets.

I met a young lady at the brewery (she was the person who took orders for beer) and made a date to take her on a picnic. I confiscated a German VW (one of the original Beetles) and we drove out to a large lake that must have been the local resort. There were a lot of people there, mostly families, sitting in the sun or swimming. What was peculiar was that there was no place to change your clothes. Men and women just stood up, took their clothes off in front of everyone, put on their bathing suits and went swimming. That was a little too much for me. I stayed dressed. I had parked the VW on a downhill slope and up against a tree so that it wouldn't roll away. We had our picnic and were just watching all the other people when it started to rain. It was coming down really hard so we ran back to the car and waited for it to quit. That was a big mistake. Because of the angle of the car the rain drenched the motor, got the distributor wet and the car wouldn't start. As soon as it started raining everyone else left and there was no one to catch a ride with back to Pilzen. So, we ended up walking back to town. One of our mechanics accompanied me the next day to pick up the car and we clocked the distance. My date and I had walked a little over twelve miles. I didn't drive any more German cars.

We had something happen in Pilzen that showed you how the Russians behaved and what would happen if you stood up to them. In order to pick up beer you had to go to the office and fill out a form stating who you were, what outfit you belonged to and how much beer you wanted. Sometimes it would get a little tedious waiting. One day there were about 10 or 15 men standing in line waiting their turn when a Russian soldier walked in. He looked at the long line, walked up to the front and started pushing his way to the head of the line. Two sergeants picked him up off the ground, threw him out of the door and down the steps into the street. He got up, grinned and went to the end of the line where he belonged.

We had found a German ambulance at the airbase. It was about a '36 model, good running, Chevrolet and one day two of us thought we would take it out for a ride. We went racing around the countryside in it, out in front of where our lines were supposed to be. Coming back, we came tearing around a corner and ran over the trail leg of an anti-tank gun where the crew was just getting ready to fire. If it hadn't been such a green crew they would have blown us to bits. Lucky again.

The fields around Pilzen were planted with a winter grain crop, which was closely grazed by large hares. I tried hunting them with an M1 rifle while standing up in a jeep, riding over those rough fields, but I couldn't hit a thing so I just gave it up and went back to camp.

A memorandum came down from headquarters saying that from now on all packages mailed back to the States must have a list of the contents pasted on the outside. Up to this time you could send just about anything back home and hardly ever have it checked. I had collected several items that I wanted to send home to keep. There were two 16gauge shotguns, two or three sabers, several knives and a bunch of German flags and armbands. I had them all crated up and, following orders, had the contents listed on the outside of the crate. I never saw that stuff again thanks to that idiotic memorandum.

The division had collected huge quantities of arms from the civilians. One day they took them out to the middle of an open field and started stacking them in large piles. There were, literally, thousands of fine sporting rifles, shotguns, pistols and knives of all kinds stacked about fifteen feet high in several piles across this field. Then they poured gasoline over the whole mess and set them on fire. I sure hated to see all of those good guns go to waste like that.

While I was in Domazlice I was given the chore of taking some prisoners back to Nuremberg, Germany and discharging them. This was quite a long way to go and they had packed the 2 1/2 ton trucks as full as they could with the POWs. I think our drivers took a perverse delight in seeing how fast they could take the curves and hills. Those POWs were pretty bug-eyed by the time we stopped. We drove in to the city square and I stood up on a fountain with an interpreter and discharged about two hundred Germans. We had one man too many, though. There was one left over without papers and he had to go back with us to the POW camp. I thought he was going to break down and cry. It bothers me a lot more now than it did then.

The division stayed in that area for about six weeks and then everyone started counting up points to see when we could go home. I don't remember how many points I had but it was enough to be one of the first ones to make it out. A bunch of us were grouped together and took a convoy through Nancy, France (where I bought my mother a gold colored brooch and some real French perfume) to Camp Lucky Strike, near Le Harvre, where we waited to be processed for our return to the United States.

The ship we boarded to sail for New York was an Italian luxury liner, the *SS Conte Grande*. That was a great trip back across the Atlantic. We took the southern route, where the weather was good, and seas were calm. We had a lot more room in our cabins and the ship had a real good stabilizer, which made the sailing real smooth. Best of all, the food was delicious. It was American Navy chow. It

sounded strange when the radio started picking up stateside transmissions about a day or two out of New York. I heard something I hadn't heard for almost two years--radio commercials. We arrived back in New York and were sent to a debarkation center at Ft. Dix, New Jersey for our papers to go on leave. I finally boarded a troop train and started on my way home.

The train went through the LeHigh Valley to Buffalo and Niagara Falls, then crossed over into Canada, over Lake St. Claire to Port Huron, Michigan, then to Chicago and, finally, to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois. The car I was riding in was right behind the engine and, because it was not air-conditioned, we had all of the windows open. You can imagine what we looked like when we got off of the train. Sweaty and black as could be from all that soot.

We got off the train, picked up our duffel bags and started walking to our quarters. On the way, we saw large numbers of German POWs standing around doing yard work, clipping hedges and grass and sweeping the sidewalks. They were so neat, clean and fat looking that something snapped in all of us about the same time. We threw our bags down and told those POWs, in GI German, to get their butts over here and pick them up. They knew that we meant it because about thirty of them ran over and picked up our bags, then stood at attention. One of the MPs guarding them said we couldn't do that to POWs but we held a short conference with him and when the conference was over, it was the MP who marched the POWs, carrying our bags, to our quarters.

I was only at Camp Grant long enough get cleaned up, get some clean uniforms and draw some money so I could start my leave. I left the next day for home and, after a thirty-day leave, during which Japan surrendered, I reported to Camp Swift, Texas on September 2, 1945. I reported on a Saturday afternoon and there was nothing to do in camp, so two other officers and I went into Austin. It was impossible to get a room in any of the hotels but we were told we might find a room to rent for the night in a private home. We ended up in a big old house on Rio Grande Avenue very near the University of Texas campus. We decided to walk down town and about a block from where we were staying found a whole porch full of pretty girls. Naturally, we had to go over to say hello and that is how I met my future wife, Barbara. She was going to school at the University, taking a mathematics course, so that she could go to work for the Air Corps in Dayton, Ohio. She ended up doing math computations for the engineers studying rotary wings on helicopters.

I stayed at Camp Swift for about a month then got my orders to go to Camp Wolters, Texas to be inactivated from the service. Bergstrom Air Base was only about 30 miles away, up near Austin, and I caught a ride that far hoping to find a flight going to Dallas. This was quicker than waiting a week for a troop transport to Camp Wolters. I was told there was a flight leaving in about 30 minutes and was sent over to a supply office to get a parachute. They only had a couple of them left. The straps wouldn't let out enough to fasten them between my legs. What the heck, we weren't going to have any trouble between Austin and Dallas, I thought. We got airborne and had been flying for about an hour when the port engine started to cough and miss. The flight sergeant stood up and told everyone to put their chutes on, just in case. When I told him that mine wouldn't fasten he said I had a real problem, I could either fasten them and break my back if I had to jump or I could leave them open and fall out of the chute. I buckled them up and felt like the hunchback of Notre Dame. That engine finally quit and we started flying sideways. Then it came back to life again and we straightened back out. Then it quit again, and again, and again. I looked through the driftmeter at the ground and we were flying at about a 45degree angle to the ground direction. We eventually got to Love Field in Dallas and landed. The field was a typical wartime air base, full of hangers, barracks and war planes scattered all over it. I took a bus the rest of the way to Camp Wolters.

It was now October, 1945 and I was on terminal leave until January, 1946 because of accumulated leave time. I know that there are a lot of things that I have left out of this narrative, either because it had been so long ago that I have forgotten them, or I just didn't want to put some of them on paper. In any case, this is pretty much what happened to me from 1942 to 1946.

MEDALS AND AWARDS

Bronze Star - for action coming off Hill 192 in Normandy.

Purple Heart - knee injury in Berigny, France.

Purple Heart Oak Leaf Cluster - arm wound in Brest.

Combat Infantry Badge.

ETO Ribbon with five battle stars.

Presidential Unit Citation.

American Campaign Medal.

American Defense Medal.

Victory Medal.

German Occupation Medal.

Belgium Fouragere.

(I fired Expert on every weapon we were issued except the Colt 45 pistol.)

Close

Author's note: Several years ago Barbara and I visited that seafood restaurant in Sabine Pass that I mentioned while I was on maneuvers and the food was still delicious.

Thirty-five years after I had been at Pembroke Dock, Barbara and I visited Wales. Those red brick buildings were still standing and I located the one in which I had been quartered. The windowpane had finally been fixed. We discovered that shortly after our visit, the entire area was going to be cleared for development and the buildings would be razed. Torquay, on the Devon coast, has a lovely beach and today shows no sign of the training that took place there. The German bunker on Omaha Beach at San Laurant sur Mer is still standing but now there is a 2nd Division monument in front of it and the road in front of the bunker is named after the Division. The barn and the farm in Berigny are still there and when we visited Europe in 1984, on the 40th anniversary of D-Day, we met the widow of the farmer and her son, who was ten years old, when we there in 1944. Their name is Chevral and we were guests in their home for refreshments (including homemade calvados, of course)! Their son, Claude, drove us around the area - taking us back to Hill 192, St. George d'Elle, etc. He also introduced us to the local priest and we visited with him in his rectory. The rectory is next to the field where the tanks got stuck when I first visited the area and near where Umberger and I caught the Germans crossing the road. The priest, good-naturedly, accused me of "shooting up his rectory." With a laugh, I assured him that it wasn't me. He still had a piece of that tank on his desk. He uses it for an ashtray.

La Roche is still picturesque. The hotel is still there and so is the ancient castle ruin. Vielsalm, Krinkelt, Rockerath, St. Vith, Camp Elsenborn and Heartbreak Crossroad appeared differently in 1984, but they still brought back many memories, most of which I have written in this story. These are my recollections of my time in the Army - - and My War.

Photo Archive

NORMANDY

TREVIERES OFFENSIVE

June 7-10, 1944

CERISY OFFENSIVE

June 11-19, 1944

ST. GERMAIN D'ELLE, ST. GEORGES D'ELLE, LE PARC DEFENSIVE

June 20-July 10, 1944

HILL 192 OFFENSIVE

July 11-12, 1944

ST. GERMAIN D'ELLE, LA CROIX ROUGE, LE SOULAIRE DEFENSIVE

July 13-25, 1944

VIRE OFFENSIVE

July 26-August 7, 1944

TINCHEBRAY OFFENSIVE

August 8-16, 1944