

GRINDING THROUGH!

(With the 7th Armored Division)

(Sept. 1944 to April 1945)

by

Richard L. McBride

7th Armored Division

McBride, Richard L.

Part 1

135-01-04

1945



Edmundson, son of [unclear]
1946

Richard L. McBride at age 25
171 Grace Church Street
Rye, N.Y. 10580

FORWARD

The purpose of this story is to give the reader an idea of the kind of life led in the Infantry during World War II. In attempting to do that, I have resorted to telling the story of one particular Infantry outfit, Co. A of the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, but it could easily be the history of almost any other group of Infantry G.I.'s

Since the most common way to join an Infantry outfit that was fighting overseas was to live through the life of a replacement first, it seems fitting to begin this story at Fort Meade through which a large majority of replacements passed on their way to the transports that took them to the fighting fronts in the E.T.O.

I have attempted to give a fairly accurate picture of the variety of experiences shared by our unit from the time I joined it as a replacement on September 13, 1944, until the day that I was wounded and evacuated on April 4, 1945. As a diary was both against Army Security regulations and physically impossible for an Infantryman to keep, this "literary effort" is a product of memory alone. Hence, errors may have been made in describing the action during four campaigns, and in names of people and places included in this story. These mistakes I regret, but I venture to say that those with more accurate information will find this an otherwise faithful and realistic description of the part which average Infantrymen in the ranks played during the campaigns of

1st Armored Division

McBride, Richard L. Vol 1

135-01-04

1944-1945

1944

Northern France, the Rhineland, the Ardennes, and Central Europe.

If the reader finds this story a bit prejudiced, please dismiss it understandingly as the inevitable result of a great pride in a great "outfit", for, of course, the mortar squad was the best squad in our Platoon, the 2d Platoon the best platoon in A Co., Co. A the best Co. in the 23d Armored Infantry Battalion, our Battalion the best in the Division, and last but not least, the "Lucky Seventh" was certainly the finest and "fightingest" of all our Armored Divisions.

November, 1945

27th Armored Division

McBride, Richard L.
Part 1

135-01-09

1945

1945

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The 7th Armored Division consisted of the following assigned and attached units:

23rd Armored Infantry Battalion
38th Armored Infantry Battalion
48th Armored Infantry Battalion
17th Tank Battalion
31st Tank Battalion
40th Tank Battalion
87th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech.)
814th Tank Destroyer Battalion
434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
440th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
489th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
33rd Armored Engineer Battalion
203rd Armored Anti-aircraft Artillery Battalion
77th Armored Medical Battalion
129th Armored Ordnance Battalion
147th Armored Signal Company
446th Quartermaster Truck Company
3967th Quartermaster Truck Company
7th Armored Division Military Police
7th Armored Division Trains H.Q. and H.Q.Co.
Combat Command "A" H.Q. and H.Q. Detachment
Combat Command "B" H.Q. and H.Q. Detachment
Combat Command "R" H.Q. and H.Q. Detachment
7th Armored Division H. Q. and H. Q. Company

7th Armored Division

McBride, Richard A.

Part 1

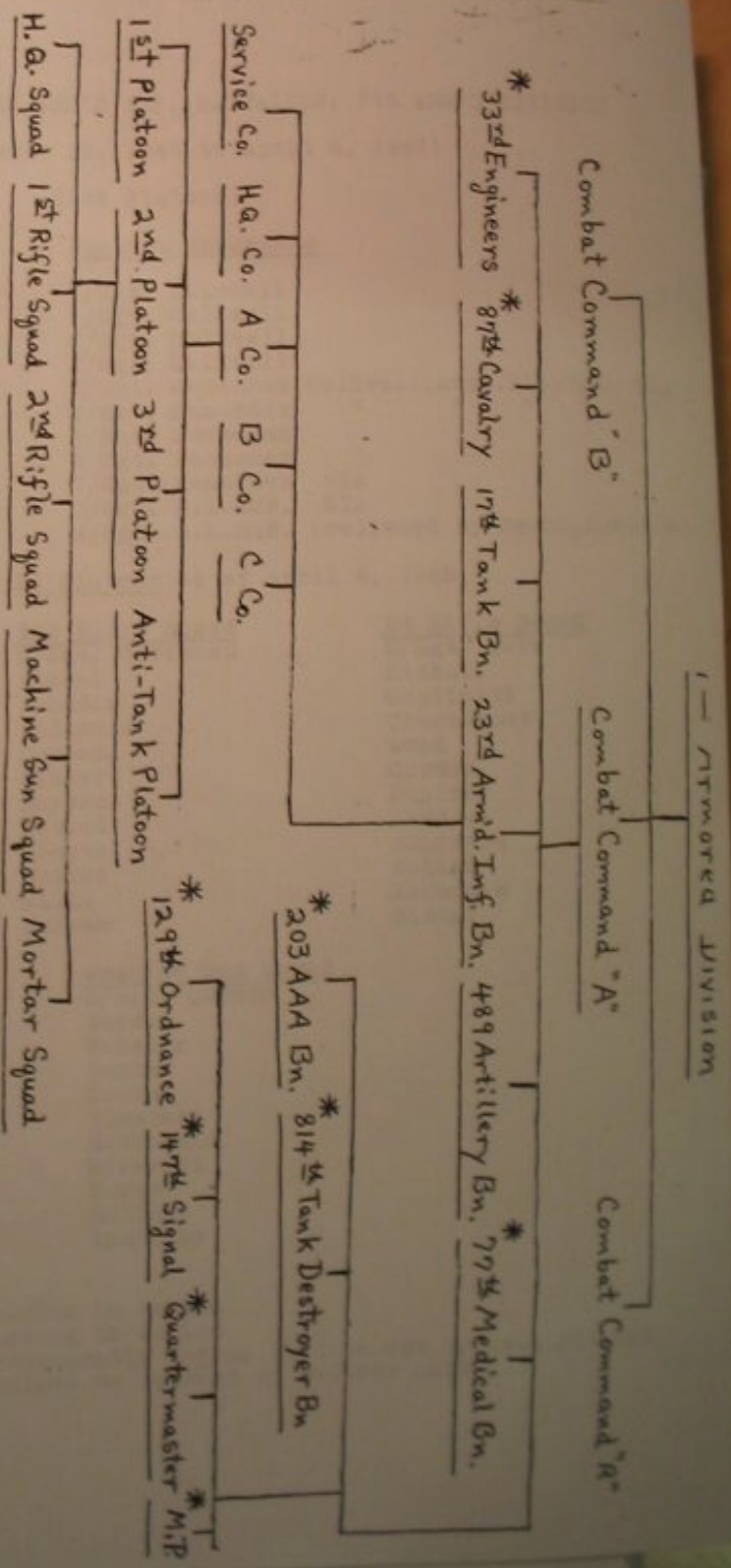
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1945

eight

(3)

M.P.



Infantry (Arm'd)
 Squad = 10-14 men
 Platoon = 55-65 men
 Company = 255-265 men
 Battalion = 1150-1250 men

Artillery (105mm. - self-propelled)
 Gun Section = 1 gun
 Battery = 6 guns
 Battalion = 18 guns

Tanks (medium and light)
 one tank - (5 men - medium)
 (4 men - light)
 Platoon = 5 (medium) tanks
 or = 4 (light) tanks
 Company = 18 (medium) tanks
 or = 15 (light) tanks
 Battalion = 54 medium and
 15 light tanks

Combat Command = varied in size with changes in component units to meet varying tactical situations

(Arm'd) Division = roughly 13,000 men

* Usually 1/3 of total unit strength of these supporting units was assigned to each of the three Combat Commands

2d PLATOON, Co. A, 23d ARM'D INF. BATTALION, 7th ARM'D DIVISION

(From Sept. 13, 1944 to April 4, 1945)

(2nd Platoon)

Platoon Leaders

Lt. Justad WIA*
 Lt. Anderson WIA
 Lt. Klein WIA
 T/Sgt. Caldwell &
 Lt. Creswell *
 Lt. Tate MIA
 T/Sgt. Menendez &
 Lt. Ford *
 Lt. Porges WIA
 S/Sgt. R.L.McB. &
 Lt. Reed

Platoon Sergeants

T/Sgt. Caldwell
 T/Sgt. Caldwell
 T/Sgt. Caldwell
 T/Sgt. Caldwell
 T/Sgt. Menendez (Caldwell, Asst. Plt. Sgt.) WIA
 T/Sgt. Menendez " " " " "
 T/Sgt. Menendez
 T/Sgt. Menendez
 T/Sgt. Menendez
 T/Sgt. Menendez WIA
 S/Sgt. R.L.McB. WIA
 S/Sgt. R.L.McB. (relieved by Sears, April 2)

Members of 2d Platoon as of April 4, 1945

H.Q. Squad

S/Sgt. R.L. McBride
 Sarno
 McCoy
 Strini
 Mirkovich
 Messersmith
 Morin
 Smart
 Anderson
 Murphy
 Potter (Medic)

1st Rifle Squad

S/Sgt. Chrisman
 Richel
 Johnson
 Vodhanel
 Ponzani
 Winner
 Haydon
 Newood
 Abeyta
 Stires
 Mills
 Mairan

2d Rifle Squad

S/Sgt. York
 Nichuck
 Guglietti
 Charbonnet
 Wood
 Gordon
 Pantzer
 Needles
 Woodward
 Foland
 McKenzie
 Sisler

Mortar Squad

S/Sgt. McDermott
 Wiatroski
 Dolan
 Coyne
 Cepelak
 DeMarco
 Gourlay
 Stone
 Warneke

Machine Gun Squad

S/Sgt. Coyazo
 Guyda
 Fansler
 Garber
 Crane
 Winstead
 MacDonald
 Mireault
 Burke
 Holiday
 Lazouras

WIA - wounded in action

MIA - missing in action

& - subsequently became Platoon Sgt. or Asst. Plt. Sgt.

* - changed to command of another unit

Former Members of the 2d Platoon and Other Members of A Co.
Whose Names I Can Still Remember

2d Platoon

S/Sgt. John Barnes
Ostrander
Erickson
Jardin
Lavetro
S/Sgt. Valentine
S/Sgt. Roll
Martinez
S/Sgt. Trujillo
Means
Miller, J.T.
Meyers, D.R.
Mixson
Millilo
Moltenbury
Mezatis
S/Sgt. Leurring
Thrall
Massiello
McGath
McDormand
Hackney
Greenway
Zunk
"Rub-cut"
Mull

A Co.

Capt. Whiteman ("Navajo")
Lt. ~~Spence~~ Stier
Capt. Foster
Lt. Mayben
Lt. Hicks
Lt. Creswell
Lt. Grundy
Lt. Rofers
Lt. Dradin
O'Brien
Norville
Kennedy
T/Sgt. Sears
S/Sgt. Leutner
1st/Sgt. Miller
1st/Sgt. Dees
Sgt. Bowles
S/Sgt. Collins
S/Sgt. Maddock
S/Sgt. Butler
Miller, Wm.
Meyers
T/Sgt. Zerlinga
T/Sgt. Stout
T/Sgt. Holland
S/Sgt. Hill, H.
S/Sgt. Hill, Ed
Mills
Misove
Meyers
1st/Sgt. Hammond
Gregg
Dudy
Sgt. Henry
S/Sgt. Johnson (3d Plt.)
S.Sgt. Johnson (ATPlt.)
Muhl

CHAPTER I

Chapter I

We left Fort Dix early on the morning of August 11th after being arranged in groups of fifty, -- as was called for. But I really got together replacements and were a crowd of individuals still, than the closely knit fighting unit known as a platoon. To reach the station at Leeds we passed the base clothing repair and baggage depot where German I.V.'s were at work. Some of these glanced nervously at us as we passed. They looked big and tough, -- probably some of the Afrika Corps. It seemed queer to think that we would be facing men like these soon in the field.

CHAPTER I

Getting there, - Britain, -

up front at Metz

Explained psychologically, I suppose. A short, steady trip with full battle equipment slung behind the back or hanging from my projections on the walls, and we came to a halt at Deep River. Perhaps we saw the F.O.S. (Fort of Observation), but Deep River was a F.O.S. (Fort of Observation). To us this meant nothing more than things beyond. We arrived at Leeds time, and the first order was to "march" to that dress of the efficient expert, the war's ready-designed, consolidated mess hall. There was a kitchen on the center with three show-tables, each equipped with the other in following the leader of F.O.S.

GRINDING THROUGH!

Chapter I

We left Fort Meade early on the morning of August 11th after being arranged in *groups of fifty*, -- we were called platoons, but freshly put together replacements are more a crowd of individuals still than the closely knit fighting unit known as a platoon. To reach the station at Meade we passed the huge clothing repair and salvage depot where German P.W.'s were at work. Some of them glanced scornfully at us as we passed. They looked big and tough, -- probably some of Hitler's best from the Afrika Corps. It seemed queer to think that we would be facing men like these soon in battle, but the martial music of the escorting band made us feel more equal to the task. It could be explained psychologically, I suppose.

A short, sweaty trip with full battle equipment stacked behind the seats or hanging from any projections on the walls, and we came to a halt at Camp Kilmer. Fort Meade was the P.O.R. (Port of Replacement), but Camp Kilmer was a F.O.E. (Port of Embarkation). To us this meant nothing more than things beyond. We arrived at meal time, and the first order was to "march" to that dream of the efficiency expert, the Army's newly-designed consolidated mess hall. There was a kitchen in the center with three chow-table-wings, each competing with the other in swallowing the hordes of G.I.'s

pressing up the steps.

At Kilmer, more equipment was issued to each man, if that could be comprehended, -- and also weapons. The records of the men in each company were placed in a wooden box, and this was given to some already over-burdened private to carry to our destination. We marched over to a theater to see a movie illustrating the do's and don't's of military travel, and then, as a grimmer ^{thought} ~~touch~~, we went through life-boat drill in one of the large tanks holding a life-boat bobbing up and down against a concrete wall over which was slung a net to simulate the side of a sinking ship. Next came a lecture demonstrating the equipment in each life-boat, and how to meet the ^a ~~ch~~allenge of any disaster at sea, even detailed as to what fish to eat.

A stage show brought out from New York as a good-bye touch was well-intended, but difficult to enjoy when mentally preparing ourselves to leave the old U.S.A. so soon.

On August 13th, we moved again by train, dressed this time in winter uniforms. Shipping space had to be saved, and after all, winter wasn't so very far off! The train came to a stop at New York Harbor. By chartered ferry we reached the Cunard White Star docks, where two goliaths of the Merchant Fleet greeted us, the Queen Mary and the British-operated Isle de France. The British sailors looked us over appraisingly, as each of us lugging 75-pound pack, rifle, gas mask, duffle bag, and overcoat struggled up the gang plank of the Isle de France. The public address system immediately hurled its

(page 3 additions)

There were 13,500 soldiers on board this large ship, plus crew, - a "full house", as it were. With no escort, we cruised at top speed (26 knots), while constantly twisting and turning to make it more difficult for enemy subs to track us.

On one of my "policing" tours on the sun deck, I had the pleasure of talking with Bing Crosby, our chief entertainer on board. As we traveled past Northern Ireland, he pointed to the area from which his grandfather had come. He invited two other men and me to his cabin for beer or soft drinks this day. What a pleasant fellow he was.

raucous voice into every compartment announcing the various details for the day, just to remind us that this was not a pleasure cruise.

Each man had a strip of canvas, which he called "home", in dimensions about 18 inches by 6 feet. On that, besides himself, or in the immediate vicinity, (which was very immediate), went all his worldly equipment except the duffle bag, which had been stored in the hold of the ship.

What did one do on a troop ship? Each of the "feeding periods" took at least 3 hours, 90% of which time was spent standing in line waiting for one's turn. Visiting the P.X. store on board meant waiting another hour in line. Guard duty, "policing" or sweeping the decks, and K.F. cut into the days and nights. Other than gambling, playing cards, or attempting to read, the chief recreation was watching the waves and thinking of home.

My particular job was to supervise the "policing" of the sun deck where only officers were allowed. I often made it last longer than necessary to enjoy the freedom of a less-populated space and the view from that height, especially in the evenings just before sundown when the decks were vacated and strict blackout was in order.

→ We were not in convoy, so the only "incident" after leaving New York's anti-submarine-net-protected harbor and the escort of a Goodyear Navy blimp was the **fast** approach and as sudden departure of a British destroyer off our stern one stormy morning. Shortly after, a bomber from the

(additions to page 3)

R.A.F.'s Coastal Command circled the ship three times and then flew off in what seemed to us the direction of England. To our amusement, and that of the A.A.A. gunner^s as well, after the plane had circled the ship twice already, the loudspeaker announced in very British tones, "NOTICE TO ALL GUNNERS, AIRCRAFT IS FRIENDLY".

For two days and nights after that it seemed as though we were going around in circles. Then, on the morning of the eighth day at sea, we rounded the tip of Northern Ireland. At one o'clock, the mouth of the great river Clyde appeared before us, surrounded by the most beautiful, sunlit, moss-green hills I have ever seen, a birthday present for me. Noiselessly we glided to a stop near the small village of Gourock. As we all leaned over the rails shouting, "WHERE ARE WE?", I remember the boatman's small boy spelling the name with chalk on the deck of his father's oiler, which had just pulled up alongside our ship.

We were not to debark until the following morning, so we crowded the rails to take in the sights of a strange harbor. The river was packed with battleships, carriers, and cruisers, the pride of the Royal Navy. One big carrier eased by us, the crew standing at review on the flight deck while a proud band strutted up and down with pomp and circumstance. Then, the Queen Mary herself, which had left two days after we, came up to further fill the Clyde with her tremendous bulk.

The next morning, after waiting our turn, we filed off

onto a Scottish ferry boat which took us to Grenock. A white-haired, pink-cheeked Scot standing on the dock smiled a welcome. We had our first glimpse of a British train at the nearby station and received Red Cross doughnuts served by two beautiful Scottish lassies. Their ruddy complexions and buoyancy were a matter of comment among us all.

We boarded the train, were assigned six to a compartment, were given our first K-rations, and what seemed unforgivable, were whisked through most of Scotland in the dark.

Eighteen hours later a Warminster, in Southern England, we gathered up our equipment and trekked over a steep hill to a large pyramidal-tent-city crowded in the fields around some permanent brick buildings, a former British Army training camp. Beyond was an Ordnance assembly and testing area, row after row of Sherman tanks ready for use. I remember seeing one field containing nothing but tank tracks stacked up ten feet high. This was characteristic of the military activity all over England. The sky was constantly filled with planes. Their motors roared night and day.

We stayed at Warminster thirteen days. In that time, nine hours was the longest, continuous, rainless period. A fire in the tents would have been most welcome, but none could be had.

Rain or shine our processing went on. The new rifles and carbines we had brought from the U.S.A. were taken away and used ones issued in their places. We were marched out to a firing range to "zero-in" (test-fire) our rifles to

make sure that they wouldn't fail us in the near future.

With our last typhus shot came a medical examination, and the doctor asked each man if he knew any reason why he shouldn't be sent to combat. It seemed a bit late for that sort of question, though it passed as a final check on each man's record.

At Warminster, beside more training, I recall one lecture which was interesting. Men were paraded on the stage in German uniforms. We knew then what color to shoot at, and their Nazi gray-green was certainly a well-chosen, easily-camouflaged color. An officer explained the mechanisms of the basic weapons of the German Infantry. We were much impressed by their efficiency. Experience later proved our untrained observation right.

We made several hikes through the English countryside, viewing neat farms and fields and the outsides of homes, well kept, in spite of the war. The people looked paler, more weary, less healthy than the Scots. So many Yanks had passed through these small towns that only the children and the old who remembered the Yanks from World War I were interested or curious enough to wave or greet us. After all, this was England's fifth year of the war. Some of the Yanks made mistakes by flashing around too much money, not showing enough respect for things that mean much to the British, and by assuming that every English girl was ready to give them a good time, whether she had a husband in the Army or not. All this, naturally, helped to dull the enthusiasms of the

British, and perhaps to disappoint us.

Thirteen days after arriving in England, we entrained for Southampton, where we boarded a small Indian ship, The City of Canterbury, for Normandy. Our convoy was assembled that evening, and while the ship zig-zagged across the Channel, I caught snatches of sleep in a half-empty bin where life-jackets were stored.

The next morning, September seventh, we edged up the French coast to "Omaha Beach", which, together with "Utah Beach", were the destinations of our American troops on D-day, June sixth. Only the scars and quantities of the wreckage of battle remained. Many of the purposely-beached ships which had formed the breakwater and other parts of the artificial harbor were battered out of position by the terrific storm that had swirled along the coast shortly after the assault landing. But the harbor still worked efficiently, and several thousand men were there unloading the ships from England and the U.S.A.

We, too, had read in the papers of the "surprisingly low losses" during the D-day fighting. The rows of white crosses in more than one large cemetery there seemed to lessen the truth of that statement. The totalling of numbers is such an impersonal way of summing up the results of a battle!

The Normandy peasants in that area still seemed numbed, - their faces nearly expressionless. A few nodded as we passed or whispered among themselves. But a fraction of the former

herds of fat Norman cattle remained to feed among rusting tanks and still camouflaged anti-tank guns.

The foxholes along the hedgerows looked uncomfortably fresh; although we didn't need to have anyone stand guard on that our first night in France. What a contrast with nights to come!

The furthest point of Allied advance was changing rapidly those days, so it might have meant a longer trek than had seemed possible when we left England, where we had heard the optimistic rumor that by the time we reached France the big show would be over, with just humdrum occupation duty for us. In the morning, the first leg of a long, varied journey to the front began.

Negro truck drivers circled into our bivouac field, and we loaded up for the trip to Isigny, just fifteen miles away. All the farming villages we passed were nothing more than debris. We were still close to the Channel, in the countryside that saw the toughest fighting in France, with the exception of the struggle for Metz on the German border.

While waiting for our train connections in Isigny, the captain of "H" Co. granted his men permission to sample French wine. As there wasn't room for enough of us inside the small cabaret by the station, the order was given that we might pass our canteen cups over the fence behind the building. There, the owner was eagerly disposing of his cherished stock for fifteen francs a shot. His wife managed the financial side, while he did the honors with the "bouteilles de vin". Even

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1944

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when drunk out of an aluminum canteen cup, it helped to kill the taste of C-rations for breakfast.

We were warned by an old Transportation Corps captain that the Army Railroad would not furnish 1st Class accommodations, but I am sure we were all a bit surprised when the clanking, squeaking, olive-drab Army freight cars halted by the station platform to await their passengers. "Forty men or eight horses" on some, "Quarante hommes ou Huites Chevaux" on others; -- it was the same in any language. The total count in our particular boxcar was forty-two -- a bonus of two extra G.I.'s -- plus all the aforementioned equipment and several boxes of K-rations. It was nearly an B.R.O. situation. Packs were stacked against the wall all around except for the open sliding door on one side, the side on which there was no other track down which a train might be expected to come. The lucky ones sat on these packs with the wall as a back-rest. Others balanced on theirs in the middle of the car.

It was a rough trip, but all we saw was new, and that made up for many of the discomforts. After leaving Isigny, we went through what was left of Carentan and Coutances. St. Lo was the worst of the three. In fact, I saw nothing equal to it as a symbol of war's costly destruction until reaching Aachen. St. Lo might just as well be fenced off as a war memorial, left as a grim reminder to anyone thinking of bringing another war upon the world. Better to break green earth, than attempt to reconstruct new stone walls from old dust.

We actually reached the good-sized city of Rennes early the next morning, - not a transcontinental speed record. U.S. railway battalions had done a fine job, though, to bring any order and efficiency from the chaos of twisted rails, blown bridges, damaged yards, stations, and rolling stock, caused by our bombing during the months before D-day and in the Normandy campaign.

It was a crystal-clear moonlit night as we stumbled sleepily off the cars for a short march through the city to what must have been a hotel formerly. I shall never forget those few hours spent in Rennes. The tower of the partially ruined church near the station standing guard over the city, as if defying the Nazis to return to bomb as they had two nights before, -- the reflection of the houses in the canal along what must have been the prize street of the town, the muffled French laughter or faint music behind blacked-out windows where people still celebrated their liberation, -- but generally the eerie quiet of what should have been normally a brightly-lit, noisy city by American standards, -- made it seem as though we were walking through a stage setting after the curtain had just gone up, but before the actors had appeared to begin the scene. We seemed to be intruding!

Early dawn found us back at the station again, waiting for the signal to load up. Some of the men were offering a hundred francs for some wine, or "vino", as some Italian-American fellows in our car kept repeating to any little Frenchie who seemed a good contact man. Here in Rennes, as at almost all stops, --

and many there were -- we lost a few fellows who were either on the quest of wine or women, or just not so eager to keep that appointment at the front.

On again, through the rich French farmland and orchards, where burned-out tanks, rusting guns, and shell-craters failed to disturb the persistent efforts of farmers, - all old men, women, and children - who continued to prepare for the autumn harvest, as in years past.

As we passed through their fields, apple orchards, and small villages, the people were glad to see the Yanks, just as they were in 1917. Twice we had come to their rescue, and they were grateful. That was expressed sometimes by throwing apples at the open doors of our cars, and always by waving, smiling, and words untranslatable, but still understood.

Laval and Le Mans were next in line after we left Rennes. Those towns appeared almost untouched by war, in contrast with the villages near the coast. By afternoon the train halted at what was to be the end of our first lap. We gathered up our equipment and trudged out through waving and smiling villagers of the good town of Écommoy in the direction of a large estate where a replacement camp had been located.

The first hot meal since leaving England and the comforts of pup tent life again made Écommoy appear like home to us. This camp was one of many held by each U.S. Army to keep a pool of replacements from which current battle-loss requirements could be met. A period of training was in order again, - old routines for ~~ser~~ and our platoon leader, a young Georgian

by the name of Kinnebrew, who had just come from instructing at Fort Benning. Rifle marksmanship, calisthenics, and marches all over again; -reminiscent of Camp Croft days!

The third night orders were issued to H. Co. to prepare for the next move forward. We gathered up our belongings and formed ranks to march to the railroad station. By this time, the duffle bags and overcoats had been discarded, but the grand total of equipment still made a cumbersome load, as we trekked the few miles from the large country estate into the town. A crowd was gathered about the train to wave good-bye to another load of Yanks leaving for the front. For this leg of the journey we were fortunate enough to draw some ancient passenger cars of former German and French ownership, and improvement over the forty by eight boxcars!

This trip -- almost all at night -- took us to the next replacement depot at Étampes. A large empty field next to the railroad tracks on the outskirts of town was our camping ground for one day and night. There were C-rations and hot water for coffee and beautiful French girls riding by on bicycles -- (and quite willing to stop a moment) -- for our amusement during that day. Also, a great many Army and civilian trucks of refugees bulging with all their possessions passed through, probably on their way back home from the country since the Germans and our bombers had left that area.

Early the next morning, another mad dash by truck brought us to the 17th Replacement Depot at Chateau Beaumont. This had been the former Gestapo headquarters for the district south of Paris. They had good taste in their choice of a

likely billet for a Headquarters. It was a pure white chateau, surrounded by large forests and endless expanses of lawns cut artistically by poplar-edged driveways. Our mess area was in what must have been the Count's or Duke's own private race-track adjoining spacious but unpopulated stables. I suspect that the reason they were unpopulated could be explained by the black-looking but still edible captured "German" (?) meat we had for dinner that day, as a supplement to the usual C's.

That afternoon, the camp commander saw fit to present another lecture and demonstration on German weapons and equipment, much the same as the one in England.

Some of the men wandered down to the stream or canal running through the estate to bathe. The water was cold, so I used the milder method, a helmet-full at a time and a wash-cloth brought from home, for just as efficient if less sporting results. I even washed some clothes, which were smoked and dried by the fire before retiring that evening.

Early the next morning we were off again by G.I. truck on the longest and last leg of the journey. We were out to catch up with General Patton's Third Army. After circling below Paris, we hit the main Paris-Chalons-Verdun-Metz highway, and struck out due east.

The signs of war were hardly noticeable in the majority of the towns seen that day. Only here and there had stubborn SS boys caused the Yanks to destroy them and the buildings they chose as citadels in which to die for their Fuhrer. Of

course, all bridges had been replaced as the result of bombing or demolition work.

The French were gay and eager to show their appreciation. Children and women ran out to throw flowers at us, and sometimes a man would toss up a bottle of wine to the outstretched hands of truck-weary G.I.'s. We could have had anything these people still had to share.

We soon discovered the magic of the shout, "Vive La France!" One G.I., who had probably had a smattering of highschool French, tried it out as a gesture of reciprocation for all the expressions of gratitude on the faces of the Frenchies below us in the streets, who pressed forward to greet our swiftly-moving convoy. A spine-tingling "Vive Les Americains" was the reply, and we soon shouted back in full chorus "Vive La France" again and again in each village passed with the same results. The spirit of old France seemed reborn!

That evening, darkness compelled the trucks to pull off the road east of Chalons. An orchard proved good camouflage for us against the vigilant eye of "Bed-check Charlie", the lone German plane that always came over each night to check positions and troop movements. No time for tents that night, as we might have been ordered forward in the dark in an emergency. Slit-trenches for each man's protection against possible strafing were not yet mandatory. Only a few of us were that cautious or industrious!

A wet September morn came along early to greet us. Down the main road to Verdun we rolled, encouraged by more and more

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waving and smiling Frenchmen. The marks of war were still insignificant, but bomb craters bracketed the road here and there near bridges and junctions where the airmen had hoped to slow down the Jerries racing toward their Siegfried Line.

The Argonne Forest, with many of its grim trenches still visible, still unhealed by erosion and vegetation, helped us to relive the stories of the last generation about their World War. The monuments and historical markers were unnecessary. The zigzagging trenches, crumbling dugouts, gun emplacements, and half-filled shell craters told their own stories.

Verdun at last! More cemeteries and more monuments, -- and more to come for this war. The Nazis had paused a moment there, but the 7th A.D. had liberated the city a few days before, earning its undying gratitude; the medal of Verdun having been granted it in appreciation. The famous street Rue de Shevert, was renamed "Rue de la 7eme Division Blindée, U.S.A." in honor of our 7th Armored Division.

Our present objective, as it turned out, was still another replacement camp, "the last", located between Verdun and Metz. The camp was too far from the front to permit our hearing artillery fire, but we didn't have to be told that the joy-ride was over. I am sure we all felt the same though no one spoke about it.

After being told that it usually took several days to clear out of that last depot for assignment to an outfit at the front, we settled down to a meal of hot C-rations and hot water for coffee or cocoa powder. Some, including yours truly, were

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even optimistic enough to attempt some laundry. Others pitched tents for what was to be the last few nights of peaceful sleep. Nearly everyone wrote letters home.

This pleasant picture was rudely interrupted about three hours after our arrival by the order, "Prepare to move out". Morale hit bottom! I remember a fellow near me who had unpacked everything and was then standing naked, washing himself in the fading afternoon sunlight. I did quite well myself with wet O.D. trousers and underwear hanging all over the bushes around me. Most of it was left behind, a good excuse to lighten the load.

As we were lined up and counted like so many heads of cattle in a stockyard and answered to roll-call for the last time as replacements, the camp commander made the belated issuing of P.X.rations -- (candy, cigarettes) -- his parting gesture. It was appreciated, but we were thinking ~~and~~ too much to care.

When the last name was called off, the secret was broken, -- our next stop was the 7th Armored Division. I was previously only vaguely aware that there were such things as armored divisions in the U.S.Army. Many thought we were to leave our 745 classification number (standing for G. I. rifleman) and become tankers. Little did we realize that every Armored Division had three Armored Infantry Battalions. The word "Armored" meant little, for it was just, plain, old-fashioned foot-slogging, with a few exceptions. These were: (1) We rode in armored "Half-tracks" (personnel carriers) instead of

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G. I. trucks when going any great distance;

(2) We fought with tanks in close support more often, and so had more firepower to hurl at the enemy, but usually drew more from him in return;

(3) We were relieved from fighting more often than regular infantry divisions, usually because armored divisions were often saved during preparation by large groups of infantry with ^{strong} artillery support in order to be fresh and ready to put the killing punch in an assault and carry through if a real break in the enemy line seemed possible. Also, some types of terrain were better suited for infantry fighting alone, though towards the end, armor and its accompanying armored infantry seemed ~~to~~ ^{to} go/almost anyplace.

At least that is how we were told that is was to be. Theory and practice often disagree. Because an armored division could move so much more quickly and strike so much harder than an infantry division, it was often called in to meet situations that were different from normal assignments. For example, our mission in Holland with the British Second Army. We were to hold a long, extended, line protecting the British right flank, employing a sort of aggressive defense, relying upon scattered strong-points of armor and armored infantry. The great battle between Lies^sel and Meijel grew out of this mission, when the Germans attempted a small-scale "Bulge" in Holland in late October. All of our fighting in Holland, except this battle in which we did have tanks with us, was carried on without close tank support. We fought

like regular infantry, relying on small arms and mortars, with artillery support supplemented by tanks firing in artillery fashion several miles behind us. The terrain (i.e. peat bogs and swamps) made this mandatory.

St. Vith was another example of an exception to normal training manual procedure for an armored division. However, that was a great emergency when exceptions were the rule. Something had to be done in a hurry to lessen impending disaster, so we were rushed south into Belgium to contact the 106th Division and hold a defensive line. When we arrived, the greater part of the 106th had been swallowed up, so it remained for the 7th Armored Division to hold that vital road junction by itself, even though an armored division was essentially and normally a weapon of fast, aggressive assault, rather than defense. With fewer men, greater mobility, and greater firepower than its brother infantry divisions, defense decreased its advantages and increased its disadvantages, -- while attack did just the opposite.

The "big show" was about to begin for the members of Infantry Replacement Company "H". Back into the trucks for the last time! We were about to join General Patton's Third Army, then just across the Moselle near Metz.

The confusion, delays, and uncertainty, but most of all, the feeling akin to that of an orphan lost in a big city (i.e. being no member of an "outfit", a division) was about to end for us all. The life of a replacement, though free from danger and conscious only of fear in anticipation of impending action,

was indeed a miserable one. To be able to wear a division shoulder patch would seem like having a "home" again in a true sense that only one who has been shoved about as an overseas replacement and later joined his outfit can really appreciate. Many have said that good morale was 90% pride in one's outfit, plus confidence in and respect for one's leaders and comrades-in-arms, with fairly respectable food, proper clothing, and a minimum of cleanliness accounting for the rest. Taking into consideration factors outside of the Army which influenced morale, mail from home rated first position. The replacement seldom got any mail until reaching his outfit. So, becoming a member of a division explained a lot of things and was an important event.

On the way from the last replacement camp to the front, we passed quantities of ammunition stacked along the highway, ready when needed, and supply trucks streamed down the roads in the direction we were heading. At one point several trucks of German F.W.'s passed going the other way. These were the first enemies we had seen in the flesh. We growled and shouted as they passed, making fun of the episode, even though we would soon be meeting their comrades under less favorable conditions. Then came the first sound of artillery fire. Suddenly everyone was quiet - just listening.

The last stretch was in the dark, with our trucks edging slowly and cautiously over the pontoon bridge across the Moselle. There were a few stars out, and there were flashes from the huge 240 mm. guns just west of the river, so it wasn't so black as it might have been. In the occasional glow of light

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Not far from the river crossing we came to a stop. This was it! We were at the end of the road! The trucks backed off into the darkness, and a lieutenant and a sergeant from the 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion appeared to meet us. We were about 200 strong. "A" Company was to receive 80 men, the remainder going to the other two rifle companies and to H. Q. Company. For this first night, however, we were told to find a place to sleep (?) on the best cluttered hillside near the Battalion H. Q. half-track.

My last job as Platoon Sergeant of the 3d Replacement Platoon was to get two boxes of C-rations for our evening meal. They cautioned us to move about quietly, avoid lighting matches for cigarettes without covering them, and most important, -- to remember the pass-word. This was something new for us, but we were warned to speak it quickly and clearly, lest some of the veterans resting near us get nervous trigger-fingers.

This was not "the front line" yet, but it was serious business already, as carelessness would have been costly, for enemy observation planes were overhead, and there were enemy observation posts nearby, O.P.'s, as they were called. The bridge we had crossed, perhaps a thousand yards or less from

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the hillside, had been knocked out several times by long-range artillery (probably from the forts around Metz itself).

It was noisy the first night, and sleep didn't come easily with 240's rumbling through the air over our heads towards Metz. Their tremendous blasts made the ground quiver beneath us, and what might have been lulls between these were frequently broken by battery fire from the 105mm. guns, with occasional 155 mm. shells tossed in for good measure. And in the short intervals of quiet, one could hear the rude crackling of machine guns to our front. A raucous rhapsody with a lethal rhythm!

Early in the morning, we hauled up our packs for the last time and filed off to our assigned companies. The first Sergeant and the drivers of the company vehicles were there to greet us. While the former attempted to list names and assign us to platoons, the latter were eager to give us details of what was in store for us. Most of the 23rd had been cut down crossing the Moselle (this 23rd Battalion had been the first unit of Patton's 3rd Army to cross the Moselle on the night of September 8th, 1944 to begin the long struggle to take Metz and its surrounding forts); we were the point of Patton's Army, the old ---; we were fighting against tough officer candidates from the Nazi officers' training school near Metz; Things were really rough "up there";-and so it went! It was all a bit hard to take at first, but we didn't admit it out loud.

The question in all our minds was "How will I be able to stand it; will I do as well as these fellows seem to have done?" We had the rest of that day to think it over. The drivers

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introduced us to 10-in-1 rations (a complete meal for 10 people), and we spent the day trying out different combinations with mixed results. Some sketchy sleep, some last letters home, and preparation of a sleeping site (pup tent pitched conveniently near a slit trench) filled out the day until late afternoon.

It was then that word was passed from vehicle to vehicle that all new men should prepare to "go up to the line", draw three K-rations each, and be ready to leave in ten minutes. That seemed like short notice, but the drivers helped strap our packs on the half-tracks, and we assembled to shove off.

Helmet, rifle, ammunition belt, two grenades, canteen and cup, first-aid pouch, three K-rations, and that all-important shovel plus a raincoat folded and hung over the belt in back, was the sum total of our battle equipment. Folded inside the raincoat I also carried a newly-issued wool sweater to ward off the chill of those fall nights. Others preferred to wear theirs all the time, and be done with it.

Our escorts for the short march to the front were Lt. Drabin, A. Co. motor officer from East Cleveland, and Sgts. Valentins and Stout. We started down the road along the river towards Nancy through a small village, then a left-turn, and cross-country the rest of the way. It seemed strange to think that this was probably the same road my father had travelled in the last war on his way from Nancy to Metz. Some more Frenchies bade us good luck on the way. There was no more pathetic sight than to see civilians like these, the old.

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especially, caught in the violent destruction of war. Their memories of the last struggle in this same area, they must have been weary of it all, but they could still wave and smile encouragingly to green troops headed for the front.

After turning off the highway, we moved up through a woods until reaching our 105 mm. artillery positions, where we paused long enough to hear more stories of the fighting and to appreciate for the first time the artilleryman's great respect and admiration for the infantryman, - something which became much more apparent as time went on.

Across the fields to the small village of Bauxierres we trudged only to pause again to exchange more experiences with the medics near our Battalion Aid Station located there, only a mile or two from the nearest German positions and outposts.

Off again into the black and uncomfortably quiet night. It seemed as though they were listening, counting our footsteps as we approached. As we passed the H. Q. heavy mortar positions, several fires appeared on our right. The village of Longueville, our objective, couldn't be far, as the fires were certainly there, -- as were the remaining members of A. Co. The distant crackling added a new sound to the heavy breathing, shuffling of equipment, and occasional clinking as a rifle butt struck a canteen, - and the fires also added more light than we wanted.

New men are bound to be careless, learning only by experience and the example of veterans, and the night of September 14th was no exception. Several of the men felt the urge to smoke and must not have shielded their matches and glowing cigarettes

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properly. This, combined with the fact that the Nazis must have had a conveniently located O.P., explained what happened. The tense quiet was broken. Artillery, mortars, and those everpresent "burp" guns (German machine guns and machine pistols) all did their best to make our first night in action an exciting one.

We were pinned to the ground while the barrage lasted. At this point, whoever was actually in the lead must have decided that it would be best to head back the other way, or didn't care to go ahead and risk running into more trouble with only new men, since we had been discovered, and/or was lost. It probably was a combination of all three!

At any rate, we got up and stumbled forward over another barbed wire fence. French fields seemed over-crowded with them. We had progressed no more than a hundred yards when shells began dropping all around us again, just as the rear group in which I had been placed was crossing the next fence. In the confusion, I was knocked down, my helmet kicked out of my reach and my rain-coat ripped off my belt. This was too much; we were all shaking with the jitters. I remember noticing the fellow crawling next to me, his bulging eyes lit up by the flash of a nearby shell-burst. Many were hysterical with the first real shock of battle, overcome by soul-grIPPING fear.

By the time it seemed safe to get on our feet after that one, we discovered that the forward group on the other side of the last fence had already pulled out. A short distance,

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or a mile, separating us on that black night were equally disastrous.

There we were, perhaps 25 of us, frozen in position by fear, lost in no-man's land, having no compass or map, no leader, only a vague idea of the direction of our own lines, and no knowledge of our password, which was worse yet. Luckily, there was one veteran, a fellow named Dawson, who had been there before, having come back from the Co. in Longueville on an errand. I was ranking man, as if that made any difference, for I knew no more than the others, and had no desire to be responsible for getting the group out of that mess. However, I found then and at other times, that one of the best ways to try to overcome my own fear, -- at least enough to permit some kind of vaguely rational action -- was to talk to others nearby, calming them and myself at the same time. By trying to assume responsibility for the whole group I was able to forget some of my own troubles and provide a fairly successful remedy.

Dawson, knowing an open hillside was no place to be in daylight, (which was no more than a few hours off), wanted to get going right away. I suggested we compromise and wait a half-hour, hoping the Sergeant or Lieutenant would return for the lost replacements. In the meantime, I did my best to persuade the others not to dig-in, trying to get them to crawl into a line along the fence row, so that we could move out when the half-hour was up. We finally persuaded the obstinate ones to put away their shovels, and then were ready to go.

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We kept low until escaping from the glow of the burning houses and haystacks. Dawson and I led the way, hoping to reach the mortar positions before being shot by our own men. Just by luck, we were halted by a voice from a hedgerow rather than a bullet. We explained our plight to the mortar-men, and they gave us the necessary sign and counter-sign; - "Welcome, morning", I think it was. No truer words were ever spoken! After leaving the mortars, we hit the ground several more times when Jerry mortar shells dropped near the road on which we were proceeding. Then up again, and back along the road to a stretch of woods where our H. Q. mortar-men had said we would find the others. A welcome meeting that was! It was foolish, but most of us were too exhausted to scrape out a slit trench that night. I picked a likely tree trunk and dozed off for about an hour until dawn.

The next morning we stumbled out of the woods and moved forward along the same route taken the preceding night, with 1st Sgt. "Red" Hammond, a replacement non-com, and one veteran squad leader in the lead. We were spread out, as mortar and artillery fire were expected.

Upon reaching a long shrubbery-bordered ditch the first barrage stopped us before we had hardly started. Jerry began the morning entertainment with some discouragingly effective mortar fire. The woods we had just left, where the men who were waiting to join B and C companies were digging-in, were then covered with smoke, and more shells landed along our ditch. I will never forget how impressed I was with the, at least outward, calmness of a tall, blond fellow from Texas

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who remained standing to adjust his equipment during all this, while the rest of us hugged the lowest and wettest part of the ditch.

In order to get into the village of Longueville, it was necessary to leave the protection of that ditch and go up over a bare hillside and across an open field, past five knocked-out Sherman tanks, and under or over several stretches of barbed-wire fence. The first group of eight or ten attempted it, but as they left, the coughs of Jerry mortars covering the hill meant trouble. Two of our men were hit, three more later on, the others rushing back to the ditch, as the machine gun bullets kicked up dirt behind their heels. I will never forget how white "Mac" McKenzie looked when he crawled back to where I was lying after helping the two fellows who had been hit.

This was the first time that we saw our medics go into action. It wasn't so long after word was passed back along the line that the medic jeep used for evacuation came skidding and alithering over the rain-swept fields right up onto that bare hillside. This time the Nazis did respect the white flag and red cross flying from the jeep, but each time we wondered whether this was the time their moral obligations would be neglected. They were many times! As the wounded fellows passed going back, one was well-enough doped with morphine to forget his shattered leg and give us the V-sign.

The situation looked bad, so the Sergeant decided to wait for further instructions. The rain poured on, and the mortar shells continued to crash along the ditch, but finally in the afternoon Lt. Justad (also a replacement, but soon to prove

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himself an excellent leader) came forward and encouraged us to prepare for another attempt to reach the Company. I was in the next group to try, probably a dozen or more of us. If we heard the mortars cough (as the shell leaves the tube), we were to hit the ground and wait for the shells to land, then get up and run for it, in spite of following machine gun fire which would attempt to rake over us, once the mortars had pinned us down. We started across, and it all worked as Justad had planned. There were no casualties although machine gun fire came uncomfortably close, especially when we crawled under fences.

We dashed down the village street and into the nearest houses. Once there, the replacements were assigned to the various platoons, Lt. Justad's second platoon being my assignment. Platoon Sergeant Jesse Caldwell, a Tar Hell and a veteran of the "Lucky Seventh" as well as a real soldier's soldier, helped Justad organize his new platoon. The new men were in the majority then, as was usually the case in any infantry outfit. However, the mortar squad to which I asked to be assigned received only one other man at that time, "Pepsi" Notarnicola. The others were Squad Leader S/Sgt. John Barnes, a real fighter and an excellent leader, Alex (Mac) McDermott, a natural leader under fire, John Dudy (later driver of the Co. Commander's jeep), Walter J. ("Yonnie") Wiatrowski, another old faithful, and Rudolph York, an Oklahoma farmer, whom we called just plain "York". On more than one occasion he lived up to his namesake, Alvin

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C., of World War I. The last man, Ruben Warneke, called "Shag" by most of us, was driver of our squad's half-track, and so stayed back with his vehicle, when we went up to the line.

The rest of the afternoon we kept inside the house to which the mortar squad was assigned, as fire from the neighboring village of Cheminot (roughly 800 to 1000 yards away) continued sporadically. We cleaned our weapons, were instructed in the do's and don't's of village fighting by the veterans, and then waited for the night's vigil.

The mission there was only a holding one, as the Battalion had been so depleted crossing the Moselle and taking the villages beyond that further assaults were called off for the present. There was a rumor that the Second Regiment of the Fifth Infantry Division would relieve us in a few days. Men were never at the front more than an hour before rumors of relief became the chief topic of conversation.

Every night previous to the day we arrived in Longueville, the Germans sent strong patrols out, which succeeded in getting into the town to create confusion, if not actually to drive A. Co. out. But A.Co. held on with less than 60 men until we arrived, completely cut off from our lines, and having only one working machine gun. Our 105 mm. artillery had done its share, too, for its well-controlled fire had done much to help our Battalion maintain its defensive position in Longueville.

The night before we joined the Company, a strong Jerry patrol had cleverly infiltrated past the first outpost just

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outside the village. They began at once to "shoot up the town" in the best "wild West" manner, pausing several times to shout defiantly, "COME OUT, YANES, - SURRENDER - WE WON'T HURT YOU." Unconvinced, our fellows answered with more grenades and bullets, but the wild Jerries were finally driven off only when the artillery's forward observer brought accurate fire down on the street in front of the houses in which our remaining men were still holding forth.

When night came, machine guns were set up to cover the streets along the edges of the village, and squads were grouped in and around houses, so as to be able to cover one another in case of attack. In each squad, two or more men stood guard at a time in doorways or at windows with grenades and rifles ready. The others attempted to relax, if they could, for sleep was impossible, until a stage of extreme exhaustion was reached after several days and nights of this sort of thing. Even then, it was necessarily sketchy and frequently interrupted, for this was "the front". One can't imagine the quiet of a place like that at night, -- between shellings or firing. The faintest sound could be heard a hundred yards up the street, a blissful snore would have been criminal negligence, for the enemy could have easily come within hearing distance. Rifles were cocked and ready; no tell-tale click of the safety-lever needed, - a shot in the dark rather than a challenge was the rule, except when someone approached along a predetermined route which lead to the other Platoons and the Company C.P. When in doubt, shoot! We didn't wander around aimlessly in the dark.

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and bump into friends without trouble. Those who were assigned to be messengers between platoons and the Co. C.P. (Command Post) had to be good men who could handle themselves in the dark. Their muffled, half-whispered answer to a challenge given by a comrade with rifle pointed at perhaps ten-yard range had to be just right.

In the middle of that night orders came to get ready to move out onto the hillside back of town to exchange positions with B Company. With Jesse Caldwell and Lt. Justad in the lead, we moved cautiously up the street and out of town in last position. Again, it was windy, rainy, and black as the inside of a cave, which made it all the more difficult to find the holes already dug by B. Co.'s men. It was a good night for a troop movement, but we didn't appreciate it as such until making similar moves on bright, moonlit nights.

McDermott shared a spacious hole with me. It was just wide enough to permit us to lie on our sides when we were both lying down and not taking our turns watching for enemy action. It rained all the next day, so our 2 cans of C-rations had to be dug from the mud underneath us when we felt hungry enough to eat, which wasn't often. Stomachs tightened up considerably under fire. Water, other than that in which we had to lie, - was more in demand than food to relieve hunger and thirst combined.

We were shelled continually, and I remember keeping track of the fairly large percentage of duds (shells which failed to explode, sometimes confused with armor-piercing shells

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which also don't explode on impact.) Shells came and went in every direction. Just where our flanks were, we hardly dared guess! Very confusing, this fighting in the Infantry!

Artillery and mortar fire were the greatest fears of the infantry, with such things as tanks and mines somewhat lesser evils, and with small-arms fire definitely last. Of course, it was uncomfortable to be pinned down by a machine gun, but what hit you was smaller, and that was some consolation. It seemed as though each shell coming over was the one that was going to come right down into your 2-by-6 foot hole to keep you company. That great fear never was overcome in combat. But, after a time, you learned to judge the approaching shells by the pitch of their scream, soon becoming able to predict whether it would be an over or a short, right or left of your position. That gave you some comfort, -- until the next shell approached!

However, mortars gave no warning whatsoever, except for a slight rush of air just a fraction of a second before impact, and it was too late to hit the ground then. That was why they earned the nickname, "whispering death".

The high muzzle-velocity of tank or anti-tank fire, unlike artillery fire, made it difficult to judge, for there was little or no warning, unless fired at a great distance. In fact, the explosion on impact was heard before the muzzle-blast, sounding like a double report, when you were in direct line of fire. Of course, if you were not hit on the first shot, you could judge the location of the gun with the next, if you had

recovered from the shock.

Small-arms bullets always cracked, just like anti-tank gun or tank fire, when the bullet was right over your head. Again a double report, the second being a guide towards locating the sniper or machine gunner. Only when passing to either side did they give a light, shrill whistle. And so it went; the sounds of battle that were soon common knowledge to the combat soldier.

After lying there and taking it all day and night, we finally got word that we were to be relieved by the 5th Division. (night of September 24th-25th) In the process of getting assembled into a company and working our way cross-country around Longueville and back towards the Moselle River, we even had the pleasure of being fired upon by the over-cautious machine gunners of the 5th "Red Diamond" boys. It was understandable, however, on such a night as that.

Relief was an ambiguous word in front-line lingo, for it meant one of two things, -- or both. (1) You were going back for a rest (a real relief). (2) You were going to the rear to merely change positions and prepare for further fighting. (3) or both! And like many reliefs, this one was meant to be considered in both senses of the word.

After marching five or six miles we reached the field where A Co.'s vehicles had been moved. A welcome sight, for they were our travelling homes, on which all other personal belongings other than those carried with us were kept. And most important, only when we were back with the vehicles did "hail call" and

"chow call" interrupt the daily routines of soldiering. Too much can never be said about the importance of those two events, especially "mail call". Letters from home were the only excuses for living those days!

We loaded up, after gulping down some hot coffee and grabbing the nearest box of K's, and then the Co. joined the division convoy moving back across the Moselle River. Our destination happened to be a field -- "Always a field until winter came along) -- outside a small village perhaps 25 miles from the river. There, we spent the rest of the day resting, eating, and writing letters. Then late in the afternoon we got the signal to "turn 'em over". Soon after starting, the word passed around that Holland was next in line, that we had said farewell to Georgie Patton for a while. The Stars and Stripes map showed the British 21 Army operating in Southern Holland. We were to join our British Allies.

The Seventh Armored would long remember those days along the Moselle near Metz. The river-crossing and the assaults on the towns east of the river in the bridgehead had cost the Division over 2000 casualties and over 140 vehicles of all types. And such was our part in the bitter fighting before the final capture of the city and its surrounding forts in late November 1944.

1944-1945

CHAPTER II

Swamps, Canals, and Tomnies!

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CHAPTER II

We passed through the corner of Luxembourg and rolled on into Belgium before dark, pausing there once just long enough to permit a Belgian farmer and his wife to rush out with a pot of what passed as coffee for them. It was a gesture which we all appreciated, thanking them in the internationally understood way by smiling, nodding, and uttering frequent "goats". I was even bold enough to ask the old fellow if he had "un journal". He ran into the house and came out with a Communist Party paper conveniently printed in French. It mentioned something about "les Boches" being thrown back across the Moselle, but preparing to defend the fortress of Metz. Another column dealt with the British drive in Holland. That was all I had time for, as the half-tracks rattled on again.

We always looked forward to convoy days, as that meant a chance to travel in a more comfortable fashion, instead of advancing cross-country on the back of a tank, or tripping over beet fields and waiting for the next barrage. It was a chance to see civilians living lives vaguely similar, at least, to those of our families at home, to see some of the towns and cities of Europe in varying degrees of destruction. The chief reason, of course, for eagerly anticipating a move was simply that it meant at least a temporary break in fight-

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ing. That was enough in itself, excluding the entertainment of travel!

However, travel by half-track was not what it might have been, though infinitely better than adding a crop of callouses. In the first place, it was necessary to seat eight or nine men in the back of the vehicle, where two benches ran the full length on either side, with a door provided in the rear. Three more sat in the front seat. Behind these benches were stuffed everything from extra pairs of shoes to several hundred pounds of mortar shells and other types of ammunition. Musette bags and other packs were strapped to bars just above the backs of these benches and to any conceivable projection on the outside. Femiars carried their burdens. K-rations in boxes were strapped on the bumpers in front or held in two racks on either side of the rear door. A machine gun was mounted on a post just behind the front seat in some types of half-tracks to provide anti-aircraft protection. On others it was mounted on a ring-type turret constructed over the car commander's seat to the right of the driver. Over the back of the vehicle a tarpaulin could be drawn to resemble the old-fashioned touring sedan. When riding near enough to the front to expect any excitement, this tarpaulin was rolled back rain, or shine, snow or sleet. It was never stuffy inside. The armor plate, roughly $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch thick, would probably stop a .30 caliber bullet, but that was all. Speed and power were adequate for rough use, but a full-tracked vehicle, lighter than a tank, would have been better, and would have permitted armored infantry to have kept

up with the tanks better without actually riding on them in a fast advance over rough country on a break-through.

So much for "half-tracks", which armored infantrymen scorned and liked at the same time; scorned because they seemed to be always left behind when the going was rough, and liked because returning to them meant "home" and a rest for awhile. Let it be said, anyway, that to travel in comfort in said vehicle would require two neat amputations above the knees. With eight or nine men in the rear it was just barely possible to find enough floor space to prevent someone's suspending his feet in mid-air. Changing positions in sleep (?) or awake, was just out of the question. Such travel was a real strain on friendship after the first few hours. To grin and bear it was a challenge!

About midnight we left the highway to spread out in a bivouac area just across the Meuse River from Luttich, or Liège, as we usually called it. Fortunately, this was before the "buzz-bombs" began dropping in great numbers on Belgium's third-largest city, so all was quiet and peaceful along the Meuse the following day.

One day was devoted there to resting and reorganization. The new men, meaning us, were shuffled around to balance the platoons after the fighting near Metz. That breakfast of hot cakes was the first hot meal since leaving Écomoy, so we made the most of it. During the day we had formal guard details and O.F.'s watching along the river, but it all seemed quite unnecessary, our only intruders being a herd of cows that insisted that the grass was more tasty in our particular field. Civilians were considerate enough to wait until we had left

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before they combed the area for discarded clothing, left-over food, -- perhaps even a grenade or two, that someone might have left behind.

It was there, also, that the 2d Platoon mortar squad received additional members to make it over-strength for some time. From this time on, our squad was lucky enough to stay together through thick and thin, and we formed lasting friendships. Clifford Dolan, Gerry Coyne, "Bud" Hackney, Greenway, John Cepelak and Mull joined ranks with those mentioned before; but John Dudy became Lt. Stier's jeep driver.

So the Squad was then as follows:

Squad Leader -----	S/3gt. John Barnes
Gunner -----	"Yonnie" Wiatroski
Asst. Gunner -----	Cpl. R. L. McBride
Driver -----	T/5 Ruben Warneke
Rifleman -----	"Mac" McDermott
Rifleman -----	Gerry Coyne
Rifleman -----	John Cepelak
Rifleman -----	Rudolph York
Rifleman -----	T/5 Clifford Dolan
Rifleman -----	"Pepsi" Notarnicola
Rifleman -----	"Bud" Hackney
Rifleman -----	Greenway
Rifleman -----	Mull

From Liège the route was traced north along the British Army supply highway into Holland. Crossing the Belgian border we were surprised to see the enthusiastic display of national colors by the newly-liberated civilians of each country. From

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second story windows, over front doors, draped around telephone poles or trees, -- everywhere we looked, the red, yellow and black of Belgium, and then further along the road, the red, white, and blue of Holland.

The people too, were eager to identify themselves, and the wearing of their colors on brassards or hat bands helped one to distinguish between the citizens of these two countries, for the northern Belgians and these Dutch looked very much alike. Blue eyes and blonde hair, particularly among children, were common among both. In Holland, besides wearing a touch of Orange, some also had black diamonds on their coat sleeves. Just what this stood for, I don't know, unless it possibly meant the wearer was in mourning for a relative who had died in the war.

Maastricht, on the Maas or Meuse River, was the first large Dutch city we saw, one visited again several times by the 7th A.D. The only visible damage there was the destruction by bombing of several factory buildings near the river and, of course, the fine bridge, then replaced by a sizeable pontoon substitute, around which were grouped many batteries of A. A. guns.

The British M. P. 's standing at crowded crossings with their scarlet and white caps, and what looked like two white towels wrapped around each forearm to aid them in giving proper directions, were the first real notice we had that the 7th A.D. convoy was entering British territory. From there until reaching our destination these signs became more noticeable, with convoys of lorries (trucks) and staff cars (American

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jeeps) heading north towards the front and more and more Tommies visible in the streets of each town passed.

After Maastricht the HAT route next brought us to Hasselt, and then to Eindhoven. The latter appeared the way I expected Dutch towns to look. A large canal ran right through the middle of the busiest section with rows of neat houses and shops on either side. In all of these towns; but especially here, the Dutch love of color was clearly expressed. Doors and window frames were bright green, red, yellow, or blue. Blue in various shades was the favorite, noted all over Holland in the eyes of its people, their clothing in the country, especially, and in the painting and decorating of their homes and furnishings. It was quite natural, after all, in a country that must be overly-conscious of the blue sky with a horizon only interrupted by occasional windmills and church steeples, and with water in streams, rivers, and canals criss-crossing their land in all directions.

In Eindhoven and other towns, the Dutch, too, were eager to express their appreciation for the efforts of Allied soldiers, but they were less exuberant, less openly emotional about it than the Frenchies. The Dutch way was to nod and smile as we passed, and then turn back to their plowing or the restoration of their damaged homes. Their greeting was just as genuine, only a bit different. Children everywhere, however, showed none of the restraint of their parents, cheering frantically and dashing out of their houses as each tank or half-track jumbled past. The jeep, of course, was a

constant source of amusement, amazement, and envy all over Europe, as well as a new word in the international language.

Another thing that was especially noticeable to one who doesn't smoke was the great value of a cigarette as an approach to friendship or as currency in bartering. It seemed pathetic to see those people so genuinely appreciative of a short cigarette butt found along the curb, or a whole one tossed out by a Yank as he passed. If cigarettes had such value, one can imagine how well any food that could be spared from Army mess trucks was received. That was something else, again.

Helmond greeted us next as the afternoon began to fade. Together with the people of Eindhoven, these Dutchmen had not yet recovered from their first joy of liberation, less than two weeks before we had arrived. It would have been unthinkable for a Yank or Britisher to pass down the street unnoticed. The Dutch offered all they had, which was little. They tried hard to be friendly and showed their appreciation by attempts at conversation, ^{but} ~~was~~ that was difficult. Few spoke English ~~at~~; almost none knew French. In Holland, that widely used "international language" involving the four words "goot", "nix goot", "compris", and "nix compris", was nearly useless, unlike its general use by G.I.'s in France, Belgium, and Germany.

It was only ten or fifteen miles from Helmond to Daurne, and then on a short distance north to another small farming village, Oploo, I believe, outside of which we found some fields where we were to assemble. As was always the case, the half-tracks spread out and parked so as to lessen their vulnerability in case of

sudden air attack or an unexpected artillery barrage.

Surely the Germans had heard our approach, as such a convoy could hardly have crept up stealthily like an animal stalking its kill. We knew "the front" was close at hand, but the few shells that suddenly came out of nowhere and crashed into a haystack and farmhouse in the field in front of us gave us a rude shock. It looked as though we would hardly get out of the vehicles before the show would begin again. However, that proved wrong, as no more shells came in that night. We had been formally greeted, and then seemingly forgotten.

Shovels moved quickly to prepare for any eventualities that night might bring. Holes were lined with hay or straw from convenient stacks. A raincoat pulled over on top of one helped to keep out the cold and moisture of the night air. While this was going on, the Platoon Leaders and Sergeants were meeting with the company Commander, who had just received his instructions from Battalion H. Q. for the action to be taken the following morning. When they returned, Lt. Justad gave us the encouraging news that it was to be a "soft touch" from here on out, that Venlo was the next British objective, and that we were to be in on the drive, the first mission of the "Lucky Seventh" being to drive all Jerries out of the zone west of the Maas (Meuse) River, and contact the 1st Belgian Brigade advancing from the south. That was sweet news to us after those days around Metz and vicinity. What happened the following weeks proved no compliment to the intelligence officers who had compiled this optimistic informa-

tion. After a long bitter struggle, the British finally got into Venlo several months later. It combined with Geldern, Goch, Eleve, and Arnheim to form a line of strong points for the defense of the lower Rhine and right flank of the Siegfried Line.

After a sketchy sleep that night broken frequently by turns at guarding, we gathered our equipment and filed down both sides of the Oploo-Deurne road towards a pine woods in the direction from which the artillery fire had come the evening before. The ground was soft and soggy on each side, so the few tanks that were chugging along towards the front of the Battalion were confined to the road.

We were still a half-mile from the woods northwest of Overloon Heidt, when Jerry machine gun fire opened up from somewhere on the head of the column. Since A. Co. was in second position, then, we halted in place until C. Co. had dealt with the snipers, assisted by fire from our tanks up front. Soon a few prisoners ran past us to the rear, their arms clasped behind their heads.

Everything seemed to be moving along o.k. until the leading tank hit the crossroads in front of the woods. Then two or three sharp blasts of a 88 mm., and there was one less Sherman tank in the 7th A.D. The other tanks backed off out of the line of fire, and as was usually the case when A.T. fire was met, it was then up to the infantry to move forward with artillery support and clean out the opposition holding up our column of advance. The Dutch terrain, where tanks had to move down roads that could be easily covered by A.T. guns, made this

even more mandatory.

A. Co. moved forward and came abreast of C. Co. as we entered the woods passing up the burning tank. We coaxed the two houses on the edge of the pines for additional snipers and moved ahead cautiously, with our mortar squad in the lead for the 21 Platoon. We had no mortar; - the old one had been lost at Longueville, - so ours was just another rifle squad, with a bazooka thrown in for good measure.

Just as the two companies working up each side of this road in the woods seemed to be nearing a clearing, the 88 mm. fired again, supported by machine guns. C. Co. then shouted to us that a tank was partially visible to their front about 200 yards away. One of their new officers shouted to Barnes to get his bazooka up where it could fire on the tank. I was carrying the bazooka, and hence not overly enthusiastic about that particular plan. Displaying cool nerve and taking his life in his hands, Barnes dashed across the road to see where C. Co. thought this tank was located. The Jerries waited for his return trip, and then cut loose with their 88, its white-hot streak just missing John's shoulder as he returned to his squad.

Any plan we had about tank-hunting was interrupted shortly after by the blood-chilling shouting and yelling of fifty or sixty wild S.S. boys who came scampering through the pine trees in Indian fashion to try to scare us out of any intentions of advancing on their tank-supported outpost. Luckily Barnes had told us to start scooping out slit trenches while he crossed over to C. Co., so we had slight troughs in which to get some cover from the crackling streams of automatic fire from

the German "burp" guns. This was the real thing, with the enemy rushing up to a scant fifty feet, or less, in front of our squad, while pinning us to the ground with a shower of bullets which chipped tree trunks alongside us and snapped off branches over our heads. We could see the expressions on their faces and the Nazi emblems on their shiny helmets as they darted from one tree to another, trying to get better positions from which to see us in the thick pine woods.

Just where C. Co. was during all of this business, - and the rest of A. Co. as well, -- I don't know, but one thing is certain, they were not there to help us. It was the mortar squad, plus Ostrander from the H. Q. Squad, against the Nazis. Fortunately, under Barnes' prompting we returned their fire, keeping covered as best we could. The new men in the squad rose to the occasion and kept pace with Barnes and the other veterans.

We decided to fall back and join the others, a few running while others fired away to cover them; ("Fire and movement", the training manual called it.) After we had zig-zagged back through the trees for a few hundred feet, we stopped firing to listen. All was quiet!

What had happened? Either the Nazis were all dead because of the accuracy of our shooting -- very doubtful indeed -- or they had suffered enough casualties to convince them that we meant business, and that it was time for them to fall back and get help.

It seemed best for us to work towards the rear in the

direction that A. Co. must have retired. We finally found the rest of our platoon again, and built up a new line of defense back where the burned-out tank blocked the crossroads. Our only casualty, in the mortar squad, was John Cepelak, who had been hit by shrapnel from our own artillery fire which was dropping around us, and the Germans, during the excitement of the counterattack.

The reason that A. Co. had retired, we found out later, was that it had been decided to fall back and throw in some artillery concentrations around the German outpost before advancing any further. That was fine, except that in the noise and confusion this word had never reached our squad at the point of A. Co.'s advance, so we were able to agree with Jerry that American artillery fire was effective. The Co. Commander was behind with his radio, and someone had failed to forward his message all along the line. This kind of thing, loss of contact, was extremely normal in combat, and with a company containing more than a good majority of green men, it was to be expected.

After further artillery preparation, we advanced once more over the same ground, only to be met by a strong answer from the German batteries. Back and forth our line swayed all the rest of the day, until by nightfall we finally stumbled over the German dead and the shrapnel - pruned branches for the last time that day, advancing out into a point of the woods aimed at our objective, the town of Overloon. We would long remember those pine woods around that Dutch village, which we never reached, then or later.

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Dutch soil, -- mostly sand underneath, was easy to dig in, but even so it could be annoying after shovelling out the eighth hole in one day of fighting. However, as darkness came, on the platoon concentrated on building up a strong defensive line, two men to a hole, to prepare for any night or early dawn counterattack Jerry might have in mind. We had to be careful to keep in the shadows, as the light-colored sand underneath might have reflected the bright moonlight. Branches were abundant and made good camouflage for holes on the edge of the woods. The quiet, except for the muffled crunching of shovels in the sandy holes of those still digging, got on our nerves, as we waited expectantly for something to break out.

"Mother" Barnes saved the day, so far as nourishment was concerned, for he had been carrying two D-bars of highly-concentrated chocolate. Each man in the squad had one square-inch, the first food since the preceding night's K-ration.

Jesse Caldwell surprised us a few hours later with the word that the plan was to fall back again to the crossroad on the edge of the woods, and wait to attack in the dawn. What a relief; - anything to relieve the nervous tension of watching and waiting under those pines for Jerry's next move or next artillery shell. He led the way back to the line agreed upon, and assigned the squads to some holes left vacant by the Nazis in their retreat.

Most Platoon Sergeants then would have called for the squad leaders to collect the K-rations just brought from the rear and distribute them to their squads, but not Jesse; for he went to every man's hole himself to make sure each got what he deserved

that night, crossing a waist-deep canal twice in the process. This kind of thing, plus his real leadership under fire, made Jesse the true friend of every man in the Second Platoon. The Platoon was all his then, too, as Lt. Justad had stopped a bullet in his neck that day. A fellow by the name of Klein took over the Platoon, being a lieutenant, but Jesse was the Platoon Leader.

If an Infantry Platoon had either a good Sergeant, or a good Lieutenant, it got along, of course, providing that the squad leaders were of high caliber. If both the Lieutenant and the Sergeant were real leaders, then it was an excellent fighting platoon. Under fire, whichever one was the better leader made the important decisions, the other helping to execute them with the aid of the squad leaders. It made no difference whether the officer or the non-com took over top position under fire. The results were the same either way. If both were good leaders, they could take turns in the key position, resting by turn in the secondary role. But, either one or the other had to be up there with the leading squad; just as each squad leader was expected by his men to actually lead his squad from first position. That's the way it worked in the American Army. Respect for authority under fire, and hence obedience to command, resulted only in cases where men were led physically by the leader of the unit.

Early the next morning, the procedure began all over again! Up through the woods, past our own dead first and then the Germans, feeling our way towards the still-living enemy. The day before we had counted roughly twenty dead

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Jerries in front of the positions where the mortar squad had held off the counterattack. Not bad shooting for mostly newcomers at this game! The 2d Platoon was in the rear the next day, platoons always rotating in the leading position. So it was one of the other platoons that dealt with the snipers met again that morning in a house near the spot where the German tank must have been.

Lt. Anderson, an excellent leader and much-admired officer, was in charge of A. Co. that day, as we edged forward in the extremely thick woods along trails carefully cut-out by the Germans. The whole wooded area had been systematically crisscrossed by roads with foot paths cut through the areas between roads. It made a regular gridiron pattern. Along the trails we found quantities of English-made bicycles confiscated by the Germans in Holland for use along those roads and trails. Discarded equipment gave evidence of a hasty retreat, because of American artillery concentrations preceding our advance.

The 48th Battalion of the 7th A.D. was on our right, having pushed up to within the outskirts of the small town of Overloon in a tough fight. We, of the 23rd, moved up through the woods until we could see the town, too, building up a long narrow front in preparation for an attack to help the 48th.

We spent the afternoon and evening waiting on the edge of the woods to receive word to attack on the 48th's left flank. That word never came, however, as we were relieved by the 38th Battalion, also of the 7th A.D., early the next morning. Whether this outfit made our scheduled attack, I don't know.

It had been quite a sight that afternoon to see the Air Corps pilots in their P-47's work over the Nazis in and around

Overloon. One poor fellow swooped down so low that he was caught in the explosion of his own 500 pound bomb as it struck a "Tiger" tank. The plane plowed into the field beyond the tank, permitting its pilot to be taken prisoner. This all took place about 800 yards in front of our position. It was quite an air show, just as it had been at Longueville, and many times later on.

The Infantry never belittled the great part played by the Air Forces. It appreciated especially the men in the fighter-bombers, the P-47's and P-38's, -- not to mention those wicked Typhoons and Spitfires of the R.A.F. as well. Those planes gave the infantry great support, when the weather was clear, earning the gratitude of G.I.'s "on the line" below. We prayed for fair days, just as the Nazis did for overcast and cloud-bound skies.

From the vicinity of Overloon, we moved back into more peaceful fields roughly one mile south of St. Anthonis. Grouped around our new area, also, were our 7th A.D. artillery battalions, so the fields selected were not as conducive to rest as might have been expected, for every time we attempted a few hours sleep (?), the artillery boomed forth its evening serenade. We heard the muzzle blasts, the Germans heard and felt the explosions on impact, so we shared vaguely in their misery. And, of course, there was nothing to prevent Jerry from returning our fire to provide further interruptions.

During the day, the bivouac area was a continual source of curiosity for the Dutch townspeople who wanted to see what American soldiers were really like. They observed us washing

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and bathing out of steel helmets, caring for the vehicles, cleaning weapons, writing letters; and worst of all, -- eating. It wasn't easy to digest a fairly respectable Army meal with Dutch children eyeing us intently, just waiting for the slightest suggestion on our parts that there might be something for them, too. But, after all, if we were to fight for their land, food was a "must", hard as it was to down it in front of them. I am sure they understood that, but it must have been difficult for them, just the same, for those Dutch had really suffered at the hands of the Germans. Any food and clothing we could spare brought lasting friendship and gratitude in return.

A large R.A.F. Lancaster bomber had crashed along the road just opposite our field, and the Dutch had buried the four who had died in the accident beside a tree there. The flowers around each white cross with a British name engraved on it never faded, for they were changed each day we stayed there. The Dutch didn't fuss over their fighting Allies so much as the French, but their appreciation was just as genuine and lasting.

A day or so, October 5th, and back to the front-line holes we went, again in the vicinity of Overloon, where the ground we took-over looked out upon another unknown village to the north of Overloon.

With "Andy" Anderson and Jesse Caldwell in the lead, we worked our way up a paved road towards that unknown town, past some farm houses and a windmill until challenged by someone from the 48th Battalion, which we were relieving.

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They were glad to turn over their holes to us after pointing out the directions from which the Jerries were most likely to counter-attack. Dusk and dawn were the favorite times!

Our platoon covered the paved road on our left flank. Lavetro and Abeysa manned one of the Platoon's two machine guns there, and Valentine and Means the other. McDermott and I, with the bazooka, which Mac and I took turns carrying, were to knock out all tanks that came down the road. The Jerries had treated the 48th roughly, so we were on our guard for the worst.

The Germans welcomed the 23rd with a barrage at dawn, and kept up the entertainment all day. The mission was only to hold again there, as no great attempt to push them back towards Germany had been planned yet. The British needed all their resources and men to clear the area around Antwerp. We were to protect their eastern flank, and maintain the line Deurne-Asten-Weert.

It was a real ordeal to stand watch in a hole on those black nights. Every nerve was on edge, ears listening intently for unfamiliar sounds when the artillery was quiet, eyes straining to make out irregular shapes in the grass and shrubs to our front. Imagination tortured us with pictures of Jerries crawling inch by inch through the high grass, their "potato-masher" grenade^s ready to be tossed. One hour was all anyone could stand without being relieved by a hole-mate. Slight relaxation, but no sleep, was possible, between shifts until the early morning barrage from both sides shook everyone into complete consciousness again.

During the days we spent our time watching for trouble, as usual, but sometimes enjoyed a K-ration that had been part-of-the-way carried, and part-of-the-way brought by jeep, from the vehicles parked perhaps 5 miles to our rear. Each night, -- when the situation permitted, -- rations and ammunition were brought up to the company on the line. This was one of "Fuzzy" Drabin's most important jobs, as Co. motor officer.

Mac, and most of the others, made coffee with the precious water carried in their canteens, but I was pessimistic or cautious enough to save most of mine to drink, if and when wounded, with the sulfa-thiazole pills carried in every first-aid pouch. Not liking coffee or cigarettes, I was a valuable man to have around, when rations were passed out.

The second night, our battalion sent out a patrol to infiltrate the German line and come back with information. Of course, we had been warned to be extra careful not to fire without challenging during the hours the patrol was to operate. But it was a bit of a surprise when the time came to hear the rhythmic clapping of wooden shoes going down the paved road toward the town and the German lines. Apparently, it had seemed best to be bold that time and pretend to be innocent Dutch farmers returning to the town. Just how they managed it, I don't know, but several hours later the Dutch shoes, and those wearing them, came back down the road past our positions. They had played the game well!

The next evening, a sniper must have come out of hiding behind our lines, as someone began taking shots at us from one of the houses we had passed on the way up to our position.

Bullets clipped the high grass around our holes, until a tank growled up behind us and blasted the suspected house. The sniping ceased.

Then "Andy" came out of the small dugout he had been enjoying since our arrival and shouted the order to fix bayonets. Another counter-attack seemed imminent. Mac only had a carbine, so I suggested he use his shovel to help me with any close-in work, should the Jerries get that far. The tank behind us cut-loose again, boring holes in the windmill perhaps 600 yards in front of us on the edge of the town. Our machine guns rattled away. The artillery threw over quantities of "air-bursts" (shells with fuses timed to explode them before the end of the trajectory). It was noisy for about an hour; the windmill was defaced, several houses set afire, and last but not least, -- the Jerry counter-attack stopped where it had started, -- at the edge of town.

It was sometime later the next morning before daylight on October 8th, that Barnes rushed over to tell us that the British 11th Armoured Division was on its way to relieve us. That was good news, because we had heard that when the British planned to do something, they did it. This relief was our first intimate contact with our Allies from Britain.

The first sound of their arrival on the scene was the clop-clopping of hob-nailed boots, as one of their anti-tank gun crews calmly wheeled and pushed their weapon right down the paved highway and off into a grove of trees behind our holes. This gun was to take the place of our bazookas covering the road. The casual, nonchalant, but well-planned way they did the whole thing was so typical of British soldiering. They didn't muffle

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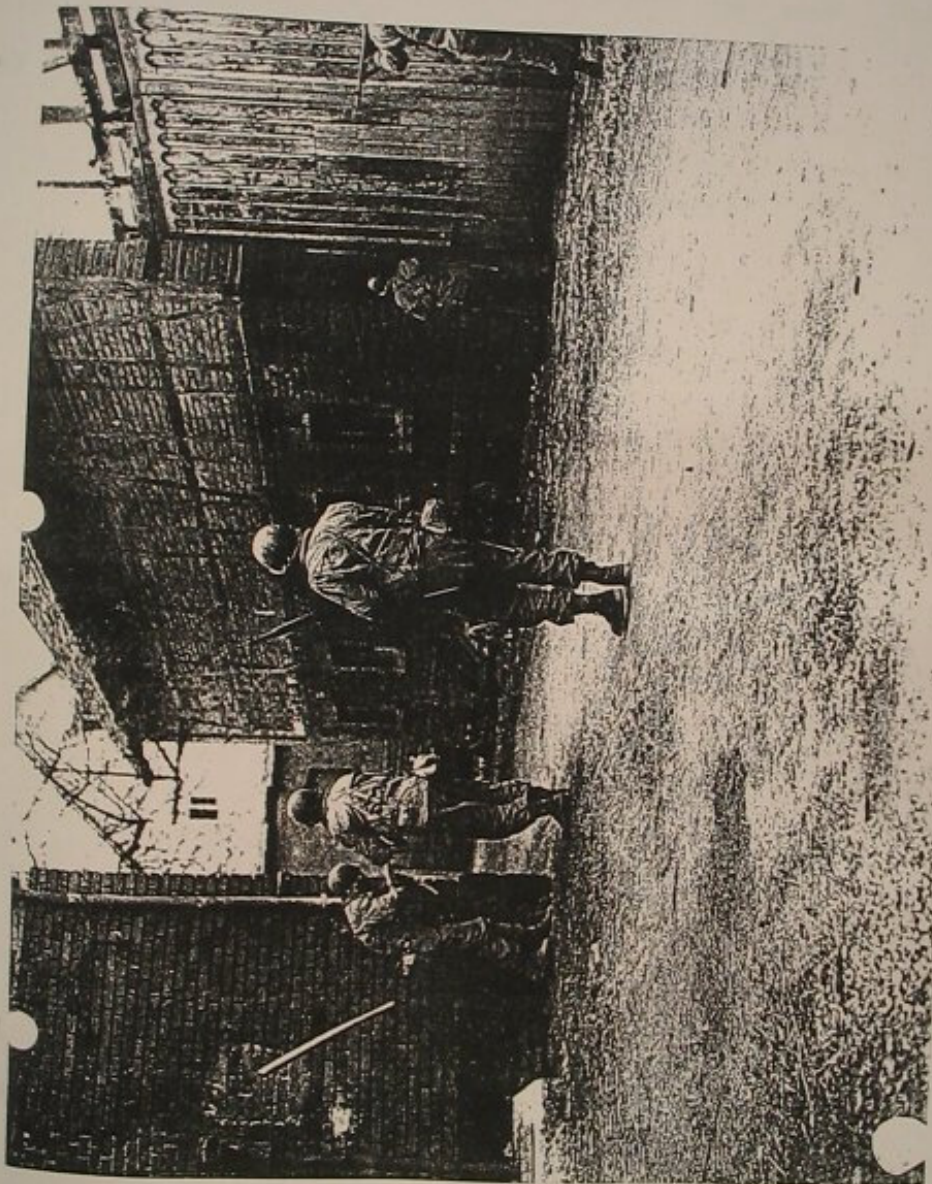
their voices, or shield their cigarettes, or observe many of the precautions we were used to. They seemed to defy Jerry, and got away with it, usually.

We were tired, but nobody ever collapsed on the way back from the front, - (with two exceptions -- the withdrawals from Liesel and St. Vith). It wasn't more than five miles to the vehicles, and after marching that far, we loaded up and returned to the fields near Asten.

Carl Leutner, A. Co. Mess Sergeant, and his cooks had their usual hot cakes and coffee to welcome us back for breakfast the next morning. It was another short "homecoming".

When we reached the bivouac area, it was learned that something new was on the schedule. The Division's defensive line had been extended to approximately 35 miles, so that it seemed best to form roving patrols of Infantry in half-tracks to guard the supply routes for the British Army, as well as our own Division's lines of communication. Two squads from our Platoon were sent back to guard Division Trains. This was the supply depot of the 7th A.D., where convoys of "trains" (i.e. trucks), deposited the needs of the division each day. We were to set up outposts around the supply base to prevent German patrols from infiltrating through our lines and disrupting the flow of vital resources. The excellent food we received there, plus no enemy action, and a little time to catch up on some lost sleep, were great advantages over previous situations.

While standing guard at an outpost position not far from our division supply base one day, we had one of the most unusual experiences of the whole campaign. Travelling innocently down



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a road near to the one which we were watching came a pure-white German ambulance, driven by a Jerry officer. As we respected the red crosses on his vehicle under the terms of the Geneva pact, there was no question of shooting him down in cold blood. Rather, the Nazi officer, dressed as snappily as only German officers can dress, hopped sprightly out of his vehicle and presented to one of our officers a permit that was apparently signed legally by a British officer. This permit requested us to give him some much-needed gasoline, so as to enable the German to go back through our lines to bring in some wounded men, including some Yanks. We were not told how or why his story was accepted as legitimate, but, at any rate, after strutting about for some time, this same Nazi, -- and his ambulance, -- left our lines (with the required gasoline) as peacefully as he had entered them. Whether, or not, he actually returned with the wounded we never knew!

About two days later, we were relieved of guarding the area around Division "trains" and sent out in the black of night to contact Lt. Anderson at an outpost made up of the other three squads of the 2d Platoon. And thereby hangs a tale!

Jesse Caldwell was in charge of the remainder of the Platoon which consisted of the H. Q. Squad and our Mortar Squad. We started out in the direction of Helmond, and there it must have been that we took the wrong road. The half-tracks roared through the night past several villages which looked unfamiliar, as much as we could tell in the dark.

Finally Jesse thought it best to halt and wait until daylight to determine where we were and then contact A. Co. over the radio in the H. Q. half-track. So, we turned up the street of the next small town and found what seemed to be a small courtyard

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surrounded by a house and barn. For all we knew, we might be behind the German lines. It was just a matter of "sweating it out" until the true picture presented itself.

Once again, the extreme quiet was the most difficult thing about standing guard by the vehicles that night. It seemed best to make sure four men in each half-track were awake and watching all the time, one standing by the machine gun mounted on each vehicle. To say that time passed slowly is a gross understatement.

This tense quiet was broken during the night by two violent explosions. Messersmith, of the H. Q. Squad, tossed a grenade at a suspicious sound near the gate to the courtyard. The "sound" answered with another grenade. Just how we were not hit by shrapnel while standing guard, I don't know. Then when on guard myself with York, I insisted that someone was creeping up in the bushes a few feet from our vehicle. Luckily, I didn't fire, for it turned out that this town of Meijel was occupied by G. Co. of the 23rd at the time, and one of their machine gun squads covering the area where we were parked would have opened up at my first shot. And it was a G. Co. man at whom Messersmith had thrown his grenade, and who had hurled one back in return. It was a real battle of nerves, but it all ended happily the next morning. - (The noise I had wanted to fire at came from the cage of some tame rabbits kept behind those bushes.)

The following day we took shelter in the barn of the Dutch family near whose house we had parked. We gave them some food,

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tobacco, and cigarettes in return for the use of their kitchen where we washed ourselves and heated our K-rations. The father was a coal dealer; the various sizes and types of coal and peat were sorted in piles around his courtyard. One of the sons made us more comfortable by spreading a load of straw on the barn floor. Another son seemed mechanically-inclined, for he insisted upon inspecting every part of the motors on our vehicles, and exhibited with great pride a British-made motorcycle, his prized possession. They did all they could to make us feel at home.

And so did Jerry, for it happened that the town was surrounded except for the road on which we had entered, which was kept open by a patrol of five light tanks operating up and down it all the time. Artillery fire was sporadic, but continually reminded us that Jerry knew we were still there. During the few intervals between artillery shelling, this same young Dutchman used his motorcycle (with gasoline supplied by us) to evacuate the rest of his family, one at a time, down the only reasonably safe road. Others, less fortunate, heaped belongings in carts or on their own backs, as they sought to escape Jerry's second coming. We stayed in town, helping C. Co. defend Meljel until the following day, when orders came through to return to A. Co. where we belonged.

After breaking away from encircled Meljel, we passed through Deurne and saw one of the most stirring scenes of the Holland campaign. Rounding a corner, the shrill screeching of bag-pipes drowned out the sound of the motor, and there before us strutted three platoons of Highlanders on their way to the

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front, each led by a piper in full dress uniform. We cheered as we roared past those magnificent Scotties, - a sight we wouldn't forget!

In Deurne, a field next to a house lived-in by an English-speaking school teacher was our temporary bivouac area. This woman was friendly and eager to hear of America, having had a brother in the States. However she explained that it was a bit difficult for the Dutch to understand what was going on sometimes, telling us that 2700 people had died in forty minutes in a recent air-raid on a Dutch town by the R.A.F. The town had not been in German-held Holland, so we tried to explain that it had been a tragic mistake, but what a waste of words! While we were talking, her younger brother came out of the house to meet us. He was a member of the Dutch Underground, the "Underduikers", identified by the Orange Brassard he wore. He seemed like a fine, eager, lean-looking young Dutchman. Anxious to be off on an assignment, he only had time to shake hands and run. We wished him "good luck", as he dashed off down the street.

That same afternoon, a Dutch Underground car pulled up to our area, and the man inside explained that he knew where ten Germans were waiting to be taken prisoner. Off we went again -- on another wild goosechase, -- for someone had definitely made a mistake. After searching several houses, we progressed too far down a back road, for the ten Nazis were not ready to quit. We could see them around a barn some distance from the road, but some British tanks, which were flushing out the area, also saw us and opened fire with their .50 caliber m.g.'s, thinking we were Germans. At that point, we decided to let the British handle

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the prisoner-taking, and withdrew back to Deurne as fast as we could go. That was enough for one day!

In spite of being shot at by the perhaps over-zealous Tommies in the tanks, (we had received similar treatment from our own comrades-in-arms several times already), we, --- and I mean we - all of us who were "up there on the line" - had come to feel that we were lucky to have such a fine crowd of fellows with whom to work and fight. It was a gratifying experience to have fought alongside those British soldiers! And to dispel some of the rumors cast about on the home front, let me add that I saw or heard of not one instance of "bad feeling" among the troops of our two countries. Those that there were must have been reported only in the "rear echelon" or among the "high brass" of each army. With the G.I. and Tommy "up front", it was a different story! Even the Irish-Americans among us had nothing but praise for our Allies from Britain!

A day or so later, on October 14th, the 23d was assembled together once again, when all roving patrols and outposts had been called in, and we turned over our area to another Combat Command, C.C.R., also of the 7th A.D. Something new was in store for our C.C.B!

I believe it was at this time that word was passed around to all platoons to warn non-coms to remove all insignia of rank and dispose of any identification. With the bogging down of the Allied assault across France and the solidification of our line west of the West Wall, Jerry had become cocky again

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and was resorting to tactics familiar in the earlier Nazi campaigns. One of the new "roughing-it-up-a-bit" policies was the reported shooting of all non-coms and officers taken prisoner. Another game was to force all Allied prisoners to eat any German equipment they were carrying when captured, or so we heard! In my eagerness to cooperate with the new order, I emptied every pocket. Out went even Social Security Card, driver's license, and Red Cross membership card. Perhaps a little over-cautious, but I wasn't taking any chances! Only the "dog tags" were kept.

Our contacts with the British became more frequent all the time. In fact, the next operation, for which we soon began to prepare in this brief "rest period," was to be closely fitted-in with their drive towards Venlo. A British force was to head north and take the town of Vanray, while we were to advance north-east out of Durne, establish a bridgehead across the canal, and then push beyond with British help.

This canal-crossing business involved the cooperation of a Company of Royal Engineers with whom we practiced for several days. We had to be able to use assault boats if the Jerries left no bridge intact. And, an alternate plan was to use several sections of a portable wooden foot bridge the Engineers had constructed. These were to be pushed up front with the infantry, ready for use, if necessary.

The boat training involved assigning each squad to a number^{ed} boat, the boats to be brought forward on trucks, and then carried the last few hundred feet. Hackney, Dolan, and I joined three experienced Britishers to form the crew to carry forward and unfold our collapsible boat at the canal's edge.

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It seemed like a perfect chance for Jerry to jellian off three G.I.'s and three Tommies with one mortar shell, but that was how it had to be. The practice session involved simulating taking the boat off the truck, rushing forward a short distance, unfolding it, then launching it, so as to permit the rest of the squad to jump to their places behind us. A Britisher, called "Pop", was to leap out with a large spike on the end of a rope to anchor the boat to the opposite shore, while we rushed on to victory. Then they returned for the next wave, etc.

The whole business sounded too much like a small scale D-day to us! The Britishers made some typically dry-humored remarks about the deal, and cautioned us to stay with the boat when it was hit, as it wouldn't sink all the way. I remember adding that, at least, the water would be warm as we swam across with shells falling all around.

We asked some of the Britishers what the five red inverted V's stood for on their right forearm's, not knowing that each one represented a year of war service in the British Army. Five ~~years~~ years was a long time! It made us feel quite small to compare our months of service, -- mostly in the States so far, -- with the records of these Tommies.

I was also curious enough to inquire what the red shield with a blue cross and crossed swords meant on their shoulder patches. I presumed it was a regimental insignia, but to correct me, one of the five-year men answered that it meant they were "some of Monty's men". I could sense their pride in being members of that tough little Scot's fighting 21st Army Group.

After working under the British for a while, we began to appreciate the reasons for that pride more and more. Even the men in the ranks could sense the thorough, sound preparation and the cautious, efficient ways in which the British planned and directed their campaigns. They had fought enough wars to know how to go about it, taking enough time to do the job thoroughly and completely. We did things faster, used more imagination and initiative, perhaps, but at what a cost in resources!

After about two days of practicing, we packed the pup tents again, and prepared to ride down the Deurne-Venray road as far as a woods north of Deurne, where the vehicles would leave us, as usual. There we dug-in for the night and waited. This was October 15th.

York and I had just completed our 2-man hole, when John Barnes came around to inform us that a patrol was to be sent out and I had been picked, along with six others from our squad and Barnes, himself.

After making sure the others knew when and where we would return, we started out towards the canal, single-file, taking a route parallel to the road running right down to the canal. It was raining hard, black as the inside of a cave, except for one haystack or house burning quite some distance across the canal to our front, and an occasional German flare sent up to keep patrols from creeping up unseen. When their brilliance lit up the night, we nudged the ground. I didn't think it possible for so many beets to grow in one field, or so many fences to be crowded into so small an area. We

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stumbled and tripped over everything imaginable, except mines, of which there were plenty we found the next morning.

The purpose of the patrol was to find out if any bridges remained; also, how wide and deep the canal was and how much opposition might be expected. The patrol was too large for efficient and safe action, so only Barnes, McDermott, Dolan, and "Pepsi" went the last few hundred yards. Before being fired on by a machine gun from the other side of the canal, they found that the road bridge was down, and then escaped back to us. On the return trip, we walked down the road, too tired to trek cross-country again. The night's work was over, but the scheduled attack was not more than a couple of hours away.

Everything started out smoothly the following day. The boat idea had been discarded, (as all anticipated plans always were), and the British Engineers had their footbridge sections mounted on carts ready to go. We inched forward slowly out of the woods and across several thousand yards of open ground toward the canal. The other companies were on our right, across the road. We stopped frequently to take advantage of any depressions in the ground when shells came too close, but progress was made.

We were advancing behind a beautiful "rolling barrage", in which our artillery dropped shells a few hundred yards in front of us, increasing their range as we advanced. It was fine supporting fire, and all seemed going well until we reached some houses around which our patrol had stumbled the night before.

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God supplied that courage for me. I felt His power like an electric current rushing into me. I threw down my rifle and yelled, "I'm coming, I'm coming".

Four men had part of their limbs blown off. The most severely wounded had lost his leg from the knee down. I remember running to him and saying, "You are going to be all right. Squeeze my arm as hard as you can." He did.

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The machine gun squad on the right flank unfortunately ran into a cluster of anti-personnel "shoe" mines. The Squad Leader, Valentine, struck the first, then Lt. "Andy" Anderson, and Lavetro set off two more, as, instantly, they ran up to help Valentine. A fourth man was hit as the last mine exploded. It was a sterling example of self-sacrifice which will never be forgotten by those that were there.

Jesse Caldwell and ~~some others~~ ^I risked ~~their~~ ^{our} legs by rushing into the mined area to help the wounded men. It was no time to pause and think; ~~we~~ ^{we} just acted instinctively with great courage in the face of danger.

A jeep arrived on the scene, and we lifted them onto the stretchers, the medics taking over from there. We had lost a real Platoon Leader, and three other good men. The advance was tougher from then on!

After leaving the fields around those marked houses, we headed up over a rise with more artillery support and then across some rolling sand dunes towards two or three abandoned pill boxes. The canal was on the other side of the last ridge of sand and high grass. And beyond the canal was a vast peat bog and endless swamp as far as we could see, the only break being the paved road built on an artificial ridge running due east towards a group of farm houses, located on a slight rise of ground that gave the appearance of an island breaking the surface of a sea of swamp grass. A desolate spot, valuable to man only because of its layers of peat!

Off somewhere to the north was Venray, and hidden in a small woods off to the south in the middle of the peat swamp was another small village, Griendstveen, by name, and beyond

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the village of Helenaveen. Our objective, later, was to turn south, take these villages, and establish another bridgehead over the canal near Helenaveen station.

We paused behind the last ridge while our artillery obliged with a barrage of smoke shells to hide the crossing. A German foot-bridge had been found intact. The wind was blowing hard on that cold, rainy day, so the smoke screen was a poor shield, but after Lt. Klein signaled over the radio that we were ready to go, we made a mad dash for the bridge.

The mortar squad was first across, one man at a time, then the remainder of the 21 Platoon, followed by all of A Co. We were across ~~the~~ ^{and} half-hidden in the high swamp grass before shells from the first Jerry battery to spot the crossing tossed sand and shrapnel in the air along the dunes near the small bridge. We fanned out, attempting to advance roughly 800 yards beyond the canal to secure the bridgehead, so as to enable the British Engineers to build a tank bridge behind us for the British 11th Armored Division which was to advance through our lines the following day.

We had gone about 500 yards before being compelled to snuggle up in the swamp grass to prevent being hit by a persistently close hail of bullets from German A.G.'s up ahead. The Jerries had let us get within easy range, so close in fact, that it wasn't until dark that we could move about enough to dig-in. We were even cut-off from the 1st Platoon.

To dig in a swamp accomplished little! Where there wasn't water already visible on top of the soil, it would soon

appear when we tried to tear away the tough grass roots to clear out a trough in which to lie. It was raining hard, and continued to do so for five more days and nights, so we were wet enough already without scooping out a bath-tub. The black, peat-bog water wasn't clean enough to wash in, anyway!

The first night, our platoon pulled back a few hundred yards to take cover and build up a line along a natural ditch. We gouged holes on the side of the eastern bank just above the water in the ditch. These soon became water-filled sinks in which to half-recline. Some men sprawled out on the grass by their holes, drying off a little, (in the rain), between enemy artillery barrages, which continued all night, often coming too close for comfort. I remember, as one shell landed a few feet in front of us, rolling the wrong direction and landing right in the middle of the small stream running along the bottom of the ditch. I swore at Means for not telling me where our hole was, as if he were to blame for my clumsiness.

Most of the night, and especially towards morning, the banging and clanging of hammers and Bailey-bridge sections could be heard behind us, as the British Tommies finished their tank bridge. We could hear the Sergeant, a rugged-looking, mustached, old-time Britisher, calling out cheerfully to his men, "Cheerio, lads, on with the job; let's finish 'er up". Frequently, his words were cut short by a string of shell-bursts bracketing the bridge. The Jerries

knew what was up, and were raising plenty of hell to prevent our plans reaching a successful conclusion. But, as I have said, British soldiers were hard to turn aside from a task undertaken. The bridge was ready for use the following day!

At dawn we tried to rush forward to contact our 1st Platoon cut off from us a few hundred yards to the front. No sooner had we started when the same well-hidden "burp" guns forced us to the ground. Then some "screaming meemies" (six-barreled Nebelwerfer mortars) began their devilish racket, dropping shells right on top of us. They always sounded like a combination of the screaming and howling of all the animals of the jungle and the agonized wailing of a hundred Model T's being cranked at the same time. At any rate, we were forced to return to the ditch, where we remained until afternoon.

We cheered the first British tanks that crossed the new bridge. The Jerries were in for some trouble! Those Britishers really were aggressive and destructive with their American Shermans, their own Churchill, and Cromwell tanks. Anything above the level of the ground that was at all suspicious looking they blasted and burned with armor piercing and then incendiary shells.

The Jerries came running out of haystacks out from behind piles of drying peat, out from cellars of ruined houses in the village to our front. They gave us a real show, those tankers from the 4th Armoured Brigade!

A Co., then joined by B and C Co.'s, which had just crossed

the canal, crossed the paved road and swung southeast towards Griendstveen, about four miles away. Eight or ten of the British tanks branched off to the right with us, though they were confined to give supporting fire only from the slight ridge to the east near the isolated farm houses.

We advanced several hundred yards before it was too dark to move safely. Over six hundred Jerries had been flushed out of their swamp holes and the few farm buildings already.

The terrain was treacherous; one false step and a man was up to his waist or beyond in pools of black peat bog. The Dutch had sliced out the layers of peat like cutting a big cheese over a long period of years. Here and there, geometrically-shaped pools remained. In order to maneuver through the area where these pools were located it was necessary to zig-zag across swaying and quivering ridges of uncut peat which separated one foul-smelling pool from another.

A halt was mandatory after dark in a place like that. So, we huddled in the grass, forming a vague circle around the Co. H. 2 and radio. The officers didn't go back to any C.P. to discuss the next day's operations that night. We all soaked up the swamp water together. In the middle of the night a large German plane glided dangerously low over the rain-swept swamp. They must have been looking for us.

The next morning we formed a column and advanced forward until met by some small-arms fire. The British tanks had been joined by some of ours, helping out for the first hour or so, but then most of them sank down in the swamp, once

they left the low ridge to the east in order to try to continue their supporting role. The remaining ones could go no further, so we pushed on through the peat-bog alone.

The Battalion formed a long line of skiraishera, and we assaulted while firing everything we had. At intervals, we ceased firing and shouted to the Nazis to come out of their holes. Most of them obeyed willingly, for we had been making a real show of strength. It was here that I bagged my first prisoner with the help of John Means.

The prisoners varied, - the few non-coms and officers who didn't die fighting were young and cocky, mostly SS troopers placed in charge of less zealous "force troops" (Poles, Russians, Czechs, Hungarians, etc.) The older Jerries, who had seen Germany defeated before, had sense enough to realize that that might happen again, so were not sorry to save themselves to live in a post-Hitler Fatherland. The "force troops", the non-Germans, were more than eager to stop fighting, if they could do so without being shot by their SS Leaders while attempting to surrender, as was often the case. It happened there in the swamp! About 30 had been cut down by their own machine guns when they rushed forward to surrender, wild with fear because of the accuracy of our tank fire. The SS troopers manning the machine gun nest near a reconverted Dutch pillbox along the canal were promptly dispatched to their ancestors, once their gesture of defiance was completed.

This advance continued easily, -- it was almost fun, -- until we were about 600 yards from the R.R. tracks running

by Griendstveen. The Nazis let B Co. get in close to their prepared defense positions and then cut loose as our men crossed an open stretch. A Co. was in the rear, but even there bullets cracked close over our heads. A battery of 88 mm.'s opened up from somewhere to help matters. That was the end of the road that day.

That evening, our Battalion surgeon, Capt. Ingling, called for volunteers to help him go out and bring in the wounded that couldn't be reached during the fighting before dark. Sgts. Bowles, Collins, and Maddock, from A Co., with others, brought the men in safely, taking care to avoid being seen in the glow of burning stacks of dried peat out in front of the line to which we had been forced to withdraw. Often this meant dragging the wounded several hundred feet through high swamp grass. Once returned, they had to remain in the dug-out left by the Jerries, receiving first-aid there, until carried by stretcher further to the rear the next morning.

Just after dawn, after one of the most terrific artillery concentrations I have ever heard, as our guns shelled Griendstveen, the old 23rd pushed on across these 600 yards into sheets of driving rain. We crossed the R.R. tracks, passed the Nazis' dugouts built of railway ties, and began searching the houses for prisoners or still-shooting foes.

The town had been vacated, except for a Dutch doctor and his dying wife and child, both wounded by our artillery. He had been told by the Jerries that he would be shot if he refused to remain behind when the other civilians left town, sometime before. They wanted his services. We did all

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possible to help him but it was not enough!

The only Germans found were "good" ones, one having died while roped to his observation post in the church steeple. It seemed that the Jerries, sensing we meant to make a real effort, had withdrawn before our attack had started at dawn. Actually, the town could have been defended quite easily, for it offered good cover and the canals which surrounded it on three sides would have greatly restricted our movement. However, we were grateful that Jerry had decided to let us enter peacefully. We soon saw again how effective American artillery fire could be. Not a house or building had gone untouched. Fallen trees blocked every street.

It had been another typically neat, well-planned Dutch village, and it will be again, I am sure, for the villagers would return just as soon as the fighting was beyond artillery range. Not a brick or a broken piece of tile roofing would be wasted, and not an hour lost, so long as strength lasted. That was the way of the Dutch!

The town area was divided up among the three companies, and then we settled into the routines of preparing to hold off any counterattacks. Machine guns were set up to cover likely approaches, some of our tanks moved up to protect the British Engineers who were to build a second bridge across the same canal we had crossed before, so as to permit vehicles to enter Griendtsveen from the rear of our lines. Patrols were sent out to feel their way down toward Amerika, our next

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objective. Rations and ammunition arrived that night. Each man received one K-ration.

The next night, October 21st, the 48th Battalion arrived on the scene to relieve us. They were all dressed in new combat suits and goulashes, much to our envy, for we could have used those water-repellent, heavy, flannel-lined suits and overshoes in the swamps the days before. Nearly everyone in the 23rd had a touch of trench-foot from the roughing we had just endured. Octobers are cold and wet in Holland, we had found. At any rate, to be relieved for a moment was sufficient.

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CHAPTER III

The fields outside of Asten were again our hosts. This town had begun to seem like home to us. We soon settled down to pup tent life for another brief spell. The British wanted us to fight four days and rest two during that fighting in Holland. It didn't work out that way, but it was a happy thought.

We had come to appreciate the fighting qualities of the British Army. Next, it was our turn to appreciate the luxuries of one of their shower tents, near Deurne. Two tents for dressing, then a mad dash to the third, where shower spickets yielded warm water heated by a strange-looking gasoline engine, with which two Tommies were tinkering when we arrived. The British, as usual, didn't go out of their way to talk to us, but once some conversation was started, it was easy to make new friends. Hot showers were bound to produce good feelings. We were as grateful as they for this first hot water in several months.

Roughly two more days, and back we went to Orienitsveen to relieve the 48th on October 25th. There had been a good bit of artillery fire coming in while we were away, and a few counterattacks had been repulsed, but the town we had first taken was still ours to occupy and hold.

We crossed a small branch of the larger canal which ran



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parallel to the main village street and entered a different section of houses. The mortar squad was to have a new citadel to defend.

The first few moments were spent in a quick examination of the chosen house in order to pick a location which would protect us most from incoming artillery shells. There wasn't one large cellar in these country houses, rather several small ones entered from different stairways from above. The one nearest the wall facing the enemy was selected as the safest spot. The next step was to clean out the broken bottles of preserves and canned vegetables which the Jerries had brought down from the kitchen when they lived there. If possible, a fresh set of mattresses or whatever blankets could be found were then carried down to our quarters. For a light, we used a little coal-oil lamp still left intact, instead of resorting to a bottle of gasoline with an old rag for a wick, as was often the case.

The Germans, and the 48th Battalion, had cluttered up the place with empty ration cartons, tin cans, and bits of civilian food they had been sampling, so we spent some time cleaning out our new home except when nearby shell-bursts made life above the cellar a bit risky.

While this was going on, other members of the squad looked over the situation outside the house. All approaches which Jerry might have used to attempt to sneak up on us in the dark were lined with bits of broken glass and slate from the damaged roof. Trip-wires were put up, and ration cans with stones in

them tied to these to give us alarm signals, should Jerry have come in too close without being seen.

The best positions for covering these approaches while standing guard from an open window or doorway were then selected. Usually, two or three men on a shift at a time per squad was sufficient. Grenades were placed on a chair ready for use, rifles loaded and cocked. Only one man left his post to arouse the next shift when one night watch was finished.

That was how we passed the first night, but then it was our turn to change places with one of our squads in a lonely out-post about two miles south down the canal from Griendtveen. The mission there was to guard a bridge still left in good shape and prevent any German patrols from crossing to our side of the canal. To do this we had a 60 mm. mortar, five rifles, and two carbines, plus about a dozen grenades between the seven of us; McDermott, Wiatroski, Dolan, Coyne, Hackney, York and myself. Barnes and "Fepsi" were not along that time.

Our "home" was built out of blocks of dried peat. One of the many piles of them which rose out of the swamp grass stood close to our bridge. We even had a few blankets along that time, and a couple were used for the roofs of the two shelters, with a floor of freshly-plucked dry grass to sleep on. It was a first-class set-up, I must say!

At night imagination played tricks again, but no shots were fired, and we had nothing new to report to the five men who came out to join us the second day. They brought a 300 radio

set along to keep contact with Griendtsveen. There was a report that two companies of Nazis were headed in the direction of our outpost, so these fellows had been sent out as reinforcements, making a grand total of 12 Yanks against the expected two companies. We thought that was quite funny, -- in a queer sort of way! Really very considerate of them to help us out, after all!

We moved out along the canal to where we had been told to establish an O.P. during the days, retiring to the bridge each night. Nothing unusual occurred the rest of that day. The two companies failed to show up. Cliff Dolan was shot at by a Jerry sniper hiding in the swamp across the canal, but that was all that relieved the monotony of watching and waiting until dark.

That same night, October 27-28th, we were told that a British Battalion from the 11th Armoured was coming up to relieve ours. We waited patiently, until about midnight, when six weary Tommies, one husky one carrying his Bren gun, wandered out to meet us. What a welcome sight they were! In our gratitude, but also because there was no point in carrying it back, we left them half a box of K-rations. This must have been something new to them, for the British Army seldom issued "tinned rations", as they called them, relying on their ability to get fresh, hot food, - and tea, of course, - up to their men under almost all conditions. Our own regular Infantry divisions did this much more than ours, also, when the fighting was static.

Before leaving, we had time to learn that those six Tommies felt the same way that we did about life in the Infantry, or "F.B.I.", as they called it. One fellow said that each time that they got settled in their front line holes, their British artillery 25-pounders began shooting, "over us, on top of us, behind us, and from all sides at once, just to make us feel that we were not forgotten and that the situation was well in hand". This was said with a touch of peculiarly British humor in the tone of his voice. We laughed, appreciating this comment on foxhole life. Those fellows agreed that it always worked out that whatever happened at the front was just the opposite of the original plans. After thus revealing and unloading our woes upon each other, we parted in the night, glad to have met others from another army who shared our misery and thought about things the way we did.

Back to the vehicles, and back along the well-known roads to Asten. Even the windmills looked familiar, and the burnt-out tanks strewn along the roads, the Nazi graves marked with only a German helmet tilted crazily on a stick; -- we could recognize them all by then!

The withdrawal from the Griendtsveen-Helensveen area was a hasty one, for we soon learned that an attack was developing near Meijel that might endanger the whole defensive line of our Division. Before dawn, on October 27th, Jerry had begun an assault with surprising strength North and Northwest across the Canal De Deurne and Canal Du Nort. He had already driven the 82nd Reconnaissance Squadron from its positions in and around Meijel. Help was needed, and pronto!

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The size, force, and direction of the attack seemed to have surprised us completely.

Shortly before dawn on October 28th, CC "B" had closed into an assembly area near the town of Liesel, while CC "A" assembled near Asten. We, of the 23rd Battalion, were part of CC "B".

Dismounting just outside of town, the squads moved forward on foot, up through the main street and out into the country on the other side. Tanks of the 31st Battalion chugged one behind the other. The artillery had gone into position already, some distance to the rear. The "Cubs" (artillery observation planes) were overhead. The villagers looked worried as we marched past quietly.

We didn't know it at the time, but the Nazis were then beginning a small-scale "Bulge" in Holland in an attempt to prevent the British from clearing Antwerp by cutting up the 21 Army's supply lines. For that task, - and with just as much secrecy and deception as was used later in the "Belgian Bulge", - they had assembled a strong force paced by two crack units, 9th Panzer and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, supported by elements of other Divisions, and even with help from the Luftwaffe thrown in for good measure. To stop this threat the 7th A.D. assigned the 23rd and 48th Infantry Battalions, supported by our tanks and the 814th Tank Destroyers, -- and the faithful division artillery, of course. The 23rd was to attack towards Meijel down the Liesel-Meijel road, while the 48th struck out down the Asten-Meijel road, both with the mission of persuading Jerry to return home where he belonged.

Upon leaving Liesel that morning, on October 28th, we made easy progress with no opposition for the first thousand yards, the

tanks moving cautiously up the road from Liesel towards Heitrek and Meijel, the infantry working parallel on each side of the highway. (A and C Companies in the lead, B to the rear).

The two leading Co.'s had just entered a thick woods on either side of the road when met by a heavy concentration of artillery fire; - always several times more effective when poured into a wooded area, for branches gave enough resistance on impact to cause fuses to detonate their shells above the ground, showering anyone below with shrapnel. The casualty lists lengthened quickly. Some of the tanks on the road had received direct hits, and soon cries for "medics" could be heard over there, too, along with sporadic explosions of burbling ammunition inside the blazing tanks.

Jesse passed the signal back that it was time to move on, and we proceeded cautiously out of that woods on across several fields, until reaching a particular bean patch which stands out in my memory. It seemed as though every time someone raised himself off the ground to move a few steps, a whole regiment of 120 mm.'s opened up. While our Platoon was in and around this bean patch, one of the leading platoons, -- I have forgotten which, -- was in the process of driving a determined group of snipers from a barn up ahead. Our tanks were firing into all suspicious houses and barns along the road, so it wasn't long before the Germans came out, and we moved up a short distance again.

Meanwhile, B Co. had branched off to the east shortly after leaving Liesel with the mission of blowing up the bridge

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over the Helenaveen canal across which Jerry was preparing to send his tanks and men. Our men soon became involved in a rugged fight there, just short of the objective, managing to hold their own only with great difficulty.

It was just before one of the bean patch barrages, that A Co.'s medical jeep bounced across the fields to where we were lying along a dirt road. Our platoon aidman had been hurt, so a replacement was brought up, Jim Potter, from California. There began one of Jim's busiest days in combat, and a noisy first day and night it turned out to be. He started right in then to become the best liked and most efficient aidman in the Battalion.

The Platoon took refuge in a spacious cow barn while a new route of advance was picked out, for Jerry seemed to have his binoculars aimed right at the open ground across which we had intended to advance. It seemed best to cross the road where C Co. was, for a spell, and see if that helped any.

We dashed out of the barn, crossed the road, and moved forward through a sparsely-wooded area, ducking behind barns and shacks when they presented themselves as possible shields from the eyes of Jerry's forward observers.

Having a mortar with us this time, plus a good supply of ammunition, our squad couldn't move so fast as the others, with the result that we lost contact with the Platoon at one point during the afternoon. It took us some time to find A Co. again. We followed in the direction the men must have gone, past one burning tank after another. Again confined to the road, our

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tankers had a rough time that day, for the Nazis had their A-T guns and tanks concealed beautifully to cover the likely approach. There were about twenty Shermans put out of action already. Some of the houses our tanks had tried to hide behind while hunting for targets caught fire, too, from the exploding ammunition and gasoline. The route of advance was well-marked.

By late afternoon, our two squads reached the road junction, just beyond Heitrack, where some of the 814th T.D.'s were waiting to stalk the Tigers if they dared venture forth from the woods to our front. We halted long enough to find out what was going on up ahead, in the woods, a few hundred yards away. We learned that A and C Co.'s were well occupied, to put it mildly. Just then, a hidden German tank whisked two A.P.'s (armor-piercing shells) through the roof of the barn and house behind which the Tank Destroyers and we were taking cover. Their Lieutenant climbed onto the roof to try to spot the uninvited guest. He clambered down excitedly, and ordered four destroyers, or "guns", ^{as} the T.D.'s called their open-turreted tanks, to go out with him to corner the villain.

About ten minutes later, they came back, minus four "guns". The one Tiger had turned into several all of a sudden. The 76 mm.'s on our T.D.'s were no match for the Tigers' 88 mm.'s in such a situation, when the hunter turned out to be the hunted instead. Only by firing from an ambush at close range, or getting behind the Tiger by using the T.D.'s greater speed and mobility, could the lighter gun compete with the German one.

We made several attempts to dash around the corner of the

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barn and up the road to the woods where the Co. was holding out, but each time an 88's white-hot streak rushed by close enough to encourage us to return. It wasn't until after dark that we made that short distance to the woods, after Jesse had come back to lead the way. Once there, we helped to complete and join the rough semi-circles, which each of the two Co.'s formed to hold those woods and keep the Germans from using the road leading to Liesel.

At one point, Jesse told me to get some help and go back to the road junction for rations and water that had been brought by jeep that far. York, Dolan, "Yonnie", and I headed back along a ditch that helped conceal us from the glow of a burning barn and haystack to the right of the road, but the road had to be crossed to get to our destination. Remembering the 88 that had been using it for target practice all afternoon, we made a wild dash, and finally reached the bushes where Harms was guarding the supply. The others started back again, and I brought up the rear with a can of water. Just as I reached the edge of the ditch after crossing the road, Jerry sent up a flare close-by and followed with a long burst of machine-gun fire. Luckily, I tripped and fell flat on my face just at the proper moment, and the white tracers crackled past where I had been standing. Because of my clumsiness, a third of the water was lost to the Platoon that night, but it was good to be able to deliver in person what remained in the can. After that, we settled down to the usual night of watching and waiting, with a minimum of relaxation.

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At different times during the night the torturing quiet was rudely broken by small-scale grenade battles, as Nazis crept stealthily through the high grass in front of our holes to harass us by tossing their "potato-mashers" through the dark, only to be answered by a counter-barrage from nervously-alert G.I.'s. The next morning, we found that several of the boldest Jerries had failed to return to their lines. One body lay about fifteen feet from Chuck Norville's foxhole, a grenade still clutched in the Jerry's hand.

The following morning began one of the fullest days of combat for the 23rd Battalion in Holland. It was unusually noisy all of a sudden just before the gray became early dawn. Both artilleries seemed to be in a particularly destructive mood. Everyone could sense that this was to be a special day, in a long line of eventful ones.

Our position was not well chosen, for we had poor visibility in several directions with woods leading up to and covering the slight rise on which our holes were dug. In spite of good artillery support, a determined enemy, which those Panzer force boys were, could get in too close without being seen. With a superiority in numbers of 3 or 4 to 1, or better, losses to our artillery fire, mortars, and machine guns could be overlooked. We could see them moving through the woods around our left flank. C Co. surely had the same situation on its flank. We could hear commands shouted in German as they pressed in closer. Several times they attacked in vain, thrown back with great losses, only to rush forward fanatically again. But, with ammunition running

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out fast, and casualties mounting steadily, we could not hold out there beyond noon. I have never seen such a concentration of small-arms fire as ^{we} were subjected to that day. It was all we could do to get up high enough in our holes to fire.

Just as we all sensed that the breaking-point had been reached, that the pressure of the Nazi assault was too much for us, the order to withdraw was shouted from hole to hole.

It was every man for himself for the first few hundred yards to the rear. "Yonnie" and I left the mortar where it was, unable to move fast enough with that to worry about. Back along that same ditch to the cross-roads, then over the road to the shelter of the barn where the T.D.'s had stayed. A lone Sherman tank, the "Blue Uniform", was parked there, helping to cover our retreat with its machine guns firing out to the flank.

Along those barns and houses we built up a new line to delay the Nazis' advance once more. We were fighting for time, fighting until General Dempsey could move up sufficient forces to meet this growing threat. It was then and there that the R.A.F. did its bit. Those terrific Typhoons swooped down, aiming their rockets, m.G.'s, and cannon at the Nazis' line of advance, about 200 yards away. They helped to dampen Jerry's fire of enthusiasm no little bit, helping us to hold that line for another hour or more.

It was then decided to fall back again, and develop another circular front line, with A Co. on the left, B. to our rear on the left, and C Co. to the right. This time we selected a perfectly open field, with the nearest woods in which Jerry

could hide located about 300 yards from our Platoon's holes. It wasn't long before this change of position was discovered, and mortar shells soon crashed all around. Again, we could see them circling around us to the left, just out of accurate rifle range. Actually, we were almost completely surrounded by that time, Liesel had been retaken behind us, when Jerry's tanks by-passed B Co. on our eastern flank. The situation was becoming desperate. It looked as though the 23rd was to be another "lost battalion".

After coming back from a patrol to contact B Co., Mac, "Yonnie", Gerry Coyne, and I took shelter in a small house by the field where our Co. had dug-in. The German Tigers were moving up the road, their noisy approach heard amid the crash of artillery bursts. We selected the small cellar, in case any 88's whistled through the house above. Sure enough, one huge tank came up to within about 100 yards of the house and fired away, as we had expected. As the dust was settling in the cellar, another violent explosion shook us. A lucky hit by one of our 155's had dropped in the turret of the German tank, engulfing it in one tremendous blast of destruction. We could see it burning for some time, after leaving the house to dig another set of slit-trenches. Artillery fire held up their tanks for a while. We found new hope in the support that our batteries gave us!

Shortly after dark, the German Infantry closed in for the kill, and tracer bullets whipped through the night above our heads, compelling us to dig while lying prone, or kneeling. I marvelled at the speed with which tough, little "Yonnie" gouged himself a hole from the almost rock-like clay where

we were forced to dig. I asked him if he had sharpened his shovel before coming up front that time. He laughed and said that he hadn't and turned back to his digging.

Late that night, with Nazis only grenade distance from our holes, we received word to be ready to move when the signal came over the Platoon radio. H-hour was seven o'clock, and a "loaf of bread" meant ten more minutes, so we left at so many "loaves of bread" in the code used.

To get out of the Nazis' clutches first of all we had to cross the Liesel road behind our positions. With German tanks edging up the road again, and "burp" guns blazing away just around the corner of the house mentioned above, it was not going to be easy.

What was left of A Co., minus new casualties and those too paralyzed with fear to leave their holes, gathered behind the house to prepare for the mad dash. Someone broke the ice and made it safely, then several more, then I followed. Just as I reached the other side, dashing past the black silhouette of a wrecked Sherman tank in the middle of the road, the Jerry machine gunner shouted out: "AMERIKANER, YOU ARE MY PRISONER -- SURRENDER", punctuating his challenge with a burst of red tracer bullets that must have gone between my legs. I don't see how else they could have missed their target. The other fellows followed between and during continuing bursts of machine gun fire.

We ran wildly down a small dirt road leading off the highway and then across fields, up water-filled ditches, darting

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behind any available cover, not stopping this pace until completely exhausted. As we left, more yells from the Germans were followed by fire from all the weapons they had in their possession; machine guns, bazookas, mortars, tanks, and artillery. But Lt. Col. Rhea, the 23d's Commander, had picked a good route, and we made the withdrawal a success, even taking some German prisoners with us.

In those few days and nights near Liesel, we saw more highly concentrated action than at any time, except during the first battle of St. Vith. In that time, Dempsey had moved elements of a whole British Corps into the Liesel-Asten area, among which was the ~~5th~~^{5/95} Division of Scottish Highlanders. With those Scots dug-in behind our abandoned positions, Jerry had a rude surprise in the morning. His attack slowed to a halt!

On the way back we kept in the shadows of the trees along the road, as the Luftwaffe was out in unusual strength that night. Often we threw ourselves in ditches, as one of the night hawks swooped low trying to locate us. They dropped brilliant flares and dive-bombed our artillery positions, as the good old artillery put on a great show to cover the 23rd Battalion's retreat. One whole battery was put out of action. Our division anti-aircraft unit, the 203d AAA kept a steady stream of .50 caliber and 37 mm. tracers fanning the bright moonlit sky to ward off the pursuers. How we had prayed for rain that night, but as fate would have it, a crystal clear sky made the withdrawal doubly dangerous. However, we finally made it back to a new area where the vehicles had been moved

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when Liesel was recaptured by the Germans.

The British 21 Army had been saved! Dempsey sent the 7th A.D. a special letter acknowledging the great debt of his command to "the splendid defense" maintained by the division at that time. The Stars and Stripes included an article revealing that the British had said our "battalions had fought like divisions, the companies like battalions, the squads like platoons, and the men like lions". Be that as it may, it was rough going and we all looked forward to a chance for rest.

Again, near Deurne we found another bivouac field in which to rest, write, eat, and sleep, - and time to be thankful we were still healthy, a little more wealthy, and certainly battle-wiser. Living from one day to the next, grateful for each hour that still found us alive, many of the veterans remaining in the Company were beginning to show the strain of prolonged combat duty, but we made the best of the situation, thankful that we had come along that far safely.

The casualties had been heavy at Liesel. We needed new replacements, or "reinforcements", as they came to be called, in order to fill the ranks to normal strength. Lt. Klein had been wounded, so another officer was ordered for the 21 Platoon. Caldwell was hit slightly, but still with us. Many of the men who had joined the 7th A.D. near Metz, when I did, were no longer there.

Our Platoon got a short break, being sent from Deurne back to guard General Sylvester in the town of Weert, where Division H.Q. was located. We spent a day or so at Division Trains on the way, resting in a woods near the canal that passes by

Nederweert, then reported to Weert as assigned.

It was there that we got our first glimpse of life in a Dutch town, which wasn't close to the front. Our five vehicles were scattered at various points throughout the town, and we were to stand guard on and off-duty all day and night. That sounded like garrison style to us, but we didn't care, for it turned out to be a longed-for break in fox-hole time. We enjoyed being members of the rear echelon for a spell. And what a contrast to the life we had come to know, -- time to sleep, time to wash and shave, three good meals a day, and time to receive and write more letters than had been possible for a long time.

Our half-track was parked out in a field close to one of the two village churches. The Dutch people must have enjoyed the contrast with days not long passed as they saw us enter their church, rifle and steel helmet in hand. At least, the Nazis had left that church undamaged. It was a Catholic church, and people flocked there every day, not just on Sundays.

The Dutch farmers passed by our field, dressed in suits of dark corduroy, dark caps, and clean, light-colored wooden shoes. Only a few wore black leather ones; shoes and leather were scarce, all over Europe, and especially in Holland. All young children and most of the village men and women wore wooden cloggers.

The people were friendly, frequently tried to talk to us, but conversation was difficult. None of these country people had even a vague knowledge of English. Gestures, nods, head-

shaking, and smiles were about as far as we got.

It was while standing guard in Weert one night that we first saw what appeared to be some mysterious secret weapon. Across the sky a point of light, star-like at a distance, shone noiselessly to the south, coming up from the east and disappearing to the west. We thought it might have been some kind of balloon or other flying invention. What we didn't know then was that these moving lights were the fiery trails of the first Nazi "buzz-bombs", or V-1's, directed against Antwerp. That port was vital to our campaigns in Europe, and the Nazis, having failed to break through at Liesel and Asten, resorted to this last fanatical effort to neutralize our newly-won Allied port. The air-siege of Antwerp had begun!

Soon the rest of the Battalion retired from the defensive positions that they had been holding while we had remained at Weert, and the 7th A.D. assembled by units to move south about fifty miles into the area around Maastricht, on the Maas River. Our platoon stayed with Division H. Q. during the convoy south, and remained at the new H. Q. location in St. Gertrude for a few days, before rejoining the 23rd in another nearby village; (Eckelrade, I believe).

These were the days in which rain, mud, buzz-booms, and hot meals were familiar sights. An orchard was A Co.'s home. Fur tents were in order again, for the last time before winter. And it was cold and miserable enough then to pass as winter in Ohio.

As was always the case when we were supposed to be resting,

a period of training and inspections of all kinds began once again. We complained, but it was really a good way to pass the time, for the schedule wasn't too strenuous. The mortar squad had a special school to attend.

This mortar school was conducted off and on by a lieutenant from Camp Croft, 1st Lt. Zang. That made me feel at home, having served as an instructor at Croft for about eight months. He needed a man to help him with the forward observing for his 23d Battalion H. Q. Co. 81 mm. mortars, and asked me if I would be interested. It would have been interesting work but the plan fell through for fear of the red tape involved in a transfer. I was glad not to have left the old 2d Platoon mortar squad, anyway.

It was shortly before we arrived in that village near Maastricht, that T/Sgt. Jim Menendez rejoined A Co. He had been the former Platoon Sergeant before Jesse took over command when Jim was hit near Longueville in September. Jim Menendez was an entirely different type of person, but also an excellent leader under fire, whose good judgement and quick decisions in combat earned him the respect and admiration of the Platoon. The 2d Platoon then had two experienced Platoon Sergeants and a new Lieutenant who seemed to be a good man, Creswell, by name. It looked as though our Platoon would be unbeatable.

Passes to Maastricht were available to those who wanted them, and beer and an occasional G.I. movie were served in the local tavern or pub. Many of the men, however, gave up the

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local night life for the chance to catch up a little on lost sleep. That was my classification.

On one such night of peaceful sleep, we were all awakened by a wild yell from "Fepsi" Notarnicola. A buzz-bomb's rocket engine had cut off just above us, and "Fepsi" wanted to warn us of the terrific explosion that seemed certain any second. Strangely, this one kept on gliding noiselessly through the night to crash about 20 seconds later somewhere near Maastricht. I slept through most of the excitement that time, but the others bolted upright in their pup tents at the first yell of "Barnes", from "Fepsi". They hardly took time to grab shoes; rather they dashed madly out into the rainy night, scattering in all directions, leaping fences, knocking each other down to get away from the area where it seemed certain the buzz-bomb was to strike.

The reason for this frenzy was the experience of the previous afternoon. A V-1 had cut-off, while flying at a low altitude just off to our left, and crashed in a few seconds. It would have been impossible to escape the doomed area of impact, so rapid was its descent. The explosion hurt our ears, even though it must have been a half-mile away. After seeing this, and noticing the quantity of bombs falling short around Maastricht, I resolved to keep away from that city, myself. Not all the bombs carried all the way to their targets, Liège and Antwerp.

The people of Maastricht were friendly to those who did go to the city. In fact, an English-speaking Dutch priest

told one fellow that the Dutch didn't understand why the American Army kept its men quartered only out in the fields of Holland, instead of letting them stay in people's homes. Thousands of letters were sent to the newspapers, he said, requesting and begging the Americans to let their soldiers live in Dutch homes when not fighting. It was the least they could offer, those people felt. The British, of course, had used Dutch homes all along, unlike the Americans. The Dutch couldn't understand why we didn't do the same, though I am sure they appreciated the fact that we were trying to spare them the trouble, not cluttering up their homes until really necessary. When winter came, we accepted the invitations!

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CHAPTER IV

From the area near Maastricht we moved one day in late November to the town of Clemens or (Klimmen) not far from Heerlen. It was in Clemens, that we intruded upon a Dutch family for the first time. What a pleasant experience it was! We were extremely grateful to sleep in their attic on those cold November nights. Actually, we might just as well have used their bedrooms, for people in Clemens, -- all over Europe, in fact, -- slept in their cellars, so great was their fear of bombing and buzz-bombs. During the day they used the other rooms, but the dread of being caught in their sleep during a raid or a buzz-bomb attack drove them underground at night, where they had some protection, anyway. The family beds were stripped of all mattresses and blankets which were taken below to convert the cellar into one large family bedroom.

The Dutch family in whose house we stayed did all it could to make us feel at home, the mother washing our clothes and cleaning up after us, just as though we were home. But the best thing they had to offer was the presence of five daughters in the house. The oldest two were pleasant enough to have around, but the three little girls, aged three, five, and seven, I should have said, were sources of real amusement and entertainment for us, when we needed just that to help forget the

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fighting. Those cute little Dutch girls pestered us glee-fully all day long, untying shoe laces, pulling hair, singing to us while we tried to write letters, begging for pieces of candy, and doing everything children of their age should be doing. We loved it!

I was surprised to hear the oldest of the three singing a German song which my mother had taught my brother - something about a three cornered hat, "Hain hut er hat drei ecken".

Downstairs there was a beer tavern, -- without any beer for sale, - on one side of the doorway, and a general store on the other. In the beer room we spent much time playing Dutch-type billiards and cards to pass away the evenings. Around the corner was a fairly large theater in which the Company met for occasional lectures, movies, and presentation of awards.

It was in Clemons that one Lt. Karl A. Forges appeared on the scene in A Co., along with Lt. Tate, and many more replacements. Forges later became our Platoon leader, but Lt. Tate was assigned to the second Platoon then, Lt. Creswell becoming leader of the Anti-tank Platoon.

Forges' first contribution to life in A Co. was a lecture on German words and phrases that some "bras hat" must have thought would be useful for the men to know while travelling across Germany, -- after the Germans. Actually this effort paid dividends more than once later on. Lt. Forges stood on the stage of the theater before us, pronouncing in correct German, not such things as "There is a hotel?" or "Is the train on time?" but rather, "Hands up!", "Throw down your weapons",

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"Come out", "Here is your squad?", "Show me", "How many", "Where", etc. It was good stuff, and those who took the trouble to remember a few phrases didn't regret the effort.

Twice in Clemons and environs, we went through tactical problems, "dry-runs", as they were called. We piled into half-tracks with full equipment and followed a column of tanks up the village street and out into the countryside. The field problem was supposed to represent the next assignment we could expect under the U.S. 9th Army's Command. We had been in the 9th Army since returning to Maastricht in late November, and had run through similar problems with our vehicles there, too. The 9th was a newcomer on the scene, taking its position between the British 21 Army in South-eastern Holland the the U.S. 1st Army inside Germany around Aachen. The 9th Army was about to break through the Siegfried Line in northern Germany near Gellenkirchen and drive all the way to the Rher River opposite Julich. It was expected that the 7th A.D. would be needed somewhere along the line; - hence the preparation.

Those problems involved simulated assaults against defensive positions on high ground preceded by the elaborate crossing of a tank-trap ditch. The division engineers even went through the efforts of constructing a special tank bridge behind our pretended assault. The first day, we didn't take the whole thing seriously enough to please the Battalion C.O. who, in turn, wanted to please his superior, the Combat Command C.O. And so, we marched back to the assembly point and

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went through the whole business all over. The veterans in the Co. were too tired and disgusted, feeling they knew enough already about what to do under fire, and the new men just did not have enough sense, -- some of them -- to take the whole thing seriously. Others followed the example of the veterans as was always the case, and only went through the motions of executing the problem. Actually, we never did go through any attack that was planned and executed as efficiently and precisely as those problems. That was to be expected, of course, for the unpredictable fortunes of battle can't be anticipated.

One night in Clemons we had the privilege of riding over to Heerlen to a Dutch theater where the 89th Infantry Division was presenting a play for both British and American troops. I have forgotten the name of the play, but the gesture was appreciated.

"Yonnie" Wiatroski had just returned from a 3-day pass to Faria, given him for being the private who had seen most action in the 2d Platoon, when word came around that Germany was to be the objective the next day. We made the most of one last night's sleep, rolled up in G.I. blankets under that Dutch roof.

The next morning, December 2nd, we carried our equipment down to the field where the half-tracks had been parked, loaded up, and rolled noisily down the highway toward Germany, after bidding our newly-won Dutch friends a last farewell.

The signs telling us to "Beware, You are now entering

"Germany" were superfluous, for the border was well marked in other ways. The Dutch villages near the boundary were largely undamaged, because the Germans had retreated through them quickly without a fight, wishing to defend the Reich from the Siegfried Line and their own German towns beyond. Hence, we passed suddenly from towns almost untouched by war into a wasted countryside where towns were almost totally destroyed. Crossing through the Siegfried Line just south of Geilenkirchen had been the new 9th Army's task, and it had been rough going.

The Siegfried line itself consisted in this sector of a belt of mutually supporting and strategically interdependent pillboxes and gun emplacements. Most of these were cleverly camouflaged to blend into a terrain that furnished ample sources of natural concealment that almost made additional paint and netting unnecessary. This belt of small forts and emplacements did not form a straight line, of course, but rather gained its strength by staggering these concrete structures in depth, for several miles, making possible interlocking fields of fire. Where any pillbox seemed at all isolated from the others, its firepower was increased by digging-in tanks and adding open gun positions around the area of the small fort. Each pillbox had at least half of its crew in holes and trenches outside the structure, so as to prevent anyone from creeping up unseen on the sides where no openings were located, for all of them did have "blind-spots" which increased their vulnerability. Back of this belt

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of forts were the batteries of supporting artillery, which could be moved about to meet attacks on the line. This sounds like an impregnable barrier, but our armies penetrated its protecting line to enter Germany with less casualties and less effort than most people had expected. Fixed immobile defense definitely proved to be inadequate protection in this war. A determined force of infantrymen, supported by strong artillery and tank fire, and equipped with the latest weapons of war, could and did accomplish the task!

Past huge mounds of slag near the many coal mines of this region we rolled towards the Roer River. The heavily damaged towns of Rimburg, Ubach, Betterich, and Puffendorf shook as our tanks and half-tracks roared through them. Sometime in the afternoon of December 2nd, the convoy halted to spread out in some fields northeast of Puffendorf, a few thousand yards from the Roer, where the 84th and 102d Infantry Divisions were then standing guard, waiting for the plans to be completed for the push across the Cologne Plain to the Rhine.

There had been heavy fighting recently in this area. The Nazis had launched a strong counter-attack against the 9th Army to attempt to keep it from reaching the banks of the Roer River. The 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, which we had faced in Holland, and other divisions, plus several hundred tanks, had fought a furious battle in and near these Roer Valley towns. The new Tiger Royal tanks had been used; colossal 67-ton monsters that dwarfed our 32-ton Sherman tanks. The fields where our vehicles and squads scattered

out were cluttered with the punctured, blackened, and rusting hulks of tanks; mostly ours it seemed, but there were a few German wrecks, as well. Two of the new Tiger Royals were resting in peace in the field beyond ours. It looked as though the monsters had been trapped in a low spot by several hits through the lighter armor protecting the engines in their rear ends.

The holes used by the Panzer Grenadier boys and later by our own men were then supplemented by some new ones to accommodate the 23rd Battalion. We had left Holland that morning prepared to attack in the afternoon to help the 9th Army take Linnich, but its attack had gone so well without our help, that by the time we had arrived, our mission was only to make ourselves at home in those fields near Puffendorf and wait for a new assignment.

Each man, or two men rather, chose the type of accommodations they preferred. Some selected a plain, old-fashioned slit-trench with a raincoat or coats pulled over the top to shield them from the icy, biting rain. Others were more industrious, venturing into Puffendorf or the small village to our front, to get a door or several shutters to form a roof for their more elaborate dug-outs. Shelter halves thrown over a framework of branches was still another variation. And then, the depth and shape of the holes varied to suit the numbers occupying them and the positions in which they wished to sleep, when not standing guard. But in every case,



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it was just another hole in the mud, which soon filled with water, no matter what type of roof selected. Seepage was inevitable, as one cold, rainy day followed another. Even those who took shelter in holes dug underneath the blackened remains of tanks, or those who defied completely the accuracy of Jerry's batteries across the Roer by pitching pup tents, were no better off.

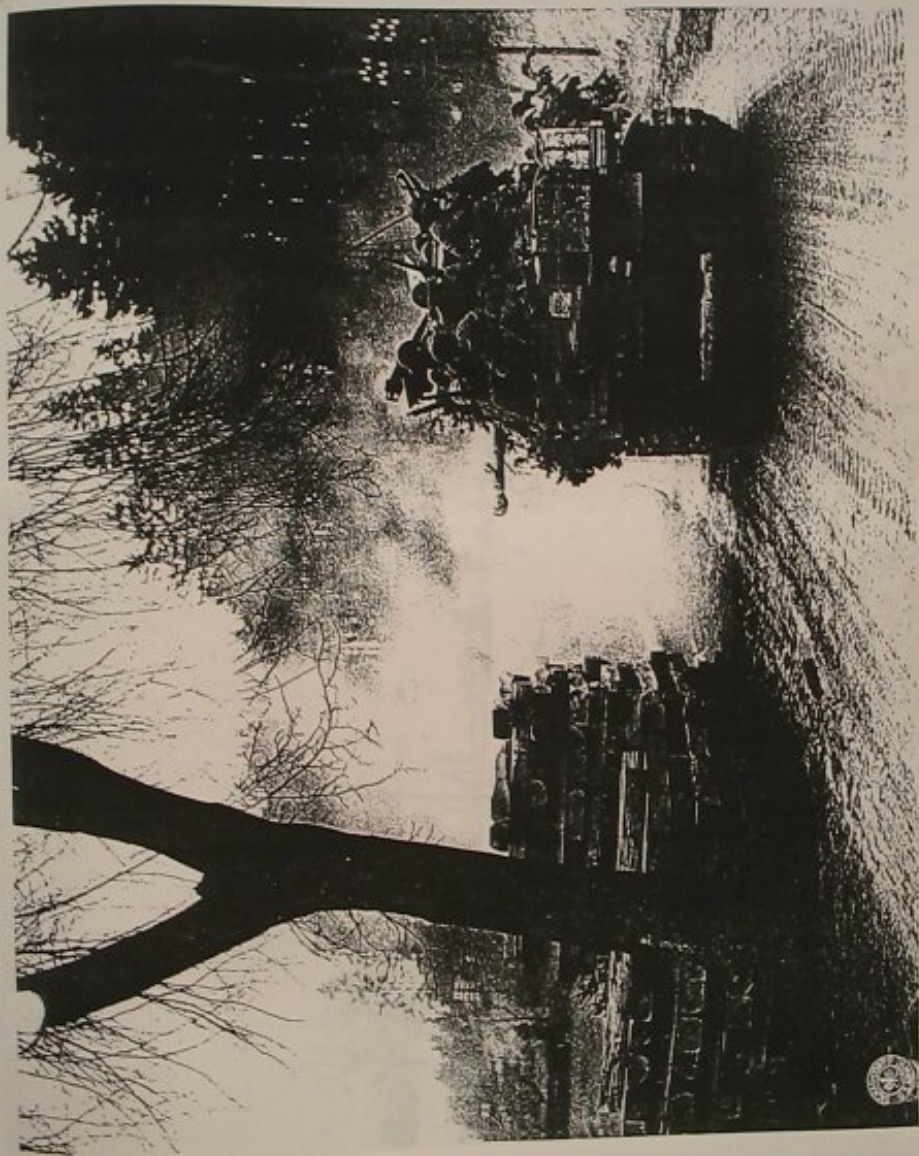
During the day, we roamed over the entire area hunting for any size, shape, or kind of wood to throw on the gasoline-kindled fires about which we all clustered. Huddled around fires, we kept partially dry on one side at a time, anyway. The days were too short in December. We waited until the very last moment before reluctantly extinguishing the smoldering fire to abide by the strict black-out regulations at night. Sometimes we sat in the half-tracks for an hour or so after dark, sharing body warmth with the next fellow and speculating on the chances of doing something else the next day, anything but just sitting there day after day, enduring that foul weather and "sweating out" the next assignment. Of course, we were a lot better off than those fellows in the front-line holes, where there were no fires at all and much more noise. We knew this, so no great complaints were made. We only wanted to be doing something more interesting, something to keep our minds more occupied, than was required in a life of digging one new, wet hole after another each day, standing around a fire with nothing much to talk about, and then standing guard most of the night.

We did get two meals from the mess truck each day, which helped to relieve the monotony a little. I hesitate to say that these were hot meals, however, as icy rain and nipping winds soon turned coffee into iced coffee and made hands so numb that it was hard to hold eating utensils. The gesture was appreciated, though, and Carl Leutner and his cooks did a fine job, working most of the night to prepare the next day's food with a tarpaulin hung over the back of the truck to hide the lamplight inside.

During the day, and sometimes at night, Jerry shelled the fields where the Battalion was assembled, providing a little entertainment on those dull, uninteresting days. In fact, the casualties increased enough so that it was finally decided to move back to a field west of Puffendorf to try to fool Jerry.

This change did not help matter long, however, as one day later, a Nazi plane, buzzed in low over our area, taking advantage of the overcast to defy the AAA guns protecting our near-by batteries, to photograph and strafe us. There were no casualties, but plenty of action, as men leaped into their holes or scrambled under tanks and half-tracks. The uninvited guest escaped into the haze, in spite of a sky-full of small caliber ack-ack fire from our vehicle machine guns and those of neighboring AAA .37 and .40 mm. gun sections.

This new field was being swept for mines as we turned off the road and chose likely positions for new sets of holes. Jim Menendez and Barnes made a wild dash for an abandoned dugout near an artillery gun position. York and I built a



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shelter out of sand bags and shelter halves next door to their dugout. "Yonnie", Mac, and Cliff Dolan, began work on a three-man hole topped with planks and mud to keep out the rain. And so it went, the same procedure all over again.

In this area, back of the 9th Army front line, there was one of the greatest concentrations of artillery that we ever came across. The numbers of battalions ran in the fifties, I believe. The artillerymen were hard pressed to find places to put their guns, often staking out claims to positions several weeks in advance; it was worse than getting hotel accommodations in a crowded city. It was on one of those partly finished reserved sites for a 155 mm. howitzer that we were then situated. During the day, we wandered about, asking the artillerymen questions about the range, caliber, and effectiveness of their guns. Again we noted their respect and admiration for the infantry G.I. in the front line holes. We appreciated this recognition of the miserable existence the infantry endured, but preferred to transfer to the artillery.

A few days later, the Battalion moved a third time; this trip our objective was some partly destroyed houses in Setterich. Those houses were grouped together in what must have been a government-housing project built by the Nazis to please the local laboring populous employed in the coal mines and factories in that vicinity.

A little reconstruction was necessary to make over the rooms assigned to the mortar squad. The debris was cleaned out, the empty windows boarded over, except for a small section of

glass that Jardin found somewhere in the wreckage. And most important, what remained of a small pot-stove was patched up and put in working condition with a makeshift pipe poked into the hole in the chimney left by the original stove-pipe. The stove always burnt out before morning, but we could start off to sleep in a warm room. This was life, at last; a room indoors, out of the mud and cold, for a change. The hard ground had a heavy frost on it in the morning by that time, the top layer frozen hard, so digging-in would have been a tougher proposition.

Behind these houses we discovered to our surprise, a huge 240 mm. howitzer, perhaps 150 feet from the rooms selected for the platoon. This great gun didn't fire often, but when it did, an unearthly racket followed the pulling of the lanyard. The roof of the house in front of the gun had been lifted off ~~and~~ completely by the muzzle blast of the first shot fired. The projectile weighed over 300 pounds and was fired by one of the largest but most accurate of our artillery pieces. It had destroyed a bridge fifteen miles to our front with the third shot, for example. Standing behind the gun, we could see the shell leave the muzzle by watching carefully without flinching at the explosion.

During the first few days there, Lt. Tate began working his platoon into shape, learning the names of his men, leading them in a training program which we always had in rear areas, and discussing plans for the coming attack. We all liked him and were sure he would stand the test under fire. He did at St.

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With, a short time hence.

One day we even had a chance to enjoy the second hot shower since leaving the States; one of our own shower tents this time. And on one other day some of us went to Heerlen to see a show put on by Army Special Services. It was hardly worth the trip, but did provide an excuse for seeing a little more of Germany, if nothing more.

In those German towns near the Roer River, there were almost no civilians at that time. Those that were still around seemed to be submissive and cooperative. I heard of no trouble with civilians in that area. Those we did see, and who saw us, either turned the other way or just kept on with what they were doing, plowing the fields, repairing their houses, combing the wreckage for loot, etc. On the other hand, some made attempts to be friendly, smiled freely, and saluted M.F.'s at crossroads, as they passed in their carts or on foot. These were always of the older generation, for the young were elsewhere. And then, to be started at expressionlessly by many was perplexing. I wish I had been able to have crawled inside those thick German skulls and to have found out what they really thought, for those were days when they had time to contemplate on the war and how it had affected them.

The new cold spell made us feel sure that our scheduled attack on Brachelen was about to begin, for the frozen ground would support our tanks. We had been preparing for this assault for about a week. Detailed maps of the town had been

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made, so that each squad knew what houses it would have to take, what kind of enemy fire we could expect, where the weak points were, etc. It sounded beautiful to us, especially the facts that there was to be a tremendous artillery preparation beforehand and that we were to be relieved soon after taking the objective.

The key to the attack on Brachalen was the attempted bombing of the Roer River dams by our aircraft, for we could never cross the Roer while the Germans could threaten to flood the Roer Valley behind us, disrupting supplies and endangering the success of our plans. We were to bomb the dams, causing the flood at a time to suit us, not the Germans. Each day, squadrons of medium bombers flew over in the direction of the dams near Duren, a few less returning each time as a result of the concentration of Jerry Ack-ack protecting the dams. Back in Feterich we could hear the exploding bombs, wondering if they had succeeded each time. They never did, even though explosives had been built into the dams to enable the Germans to destroy them when they wished.

Next, we were told that the attack would go on as scheduled, whether the flood was caused or not. The Allies were apparently fighting for time. After taking Brachalen, we were to be relieved for perhaps a week while the 102d and 84th crossed the river, and then we were to drive through their lines across the Cologne Plain, together with the 2d Armored Division. The British were to "jump off" the same day, so it was big

strategy, a real undertaking.

Just when we had worked ourselves into a high state of nerves over this impending action, word came down that the 48th Battalion was to relieve us for a few days, that it would make our scheduled attack if the order came to begin the big push, while we were to return to Heerlen in Holland to enjoy beds, electric lights, hot water, three meals a day, movies, -- in short a return to civilization. It seemed unbelievable to be snatched away from it all, like that! Perhaps we would have Christmas back in Holland, after all!

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CHAPTER V

"The Bulge", - 1st Battle of

St. Vith - Vaux Chavines

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CHAPTER V

Into this anticipated dream-world, like the explosion of a delayed-action bomb, burst the ominous word that plans had been changed, that we were to rush south to "a place called Bastogne, somewhere in Belgium." The Nazis had begun a counter-offensive along the Belgian border. All available help was needed. And because most of our Division's units were not then actually engaged with the enemy, it was one of the first free and ready to meet the emergency. General Bradley was shifting forces without a moment's delay.

As the vehicles started down the road to the rear that night of December 16th, searchlights swept the dark sky to catch the elusive Nazi planes that were out to spot our troop movements and bomb bridges and highways. There was more of the Luftwaffe in the air that night than we had ever heard before. The ack-ack batteries put on a good show of strength, streaking the black sky with red tracers, and lighting it with hundreds of shell-bursts.

Our route south took us first to Heerlen, and then through Aachen, and on down to Verviers. Neither the Belgians, nor we, realized the full implications of this hasty trip south at the time. They cheered and waved as the convoy roared past. South from Verviers we were re-routed. Bastogne was no longer the objective!

As we were winding along a road some distance southeast of

Verviers in the beginnings of the rugged, thickly-forested Ardennes hills, word was passed from half-track to half-track to fasten on combat equipment and be ready for action at any moment. We knew all this haste was for no good reason, but this order came as a shock. The usual procedure was to move into an area at evening, get ready, and then attack in the morning. This seemed to be rushing things a bit!

We were finally informed that the 106th Infantry Division had been hit hard east of St. Vith, two of its regiments having been completely surrounded and cut off on the Schnee Eifel, where they had been holding positions in a "quiet sector" just inside the Siegfried Line. In order to rescue these two regiments, it was agreed that the best plan was to give part of SS "B" the mission of capturing Schoneberg first, followed by the attempt to contact the 422nd and 423rd by swinging south from that town. If that proved an impossible mission (which it did, by evening on the 17th of December) the obvious alternative was to build a strong defensive position around vital St. Vith and hold on as long as our strength and resources enabled us.

We knew that some excitement was in the offing when Captain Britton of B Co. rushed past our vehicles standing erect in his jeep, bayonet fixed on his M-1 rifle, slung at "shoulder arms", as was always his custom when going into any action. Lt. Creswell, our executive officer, was passing up and down A Co.'s column to make sure everyone had received word to get ready.

If those were not signs enough, then the column of vehicles of all description which jammed the road in the next town was final proof. Those trucks, jeeps, and prime-movers hauling large artillery guns, and others dragging ack-ack pieces with the fresh mud of their emplacements still on them, were all heading towards the rear, bumper to bumper. G.I.'s sprawled all over the tops of their vehicles in their haste to make sure of a seat, lest they be left behind in that wild retreat. The Nazis had broken through the thin infantry line, compelling these artillerymen, anti-aircraftmen, and engineers to move out quickly in order to save vital equipment. A squad of infantrymen could be replaced easily enough, but perhaps not a 155 mm. howitzer or a heavy engineers' bridge-truck. That seemed to have been the logic! I remember the way those G.I.'s looked at us as we headed towards the enemy from whom they were fleeing. They must have thought that we were crazy; - just didn't have better sense. Yet, we could feel their great respect for us as infantrymen, called in again to do the dirty work. There was a kind of awe in their expressions. As for us, we just looked back longingly as they passed going the right way.

When the combination of these traffic jams along our route of advance through Stavelot, Vielsalm, and Petit Thier, and the rapid advance of the Nazis west of Schoneberg, prevented the rescue of the two trapped regiments, our leaders hurried all efforts to build a defensive ring around St. Vith. B Co. of

the 23rd joined the 38th Battalion ahead of us, and was rushed into position east of St. Vith that same night, the 17th of December, while we waited 4 kilometers west of St. Vith until the following morning.

The 23d moved up the road to a hill just west and overlooking St. Vith on the morning of the 18th. This was to have been only a forward assembly area, but we had no sooner parked the half-tracks when someone shouted that some Jerries were coming up on our left. Several artillery shells whistled into our area, and at once, Capt. Foster, A Co. C.O., gave the order to form a line where we were, until hearing differently. The fun had begun! We dug-in as fast as we could, the half-tracks were placed where their machine guns could help cover the Co.'s positions, the three 57 mm. A-T guns were pulled over the crest of the hill and made ready to fire at anything that came in close enough to hit, and everyone prepared himself to stand another test under fire.

However, nothing happened until afternoon, once our tanks had put an end to Jerry's mild attempt at an attack on our flank. It was in the middle of the afternoon when A Co. of the 23d was called upon to advance through St. Vith and help the 38th hold off the Nazis, that were then rushing up through the woods to threaten the town itself. C Co. of the 23rd Battalion was placed in CC "B" Reserve on call to assist elements of the 31st Tank Battalion north of St. Vith. Meanwhile, CC "A" had closed into defensive positions along the north flank in and around Foteau, tying in with CC "B" near St. Vith to the east.

CO "R" located its elements southwest of the vital road-junction town in the area near Recht and Sart-les-St. Vith.

Hastily, we grabbed some K-rations, shouldered our weapons, and marched down the hill towards the town below. Several of its houses displayed large yellow panels used to identify our front line to the air forces, but it was a vain hope that planes would appear that dark, rainy day. The people in town looked worried, almost too scared to greet us encouragingly. And, as a matter of fact, this part of Belgium was really more German than Belgian, and I am sure many of the townspeople wished the Nazis might succeed. Some even said so, when we withdrew several days later. None, however, relished the thought of being caught in the violent struggle that seemed imminent.

Just as we crossed an engineer-built bridge over the railroad tracks on the eastern side of town, we ran into what remained of a company of engineers attached to the 106th Division. These fellows had withdrawn from the hills in the face of a strong Nazi-counter-attack, and were lying exhausted and scared along the road as A Co. filed quietly past across their bridge and up the steep hill towards the woods above, where our tanks and the 38th were noisily engaging the sons of Hitler. Those engineers were really glad to have the infantry come along, and panted out their appreciation.

The trees on either side of the road had T.N.T. blocks wrapped around them, so as to enable the engineers to block the road into St. Vith at the proper time. The newly-built

bridge was prepared likewise for demolition.

Up the hill we went, leaving the road and working our way across an open field towards the dark Ardennes pine woods that shrouded those hills surrounding St. Vith on three sides. More of the 31st Battalion's tanks moved along, groaning and straining every cylinder to make the grade up to where some of the Nazis were being stopped in their tracks and driven back out of the woods, back towards their Siegfried Line, a scant four or five miles away. The firing ceased when we entered the woods.

I remember tripping once on some barb wire just before reaching the woods, hurling the mortar to the ground as I fell. A bullet had cracked nearby, so Jim Potter rushed up to find out where I had been hit. Again, I seemed to have fallen at the right time!

Moving into the heavy pines was like entering a cave, so well did the long-needed branches keep out daylight. Jesse Caldwell warned us to keep up with the column of advance, so that there would be no loss of contact with the leading platoon. After stumbling along for several hundred yards, we reached the edge of an opening in the woods which appeared in the dull moonlight to be about 800 yards across. On our right flank, near a stone farm house, was a road junction, from which roads branched out at right angles, bordering two sides of this opening in the forest. With part of the 38th Battalion on our right, we were to form a strong defensive position to defend this junction, blocking

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Jerry's easiest path into St. Vith.

Captain Foster (A Co. Commander) and Jesse took our mortar squad and placed us about 100 feet behind the stone house. At that time, we didn't care where our 60 mm. mortar was located, just so long as we could rest a moment after climbing that rugged hill. It was quiet then, but before long we discovered that our position was going to be a very "hot corner". With that damn house for a marker, Jerry just couldn't fail to throw some well-aimed shells our way.

"Yonnie" and I being gunner and assistant gunner, set about the task of preparing our position for action, after having been told in what direction to fire when ordered. The gun was placed in front of a large two-man slit trench, which, with York's help, we proceeded to enlarge to three-man capacity. Barnes and Coyne laid the wire for the "sound-powered" telephones which were used to connect the gun with a hole 100 yards forward on A Co.'s front line where Barnes was to observe and adjust our fire. As this was a defensive position and there was plenty of time, we put out some aiming stakes in front of the mortar sight. On these I fastened some tin-foil (dropped by airplanes to disrupt the radar detecting and altitude-computing mechanisms used by AAA batteries) and also placed some shiny ration cans at the bottom of each stick to make them visible at night.

That night, and everyone thereafter, we fired illuminating

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shells at irregular intervals in order to make it impossible for Jerry to sneak a patrol in too close to our lines. We took turns listening to the phone all night and during the day to hear the next fire order. This was especially important the first day, as our 21 Platoon mortar, the only one in the Co. with a position from which it could fire, provided the only support A Co. had directly under its control. The artillery had not been placed yet, so we had no F.O. to call for supporting fire, and the H. Q. Co.'s 81 mm. mortars were busy with targets found by B and C Co.'s, as well as by ours.

Lt. Tate and Caldwell adjusted our fire the next morning on some Jerries attempting to move up in the woods across the clearing and on a patrol coming up from another direction, near a knocked-out German tank that blocked the road. Each time the mortar coughed, we counted the seconds during the flight of the shell, with ears straining to hear the results of our shooting as reported over the phone. Each time, Lt. Tate's voice came through with the word that the hits had been "right on them; scattered them all over". The old mortar was paying off for the many miles it had been lugged cross-country, when it seemed only excess baggage and carrying it seemed wasted effort.

And to confuse the Nazis, our 81 mm. heavy mortars were located perhaps a half-mile behind us at the bottom of the hill, but right on a line running through our position towards the target. So, often when we fired, they thought it was the 81's, and their answering barrage of mortar shells would

misjudge the range, sailing well over us to the rear, much to our relief.

We gained much satisfaction out of that important supporting role, and began to develop a kind of pride and affection for our old 60, especially when word came down to us to "Keep up the good work", and that, "Capt. Foster was very pleased with his mortar support".

At night we could get a fine running account of the situation along the line up ahead, by taking turns listening to the "sound-powered" phones which easily picked up the voices of the other Platoon Leaders, as they talked with the 2d Platoon's Menendez, Caliwell, or Tate. The three of them together with Barnes, took turns in the observer's hole a few yards behind A Company's line to which our phone-wire was connected. Their hushed, half-whispers could be heard distinctly as we lay there waiting and listening for commands over the phone. One time Forges would call from the 1st Platoon for one of our illuminating shells to catch a Jerry patrol that he felt sure was creeping up towards his positions; another time Menendez would be heard talking to the F.O. to try to get an artillery or mortar concentration thrown out to our front; or another time someone would be trying to reach the tank observer to get him to move one of his Shermans through the woods to meet an expected counter-attack that seemed to be developing; and so it went. Thus, we had a complete picture of the action by remote control!

It was sometime that second day that we were told that

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the Nazis had cut the roads behind us, shutting off our flow of supplies. Things began to look more serious. Rations were pooled and redistributed equally, and ammunition was rationed and used only when absolutely necessary.

Our tanks moved up closer to the front-line holes where they could deliver direct supporting fire from easily camouflaged positions. The Sherman in front of our position had an ideal setup. It moved up the hill just enough to permit the gunner and tank commander to observe over the crest when firing a shot, then backed down hill out of sight again each time. The tanks, as a whole, did good work, picking off German tanks that attempted to close in close on our flanks. One Sherman blasted four Tigers in as many shots by waiting until the gunner could aim point-blank at the lighter armor on the Tiger's sides.

The artillery did a fine job by blanketing the surrounding areas and likely approaches with heavy concentrations when Nazi vehicles or personnel came up to where they could launch a counterattack. And once launched, their attacks were speedily broken up in those first days. Wallerode was a favorite target. A whole convoy of enemy vehicles was destroyed near there one morning.

The Germans tried coming at us with tanks, with infantry alone, with the two combined, with and without artillery support, and at different hours during the day and night. They attempted everything and failed from December 17th until early in the morning on the 22nd.

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We were not entirely alone at St. Vith during the onslaught of the Nazis. Fine support was rendered by CC "B" of the 9th Armored Division - (the same unit which captured the Remagen Bridge on the Rhine later) - which tied in with our own CC "B" directly south of the town. South of the 9th Armored's units, the one remaining regiment of the 106th Division, the 424th, acted as a bulwark of defense, delaying the advance of the Panzer Divisions. Still further south, and slightly west near Holdingen, the 112th Regiment of the 28th Division assisted in the formation of the now-famous "St. Vith Horseshoe" defense. But, south of the 112th, there was an 18 mile gap through which poured the fast-moving Panzers of Gen. Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army.

During the last few days, our firepower grew less and less as tanks and artillery ran out of ammunition with no supplies arriving. The H. 2 Co. mortars used up theirs quite early in the siege. But, while the "out-going mail" diminished, the "incoming mail" increased by the hour. The 7th A.D. was preventing the Nazis from advancing and exploiting the great advantages of the shock given our armies in the initial breakthrough. They had to dislodge us from that vital road junction or lose the opportunities offered them, - hence the growing frenzy and fanaticism of their attacks. More and more frequent was the cry for "Medics", as barrages crashed into the pine forests covering our holes. Each time a medical jeep dashed madly up the road from the aid-station in St. Vith to answer the calls for help.

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After the violent explosions of each enemy barrage died away, we dug in deeper, even covering over our mortar position with fence rails and earth in the afternoon of the last day.

"Yonnie", Cliff Dolan, and I wandered up through the woods to the front holes of the 38th to gather up any extra mortar ammunition not needed. The 38th was unable to use its small mortars in the thick woods, so on our return trip we were heavily-laden with shells. Up by the 38th holes we passed piles of Nazis cut-down in repeated counterattacks, always having come from the same direction to end their existence in front of the 38's a.g.'s and rifles, -- stubborn devils, those 33 boys! Some were dressed in G.I. uniforms, to add to our confusion.

On the morning of the 21st, we could sense that a special effort was to be expected soon, for the incoming shells were steadily more accurate and frequent. All day long we heard Jerry tank motors laboring in low gear, as the Panzer forces moved up through the woods. With casualties running high, food all gone, and ammunition going fast, we prepared ourselves mentally and physically for the worst. It came that afternoon and evening!

First, their white phosphorus smoke shells burst in the tops of the tall pines along our line, so as to confirm their estimate of the range and mark the target area for the following barrages. Next, one heavy concentration after another covered our positions with smoke and flying shrapnel. The stench of burnt gun powder was overpowering. One chunk of shrapnel dug itself into the casing of one of our shells kept

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ready for use by our feet, without setting it off, miraculously. The telephone wires ten feet above the mortar hole were slashed, as were those connecting us by voice with the rest of the platoon. The enemy batteries pounded us into a state of semi-consciousness; we were numbed by the concussions. We prayed that each incoming shell would somehow avoid our fox-holes.

There was no relaxation of their frenzied efforts all afternoon, and early in the evening the final crushing assault came, preceded by the most violently-destructive artillery preparation we had ever heard or seen. Flares shot up, red ones at first, and the artillery fire died away. The longed-for silence was soon interrupted by tank fire from the woods to our front. Then tank motors started up, and the Tigers edged in closer in the black night. They halted, fired a few more sharp blasts with their 88's, and our machine guns along the road junction were silent. Our machine gunners there kept their heavy 50's blazing away unflinchingly, until blasted into eternity by direct point-blank fire from the Tigers, then only a hundred feet from their holes. Real fighters, those men!

There were only a few more shots fired and then it was all quiet. We didn't know what to expect next, for the few remaining men from B Co. of the 38th had retired from their front holes, having nothing with which to stop the approaching tanks. That left a gap for the Nazis, but they were about to

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make their own gaps then, anyway.

The quiet was next broken by shouts in German voices of "A COMPANEE, A COMPANEE," followed by the calling of American names "John," "Bill", "Joe", "George", etc. I believe their intention was to confuse us, to fire in the direction of our replies, if we gave them. But nobody answered the Jerries, so they began to march through our lines, across the field, and down the road towards St. Vith; one group passed within a hundred feet of our mortar position.

Upon hearing these Nazis approach, being greatly outnumbered and having nothing with which to stop the Tigers, we decided it was high time to move out. "Yonnie" stayed behind to fire two more illuminating shells at the suggestion of a lieutenant from the 38th, while the rest of us hid in the woods close-by. The first German infantrymen had passed on, by then, not revealed in the light of the two shells overhead, but more were ready to advance with their tanks.

Assuming the quiet meant A Co. and the others had fallen back without having had time to contact us during the excitement, and not caring to return to investigate where hordes of Nazis were probably then stepping over our dead and dying, it seemed best to move back to where we had noticed one of our tanks parked in a corner of the woods during the last barrage before dark.

There we tried to get the tank lieutenant to use his gun against the Tigers waiting at the top of the hill for the

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signal to advance again. That lieutenant refused to fire, however, saying he wasn't supposed to expose himself. It didn't seem to be any time to be an impartial observer; our line had been broken, and most of the other tanks had retreated and left us alone. Surely this one Sherman could have settled the score against one of the Tigers, but the lieutenant remained adamant.

As he also refused to use his tank radio to let the rest of the Battalion and the rest of the division know that a break in our line had been made, Barnes, who had joined us by then, decided to go with another fellow to Battalion H. 2. to explain what had taken place. That was the last we saw of him until two days later in Hamoir.

Just at this point, the German Tigers, with Jerries clinging to their backs, blasted the stone house by the road junction and came over the crest of our hill and down towards where we were standing. Score flares, white this time, (white standing for "we are here" in their system) silhouetted the black firespouting monsters heading across the open field towards the bridge into St. Vith. Their sharp muzzle-blasts reverberated through the pine woods, adding to the already terrifying sounds of the explosions. White streaks from the long snouts of their 88's probed into the black night mercilessly seeking out targets. Burning tanks and blazing houses soon proved those targets had been found, among them the tank of the lieutenant who had refused to fire.

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While this tank assault was proceeding towards St. Vith, we five of the mortar squad made our way as quickly as possible down through the woods towards the low ground separating the town from the pines in which our positions had been located. Flares, tank fire, burning vehicles, and houses lit up the night much more than we liked, but we hurried on, watching on all sides for German patrols. By the time we reached the edge of the woods from where St. Vith was clearly visible, there was so much light that we hardly dared to cross the open ground before us. York and Dolan became separated from us here, while going under a fence. That was the last we saw of them for some time. "Yonnie", Gerry Coyne, and I then waited our turn, and finally started out as fast as possible across the low, swampy ground, reaching the other side just in time to see the first Nazi tanks entering St. Vith.

We pressed forward again into the night, hoping somehow to get beyond the town and escape to our own lines, wherever they were. There wasn't much choice as to direction, but we kept moving along anyway. Soon a challenge halted us, and by great luck, we had run into the positions of A Co. of the 38th Battalion, located on the north-eastern fringe of St. Vith.

We crouched in the shadows of a dug-out along the road, while attempting to tell the J.O. what had taken place up ahead of him on the wooded ridge above the town. He tried to calm us by saying that the Division was still getting artillery support. If that was so, it was mighty sketchy support, for the only artillery sounds we could hear were the shell-bursts of the

Nazi barrages crashing into St. Vith just ahead of their leading tanks. Nor were we reassured by the statement that his lines were still holding. His talk sounded like a misunderstanding of the situation, but in any case, we became members of this company for a few hours, sharing a machine gun position. From the rise of ground where A.Co. of the 38th was defending, we got an excellent view of the whole tragic end of the struggle to hold on to St. Vith. With our lines broken, the Nazi infantry and tanks moved down from the wooded hills, out across the open stretch, and felt their way cautiously into the town itself. A Co. of the 23rd and B Co. of the 38th had taken a good share of the killing punch that "bulged the Bulge" which enveloped St. Vith that night of December 21-22nd. A trail of burning tanks and houses, not to mention hundred of fallen Yanks, marked the course of the advance of the Nazi Divisions that had finally penetrated the line of our 7th A.C. That was a fateful night, and one we would never forget!

It wasn't long before word reached the 38th to withdraw to the west towards Crombach, as best it could. We became part of a group of roughly a hundred and fifty men from that A Co. We headed across the railroad tracks and swung around the town to the southwest in order to escape from the advancing Nazis. Stumbling through fields, clambering over fences, struggling through streams up to our necks in depth, we fought ourselves to keep pace with those in the lead. Somehow, someway, endurance

carried us through the ordeal of that exhausting fifteen-mile trek across the then snow-covered Belgian countryside. Parching thirst intensified fatigue, until we came to streams where canteens were filled. There was no such thing as morale or discipline that night, -- men threw away their equipment to lighten their load, anything to add to that unbelievable strength that kept them plodding on to safety.

Several times our group was fired upon as we left the area near the town. On one occasion, a fellow in the rear became hysterical at the sound of our own machine guns being fired at us, crying out, "Don't shoot, we're G.I.'s coming through". What he didn't realize was that these were Germans firing our own weapons at us. All seemed lost then, but a quick change of directions, a dash behind some houses and up a country road, and we were off into the snowy night, again.

Of that group of 150, perhaps 35 or 50 finally made it back along the railroad tracks to the fields outside Crombach where one of our Division artillery batteries was using up the last of its ammunition in a final gesture of defiance to the Panzer Divisions approaching from the east. We could have dropped down there and slept forever while the snow drifted on top of us, but something kept us moving all the way into Crombach.

There "Yennie", Gerry and I separated from the group to try to find someone from our own Battalion. I remember picking out a house where the light inside shone through a crack in the black-out shutters. I stumbled in the door, and only partly absorbing the sight before my eyes, blurted out, "Can

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anyone tell me how to get to the 23rd Battalion?" In the room, several neatly dressed Colonels were sitting at a table on which was spread a map, near the two-way radio. Interrupted in the middle of an all-night session involving continuous attempts to maintain contact with units on the line and with defensive artillery fire arrangements, the startled officers turned from their work to look at the intruders. What a contrast in appearance, - we and they! I have forgotten whether anybody answered my question, but we were were invited to sit down and rest a bit. We accepted the invitation!

They told me later that I slid down off the bench I had sat on, and soon partly blocked the doorway, stretched out on the floor of the SS "B"'s forward H. Q. in blissful slumber, making it necessary for Colonels to step over me going in and out of the door, for the few remaining hours until dawn.

In the meantime, what was left of A Co. of the 23rd had withdrawn from our original positions, being the last unit to pull out of St. Vith, and the first to re-enter it one month later. Out of one group of one hundred men which started back, only two finally made the escape to rejoin us several days later. Lt. Forges, in charge of A Co., after Captain Foster was wounded, led a group of 20 men through the German's newly-won positions to the safety of our own lines. He was halted frequently by Nazi Patrols, but his knowledge of German saved them each time from capture, or worse. Receiving only the order "Go West", over a radio borrowed from one of the

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F.O.'s, he cleverly led his men to Groebach, where a new defensive line was built up at once. It was every man for himself that night, once the line was broken, and each had wild stories of narrow escapes on the return trip from St. Vith. Of the roughly 265 men with which A Co. had come to that town, less than 50 returned to fight again. Of eight officers, only two returned from the line, Forges and Creswell.

From December 17th until early morning on the 22nd, the 7th A.D., and those units attached to it, held off elements of eight or more Nazi Divisions, the toughest of which were SS Panzer divisions of the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies. The 7th Armored's great stand kept the crushing weight of those two forces from exploiting the early gains made during the first shock of the break-through, slowing at great costs to the Nazis in time, men, and resources the first great rush of their Ardennes campaign, thus helping immeasurably to make that campaign a failure. It cost the 7th A.D. several thousand casualties and hundreds of vehicles of all types to accomplish that task, but it won the immediate recognition of General Eisenhower. He sent this message to Gen. Hasbrouck, the commander of all forces in the St. Vith "Horseshoe": "The magnificent job you are doing is having a great beneficial effect on our whole situation. I am personally grateful to you, and wish you would let all of your people know that if they continue to carry out their mission with the splendid spirit they have shown so far, they will have deserved well of their country." Incidentally, it was several weeks before we in the ranks heard

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of "Ike's" message, - when we were resting temporarily in Hamoir.

Perhaps this is an appropriate point to add that, while those men fighting in the area near St. Vith during the early days of the "Bulge" may have "deserved well of their country", their efforts were almost completely ignored by the Press, and hence, the people at home. Only recently has that great defensive stand begun to share a small portion of the applause and unbalanced credit given to those men who fought at Bastogne. (R.S. Merriam's Dark December succeeds in giving each struggle its proper due in relation to the whole campaign.)

From prisoners it was learned that many of the Panzer troops who faced us in that struggle had just ended a 15-day trip by train from the Eastern front. These reserves had been told that this was their last chance for victory, that Antwerp was to be retaken, that they would spend New Year's in Paris. At any rate, they were well equipped and attacked with a fanatical frenzy in this last great gamble. Many had white-camouflaged snow suits and white helmets to hide them in the snow flurries that came during the final hours of the break-through at St. Vith. Either that was luck, or the Nazis were good at calculating changes in the weather.

An accounting made later by Division Intelligence officers revealed an impressive list of the enemy units we had faced during the "1st Battle of St. Vith". Elements of the following divisions were identified in the struggle: 18th Volksgrenadier

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Division, 62nd Volksgrenadier Division, 1st SS Panzer Division, 2nd SS Panzer Division, 116th Panzer Division, 2nd Panzer Division, 560 Volksgrenadier Division, 9th SS Panzer Division, the Fuehrer Escort Brigade, and the 401st G.H.Q. Corps Artillery.

The next morning in Cronbach, the three of us left G.C.B.'s H.Q. and began to hunt again for the lost 23rd Battalion. Up the street we met Capt. "Shorty" Free, Battalion 3-3. As he said he was reforming the 23rd right there, we went over to help him.

He had requisitioned a house from which a scared Belgian farmer's family was hurriedly gathering its most cherished belongings, packing them in the family cart to which a lean, shabby old nag was harnessed. Those people had heard the sounds of the guns the past eight days, and fear of the Nazis urged them to abandon their home once again. The stoves were still burning, the potatoes and cabbage still warm on the table, but the old farmer grabbed the loaf of bread as he ran out of the door the last time to join his impatient wife and children. That same scene was repeated many times in Belgian villages those days, but not all were fortunate enough to have horses, carts, or bicycles. Many tossed blankets, and extra clothing over their shoulders, hugged a sack of bread under an arm, and started down the roads to the West, away from the advancing Nazis.

By that house in Cronbach on the morning of the 22nd, the

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Battalion radio half-track was set up to attempt to regain contact with the companies of the Battalion, in order to build up a new line of defense. While Captain Freed talked over the radio, we three, together with some other men who had straggled back by then, took the opportunity to pour the water from our shoes and goulashes and warmed ourselves by the stove.

All available men who hadn't originally gone up to the line at St. Vith, the cooks, motor-maintenance mechanics, the company supply personnel, were assembled and joined together with those who had escaped from the first ordeal and placed in a perimeter defensive line along the railroad tracks outside of Cronbach. Road blocks were established at selected points on the outskirts of the village, supported by any remaining tanks and T.O.'s which could still be mustered into service. Men in the division who had never fired a rifle before in combat were to get their first chance that day.

Lt. (later Captain) Whiteman, better known to his own men and the rest of the Division as "Navaho", had taken over A Co. at that time, revealing again his great capacity for leadership under fire by building up a conglomeration of men and machines called "Task Force Navaho", which was put in defensive positions outside Cronbach. The remnants of A Co. were supplemented by attached tanks, T.O.'s, engineers, and artillery, all under Navaho's control. His skill and good leadership did much in those days to help the 7th carry on

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and continue to do its job against overwhelming odds.

We waited there all morning and afternoon for the Tigers and SS troops to move up through the snowy fields. The radio waves were jammed with conversation between units preparing for the attack to begin again and with calls to the rear for assistance.

Capt. Freed had ordered me to go back to the C.C.B. H.Q. where Brig. Gen. Clark was holding forth. I was to be a messenger between our H.Q. and C.C. "B". That chance permitted me to miss returning to the line outside of Crowbach, (something I never regretted), while at the same time gave me a marvelous opportunity to watch and listen to what took place at H.Q. that day.

My impression was that Gen. Clark was exceptionally calm for a man in his position and that he did an excellent job, forging a chain of defense around Crowbach that was as strong as could be expected under the circumstances. With a large colored map spread out before him, and a radio-telephone by his side, he directed his unit commanders to assemble their men at strategic points to fill in our line. The Germans were not through with the 7th A.D. yet!

Perhaps the hardest task for the General was to collect the data from his commanders which gave him the true picture of the strength of the division. I remember Lt. Col. Rhea's reporting that his 23d's casualties were, "over 60%". The tank battalions had pitifully few Shermans to count. The artillery battalions' guns were hungry for shells. A young tank lieutenant was

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brought over in an hysterical state to tell the story of the destruction by three huge Tigers of his entire platoon of four light tanks. The 425th Regiment of the 106th Division could only send up one Battalion to supplement our defense. A mortar Sergeant reported all three of his mortar half-tracks lost as they bogged down trying to cross swampy ground to escape pursuing Tigers. Another Battalion had lost all its assault guns. And so went the tales of woe, the grand total forming a gloomy picture for the "Lucky Seventh". I remember at one point, Gen. Clark exclaimed in discouragement, "Why, this will set us back for months!"

The second assault came early in the evening of that day. I had just stretched out on a bench back at 23d Battalion H. Q. when the loud reports of tank fire pierced the quiet of that cold, foggy night. Then the rapid fire of "burp" guns was answered by our own machine guns. Our men fought as best they could a second time, but the crushing power of the Nazis overwhelmed them in short order, forcing those who had been spared again to escape by any means possible. An even less orderly withdrawal than before! Some rode on the backs of those tanks that still had gasoline enough to turn over their engines, others piled into the few jeeps and half-tracks still in Crobach, but most started out again on foot cross-country and along back roads which the Nazis seemed unlikely to use, all heading back to the fields where the majority of our half-tracks and remaining vehicles had been

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assembled and kept ready.

"Yonnie", Gerry, and I were lucky enough to be able to ride those few miles while lying sprawled over equipment that was loaded on several of our H. Q. Co.'s reconnaissance jeeps. Lt. Col. Rhea, Capt. Freed and the others rode in the Battalion H. Q.'s half track.

It seemed as though the world was coming to an end that night, as the full shock of defeat hit us. What a terrible cost; what a crushing blow the Nazis had given us, and there was no end in sight to our retreating, nor any relief from the awful tension of being constantly pursued. We knew then how the Nazis had felt in their frenzied retreat across France. We only wanted to keep on going that night to try to escape from it all, somehow!

It was a bitter cold night, and the clothes we wore, still wet from the stream-crossings 24 hours before, froze stiff against our bodies, chilling us that much more. It was snowing hard and drifting along the roads, making the withdrawal even more difficult. The only consolation was that those damnable Nazis were bucking the elements, too.

After going a few miles, Lt. Col. Rhea ordered the vehicles to halt again and back off the road by some farm houses to wait for any more men from the 23d that might have been able to escape from the area around Grewbach to join us. He next decided to send the H. Q. Co.'s reconnaissance jeeps further to the rear to the area where our remaining vehicles were parked

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to warn the drivers to be ready to move when he gave the word. "Yonnie" and I went back with those jeeps, but Gerry Coyne became separated from us there in the confusion.

When reaching the field in which A Co.'s vehicles were bivouaced in the snow, the two of us trugged up to a nearby house where Chuck Norville was standing guard. Inside, we found the Co. H. Q. squad and most of the drivers resting in warm comfort, taking turns listening to the radio for the latest word from Bn. H. Q. We roused them, and told them that the remainder of the Battalion and the vehicles would be ordered to move any moment.

It wasn't long before word came over the radio, and we piled into the half-tracks and the convoy started off down the highway to the west. "Yonnie" and I were so tired that we didn't even have energy enough to go around to all the half-tracks to see who else had made the getaway from Crombach. It wasn't until the next morning, December 23rd, that any semblance of a company roll-call could be taken in order to find out.

Back through the cold, snow-blanketed Ardennes we rolled until a bright, beautiful December morning found us across the Salm River and free from the encirclement of the Panzer divisions. We passed through the lines of the 82d Airborne division that sunny morning. What a relief! With those fresh paratroopers and their dug-in artillery between us and the advancing Germans, it looked as though the luckiest of the "Lucky Seventh" were to get a few days rest, at last.

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December 23rd became the first good day since the Nazis launched their Ardennes counter-offensive. Hence, on that day our air forces appeared in great strength for the first time. And how we cheered those waves upon waves of bombers and fighters that filled the skies with thunder overhead, all roaring past in the direction from which we had come. As we looked back to the east a short distance away, it was possible to see the planes moving through a sky pock-marked by the black bursts of Jerry ack-ack fire and streaked by great interweaving fans of brilliant tracers. Of course, it was inevitable that some of our airmen and their planes would fall when passing through such a concentration of defensive fire as the Germans threw up to meet them. We saw more than one great bomber burst into flames and glide crazily earthward, followed by the white fluffs of the parachutes of those fellows lucky enough to leave their stricken ships. The airmen were giving and taking a share of the fighting from then on, too; all rushing up together to help contain and finally "write-off", as Monty said, that last great threat to victory.

All the way back to our destination on the Ourthe River, we ran into preparations for building a line that would hold, and from which we would eventually throw back the Germans. The further to the rear we went, the greater the preparations. Instead of passing wrecked vehicles, intentionally destroyed supplies and equipment, abandoned artillery guns and positions by contrast we began to meet convoys of troops headed towards

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the front, saw crews digging-in quantities of ack-ack guns to hold off the first real German air attacks that had come for a long time, saw artillerymen cleaning and oiling their guns, eager to fire at the approaching Nazi columns. These were sights we had wanted to see. They gave us new encouragement; morale recovered some from the depths of St. Vith, and we lost most of the real doubts of eventual victory that the first shock of retreat had given us. While first stumbling back from St. Vith, we would have bargained for only a rest, for only a safe escape, victory or no victory, -- but by then, two days before Christmas, it seemed again that we had a good chance to have both.

It must have been about noon on the twenty-third that the column reached the small town of Hamoir which is divided in half by the Ourthe River. The half-tracks were scattered through the streets and parked close to houses where the squads were to billet for the night. The arrival of a Co.'s mess truck seemed to confirm the rumor that a rest was scheduled, and the men fumbled with mussette bags tied to the "tracks" to dig out their utensils in anticipation of the coming hot meal.

But, two announcements killed that rumor! (1) The Battalion, -- the division in fact, -- was alerted to return to the front at any moment, as soon as replacements were received and reorganization completed. (2) Gas masks were to be carried at all times from then on, for Wey Intelligence

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thought the Nazis' resort to gas warfare was not at all unlikely in this last desperate effort to ward off defeat. The hoped-for hot meal, having lost then much of its flavor, went on as scheduled.

When the final roll call was recorded that morning after returning from Grombach, the high percentage of casualties (less than 50 remaining out of roughly 265 in the company) had seemed to guarantee a rest of several days until sufficient replacements were brought up from the rear areas, but such was not the case. The replacements we were told, were to be tankers from our own tank battalions. A surplus of drivers, gunners, and tank commanders, no longer having enough remaining tanks in which to fight, became a pool from which the Division's infantry battalions drew new recruits.

I will never forget the sight of those tankers; they were an unhappy-looking crowd of men, for fighting in the infantry was to be a new experience for them, one which they didn't care for at all. For a tanker, to dismount from his Sherman and fight on foot was as undesirable and unprecedented as would have been a knight's shedding his armor, casting away his long lance, and climbing down from his charger to fight on foot with only a sword. Each would have felt equally naked, unprotected, and unarmed.

When the truck-loads of tank-less tankers pulled up, some without weapons, others without steel helmets, almost all without ammunition belts, canteens, and first-aid packs, we

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did our best to re-equip and arm them in the short time left before the scheduled departure for the front. The most important task, of course, was to learn their names and assign them to squads which were led by old men from A Co., even though they were only privates at the time. In our platoon, Menendez built up his new organization around squad leaders chosen from the mortar squad largely, as it had suffered fewest casualties at St. Vith. York, McDermott, Coyazo from the machine gun squad, and I were chosen. Jim didn't even bother with a H. Q. squad, as there weren't enough men, using only Ostarder, "Slim" Smart, and Messersmith as his messengers and radio men. Jim Potter was still along, waiting for trouble with his morphine, sulfa powder, and bandages. It was a hastily assembled unit, but that was an emergency, and there was no time for formal interviews to find out who belonged where according to his interests or experience.

Just as we were preparing to leave for the front that same evening, word was received that we would spend the night in Hamoir, after all. Nobody was sorry to hear that. However, few slept peacefully that night; - (between even more frequent tours of guard duty because of the scarcity of guards available), - there were too many thoughts of what another day might bring. The law of averages was bearing down hard on those still ready for duty.

Many of us spent most of the night watching the efforts of a company of Engineers, which was assigned the task of

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constructing a Bailey Bridge over the rapid Curthe River to connect one side of Hamoir with the other. More important was the urgent need for a fast route of supply to the fighting units which were a few short miles to the east still.

After further hasty preparations, we pulled out of Hamoir up the steep hill towards our next mission early in the evening of the next day, the 24th. When the convoy had actually left Hamoir, it was revealed that our objective was to take up defensive positions on the hills around the three small Belgian farming villages of Grandcaenil, Manhay, and Vaux Chavines (or Vaux Chayanne) which were located on or close-by the main Bastogne-Liège highway. The Nazis wanted to be able to use that highway to extend the width of "the Bulge", while aiming for Liège, or so we feared! We were to stop them, together with a regiment from the 82d Airborne Division, which Monty had ordered to withdraw from its Salm River positions into the hills to the west. Units of the 9th Armored, 3rd Armored, and 106th Infantry divisions were in that area, also, on our flanks.

There had been no more snow that day, so it was a clear, cold starlit evening as we wound through the hills towards the east. After leaving the main highway not far from Hamoir, the vehicles inched along the most sheltered and unlikely routes of approach that could be found on the map, so as to keep our destination secret from the enemy. However, it wasn't long before a Jerry fighter plane buzzed in low over the trees to observe the convoy. Determined machine gun fire kept him out

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of close range, but could not keep him from circling slowly over us like a great black hawk toying with its prey. He kept that up for the next ten minutes or so, -- never firing at us, only waiting and watching where we went, -- until the fast-approaching roar of some of our F-47's and F-38's sent him scurrying away in frightened haste, only to be pursued eagerly by our returning fighters until out of sight. Next came the snubling, deep-throated roar of the Flying Fortresses and Liberators passing overhead in waves of 25 and 50, all heading west after the busy day's exploits. A few stragglers brought up the rear, and the skies were quiet again.

We stopped en route, pulling off the road onto a hillside, while the plans for taking up defensive positions were completed. Taking the opportunity, we instructed the tankers in some of the do's and don't's of infantry work to give them at least a vague notion of what to expect. They were game enough to try to cooperate, but we knew they were not looking forward to the experience.

Back to the vehicles and on again. A few miles north of Vaux Chavines, we ran into some of our self-propelled Division artillery, which was beginning to make itself at home in new positions in order to cover our defense. That made us feel more reassured about the whole undertaking. After continuing a short distance, we turned off the paved highway and passed down a winding woods road to Vaux Chavines as noiselessly as was possible with half-tracks and jeeps. Just beyond the village and out in

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the middle of a good-sized valley between two ridges of fair-sized foot-hills, the vehicles were halted long enough to unload their men and then returned back along the paved highway to park a few miles north of Vaux Chavines. Across the valley ran a slight ridge of freshly ploughed fields, and along the top of this A Co. began to dig-in, while B Co. deployed to our front, stretched out near the dirt road leading to Manhay. C Co. was on our right.

The best way to keep warm on such a night was to dig until completely exhausted, rest while one's hole-mate did his best with the shovel, and then start all over again before one cooled off and lost his exercise-gained warmth. The ground was frozen solid to a depth of about two feet, so digging one fairly respectable slit-trench for two men lasted several hours. And when those "several hours" ended, the platoon would probably change positions anyway, to provide a fresh patch of earth in which to dig and keep warm for the remainder of the night. And, of course, during the day there was bound to be enough activity required to provide "plenty of exercise".

Our mission here was to hold a very narrow front between a regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division and the 3rd Armored Division, just east of us near Grandmenil. These units, together with CC "B" of the 9th Armored Division, had been rushed into this area to meet the dangerously vigorous thrust of the Panzers north along the Bastogne-Liège road. "Farker's Crossroads" south of Manhay had been overwhelmed by the 2nd SS Panzer and 560 Volksgrenadier Divisions that same afternoon. Unfortunately,

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the first Nazi tanks struck our 7th Armored just as it was withdrawing some of its units from south to north through Manhay in order to straighten our lines. And, we add to the confusion, 3rd and 9th Armored units were also pulling back to better positions.

We had been digging away peacefully for several hours that night, when suddenly the distant sounds of tank motors could be heard to the south. This was soon followed by the brilliant flashes of artillery bursts that hit first up along the top of the hills south of our positions. The range was increased, and the next shells whistled over the dark ridge and crashed into houses in the village of Manhay, which was perhaps a mile southwest of us in the middle of the valley. These shells were the beginning of a night battle for Manhay, one of the most destructively-beautiful sights I have ever seen. It was as though we had been sitting in balcony seats for the evening performance on that strange Christmas Eve.

Soon, right in front of our positions, a ghostly column of twenty or more tanks crept slowly across the dark valley towards Manhay, where several houses were already burning furiously. We could just make out their shapes well enough to count them as they passed, not being able to tell at what distance whether they were friend or foe. (We learned later that it was a column from the 9th A.D. which was passing through our line to new positions.) Just as this mysterious

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9th Armored column was making its way up the valley, our 48th Battalion, in the act of withdrawing from the high ground just south of Manhay, was hit hard by a strong Jerry force led by captured Sherman tanks---, an attempt to deceive the 48th's road block guarding the highway running through the village. The trick proved unnecessary, for the power behind the German thrust was sufficient in itself to break our weakened, over-extended line. The squeaking and clanking column of tanks in front of us paused to survey the situation, and then the fun began!

Violent explosions shook the valley, each one reverberating back and forth from hill to hill. Brilliant flashes lit up the countryside, silhouetting the tanks and the infantry moving up cautiously alongside them. White streaks zipped in all directions with each explosion as our tanks hiding in Manhay exchanged fire with those assaulting across the valley. Ricochets shot up crazily into the air, as white-hot A.F. shells bounded off tank armor or rocks along the hillsides. Streams of red and white machine gun tracers poured into dark houses, setting them on fire, or glanced off the tough sides of the approaching tanks.

Some of the column of tanks in front of us got as far as the village itself, but once there, they never returned, caught in the cross-fire of Jerry's Tiger tanks, which had already entered Manhay. The column of advancing tanks, straight and orderly before the excitement, was then broken and scattered,

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as those not already mortally hurt and burning sought to back off and escape to the north, firing all the way. Finding the opposition too tough, the supporting infantrymen also retreated from the glow of that bitterly-contested village.

The reports I received from some of the 40th Battalion tankers who had been supporting the 48th Infantry in front of us told of more than the usual quota of confusion, especially because Jerry had managed to sneak several captured Sherman tanks into our column and had begun to knock off our tanks before the ruse was discovered. Our infantrymen had fought in support of the Nazis' tanks at times, as had Nazi infantrymen with ours, shouting orders at each other in German or English until realizing their errors, -- often too late. The whole business had been a colorful, noisy, and active show.

When the other units in front of our positions pulled back that night, we did likewise, withdrawing to new positions astride the paved highway running north and south above Vaux Chavines. Ours was hardly an orderly retreat, for we were more than weary and morale was low after the recent set-backs. One more retreat; would we ever be able to hold a defensive line again! That night, as he had at no other time, Lt. Col. Shea had to lead his Battalion personally, exerting his influence directly, to inspire the men to take courage and dig-in one more time. "There will be no chance for relief", he said, "until we hold a defensive line long enough to be relieved." With the help of "Navaho", Major Sid Frasier, some of the other

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officers, and the Platoon Sergeants, he finally managed to get the companies organized to hold fast until morning.

It was extremely cold that night as we stood guard in those fields overlooking the pine woods that surrounded Vaux Chavines on three sides in the valley below. Many of the men were too exhausted to break the frozen ground that defied a standard G.I. shovel. Only by borrowing picks and heavy shovels from the few tanks and T.D.'s scattered around the buildings near our field could we gouge out shallow holes from which to watch for Jerry's next advances.

There was a fire in one of the farmhouses near the road-block formed by our tanks and men, and in that house we found a degree of warmth when not on duty standing guard out on the hillside in our holes. In the house, men stood silently around the wood stove in the kitchen, too tired to talk, except to growl at the fellow who attempted to shove closer to the source of that longed-for warmth. Others sprawled out on the floor to rest for a brief spell, ignoring those who tripped over them in the dark room which was lit only by a small oil lamp by the stove. If Jerry had only known where to aim his artillery fire that night, a few well-directed shells could have wiped out a good share of the remaining men in A Co. It was foolish to invite disaster by crowding into a house on that Christmas Eve near Vaux Chavines, but nobody seemed to care, and even the officers abandoned their efforts to keep everyone outside. They were too tired to worry about it, too! And luckily, for some strange reason, that was one night Jerry

did not seem to know where we were, for no shells came in close enough to cause us any great amount of anxiety.

Now that the reports are in from both sides, we know how close the Nazis came that night to another successful break-through, which would have disrupted 1st Army's struggling efforts to form a solid defense before the Panzers reached the Meuse. It was a case of inadequate information as to our exact strength at that critical moment which probably prevented Jerry from exploiting to the fullest extent the great shock he had given us. By the evening of the 26th, 48 hours later, the crisis was over. Enough men and equipment had been rushed up to plug the gap, and finally, to prepare for the attack which would send Jerry back to the Siegfried line. But, on that Christmas Eve, there was very little to stop an SS Panzer Division or two between us and the British units assembled along the Meuse itself.

The next day our Co. stayed put, but some of the Division's other units moved up to help the men from the 82d Airborne Division retake Manhay, and clear the area around Vaux Chavines. It was a real relief to let someone else "carry the ball" for a change; we came to appreciate the presence of the 82d paratroopers on our flank. They did a great job during those "Bulge" days!

After hearing the attack progress all day, it was learned that the 23d was to advance that same night and take up positions in and around Vaux Chavines again. We were ordered to

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hold a line between the 48th Battalion and a battalion from the 82d Airborne. We started off down the winding trail through the woods towards Vaux Chavines. Just to make us feel that everything was normal, we arrived at the edge of town right in the middle of Jerry's usual pre-dawn counter-attack. Mortar shells were crashing down among the village houses and barns, machine gun tracers lit up the sky just above our heads, and occasional snipers' bullets whistled close-by in the dark, as a large moon sank low in the west, ready to yield to the dawn. We didn't need to be told by one of the 48th's bazooka teams to keep down low to avoid being silhouetted above the small ridges on either side of the street entering the village. Such conduct was S.O.P. (standing operating procedure) in a situation like that.

"Navaho" was up front with the 1st Platoon, making contact with the 82d's unit on our left flank, but word soon came back from him to Jim Hernandez, telling him to move the 2d Platoon over to some houses on the other side of the village. We moved forward quickly taking advantage of any protecting walls, and keeping our eyes cocked for any doorways in which we could rush at the crash of the first shell of an incoming barrage.

All made it safely to the small row of houses in and around which the 2d Platoon was to be deployed. Beyond those houses on the edge of town was a large draw bordered by two, low, wooded hills which opened out into a broad field for

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perhaps 800 yards only to end at the foot of another long wooded ridge of hills, just opposite our positions. On the other side of that ridge were the German artillery and heavy mortars, and along the top of that ridge, our own artillery bursts were then lighting up the last minutes of night before the fast-approaching dawn. This artillery fire, together with some of the 821's 81 mm. mortars soon turned Jerry's counter-attack into one more vain effort to enlarge "the Bulge".

Once that had been done, the Platoon prepared to defend its share of the town. 3 squads were assigned to houses so as to be able to cover each other and best protect the village street which was our "front line" that day. Those not on guard by windows or cracks in barn walls were rummaging through the area for food, (i.e. bread, preserves, chickens, smoked meat, potatoes, butter, and cows eager to be milked), stocking the wood stoves (one to every room), hunting for souvenirs, or lounging about in various positions and in various degrees of sleep, for even sleep was possible at that stage of extreme combat fatigue.

Soon after we had arrived, the F.O. for A Co. turned up at our particular house, as it had the best view of the wooded area to our front, from which Jerry was most likely to launch another counter-attack in that sector. Together with his radiomen, the F.O. lieutenant took up quarters in our parlor, and we spent the rest of the afternoon helping him pick out good target areas for the night's defensive

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firing which was always used to keep Jerry from coming in close in safety, helping also to keep him and ourselves awake. Even with his powerful binoculars the only thing interesting that we saw that day in the woods opposite us was a parachute caught in some branches. It was probably the parachute from a Jerry aircraft flare, used so often in those days to spot movements and positions at night. Lt. Porges dropped in during the day to see T/Sgt. Menendez and the F.O.. He happened to arrive, quite by accident at a very appropriate time, for some Belgian fried chickens were ready to be served. His arrival was accidental, I say, because I am sure that aroma of frying chickens could not have reached his 1st Platoon on our left flank, though the smoke of our fires was certainly visible there as well as to the Germans across the valley. At any rate, let it be said that our hospitality compelled Porges to remain for most of the afternoon. There was really not much else to do, but sit and wait for Jerry's next move, or next shell, anyway, so we made the most of a good situation.

The sun was beginning to disappear in the trees to the west, when word came along that the 2nd Platoon was to move to a new location where it could cover the approaches to the town better. Just why we couldn't have moved during the day when there were few incoming shells, we didn't know. At dusk the Nazis began to dimiss the day with another unnecessarily noisy barrage. We had to get into position before dark, so there was no time to make further comments on Army life, but only

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to gather up equipment and prepare to dash down our street and up the hill to the new positions across the street from the village church. Away we went, two or three at a time, with Jim Menendez in the lead. There were a few close ones, but nobody in our platoon was hurt. However, we learned upon arriving that the house we had just left had received several direct hits, wounding some men in another platoon.

Behind the house then occupied by the 21 platoon were some holes left by some of the paratroopers we had relieved. Our platoon was broken up into three six-man shifts to stand guard in holes dug on that bare hillside back of the houses facing the Jerries. Excluding Menendez and a runner at Co. C.P., who didn't share in the turns at standing guard, but including several recruited tankers, the platoon numbered just eighteen, instead of its normal strength of roughly sixty men. Two of the tankers were Whaddams and Bewalker.

To supplement our rifles, carbines, and grenades, each platoon received at that time two B.A.R.'s (Browning Automatic Rifles) which would have presented the Germans with plenty of trouble if they had chosen to press in close enough to Vaux Chavines. With these new B.A.R.'s in our hands for the first time since coming overseas, it would have been suicide for the Nazis to cross the open stretch in front of our holes. Several farmers' barbed wire fences and an uphill charge in the face of automatic fire would have greeted them. Even at night, if

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it were clear, we would have been able to see them approaching across the snow, from a distance of 200 yards or more. And, it was clear, every night except the last one spent in that Belgian village.

There were more chickens, bread, potatoes, and cogs in that house and barn, too, so we began all over again. There were no oil lamps or candles anywhere the first night, however, so something had to be done in order not to spoil what had been the most luxurious and comfortable two days we had ever spent at the front. I solved that problem the next morning by invading the sanctum of the village church long enough to snatch the largest and most decorative candles from its altar. It seemed queer to enter that beautiful little church, unused by its people in the most sacred season of the year, for there had certainly been no Christmas mass there three days before.

Only a few of the villagers remained when we first arrived in Vaux Chavines three nights before, and those still lingering left as soon as the artillery fire quieted down enough to grant them fairly respectable chances for a safe exit. Once again, we saw old men and women start off with all their belongings strapped on their backs or pulled behind them incarts by manpower alone. It was a pathetic sight, for these people were all old, the young men and girls having been taken away by the Nazis as prizes of war. One poor old woman left the house we were occupying once, and then returned later in the day, weeping because she had lost her citizenship papers in her haste to

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depart. We helped her hunt for them, but in vain, and she left her house still crying, to join her husband, a feeble old farmer, who looked helplessly at us, and then started out again with his wife. Just where those people went how they survived out in that freezing, snow-bound countryside, I don't know, for the next peaceful village was no short hike away. However, miracles of physical and mental endurance seemed commonplace in war.

The second morning in our new position, the Jerries began shelling the village more persistently than usual, and we began to prepare for another assault. In the excitement, one shell whistled right in the front door of Forges' 1st Platoon C.P., injuring Forges, himself, and several of his men in the explosion, which interrupted another chicken dinner, we heard. It was all Jim Potter could do to make Forges' leave the platoon and go back to the Aid Station, but he consented finally, and was lost to the company for a few weeks. The counter-attack failed to materialize, but the 23d's ranks had been thinned again, as every house in town had received one or more direct hits by that time.

Each night, the holes out on the bare hillside back of our houses on the eastern edge of town became listening posts where we waited patiently to either hear or see any patrols which might attempt to penetrate our lines and cause us trouble. From those holes we also waited to be ready to warn the remainder of the men if a night attack was launched, holding off the Nazis until the rest of our men could get to firing positions

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outside their houses or in supplementary holes dug for just such an emergency. The third purpose of these holes, -- of one particular hole occupied by our 21 Platoon men, -- was to be ready to observe and adjust our own artillery fire in case of enemy patrol action or a night attack, or in case we felt the regular defensive artillery fire sent out automatically at irregular intervals should be altered.

There were never enough F.O.'s to go around, so we often had to observe and adjust our own artillery fire. For that purpose, the hole having the best view of the company front contained a radio with which we could relay messages through the Co. C.F. radio to the artillery battery assigned to deliver fire for our Co. If the radio in the C.F. hole was strong enough, of course, messages could be sent directly to the artillery. It gave us great satisfaction to be able to call for an artillery concentration at the slightest provocation, but, of course, it was necessary to avoid wasting ammunition, which was often rationed by the day with quotas for each unit.

When going into any defensive position, the artillery always began at once to fire over us while scattering their concentrations or single shells over a large area to our front and flanks. Each spot hit which was easily recognized was numbered so that all we had to do after the guns were "registered" was to judge how far the particular target we wanted to hit was from one of those numbered points, and then call for fire, waiting to adjust

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any errors after the shells were "on the way". There were many other ways for an untrained infantryman to call for fire on a target, but that was one of the easiest and best.

Those extra duties and the presence of a radio for immediate contact with Co. C.F., or with Jim Menendez in our platoon C.F., gave us more assurance on those cold nights, and helped to relieve the monotony of just listening and watching, when not digging our holes deeper to keep warm, or digging new holes to prevent Jerry's knowing where to find us.

It was high time that a relief was granted to what remained of the fighting elements of the 7th A.D. We were told that help was on the way, but not to expect to be relieved for a few more days. Rumor was spread that the 75th Infantry Division was heading up to the front to take over the defensive line of our Division.

For this reason, we were not surprised, but only pleased, when an officer from the 75th was reported in Vaux Chavines that third evening. Then, the following morning, more officers appeared. It turned out that they were the platoon leaders and company commanders of the units that were to relieve us that night. That Division was coming into combat for the first time, and to see the expressions on the faces of those green officers when they saw what "the front line" in Vaux Chavines really looked like was amusing to us. The young, uninitiated, platoon leader who interviewed Jim Menendez was startled to see the luxurious manner in which we were living. He had expected

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to see us as dirty, haggard-looking, and unkempt as we were, but surely the picture of dwelling in a house and eating fried chicken by a warm stove was something unbelievable to that Lieutenant. I am sure he had been planning to crawl hundreds of yards through the snow on his stomach to find a platoon of men half-frozen in foxholes that were constantly subjected to all kinds of enemy fire. What he found instead was quite a contrast to the grim situation he had foreseen. We explained that "front line life" was not always as comfortable as we had managed to have made it that time, and offered him a piece of chicken as one way for showing our appreciation for the approaching relief. We learned that the new men would not arrive until late that night.

It was a dark, foggy night, perfect for a troop movement, -- by the enemy, or by us, so ^{we} were especially watchful out in the observation holes. There was more shelling than usual that evening, from both sides. I had called for artillery fire along the edge of the woods to our front on several occasions just to make sure that Jerry was not getting any ambitious ideas, and Mac Mc Dermott did the same when his shift relieved mine at nine o'clock.

We had just changed guard shifts and were getting ready to lie down by the stove for some sleep that would have been easy to attain with thoughts of almost certain relief in our minds, when three long-lasting low whistles from a Jerry howitzer battery ended in three loud explosions close to our house.

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That shook us out of any ideas of slumber for the moment, but before we could gather our wits enough to move down to the cellar, three more shells crashed through the corner of the house, one sailing through the roof to burst in the bedroom above our kitchen. In wild confusion we all began moving in every direction at once, getting really nowhere between the time we heard the fast-increasing crescendo of the whistle that a close shell always gave, and the crash of the shell-bursts themselves.

No one was hit, but it had been a close call. The roof was caved-in; the bedroom upstairs was a shambles; and the twisted bed and burning mattress had to be extinguished with a bucket of water. Several hot chunks of metal had come through the two roofs above us to set on fire the blankets Jim Menendez had been lying on by the stove, and another piece at least eight inches long had been stopped by the huge twelve-inch beam that supported the kitchen roof. Mac reported over the radio outside in the O.P. that the first shells had showered bits of shrapnel all around and even into some of their holes.

Soon after that episode, the men from the 75th marched up the street, and we had a chance to meet the squad that was to relieve ours. Where we had held the line with no more than a squad, a platoon of those new fellows was placed. Even then, they wished we would stay to help them, being eager to know all the don's and don't's of frontline existence. We did what we could to pass on any combat "know-how" that came to our

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minds at the time, but declined their invitation to stay longer in Vaux Chavines. We led some of their men out to relieve Mac's shift in the holes, and then returned to spend the remainder of the night reclining in the somewhat uncomfortable safety of the potato bin in the cellar.

It was shortly after daylight the next morning that "Navaho" sent over the order to prepare to move out. That was worth celebrating, for it seemed certain that at least a short rest was in store for us. Quite fittingly, Jerry did not bid us farewell as noisily as we had been greeted upon first entering Vaux Chavines. It was a quiet, peaceful, and, thankful exit that the 7th A.D. made that morning. We had cursed the T.D.'s placed near our house for starting their engines to warn Jerry that something was up before we were able to march out of town safely, but no harm was done. The vehicles left after the last doughfoot had plodded out of town, as they would have been far less vulnerable to the expected artillery and mortar fire which strangely did not come that morning.

With tall, lanky, unmilitary-looking "Navaho" in the lead, we must have made a poor impression on the neat, snappy, little Major that passed us in his new, clean jeep on the way out, for we were a sloppy-looking bunch of men, -- but visibly happy for the first time in quite a while. "Navaho" paused when the jeep stopped, saluted, and made the meaningful and humorous comment, "Sir, the situation is strictly 'non-tactical' today."

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Those of us who had heard chuckled, and then followed "Navaho" wearily up the same wooded hill down which we had descended into Vaux Chavines six days before.

We climbed into the half-tracks which were waiting at the top of the hill, looked back over that snowy Ardennes landscape towards Vaux Chavines and Manhay for the last time, and then turned to see the new sights that would be waiting for us on the road to the rear. Past one artillery battery after another, we rolled along good paved roads through the Ardennes hills and occasional small villages, until we descended once again into the Ourthe River Valley and arrived back at Hamoir.

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Chapter VI

Georges Jadot, St. Vith

Retaken !

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Chapter VI

This time the new U. S. engineers' bridge had been completed, so it was possible to cross the fast river and move into the more populated section of town.

As soon as the vehicles stopped, Jim Menendez and I began to look around for some houses in which to billet the 2nd Platoon. We didn't have far to go, -- just across the street, in fact, from the yard of the large mansion around which our half-tracks were parked. Standing there before us was a short, stocky white-haired Belgian and his smiling wife. He hardly waited for the few fumbling words of French to leave my mouth before nodding and uttering frequent "oui's", to let us know that he did have "des chambres pour des soldats Americains". The old fellow darted inside, urging us to follow, and rushed upstairs to show us four small empty rooms which were to be our bedrooms for the next few days. We explained as best we could that we would sleep on the floors rolled up in G.I. blankets, that it didn't matter that there were "pas de lits". He nodded understandingly, and invited us to warm up in his kitchen downstairs, where his wife was heating some coffee for us.

That was quite a New Year's Eve, that night with Georges Jadot and his wife in Hamoir! We could laugh and relax for the first time since December 15th when we left Germany for the

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dash south into Belgium and "the Bulge".

And Georges gave us many excuses to laugh, for he had been formerly a comedian on the stage. I was the only one in the room who had any knowledge of French, but everyone there understood all that Georges said. It was not so much what he said, but rather how he said it that made his words both humorous and understandable to us all. By gestures, a great variety of facial expressions, and by the tone of his voice he always made us understand the point he meant to make. He was also quick in picking up English expressions from us, and inserted those into his flowing dialogue at appropriate times.

When it was learned that I knew "un peu de français", both Georges and his wife constantly hurled "compris's" at me during the course of our conversation, expecting me to interpret for the whole group, though that was usually unnecessary. When Georges got particularly wound up in his conversation, his wife would watch my face to see whether I understood, quickly questioning me with more "compris's" when I gave the slightest sign of doubt. In such company it was much easier to try to forget "the Bulge". The other squads had equally warm receptions in other homes along that street, but I doubt if they had as much fun as we with Georges and his wife. They were quite a couple!

When we were not enjoying the excellent food served up by Karl Leutner and his cooks, writing and reading the first letters sent and received for over two weeks, or just resting in peace,

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we were sure to be found in the Jadot's kitchen being entertained by our host and hostess. Georges talked often of coming to America "après la guerre", where he wanted to buy a Ford to take the place of the motorcycle which his wife would no longer permit him to ride. He had been quite a sportsman in his youth, we gathered, and had travelled over Europe on his motorcycle on which there was an extra seat for his wife. Other times he talked of his former stage life, and of his courtship. He was a regular fellow!

But George's chief pride, even more so than his then gasolineless motorcycle, was the fact that he was a member of the Belgian Underground, the Belgian maquis. His round, pink face was wreathed in smiles, and his twinkling eyes glistened when he told of the number of SS Nazis he had personally disposed of by various methods.

His closest escape, he said, came when the Gestapo surprised him by breaking into his house in the midst of a dinner with some of his underground friends. Georges showed us the small .25 caliber automatic with which he had been armed at the time. Knowing that he would be shot immediately if a weapon were found on his person, Georges looked about quickly for a likely spot where he could hide his trusty automatic. His eye fell upon the soup bowl in the center of the table. Just before the Nazis entered the room, he plunked his weapon into the steaming pot. His quick thinking saved the day, for Georges had lived to act out the scene for us just as

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it had happened, performing ably all of the parts in ^{the} short melodrama under the prompting and direction of his wife!

It was fun to be able to hear the late news reports over a radio for a change. Georges and his wife never missed one detail of the reports of the fighting at the front. All we could say was that we had been at St. Vith recently, but I am sure their imaginations filled in the rest, especially when the quantities of replacements, "nouveaux soldats", arrived in Hamoir for the 7th A.D. soon after our return there.

It was discouraging for the veterans in the Co. to see all those new fellows arrive. We were glad to have more help for the fighting ahead, of course, but the slim chances of our surviving much longer under the law of averages were accentuated by the coming of those new recruits. We began to wonder whether it was thought that we could go on forever, continually setting the pace and showing the way for those who were always brought up quickly to replace veterans. We wondered whether we were being forgotten in the gris progress of that colossal machine of war, the U.S. Army. And it wasn't easy to try to forget the good men and friends that fell along the route, only to be replaced by those new fellows.

Shortly after the new men arrived, we left the part of town where Georges lived, taking up new billets in another section of Hamoir. The real reason was never explained, but I wondered if it might not have been because some of the people where we had lived at first had been found to have had collaborationist leanings.

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Georges and his wife had told us that there were many people in Hamoir who favored the Germans, some even freely admitting it in public, -- before we had arrived. Georges said that his own life had been threatened before the Allies entered that part of Belgium. One person whom he suspected was the owner of the large estate across the street from his small house, and that estate had first been our A Co.'s C.P. and mess area. That seemed to explain the move, though we never knew for sure.

We didn't care for the new family where the mortar squad was billeted. They were not overly enthusiastic about having us around, and were dull, simple-minded people as well, company that could hardly compete with the warm, friendly, and amusing personalities of the two Jadots. So we often wandered over to see Georges and his wife after dark, when not clinaxing a day of training with a trip to the local theater where G.I. movies were shown almost every night.

A trip to see the Jadots was better than any entertainment a movie could provide. Each night Mme. Jadot had a heaping bowl of fried potatoes and a pot of hot coffee for us, as added temptations. In turn, we brought them extra rations and coffee from the mess truck. Little Mike Sarno even gave Georges an extra pair of his G.I. shoes.

Each night, among other things, Georges would tell us of his great pleasure at seeing the Nazi P.W.'s packed behind barbed-wire fences in Hamoir's P.W. clearing station. He would watch

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them all morning, making faces at the shivering, miserable, but mostly still arrogant, Nazis crowded together in the snowy field by the river. I am sure he counted every prisoner brought in, gloating at the swelling numbers, for "the Bulge" was beginning to recede.

It was in Hamoir that John Barnes left the 2nd Platoon to go back to the rear for a long-overdue rest. John had given A Co. his best services ever since landing in Normandy on August 10th with the rest of the 7th A.D. For any man to do only what was necessary to do his duty in front line fighting with the infantry for six months without a break and without becoming a casualty of one kind or another was a rare exception. And John Barnes had done far more for his squad and the Company than duty required. So far as I know, he also passed unrecognized, without any official citation, just as was the case with so many other good fighting men. It is an understatement to say that John will never be forgotten by the friends who knew him in A Co.

In John's place I was put in charge of the mortar squad, but that squad needed no squad leader, as the training manual described that position. We had all lived and fought together enough by then to know how each would react to various situations under fire. Cooperation was instinctive, not enforced by authority. Mac and I shared the responsibility of the actual physical leadership from then on, until Mac took over the mortar squad himself, when I moved over to the H. Q. Squad in February.

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We were supposed to be resting during those days, but a training schedule was in order again, after new equipment had been issued, and more replacements had joined the ranks. The most valuable parts of that training schedule were the field problems which were planned to give both the new and old men an idea of the kind of fighting they could expect soon in the snow-camouflaged Ardennes forests.

To better adapt the men and vehicles forming the striking power of the Division to that type of terrain and the type of fighting anticipated, it was decided to operate in small, self-sufficient, "task-forces", which became a common word in our tactics from then on. The elements forming these "task forces" varied with the situation and terrain, but the usual set-up was a combination of two companies of infantry, two companies of tanks, one or more platoons of T.D.'s, two platoons of engineers, and one or more batteries of self-propelled artillery. For the field problems, only one company of infantry, one platoon of tanks, and one platoon of engineers were used, as we had to operate on a small-scale problem.

Each company in the Battalion took turns at spending a day out in the woods and snow drifts, hunting down imaginary Nazis. But, a realistic note was added, for the area selected for the problems was within sight and hearing of artillery "air-bursts" on the front line a few miles away. The problems were not time-wasted, for they did make us realize how lucky

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we were to be only imagining Germans hiding in the pine woods surrounding us most of the time. We all appreciated that respite from the Bulge fighting, and we resented the implications in Col. Rosebaum's words when he told us that all would be well in the "near future," if we used as much aggressiveness and initiative as was shown during the "fighting" of these problems.

We made the most of the last days spent in Hamoir, resting as much as possible for the return to the struggle. "Navaho" introduced himself to the new men of A Co. at a formal meeting, giving them an idea of what was expected of them, and also passing on to them the history of our Division in which we took so much pride. We came away from the meeting with the impression that A Co. was in good hands, even though "Navaho" was the only experienced officer in our company at that time, excepting his executive officer, Lt. Creswell. The new officers who had joined us at Hamoir were also introduced to the Company; Lts. Ford, Reed, Grundy and Refers. It was almost an entirely new Co. that would leave for the front a short time hence.

The day before we left, the supply highway passing through Hamoir was crowded with convoys of men and vehicles heading up the hill out of town towards the east. The pressure of Allied power was closing in on the Nazis, compelling them to fall back slowly towards their Siegfried Line. That retreat was too orderly to suit Allied H.Q., but it was costing the Nazis, -- and us, -- a large total in men and equipment. Our turn to move

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up, too, seemed near at hand.

It was, for the order came the next morning! Back on the half-tracks we strapped our blanket rolls and mussette bags, and after rushing through a last hot noon meal, the convoy of "Task Force Rhea" moved slowly, and regretfully out of Hamoir. Georges and his wife were there to wave goodbye to us, shouting "bonne chance" as we passed them standing along the road. Though they could not be told, of course, I am sure they knew which direction the Division was heading.

From Hamoir we followed the Ourthe River north through Esneux until within a short distance of Liège, then turned east towards Verviers. It was unusually cold that day, and it was necessary for Mac and me to take turns in the car commander's position to avoid ending up with frozen faces and hands. The tarpaulins were pulled back on all the half-tracks, so that the machine guns and men could be ready for action in case of air attack, for the Luftwaffe had been drawn out from its hiding places during the Bulge. So, all the men in the rear of each half-track were also exposed to the too-fresh air on that bitter January afternoon.

We passed some British tankers in a small village north of Esneux. They were standing alongside their Sherman tanks, jumping about and pounding one another in order to get warm before re-entering the refrigerated interiors of their tanks and continuing towards the front. We ran into the British frequently those days, for our Division was placed in action

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along the northern flank of the German Bulge which was under the command of Monty. It seemed like Holland days again to be under British over-all command, though we were still attached to the U.S. 1st Army.

In Verviers the convoy halted for about a half-hour, and we had a chance to feel again the gratitude of those Belgians for the work that the Allied armies were doing to hurl back "les Boches", as they still called the German invaders. Women ran out to offer us hot soup and coffee, or glasses of Cognac. Since food was always scarcer as towns grew larger, it was a real sacrifice for them to give up any of their precious rations. We thanked them as best we could, and then began to help a small Belgian boy shovel the snow and ice from his sidewalk, both as a further gesture of our appreciation, and also as an excellent way to warm up a bit before rolling on again. The youngster laughed and sputtered away in a stream of French, thoroughly amused at the vigorous manner in which our squad attacked the snow and ice. We finished the job in no time, and were applauded and cheered by a group of townspeople, - some on skis, - who had gathered to watch us.

That fun was interrupted by the order to "load 'em up", and once more the column of vehicles moved forward. This time the route was traced out of Verviers along almost impassable country roads south towards the village of Ster, our immediate objective. Daylight faded into early darkness, making it that much more difficult to find a safe way through the snow drifts that had buried the outlines of the roads.

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We inched forward slowly with only small "cat-eye" black-out lights to identify separate vehicles from the long shadowy column of our convoy. These lights failed to help at all in lighting up the road, so it was necessary to walk in front of the half-tracks, directing the driver by voice and hand signals to keep him from ending up in the ditches along the road. More than once the convoy halted, while another vehicle was called up to pull the victim back on the road.

After several hours of that sort of thing, we reached our destination. Menendez and I, plus Lt. Ford, our new Platoon Leader, began at once to search for houses or barns in which to billet the Platoon in 3ter. In spite of the usual conflicts and competition with other platoons to find space, we finally ran across a large barn that seemed sufficiently spacious to house the whole 2d Platoon. In the house alongside the barn, a section of AAA gunners had already taken up quarters with the permission of the Belgian family which had had a room to spare. We reached an agreement with the farmer to billet all 55 men of the Platoon in his hay loft, after being instructed not to smoke while inside the barn.

The vehicles were parked alongside the barn or under the trees that bordered the fields nearby. We were thankful to have been able to roll up in our blankets spread out on the hay that night, as the harsh winds had whipped up a regular blizzard outside. Those standing guard at night could even warm up in the kitchen after standing out in the cold for two

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hours at a time, so it was an ideal situation. Some men preferred to sleep in with the cows to share the heat of their fat bodies by curling up in the hay alongside of them.

Just how long we were to remain in 3ter before returning to the front line we didn't know from day to day. We could only live and enjoy our relative comforts while they lasted. We were perhaps five to eight miles behind our front line when first arriving in 3ter. That estimate could be made without looking at the map, for there were 105 mm. batteries located a short distance in front of us and 155 mm. self-propelled guns firing away a short hike behind 3ter. By knowing the ranges of those guns and the usual distance behind our lines from which they fired, it was possible to make a fair estimate.

Standing guard at night, we could see the brilliant flashes of artillery fire all over the countryside around 3ter. The pine-topped hills were silhouetted with each bright explosion, and the following thunder of each battery's fire rumbled back and forth from one hill to another to disturb the snow-muffled, peaceful, quiet of those hills and valleys. Often, when the artillery was silent, we could hear the eerie howling of Jerry's "screaming-meeemies" as they sailed through the night air to crash around the holes of our men in the front lines. So, the new men had a chance to learn some of the sounds of battle while attempting to enjoy life and relax in the comparatively peaceful atmosphere of our assembly area in 3ter.

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During the days, we test-fired our weapons, received more equipment and supplies to replace those lost at St. Vith, and attempted to prepare ourselves and the vehicles for winter warfare. The latter consisted of white-washing the tanks and half-tracks with melted snow and white-wash, and making snow suits for ourselves out of the mattress covers that had been rushed up to us for the emergency. (Someone along the supply line had apparently failed to anticipate the need of properly camouflaged clothing for winter fighting.)

The mattress covers were cut to make holes for head and arms, and then shortened to make a knee-length garment. The strips of white cloth left over from the arm slits were saved to be wrapped around the arms themselves. The material saved when the skirt was shortened was used to cover the steel helmet with hat-styles to suit individual tastes. Mine resembled that of the French Legionnaire, with enough hanging down behind to hide the neck and break up the outline of my head and helmet, and also to keep snow from getting down my neck. The snow-suit was loose and baggy enough to permit even a large man to wear his ammunition belt, canteen and shovel underneath the white covering, with only a single bandoleer of ammunition slung on the outside, ready for use.

Besides vehicles and ourselves, it was necessary to camouflage weapons as well. Some selected white-wash again, others used the left-over bits of mattress covers which were fastened on with strips of adhesive tape from Jill Potter's

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medical supplies. Jim, himself, had a large red cross painted on the front of his own mattress cover, and a flap of white cloth pinned on above it, so as to enable him to hide the tell-tale red cross until close enough to the Jerries to enable him to rely on the supposed immunity it gave him while performing first aid.

While we camouflaged ourselves and the half-tracks, the men from the platoon of light tanks, who also shared the barn with us, were busy white-washing their tanks or checking the actors to make sure that all would be ready to move out soon.

Each night, the squad leaders, Jim Menendez, Lt. Ford and Lt. Hammer of the light tanks, would gather around the maps to learn how the action was going at the front from reports given Lt. Hammer at Lt. Col. Rhea's task force unit commanders' meeting. Each night we waited grimly to know by the expression on Lt. Hammer's face as he entered the door whether or not the following day would find us on the way up to the fighting. When the word was good, we would settle back into a "bull session", talking of anything that came to our minds and rejoicing that the barn would shelter us one more night. It was particularly fitting that some Christmas packages arrived at that time, including the quantities of nuts sent to me. They helped us to celebrate the good news each night we stayed in 3ter.

One Sunday morning, a day or so before we left that Belgian village, church services were held in the attic of

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a general store. Men crowded together under the beams, eager to take part in the last service before returning to action. Our area was still within artillery range of the Nazis' guns, but only a few shells had burst near us recently, so it was felt that the risk of a gathering such as that was worth taking. I believe it was that same afternoon, just as we were finishing evening chow, that Lt. Col. Rhea, Capt. Freed, and Lt. Kew turned up to present some awards to members of A Co. who had been in action at St. Vith in December. "Navaho" (Capt. Whiteman), Jim Potter, T/3gt. Stout, and I were called out before Lt. Col. Rhea that afternoon. Jim and "Navaho" received long-over-due citations for their excellent work, which had gone unrecognized officially on so many different occasions until then, but the fact that I was selected to receive anything, when so many really good men who deserved recognition got nothing, will always make me feel guilty. Jesse Caldwell's and Lt. Justad's names were on the list, too, but the former was wounded and hospitalized, and the latter was missing in action. Later, Lt. Forges and "Yonnie" Wiatroski also received awards for their good services during the 1st Battle of St. Vith.

That good life couldn't last forever, so after four or five days there, we were told to prepare to move out late one afternoon. The route by which we were to reach the final assembly area before attacking had been covered the day before by Lt. Hammer in one of his light tanks. He

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warned us that it would be a risky trip, especially an attempt to creep forward on those hilly roads in the dark.

We headed north from Ster a short way, took some back roads east, and finally turned south in the general direction of St. Vith. Just before leaving, the secret of our final objective had been broken. We had felt for some time that that particular town had been reserved for the return trip of the 7th A.D.. Several other units, including the 1st and 30th Divisions were already fighting through the woods towards our objective. We were to pass through their lines and push through the last five or six miles into St. Vith itself.

We had progressed about half-way to the next objective before dark. Then the fun began, -- skidding and slithering up and down winding roads through the pine-covered Ardennes hills, often with steep precipices bordering the road! The Division engineers were out ahead of the convoy to guard bridges and help the half-tracks and tanks make the grade up the worst hills by scattering what gravel could be found in front of the advancing column. No lights could be used, of course, as our route could be observed from the air, if not from the enemy's ground positions as well. "Bull-dozer" tanks (medium tanks with a large blade suspended in front of them) were sent to the head of the convoy to help clear the deep snow drifts from the roads hidden beneath.

Slowly but surely, "Task Force Shea" reached the snow-blanketed fields not far from Walsers where we were to remain

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until morning. The orders were to sleep in the vehicles that night and be prepared to move up just before dawn, -- which was not more than a few short hours away by the time we had bulled our way through the last snow drift. Those that wished ate a K-ration and then attempted to rest a bit. (enough has been said already about the chances of resting in a half-track, but it was a better deal than standing watch in a hole in the snow that night. Tom Erickson, who had joined the mortar squad in Hamoir, chose to roll up in his sleeping bag out in the snow. I was afraid he would be frozen in a short time, but apparently enough snow fell on top of him to keep him warm, for though almost completely concealed by the time we left, he was still in good shape.

While much of our equipment was inadequate for one reason or another, the secret of keeping at least fairly warm those days was not so much the quality of the clothing worn, but the quantity of it. The list is a bit staggering for any-
^{not}one acquainted with that greatest of all outdoor sports, -- winter fighting in the infantry.

To begin with, the average man put on two 50% woolen underdrawers, two or three undershirts, and one or two pairs of woolen stockings (depending on how much extra room he had in his shoes). The next layer usually consisted of at least two O.D. woolen trousers and shirts, and a G.I. sweater. Then came one or two field jackets (two when no overcoat was worn) and either an overcoat (usually cut-off just above the knees

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to permit freer leg action) or a short length mackinaw. Some, including yours truly, also wore a pair of white-washed, cotton, "fatigue" trousers over the G.D.'s for the double purpose of hiding the legs and keeping snow from getting down inside overshoes which were worn over regulation G.I. shoes. (Should any snow get inside overshoes, body heat would melt it when exercising, and the resulting moisture, combined with perspiration, would be much more likely to cause feet to freeze at night while standing guard in a fox-hole.) On his head, the average man wore a G.I. wool knit cap under his helmet, and one or two pairs of gloves on his hands. Last but not least, came the white, home-made, snow-suit, and all of his fighting equipment. That sounds like an impressive quantity of clothing, but it still did not keep the wearer warm at night when not fighting or digging a fox-hole. The chief complaint was that our clothing was too bulky and heavy for the warmth that it gave, while being anything but water-repellent at the same time. Gloves were miserably inadequate at first, and only slightly improved later on. Foot-wear was too heavy and lacked sufficient water-proofing qualities. And so it went, for the list of complaints offered by foot soldiers was a long one.

Just before daylight the next morning, we guided the half-tracks back on the road and headed in the direction of Wailes. Entering the town we passed the usual sights seen in an area situated immediately behind the line. Artillery gun crews in

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the fields on either side of the road were fussing with their guns and ammunition, waiting to fire; jeeps carrying officers clutching maps passed back and forth along the road; medical jeeps or the newer "weasels" (full-tracked vehicles used for evacuating wounded and carrying supplies) whipped by us carrying casualties to the house in town marked by a red-cross flag, the Battalion Aid station, and jeeps drawing trailers for bringing water, rations, and ammo up to the men up at the front, were running busily back and forth in both directions. We saw occasional shoulder patches of the units operating in that area with us, the 1st and 30th Divisions.

A short pause by the road leading to the front, and then on again past the scenes of rugged fighting between Waiues and Ebertang, where the half-tracks were to leave us. We passed through pine woods that were badly ripped and torn by flying shrapnel, passed quantities of frozen dead barely visible in the drifts, passed occasional shattered farm houses, passed the blackened hulks of German and American tanks. One Sherman tank had sunk in a pool that must not have been seen by its driver. Only the gun and turret could be seen above the ice and snow; it looked like a great animal caught in a trap.

By the small villages of Ebertang and Evelang we unloaded from the vehicles and started out on foot towards the village of Deidenberg, perhaps two miles away. The snow was packed hard to a depth of nearly three feet on the level (when a level stretch was found) and up to six or seven feet in drifts.

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It is needless to say that progress on foot was slow, hard work. Men in the lead who broke the trails for others to follow had to be relieved every 50 yards or so, except when we were all able to walk in the ruts left by the tanks that sometimes went ahead of us to cross open stretches as quickly as possible, so as to avoid being spotted by Jerry's F.O. 's up ahead.

We arrived in Deidenberg a couple of hours after leaving Ebertang, only to find that a platoon of our light tanks had already captured the town and the twenty or thirty Germans that had been found there. It was necessary for us to clear the houses to make sure no stray snipers remained to annoy us after dark. The tanks in the task force moved in to take up defensive positions alongside houses on the outskirts of the village. Part of each of the two Companies of infantry had to move out of town to the open ridges on our exposed left flank and front, but our platoon remained as part of the reserves held in readiness in Deidenberg.

Our squad occupied an empty house on the eastern edge of town, across the street from one of the Sherman tanks. We had begun to select positions from which the approaches could be covered best, when the first German shells exploded nearby to inform us that the enemy was quite aware of our exact locations. Nor did that fact surprise us!

Between incoming barrages we were able to poke around ⁿ those houses and soon discovered that many of the villagers in

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Deidenberg had been pro-German. They, themselves, were nowhere to be seen, but convicting evidence had been left behind. Carefully hidden under innocent-looking clothing in one bureau drawer were Nazi flags and brassards, and in another room were found several American uniforms, probably for espionage work behind our lines. Fire arms were also collected, as were quantities of German Army equipment that had been abandoned by the retreating Nazis in their haste.

While rummaging about in the house then occupied by our squad, I decided to use some of the unusually clean white window curtains to take the place of what was left of the dirty and torn mattress cover which I had been wearing. Three did the trick; two hole ones swathed around my body, and half-of-one around my helmet!

The only things we had to worry about that night were the occasional artillery shells Jerry sent over to keep our nerves on edge. Otherwise, it was a quiet night.

In the morning, a battalion from the 82d Airborne took over Deidenberg, and we moved over to another small town a few miles to the west. There we waited all the rest of that day and night while Combat Command B of the 7th A.D. attacked and cleared the town of Born, south of our new location. The Division's plan of advance had to be followed carefully, so as to avoid conflicts among the units forming its striking power. Each unit's task had to be coordinated with that of another on its flank. Hence the delay in C.C. "A"'s advance,

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when it seemed that our only opposition was sporadic mortar and artillery fire from an enemy seeking an orderly withdrawal to save his remaining strength. It had been easy going for us up to that point, counting out the natural elements, which were no small part of the conflict. C.C. "B", however, had tougher opposition in and around Born, so it was not until the following morning that we could push on again cross-country towards St. Vith.

The plan of attack that day called for the infantry's riding on the backs of the tanks until encountering opposition or until passing through dense woods which made necessary a protective screen of foot soldiers to guard the thin-skinned Sherman's from possible ambush by Nazis armed with their powerful anti-tank bazookas. The idea was that we would be more rested after a speedier advance up to the objective, which would be taken on foot with the tanks giving supporting fire overhead from concealed positions behind us.

The advantages gained in riding a tank into battle were as follows: (1) a more restful and more rapid approach, (2) More firepower to be had promptly when needed for support of the infantry's attack, (3) The warth given off by the tank engines. The disadvantages were these: (1) The noise of the engines made it impossible to hear the screams of incoming shells. (2) The inability to get off the moving tank when shells started landing too close for comfort. (3) No chance for a surprise attack.

So, upon hearing of the new method of advance to be

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employed that day, we had mixed feeling, with a general dislike for the whole business finally becoming accepted as the vote of the majority.

The route of advance led through Geidenberg and out past a stretch of pine woods which had been attacked and cleared by another battalion from the 821 before dawn that morning. In Geidenberg, we stopped long enough for us to renew acquaintances with some men from the 821 Airborne whom I had helped train while serving as a cadet back in the States at Camp Croft. I had hardly expected to meet them again while fighting in the Ardennes. We chatted by a fire there for a few minutes, darting into the neighboring cow barn every time a shell whistled in to crash close-by. One landed in the barnyard, killing several of the cows.

The tank engines turned-over noisily, and we clambered up on the backs of our chargers once more. That time we advanced quite some distance over the countryside and occasional shellfire until we reached a low marshy spot on either side of an artificial railroad ridge that had to be crossed. Several tanks and the T.D.'s had bogged-down by the time we arrived, so we left the tanks again and advanced up the next hill on foot to wait for the tanks to maneuver around the obstacle as best they could. What appeared to have been a hidden German tank or S.F. (self-propelled gun) spotted the distressing situation our tanks were in and opened fire from long range on our flank. Quick action by the platoon of T.D.'s

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however, either put the culprit out of action or scared him off before any of our tanks had been hit. The T.D.'s terrific 90 mm. guns shook the hillside where we lay waiting in the snow, and we felt reassured to have such good support.

Soon after that, most of the tanks made the grade up to where we lay, and we then resumed our former positions as riders. A column of 821 paratroopers could be seen working up through the woods on our left, and a column from the "Big Red One" Division was on the right, as we continued the advance while mounted on tanks for another stretch. But we soon passed up those two "screening forces" on the flanks, and it was necessary to dismount and move through the snow-laden branches of the tall pines on either side of our tank column that edged forward in short, fast rushes along an old trail.

After continuing in that manner until we were too exhausted to move another step, Task Force Rhea, led by A Co., came to a large clearing in the dark woods that had to be crossed if we wanted to get in closer to St. Vith. While we caught our breath and the tanks moved off the trail to deploy along the edge of the woods behind us, two scouts from the 2d Platoon started out alone across the white field towards another patch of woods that was selected as the next objective. They were to fire a few shots when about half-way across the field in order to draw fire, if possible, and expose the enemy. When they had gone about two hundred yards,

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they drew no fire, but could see several German vehicles partly concealed in the woods ahead.

When further shots drew no reply, it was decided to have A Co. continue the attack on foot, while the tanks fired over our heads in support from the woods. We staggered out from the trees, firing from the hip as we moved forward, fighting the snow to advance as fast as possible. The tanks growled out from the pines behind us to join in the attack, with all guns blazing. With the mortar squad in the lead, we closed in on the patch of woods ahead of us without any casualties, for our showers of bullets and tank fire had drawn no answers from the Germans. In fact, the only Nazis in the vicinity were later found hiding in the cellar of a badly damaged farmhouse on the edge of the woods. The only opposition came in the form of several well-directed artillery shells that wounded some men in the 2d Platoon, among them one of the two scouts who had made the reconnaissance before our attack.

To be able to throw back the counter-attack that seemed likely any moment, A Co. began at once to dig in on a defensive line along the southern edge of the pine woods just captured. In the meantime, others checked the abandoned Nazi vehicles for snipers and collected the prisoners hiding in the cellar. The tanks moved up into defensive positions behind our new line. The day had brought another good advance toward the final objective, St. Vith! After establishing contact with the other platoons on our left, we settled down to

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the work of digging two-man holes. In frozen ground that task could furnish two men with enough work to keep them warm for several hours, each taking turns with the shovels or short picks carried on their belts. When the hole was dug, one man would lie down at a time to try to rest for an hour while his partner stood guard at the other end of the hole. It was almost impossible to relax, both because of the nervous tension always present in front line duty, and also because of the penetrating cold that kept us shaking so much that snow flakes had difficulty clinging to our clothing.

We had heard at 3ter that men in other divisions had tried grenades or one-pound blocks of T.M.T. to help them blast out the beginnings of a fox hole. Being skeptical, we had experimented with both methods at 3ter, and found them unsatisfactory, so the grenades carried along on our belts were saved for their originally-intended uses, and the T.M.T. blocks were left behind with the half-tracks. It was agreed that it would have been foolish to disclose the exact positions where our foxholes were to have been dug by wasting a grenade in a futile attempt to penetrate the frozen ground. The improvisation was no short-cut at all!

After standing guard all night in these pine woods near 3t. With, we prepared to move up again the next morning, for another of our task forces had come into that sector to relieve us. The next mission of Task Force Rega was to move back the way we had come for a short distance, then off through the woods towards

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Huennigen to another assembly area before the final assault on St. Vith, itself.

Our column advanced along roads and trails cut through the Ariennes Pines, while being followed all the time by a small cub observation plane that circled back and forth, skimming the tree tops to keep us in sight. We presumed that an American was operating the plane, but the accuracy of the Nazi artillery shells that also followed us caused doubt. It would not have been improbable that the plane was scouting for German batteries, for several of our artillery observation planes had been captured previously during the first days of the Bulge fighting.

Along one woods road we ran into two batteries of 88 mm.'s that had been abandoned by their former owners, together with a large supply of ammunition that was stacked in neat piles just off the road. It seemed queer, but satisfying, to pass by those long-barrelled, dreaded 88's when they were in such a quiet and peaceful mood, for eight of those guns, manned by determined crews, could have held up the attack for no short time.

When perhaps a thousand yards from Huennigen, we turned south along the edge of a clearing where we joined a column of Col. Weaple's 17th Battalion's Sherman tanks. We paused there until the plan for the final attack on St. Vith was completed. Crouching in half-dug holes while the tankers sat patiently in their white tanks, we ate snow to quench our thirst and waited for the next move forward. Cut in the field were

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several of our tanks that had been hit while attempting to go over the open crest of the hill from the top of which it was possible to look down to St. Vith. In each was at least one ugly, black-rimmed hole through which an 88 mm. shell had passed to set on fire the ammunition and gasoline inside. Their white camouflage was soiled and blackened by the fires which were still crackling and sputtering.

Shortly after noon, we moved up again, together with the tankers, and dashed across an open stretch of deep snow between two patches of woods. During that crossing, the Germans opened up with an A-T gun from somewhere on the left flank. Luck was with us, so all made the opposite side safely, eager to take cover in the woods again.

While the tanks moved forward as quietly as a company of tanks can move, into a firing line formation on the edge of the pines overlooking the 800 yards of low, exposed, ground between us and the first houses on the northern side of St. Vith, we of A Co., and the men of C Co. on our right, paused to rest before the last assault.

It was at that point that I found it impossible to go on any further. The limit of endurance had been reached. I turned over the leadership of our squad to "Mac" McDermott, who did a far better job than I could have ever done. Taking Jim Potter's advice, I remained behind when the Platoon jumped off in the attack, again led by our *mortar* squad. It

✓ * still without a mortar, ours was really just another rifle squad.

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was not until about an hour and a half later that I got control of myself once more and headed into St. Vith alone. During that time I had sat in the 17th Tank Battalion radio half-track while Lt. Col. Rhea directed his attack, and finally announced jubilantly that his 231's Task Force Rhea was the first unit to re-enter the town, right on schedule. From there I rode back to Huennigen, where I wandered about for a while before collecting myself enough to inquire from C.C.A.'s Col. Triplet which was the best way to get back to A Co. He pointed out the road to St. Vith, and off I went, riding part of the way by jeep with another colonel from one of the tank battalions. I finally reached C Co.'s C.P., located in the cellar of a ruined house, outside of which two G.I.'s were guarding some shivering Jerries. Downstairs I met "Navaho", and together we crossed over to the sector where A Co. was located. He pointed out in the dark the direction of the houses held by the 2d Platoon, and off I went alone.

It was a black night, not a star out to help light the way, as I trudged along near the railroad tracks, after crossing under the wrecked bridge to which "Navaho" had referred in his directions. The only sound which disturbed the quiet was the crunching of my footsteps in the dry, packed-down snow. I had gone on through the white streets longer than seemed necessary, so I began searching the houses that bordered, (or rather what remained of them), that bordered the road on the side opposite the railroad tracks, all without any success.

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still plodding forward innocently in the dark, I stopped short suddenly at the sound of small-arms fire around some houses situated on a hill a short distance in front of me. This was followed immediately by the sharp blasts of tank fire. That was quite enough for me; I wheeled about and headed back the way I came, only faster than before! On the way I was nearly shot by a machine gun outpost from C Co., set up near the same bridge previously passed. Luckily, I had remembered to get the password before returning to St. With.

The best plan seemed to be to go to the house where A Co.'s C.P. was located, and start all over again with new directions. I did just that, passing up a street blocked by fallen trees around which our engineers later found many mines that Jerry had left behind. Getting new directions, another short trip finally brought me to the two houses on the outskirts of town defended by the 21 Platoon.

There I rejoined the squad and learned how the attack had gone. After leaving me in the woods, the men from A and C Co.'s had moved out across the 800 yards of snow-packed marshy ground, firing every weapon they had, and supported by all the overhead fire that 18 tanks and 5 T.D.'s could offer. Our task force had met little resistance upon entering the northern, more open, sector of St. With. Light small-arms fire, and a few mortar shells, but that was all. Those Jerries left behind had surrendered quite willingly, at first. But, when Mac and

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"Chris" Christman had taken the mortar and 1st rifle squads across the railroad tracks to clear the houses on that rise of ground from which I had just returned, they encountered Jerries and German tanks that were not at all interested in giving up their positions. In fact, Chris and Mac had done a fine job to escape with as few casualties as they had. The firing that I had heard in the dark had been the excitement that took place just before their departure from that part of town. And, by the time they returned, I had finally found the location of our Platoon.

There were still civilians in the house where the mortar and 1st rifle squad were located, together with the Platoon C.F. (Jim Hernandez, Lt. Ford, and what remained of the H. Q. Squad.) The other squads occupied another house down the street a short distance. Together with the Belgian couple still living there, we all crowded into the limited space of a small, two-room, cellar, for Nazi batteries east of it. With had begun to shell the ruined town with a vengeance. Those in the cellar took turns standing guard outside the house, four men on a shift.

Up ahead of our two houses, along the road leading to that part of town still defended by the Nazis, was a small shack, well situated for an advance outpost. We kept a half-squad out there day and night. Between the outpost and our C.F. we strung a telephone wire for the sound-powered phones that the mortar squad always carried for such purposes,

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when not using the mortar itself. Back by the C.F., the one working machine gun still with us, was placed in the barn doorway to cover the long open stretch of ground to the east between the railroad tracks and our advance outpost.

That was the situation on the first night after re-entering St. With exactly one month following the night when the Nazis' Panzer Divisions had driven us back to the west. We had been able to enter the town quite easily, but Germans still remained behind in the eastern side of town, so a counter-attack seemed likely.

Several hours later, while standing guard out in the eerie quiet of that cold, black night, we suddenly heard the sound of German tanks moving up from the east. Slowly and cautiously they approached, the motors of the leading tanks growing louder and louder, until we felt sure that they had reached the road just across the railroad tracks from our positions, perhaps 300 yards away. We could hear the German infantrymen shouting directions to their tankers above the noise of the engines. They hesitated a moment to survey the situation, then the heavy Tigers rumbled forward again towards us. Next came a blinding flash that silhouetted the whole scene, followed by the terrific explosion that our T.D.'s 90 mm.'s made. A bright, white-hot, streak shot across the short distance to the leading Tiger, zipping clean through the thick frontal armor of the surprised German tank, out through the other side

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and off into the night sky beyond. The first shot made the "kill" of the trapped Tiger, but several more colorful streaks of light whistled through its tough steel hide, just for good measure. Immediately, bright flames engulfed the leading tank, lighting up the scene of battle, as the remaining tanks backed off in retreat, never to be heard from again that night. The German foot soldiers accompanying the tanks scurried away into the shadows, having lost their taste for more fighting. Streams of machine gun tracers helped to persuade them that further attempts to penetrate our defenses would have been futile. Then all was quiet again, except for the exploding of ammunition in the blazing Nazi tank across the railroad tracks. We settled back and waited for daylight, reassured by the fine shooting of some men from our 814th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Early the next morning, while our shift was on guard, some of the Division's tanks began to move up through the grey haze that enveloped the town before dawn. With infantry support from another task force, the tanks headed towards the sector from which the Nazis had come the night before. Firing guns and machine guns all the way, their advance continued on past our houses and off to the East, until the rest of St. With had been cleared that day.

As if in retaliation for our compelling them to withdraw completely from St. With, the German artillery batteries vented their wrath upon us, shelling the town with a new fury. It was necessary to keep down in the cellar most of the day, unless we were ^{un}fortunate enough to be standing guard outside the house by

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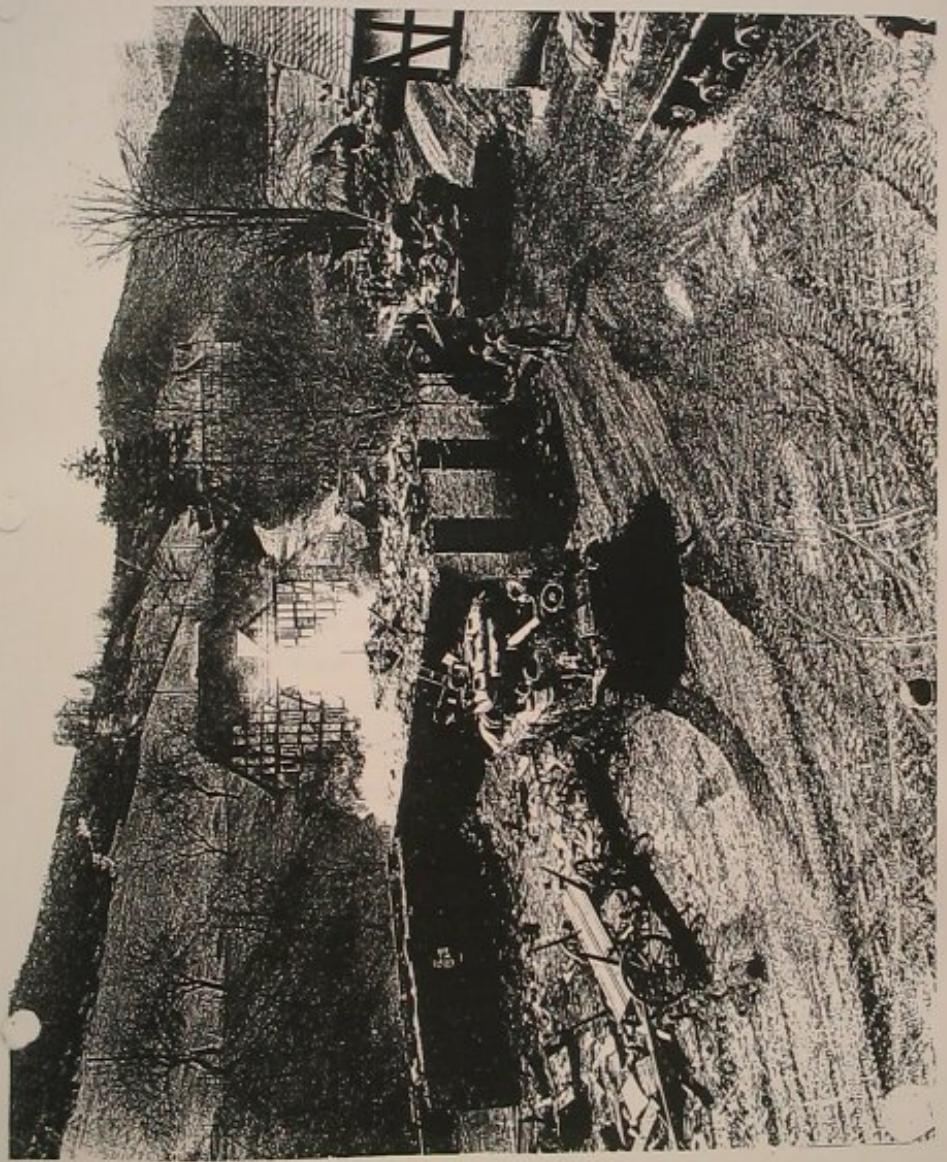


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the barn door. Shrapnel sprayed the area and pieces of metal ripped into the walls above our cellar, compelling those outside to hug the ground to avoid being hit. Several direct hits demolished the top floor, adding one more home to the quantities already left in ruins in that Belgian town. Shelling during the 1st Battle of St. Vith, combined with the Allied* bombing of the town when it was retaken by the Nazis in December, had left it devastated, - almost totally destroyed, - before we had returned to that sector in late January. The shells that crashed among the ruined houses that day seemed to be only disturbing ~~to~~ the dead, for St. Vith would have to be completely rebuilt, stone by stone, once those present lifeless ruins had been swept aside.

The remainder of that day, we prepared ourselves for another advance that had been scheduled for the following morning. The most important preparation was to make certain that our rifles did not have too much oil on them, for if so, the freezing temperature would have rendered them useless in a short time. They had to be kept dry and clean.

When night swallowed us in darkness again, we resumed our watching and waiting, often bringing the bolt and elevating and traversing mechanism of the machine gun inside the house in order to thaw them out by the kitchen stove. Otherwise, the gun would have been worthless should we have needed its firepower to help

* On December 26, 1944, the R.A.F. dropped over 1200 tons of bombs on St. Vith in just one of several raids.

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throw back a counter-attack.

That night the Belgian couple was joined by some neighbors, so the cellar was a bit more crowded than it had been before. Under other circumstances, it would have made a rather amusing picture; ten or fifteen dirty, tired G.I.'s crowded into two small rooms with two or three old women and two old men. There was no room for anyone to lie down; it was just a question of sitting on benches to nod on the next person's shoulder, or else sink down to the floor, head between the knees. We were all huddled around a small stove which one of the two, fat, old Belgians kept stoking off and on all night. Pipe and cigarette smoke clouded the already stuffy room, making the dim coal-oil lamp even less efficient.

During the night word came over the Platoon radio that rations and ammunition had been brought up by Lt. Drabin and deposited by the same ruined bridge. Two or three of us volunteered to go back to collect the 2d Platoon's share. At least we were to have a meal of K-rations before the next attack in the morning.

Just at daylight, we were ordered to assemble along the road leading past the house where A Co.'s C.F. had been. The objective for Task Force Rhea that day was the town of Wallerode, roughly two miles northeast of St. Vith. The Division's other task forces were to clear out the wooded hills on either flank of the town. B and C Companies attacked with tank support, and then we followed C Co., approaching from a slightly different direction.

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As it was open country, deeply-drifted with layers of fresh snow, the 17th tankers led the way for the first 500 yards or so, after leaving the road outside of St. Vith. Then the tanks in B Co.'s task force met bazooka and A-T fire along some hedgerows up ahead closer to Wallerois. Our supporting tanks, in whose deep ruts we had followed gladly, stopped to take cover behind the crest of a bare hill, over which we had to pass to get to the village. The Sherman which Lt. Col. Shea had been riding spun around in front of us, and raced back down hill to a safer position.

The 2d Platoon had just reached the crest of the hill, after passing ahead of the waiting tanks, when a Jerry tank concealed in the woods about 800 yards away on the right began scattering snow and shrapnel all around us, and shellbursts dotted the white hillside with ugly black holes. I remember the smell of the powder of those exploding shells seemed particularly sickening that morning. Several of our men were hit there, and were getting Jim Potter's prompt first-aid as we rushed past to get over the crest of the hill.

Beyond the hilltop we ran into the hedgerows and orchards where the other tanks and B Co.'s men had first met opposition. B Co. was over on our left somewhere by then, when we, too, were stopped short when met by the fire of some stubborn Nazis who were unwilling to give up Wallerois without a stiff fight. There had been little artillery support thus far, so once our tanks had been compelled to fall back from the

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range of the Nazis' bazooka's, and it became infantry versus infantry.

On we went again, across the road and through a field past two of our smoldering tanks, which had been hit not more than a stone's throw from Jerry's well-camouflaged bazooka positions. We swung back on the road, past more of our wounded men and a German ammunition truck, only to be stopped again by close bullets from snipers and "burp" gunners hiding somewhere near the farmhouses on the edge of the village. I remember stopping to talk to one of two medics who had been shot by the Nazis in spite of the red crosses on their helmets and arms.

The signal to move up was passed back along the line, so we made a wild dash down hill, and across the short open distance to the first houses, one or two men running at a time, for the wounded lying on each side of the road there were sufficient proof that the snipers had their sights aimed on that stretch of road. Panting for breath, we hugged the friendly walls of the nearest houses or fell flat in the ditches nearby for protection, looking back to see if the next fellow would run the gauntlet safely.

"Navaho" came galloping up next, followed by the radioman of our P.C., who had just been hit. Then the remainder of our Platoon made the crossing. Somewhere, in the confusion, our 1st Platoon had lost contact with the rest of A Co., becoming pinned down by accurate sniper and machine gun fire. After ordering Lt. Ford to take the 2d Platoon up through the village

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streets to the hill beyond, which we were to defend, "Savaho" headed back again to find the lost 1st Platoon.

Moving cautiously through the streets, we passed several burning houses that must have been set on fire by our tanks or artillery before our final advance, and finally came upon a platoon from Capt. Tommy's C Co., which had already cleared the empty houses in that part of town. They had collected some prisoners, but most of the snipers there had been stubborn SS boys who would cease firing only when dead. That meant taking the town the hard way!

We found our hillside and proceeded to make ourselves at home by scraping away at least two feet of snow to get at the soil to dig two-man holes. The squads formed a rough half-circle, selecting positions so as to be able to cover the approaches to Wallerode from our front and right flank with a bazooka team behind a hedge by the road leading away from town. Other platoons protected the left flank, and the other two Co.'s of the 23d were located in and around other sections of the village.

Late that afternoon, when all of the Jerry bazookamen and snipers had been rounded up, our tanks and T.D.'s came into Wallerode to strengthen our defensive positions. We had been working with the same tankers of C Co. of the 17th Battalion and the same platoon of T.D.'s long enough by then to make friends with our brothers-in-arms. Such friendships made the essential cooperation between us that much easier, and we looked

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forward to working with each other.

Just before they had arrived, Cliff Dolan and Mac McDermott had been surprised to look up from the task of digging their hole along the road to see two Jerries, dressed as civilians, coming innocently around the corner in front of them. The Germans were apparently no less surprised to find two Yanks there than were Mac and Cliff to see two Jerries appear so unexpectedly. However, both recovered from the shock quickly; the Germans wheeled about and dashed down the road, while Mac and Cliff pursued them on the run, firing as they ran down the hill. One got away, but the other was found later lying by the American machine gun that he had been carrying. We were even more on the alert after that unusual episode.

The few civilians that still remained in Wallerode shared their homes with new "guests" dressed in C.D., instead of grey-green. They seemed only too glad to see us, greeting us with smiles and bubbling over with French phrases instead of the German ones they had used before our arrival. While their proximity to the German border (four miles away) compelled them to have a knowledge of both German and French, it was the heavy, harsh accent of the former that prevailed over the softer, milder accent of the latter, no matter which one of the two languages they happened to be speaking at the time. Those people referred to the Nazis as the "deutche", not "les Boches", to which we had become accustomed in other parts of Belgium. It wasn't surprising, I suppose, for people dwelling close to borders in

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Europe have to be flexible enough to accept the influences of whichever country happens to predominate at the time. They are well-trained in friendly greetings!

However, we accepted their invitations to share some space in their homes for a few days, but unconsciously we watched our hosts and hostesses more carefully than had been the case before. About two-thirds of the Co. remained on the alert outside in snow-camouflaged holes, while the others rested and warmed up for a few hours in houses and barns still left in reasonably good shape after the fighting that day.

It was not until the following morning that our medic, Jim Fotter, returned to the Platoon. He had spent the whole night looking after some of the men wounded in the attack, patching them up and keeping them from freezing before they could be evacuated by watching over a fire in the barn into which he had been able to carry them, with the help of a captured German doctor. Jim's diligence and care kept most of the less serious cases alive until they were removed to the rear, but some, of course, were beyond the best care that he could have offered them. It was work like that that made us appreciate having a man like Jim around when the going was rough!

That next day, there was quite a stir over in the patch of woods on our right flank as one of the Division's other Combat Commands moved forward in the attack to drive the Nazis back still further from the hills surrounding vital St. Vith.

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From our outpost positions on the hill by the northeastern fringe of Wallerode, we could hear the progress of the attack, but the participants were invisible in the thick, snow-padded pines. By afternoon, the woods had been cleared to further strengthen our positions.

By that time, the famous "Ardennes Bulge" was a thing of the past, for the First Army's front line was nearly back to where it had been on December 16th. The Nazis' last great gamble had failed in its maximum objectives. It had cost us time, resources, and many casualties, but the loss to the Nazis was infinitely greater for victory was a certainty for us from then on. We in the ranks on the front line sensed that, and the "brass hats" were sure of it, so morale in our ranks grew better by leaps and bounds shortly after the German withdrawal in the Ardennes, making it that much easier for us to deal with the closing, bitter, self-preservation struggle which the staunchest of the Nazis were still willing and able to offer.

The only enemy action after the rough time we had had getting into Wallerode came in the form of artillery shelling from retreating batteries that entertained us from time to time in the hope of discouraging further pursuit before the Nazis had been able to withdraw behind the comforting protection of their Siegfried Line defenses. By keeping low in our holes, avoiding any floor but the first, or remaining in the cellars of the houses, casualties in Wallerode were kept

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at a minimum for the remaining time spent there.

The afternoon following our capture of the village, the P-47's had come over to plague the retreating Nazis' columns and the artillery positions from which we had been drawing fire. It was great sport to watch those fat, grey birds swooping down to scratch their bellies on the tree tops, only a half-mile or so from our hillside. We saw the leader climb steadily, circle slowly until fixing his eyes on the Tiger or gun position below, then scream into a sharp dive, firing all eight .50 cal. m.s.'s as he went, and releasing one of his bombs at just the right point to hit the target. We could see the bombs hurtling earthward to disappear in the trees, only to have the doomed area instantly marked by a bright flash and then a plume of dirty grey smoke that hung over the trees, for a moment before drifting off to disappear completely. The leader was followed closely by the next in line, until each had emptied his guns and bomb racks on the selected target. When the work was done, the planes circled over the area slowly to survey the damage below, throttled their engines, and winged away towards home to reload their guns and refill their tanks.

When standing guard at night, we had the experience again of directing and adjusting our artillery's defensive fire from the O.P. foxhole out on the hill which had the best view. The chief reason for keeping in contact with the artillery those nights was the presence of a German tank that crept forward persistently through the woods each evening to get in close enough

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to Wallerode to annoy us with direct fire, coming uncomfortably close to the particular house where our Platoon O.P. was located. The observation planes had been unable to spot the villain, so we were compelled to rely on artillery fire that was directed upon all the likely positions where the Tiger might logically have hidden in the dark. Each night when hearing its engines getting closer, the man on duty in the O.P. would call for fire. We never did have the satisfaction of knowing that the tank had been destroyed, for its shells were still disturbing the peace the night we left Wallerode.

The last day spent there, we welcomed the men from the 82d Airborne Division who were moving into Wallerode to assemble before their next push through the snow drifts to the Siegfried line. They were a crazy lot of fellows! Full of Jerry-hunting stories, they gave the general impression that they "didn't give a damn for anyone or anything." But, discounting their perhaps exaggerated cockiness, we appreciated the good fighting qualities they had revealed while placed alongside of us around Manhay and Vaux Chavines during "the Bulge" days, and told them so.

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CHAPTER VII

Henri-Chappelle, Hörtgen, and
the Roer Dams

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CHAPTER VII

We left Wallerode early in the morning before daylight, turning over our houses to the 82d and marching wearily but happily out of town to meet the convoy of half-tracks. It was a clear, cold, moonlit night as we climbed into the vehicles to head back westward into the part of Belgium with which we had become more familiar. Had it not been necessary to associate the winter scenery through which we passed with the Ardennes fighting, the Belgian countryside we saw in that dawn of a new day would have given unspoiled impressions of rare beauty. The pink glow rushing up behind pine-capped white hills revealed one small village after another tucked neatly among the pure white slopes and valleys surrounding us on all sides.

North to Malmedy, a name forever linked with the cold-blooded massacre of captured American prisoners, and on through that battered town to Verviers we rolled. The latter city was always a welcome sight, for its friendly citizens never tired of greeting members of the liberating army that passed frequently through their streets going to and from the front. On beyond Verviers, we turned off the main road to the north-east, and finally reached our destination, the small, tidy village of Henri-Chappelle, situated roughly ten miles from both Verviers and Eupen.

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The houses to which our squads were assigned had been requisitioned ahead of time that trip, for with the coming of winter and the quantities of extra troops that had been rushed into Belgium during the Ardennes Campaign, billeting space was scarce in the rear areas. The family whose house we shared was extremely generous and thoughtful, and made every effort to make our visit with them a comfortable one. The father of the house was a postal clerk. With him lived a younger brother, Georges, his pretty niece, Julie, his wife, and two young daughters, Georgette and Marie-Theresa, or "Marie-Tee-Tee", as we learned to call her, much to her annoyance.

In order to add to the ^M comforts which G.I. blankets spread out on a dry floor under a protecting roof already gave us, Hugo, the father, insisted on our helping him go after a stove which he had arranged to borrow from a neighbor upon hearing of our arrival. So off we went in one of A Co.'s jeeps to get the stove from a barn nearby. After a bit of a struggle, four of us managed to mount it on the back of the ever-useful jeep, climbing on top ourselves for the return trip. A stove was no good without wood, so the mortar squad half-track was requisitioned next to carry us out to the neighboring woods to cut some fuel, just as it began to grow dark. Armed with some of Hugo's saws, we gathered a good supply and returned in time for evening show.

We spent exactly four days in Henri-Chappelle the first time we were billeted there, and during that precious time,

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we enjoyed the usual luxuries of rear echelon life that were enriched by the unusually pleasant companionship of a gracious and friendly Belgian family. Nor was the luck of our two squads contrary to that of the others, for everywhere we were received warmly and enthusiastically. Those people were definitely pro-American. May we always deserve the friendship of those Belgians!

It was during those four days at Henri-Chappelle that Earl Forges returned to A Co. from the hospital after being wounded at Vaux Chavines. As the 1st Platoon, which Lt. Forges had formerly led, already had another capable officer, it was the good fortune of our 2d Platoon that he was assigned to work with us. With Forges up there to help Jim Menendez "call the Flays", it seemed that the 2d would continue to be the leading platoon in A Co. That was how we felt about the latest addition to our ranks, at any rate! He became the ninth Platoon leader that had led our Platoon since the time I had joined A Co. of the 23d on September 13th. And even though K.A.F. was a Harvard graduate (Class of '41), I must concur with the vote of the other veterans of the 2d Platoon by admitting that he was certainly one of the best that had come along. His able leadership, great interest in the welfare of his men, and his keen sense of humor placed him high on all of our lists!

While we rested, ate good hot food, wrote letters, and thought of home, we tried to forget the Ardennes fighting for a while and relax in peace, but, of course, that was impossible.

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To remind us that a war was still going on, we could look out across the lowland between the high ground where Henri-Chappelle was nestled in the snow and the dark hills of the Hürtgen and Roetgen forests, where other G.I.'s were then battling the Nazis in bitter woods-fighting. We could hear the bombers roar overhead in the direction of Düren and other Roer River towns towards which the 1st and 9th Armies were pushing. Later, the rumbling of clusters of exploding bombs could be heard following the series of bright flashes which silhouetted the hills to our front. And the heavy guns of our long-ranged artillery thundered nearby when hurling their devastating shells through the night sky towards the German lines somewhere along those same hills. Guard duty at night provided us with a better and more dramatic show than any Fourth-of-July celebration previously attended!

On the afternoon of the fourth day after our arrival, just when we had begun to imagine ourselves once more in a semi-civilian state of mind, Battalion H. Q. ordered the Co. to prepare to move up to the line again that same night. The mission was to take over defensive positions in the southern sector of the Hürtgen forest where the 78th "Lightning" Division was fighting to reach the Roer River dams near Schmidt. The 23d was called upon to relieve a battalion near Schmidt. The 23d was called upon to relieve a battalion from the 78th so that it could join in the offensive action. All of which meant nothing more nor less than a return to that phase of the Allies' general

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strategy reached before the Ardennes break-through, when we had been north in Germany with the 9th Army near Setterich, waiting for the dams to be boomed by the Air Forces, or captured by the 1st Army, before we crossed the Roer to spearhead to the Rhine River.

Plans had been made to permit our return to Henri-Chapelle after the completion of the task assigned the Battalion at that time, so we waved goodbye to our new friends with the understanding that we hoped to see them "bientot".

We started off down the main supply route as far as the town of Turen, just ten miles away. From there, the red line on Lt. Forges' ever-present map revealed that we had turned off the main road to wind slowly up through the wooded hills into the Hürtgen and Roetgen forests.

Just as we began to reach the first clusters of dark pines we noticed the first beautifully-concealed pillboxes of that western belt of the Siegfried Line defenses which divided from the main Line to pass west around Aachen and finally swung back again to join the more elaborate defenses of the West Wall which continued south of that city to the Swiss border. Again, we marveled at what seemed to be an impenetrable barrier of strongly built, mutually supporting forts of reinforced concrete that had been painted or partly covered over with earth to deceive the attacker, or so placed as to blend in perfectly with the natural surroundings. Each pillbox had been destroyed by the demolition work of our engineers so that they could never be used again to help the

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enemy in case our men were forced to retreat and attack the Siegfried Line a second time.

Thankful that we had not been among those who had first penetrated through those imposing defenses, we continued on toward the scene of the present struggle. A short distance further along the road we passed a large dam, one of several built near the sources of the Roer River both for the purposes of furnishing power and also of providing the Nazis with a means for a strategic flooding of the Roer Valley, should the occasion present itself. That particular dam had been captured in good condition, but the 78th Division was having a real struggle to get control of the remaining Roer River dams.

Continuing on through the forest roads some distance north of Roetgen, we soon heard the unpleasantly familiar sounds of artillery fire, -- our own to be sure, but when we knew the front line was only a few miles beyond. There were no signs of any civilians in the almost totally wrecked villages around which our big guns were placed. Rusting tanks and the battered skeletons of all types of battle equipment of both armies dotted the clearings in the woods, or lined the ditches along the roads where they had been pushed by "bulldozers" to clear the way for further advances. Such signs were mute testimonies of the bitter and costly struggle that had taken place in those forests. And the constant firing of guns, singly or whole batteries at a time, was noisy

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evidence that that fight was still going on without a moment's pause or delay. First came the batteries of 155 mm. "long-Toms", then the 155 mm. howitzers, followed by the close-supporting fire of the 105 mm. howitzers, the latter placed only a few short miles behind the holes or dugouts up front where Yanks and Jerries peered through the shadows of the tall pines to try to find targets for their rifles, a.s.'s and mortars.

Our column came to a halt perhaps five miles from Roet, the last village that we had seen off to the south of the road along which the Battalion had reached the front. We left the half-tracks behind, perusual, and shouldering the mortar, ammunition bags, and our own personal fighting equipment, we joined the rest of A Co. and began the hike that would take us up to the battalion of the 78th which we were to relieve. Those leading the procession must have been in a great hurry, so it was not long before the mortar squad lagged behind the pace-setters, for carrying heavier loads than the rifle squads, we found it impossible to keep up that night. Tom Trickson slipped and fell on the icy road, and when John Cepelak, Jerry Coyne, and I had stopped to make sure he was not injured, we lost contact with the rest of the Platoon and company. It was a familiar story in combat, especially on a night as black as that.

We did the best we could to catch up so as to find out which way the others had gone, but by the time we had come to a fork in the road we gave it up as a lost cause. To advance

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further down the wrong fork could have proven disastrous that close to the front line, so we waited until someone appeared who knew the situation. That turned out to be Capt. Tommy of our C Co. He didn't know the exact location of A Co. so he suggested that we follow his men and remain with them until daylight permitted further investigation. Following his advice, we fell in line behind C Co. and moved up the right fork of the road until halted by a sentry from the 78th Division. C Co. crossed the road to take over its assigned defensive positions, but the four of us accepted the invitation of the sentry to share one of the dug-outs that had been built by men from the 78th while holding their line in the Hürtgen forest.

The dwelling selected proved an excellent shelter with a reasonably dry floor of pine needles and branches that was far more comfortable than would have been a hastily-prepared bed in the wet snow and mud outside. We were grateful, and thanked our host before retiring to enjoy a few hours of peace.

We brushed the pine needles out of our hair the following morning and aroused ourselves to survey the situation outside of our luxurious home. C Co.'s holes were out of sight across a dirt road leading through the woods. Our dug-out was one of many in that area, but their only occupants at the time were two G.I.'s from the 78th who had remained behind to collect equipment left there by the Battalion we had relieved. One of them told us that there was an anti-tank gun crew about a hundred

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yards up the road and that a short distance beyond, Jerry was waiting patiently for anyone to try to push him further back through the woods towards his Fatherland. If we had known that, I doubt if the four of us would have slept so peacefully without even bothering to stand guard at all during the night.

Being Squad Leader, I assumed responsibility for finding out how to contact A Co., and started out at once to do just that. The first move was to cross the road to ask Capt. Tommy if he knew any more about our Co.'s location. He was not at home, and the Sergeant with whom I talked knew nothing interesting about my problem. Remembering next that Battalion H. 2 was to have been located in an old house near the point where we had left the half-tracks the night before, I started back along the same road, passing our H. 2 mortar positions along the way. Every large tree along the road had springs of yellow blocks of T.N.T. wrapped around it for demolition to block the road should the Germans have thrown back our men. There were two, small totally destroyed pillboxes near the road junction passed the night before. Further along the road, I came to a gate of some kind, probably marking the entrance (from the German side) of the Siegfried defensive line in that sector. At that point, large tree stumps sunk in holes across the road by the Nazis had been sawed off to permit through-traffic. Here and there were piles of some of the quantities of mines that had been cleared from the area by our engineers. However, many more still uncleared would have made wild-flower-hunting (if it had been spring) a risky pastime. Some of those

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uncleared mines were marked with bits of red rags tied to stakes placed near their discovered positions.

Nobody seemed particularly disturbed to see me at Battalion H. 2., but I did manage to have some Captain point out on the tactical map the exact location of A Co. Then, without a map, I started back again through the driving rain that had begun to melt away the dirty winter snow which still partly covered the ground. Hiking past the pill-boxes, road junction, and mortars, again, I finally reached the same dug-out where the others were still waiting for my return.

After finishing a K-ration that I had found (?) at Battalion H. 2., I set out again to circle widely through the woods to attempt to put to use the information gained from the map, while the others covered the area nearer the dug-out, so as to be able to watch for anyone intelligent that might come down the road, -- in an American uniform. That time, I was as unsuccessful as before, and returned wet, tired and thoroughly disgusted with the whole situation, while comforting myself with the thought that the red marks on the map must have been misplaced. The others had had no more success!

Shortly thereafter, the Nazis began to lose some of their patience, and having no better way to relieve the nervous tension of inactive waiting, their mortars began to cough loudly from positions that were annoyingly close. We could even hear the gunners shouting fire orders in the best-trained manner. A short, awful, delay and the shells came crashing down in the trees along the road. They must have landed right on top of some of C Co.'s positions. A few

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more rounds, and Jerry quieted down again. Even more anxious than to get out of there to find A Co., which was supposedly in a reserve position somewhere to the rear, we gladly accepted a jeep ride from two fellows from the 78th who had just turned up to collect the abandoned equipment. Climbing on their trailer with all our mortar equipment we journeyed back to the same road junction. From there, with new directions, a short hike brought us "home" at last.

After we had explained where we had been hiding since the evening before, we were invited to share one of the dug-outs in A Co.'s area. These dwellings varied in size, shape, and design to suit individual tastes.

The first step in construction was to dig a hole to the depth desired. Then the sides were extended upward by placing logs around the edges of the hole, except for an opening at the doorway. More logs, with extra shelter-halves or rain-coats stretched on top of them, made the first layer of the roof. On top of those, dirt and quantities of pine boughs were piled to strengthen the roof and give more protection from flying shrapnel to those huddled inside. Of course, those positions that were along the front line were far less elaborate, usually nothing more than enlarged slit trenches with roof of logs and mud, covered with branches to help conceal the finished product. In those it was necessary to leave more openings from which to fire if Jerry decided to cause some trouble. The "houses" in the reserve positions to the rear, where A Co. then was, however, were far more comfortable.

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Some even had crudely-made bunks, tables, and always a stove of some kind. Gasoline and oil-filled bottles provided sufficient light for letter writing and fairly comfortable living.

The quest of a stove is a story all by itself! During the winter fighting, a good stove was the most cherished prize of all souvenirs in the wrecked towns and villages through which our armies passed. In fact, a stove was far more than a souvenir; it was a necessary fixture in our "homes", whether they were ruined houses, pill-boxes, dug-outs, tents, or enlarged slit trenches. The chance of finding good stoves was the chief reason for capturing towns. Where possible during the winter, we fought from one town to another, combing the countryside for the slightest suggestion of some kind of habitable dwelling or shelter, for inside there was always the possibility of finding a stove, or if not, a place where an open fire could be built. And that was the simple story of the winter campaign!

Where no stoves could be found, when there were no villages nearby, G.I. ingenuity soon solved the problem. Cylindrical tin cans, metal mortar ammunition containers, large box-like G.I. coffee tins, fifteen-gallon oil cans, and a great variety of German pots and buckets were only some of the more common selections. Holes were punched for fuel entrances and drafts. Pipes were made of strings of small tin cans fastened together to form flexible but leaky substitutes for real stove pipes.

Several days were spent in the reserve positions, during

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which time the only important thing we did was to stand guard at night in outposts placed around the dug-out area to listen for stray Jerries or patrols that might be lurking in the woods. Then we were ordered to move to a new location. Carrying a blanket and three K-rations each, we trudged back along the road to the Battalion H.Q. house, turned left and continued for another mile or so until halted by the men from the 3d Platoon who had entered that area before we came.

Our positions there were located on the edge of a clearing through which ran a ravine. To our front was a line of barbed wire entanglements to which "booby-traps" (firing devices connected to mines or explosives) and "trip flares" had been attached to prevent Jerry from infiltrating through our lines unseen. The clearing and ravine, the whole Hürtgen forest in fact, were filled with A-F and A-T mines. Across the ravine a bare hillside led up to one of the towns which the 78th had to capture to control the area around the Roer River dams. Their attack had not progressed as far as that town by the time we had arrived, so there was still a pocket of Jerries in front of us. Our mission was to keep them from getting out of the pocket.

When we arrived to take over the dug-outs assigned to each of our squads, the medics were carrying a wounded man up from the ravine, where his patrol had run into some mines. He was one of over twenty-five men from our Battalion who stepped on mines during our stay in the Hürtgen Forest. It seemed to us that mine warfare was almost the dirtiest part

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of the whole rotten business. It didn't give a man a fighting chance, for one false step on the carefully concealed firing device of the mine, and the man was minus one leg or foot, unless it happened to be an I-T mine, when certain death was the result.

We spent about a week in those new dug-outs over-looking the ravine. During that time, the 78th Division and another Combat Command from our 7th A.D. passed on by to our front with thundering artillery support to take the town, (or what remained of it), along the ridge across the ravine. We could watch the tanks and G.I.'s quite easily through Lt. Forges' field glasses. It was not long after the town was taken and the pocket cleared of Jerries that we prepared to move back to the reserve area again.

We had found life quite comfortable while guarding the line along the top of that ravine. When the small dug-out in which the mortar squad stayed the first night filled with water from melting snow and rain, we promptly constructed a new shelter with heavy log sides and a roof of shelter halves and raincoats. One night of sitting in waist-deep water had been enough for all of us. At night we felt our way by turns along a wire stretched from tree to tree leading to a listening post about two hundred yards away. By that means we kept contact night and day with the 3d Platoon on our left flank. As each two men returned from their night guard duty, they would poke a few sticks into the small can-stoves which helped to take some of the chill and dampness from the air inside of

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our home. Warm (7) chow was brought up twice a day by jeep from Karl Leutner's mess truck back at the reserve area. One day, we even got some mail delivered to us, so life was really far more luxurious than had been our fondest dreams upon hearing that we were moving up into the Hürtgen Forest.

With sight of G.I. vehicles parked all over the bare hill to our front, we knew that the 23d's assignment in the Hürtgen Forest had been completed. So, we were not surprised when the order to return to the reserve positions came over the Platoon radio. Gathering up most of our equipment we followed Forges back along the road to join the remainder of A Co.

At that time, we received the Army's new winter foot-gear. The worst of the winter had passed, but the delayed effort to provide a suitable boot of some kind to prevent the alarmingly large number of cases of trench foot and frostbite finally brought forth what was called a "shoe-pack" in army lingo. They were calf-high, leather shoes with rubber feet. Inside a felt pad was placed under the sole of the man's foot to provide further insulation and warmth. Two pairs of heavy woolen stockings were worn to take up space inside. All was fine except for several things: (1) A seam where the rubber foot was connected to the leather top caused most men great discomfort by blistering their heels. (2) There was poor arch support and walking on hard ground or roads was soon tiring. (3) Except on very cold days they were too hot, once the freezing days had passed. It wasn't long after the first experiments that most men returned to

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the wearing of regular shoes and overshoes.

The Battalion remained up in the Hurtgen Forest near Nost for a day or two more, and then part of the men returned to Henri-Chappelle while the others were formed into road gangs for repair work along the vital supply routes behind the 1st Army's Roer River front. Late winter rains, combined with the melting snow from one of the coldest and most heavily snow-packed winters in many years, had played havoc with roads over which supplies had to move. Since our Division together with other armored divisions, was being held in reserve at that time until the regular infantry divisions had crossed the Roer River, we were used to help the engineers keep the roads open to supply the men in the front-line foxholes. Our three infantry battalions became "engineers" for the next week or ten days, while the rest of the Division prepared for the next action and rested.

I was in the first group to return to Henri-Chappelle for a rest before rotating with those who started out at once to do the shovel work. We lucky ones loaded up and headed back in the direction from which we had come two weeks before. The route to the rear carried us further south than before, so that time we passed through the main belt of the Siegfried Line. There we saw for the first time the broad rows of concrete "Dragon's teeth", barbed wire entanglements, anti-tank ditches and prepared road blocks, besides the usual assortment of concrete forts for A-T guns and machine guns. Having passed through the

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gates of that imposing barrier, we next headed for Eupen, where the trucks stopped long enough to permit us to enjoy our third shower since leaving the U. S. A. A change of clothing was even provided to replace our soiled ones at the same time. That became the practice of the Army towards the end of the war, instead of issuing new clothing directly to the combat units themselves, as in the past.

It was strange to reach Henri-Chapelle, and find almost all of the snow melted away. It seemed naked without that white covering, almost a different town. But its people were just the same, if not even more genial than before. Enjoying their great enthusiasm and excitement upon seeing us return, we climbed down from the G. I. trucks and entered the same houses where we had been so comfortable before. The young girls, "Marie-Tee-Tee" and Georgette, together with Julie, came running out to greet us and welcome us back from the front. Hugo, his wife, and the old grandmother were there, too. A regular reunion; just as though we had been members of their own families!

Having made ourselves at home once more, we settled back in anticipation of another pleasant rest. There was some commotion going on downstairs that afternoon, but we were too busy making ourselves at home to pay much attention. However, when we did come downstairs with mess equipment in our hands, the sight that met our eyes was a bit overwhelming. There on the dining room table, then covered with a fresh white tablecloth and the family's best glasses and silverware, was our evening meal! Hugo and his wife had apparently worked all afternoon since we had arrived to

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prepare a "home-coming" meal for us. Hardly knowing how to act, but thanking them as best we could, we accepted their invitation to dinner. While we ate in the family's dining-room in style, our friends crowded into the kitchen so that there would be room at the table for all of us who had returned. Hugo, himself, waited on us. Belgian beer, heaping bowls of fried potatoes, some kind of meat and gravy, good dark bread, and several bowls of delicious salad provided an unbelievably fine meal. How they had managed to gather the rare ingredients, we did not know. Before starting, we toasted our host and hostess, lifting our glasses of beer, smiling, while uttering many "merci's" and "goot's". I am sure that none of us will ever forget the friendship and generosity of that Belgian family.

The second sojourn in Henri-Chapelle was quite different from the first. There were more sources of amusement and entertainment, such as: passes to nearby Verviers and Eupen, G. I. movies in a school house around the corner every other night, and more time to meet the townspeople, but the general impression was that "things were more G. I." by which was meant, that the "brass hats" had had sufficient time and opportunity to find more ways to remind the soldier in the ranks that he was still in the Army, only their emphasis then was on the Army of "military courtesy and discipline", training and regimentation. In combat, there wasn't time for "courtesy", and "discipline" grew from respect for real leadership under fire rather than authoritative "rank-pulling" and enforcement of endless regulations, while "training" gave place to fighting,

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and "regimentation" was translated into coordination and cooperation among men and units. The "G. I." atmosphere present in Henri-Chapelle the second time was noticeable in great emphasis on the proper manners of standing guard, greater stress on proper dress (i. e. wearing of G. I. sweater, wool-knit cap, etc.), and in a greater emphasis on the current training program. So, we found advantages and disadvantages in returning from "the line" to the "rear echelon" in Henri-Chapelle.

As a part of that training program, which included hikes, practice firing of bazookas and rifle grenades, and orientation talks, we went one day to see a movie in the town of Limbourg. It was an Army production which was meant to tell the men "how to act in Germany", how to treat our enemies when we entered their country in the near future. Some of us thought it was a good film, well-intended to provide us with reasons for abiding by the non-fraternization policy towards the Germans. Some laughed it off, being in a happy, "rest period" mood. I cannot help but feel that if the men of our Division, and those of others, had accepted the doctrine of that film which was dismissed glibly and without much thought as "propaganda", that our armies would have avoided many of the problems and troubles in dealing with the Nazis which arose later on. There was much more interest that day in the history of the "Lucky Seventh", reviewed so ably and fully by a lieutenant from Division H. Q. before the showing of the picture. We left the theatre even more proud of our membership in that fighting outfit!

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In a few days, it became our turn to move up and relieve some of those fellows who had been working on the roads. The road repair crews rotated, giving the others a chance to enjoy "rear echelon" life for a while. About twenty-five of us left Henri-Chappelle one afternoon in A Co.'s supply truck, which made trips back and forth each day to carry food and mail to the men working on the roads.

It was on that day that we had our first chance to see the remains of Aachen. What we saw shocked us, for what had been one of the oldest and most renowned cities of Europe was then no more than an empty shell. St. Lo was far smaller and had been less able to absorb the full force of the fighting, but certainly Aachen was a close rival as a symbol of the great cost and destructive power of modern war!

After leaving the ugly ruins of Aachen, we branched off the main highway near Brand to reach the small town of Schleckheim, perhaps ten miles further on. There we arrived in time to see the men returning from the days' work to enjoy the hot meal Karl and his cooks had waiting for them. Those whom we were to relieve were glad to see us, and they wasted no time climbing into the truck for the return trip, pausing only long enough to tell us that "engineering" was not a bad deal. We made ourselves at home in one of the empty houses A Co. was using for billets, and "hit the sack" in anticipation of the early morning ride to work.

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We ate breakfast in the dark in order to make the twenty-five miles or so to the roads of the Hürtgen Forest by 8 o'clock sharp. The Battalion was assigned to one of the 1st Army's Engineer battalions, so we had to abide by their strict schedule, or they would have made us live less comfortably in one of the damaged villages nearer the front. Our own Division's Negro Quartermaster Co.'s trucks were the "busses" that took us to work every morning and brought us home just before dark. A hot meal was carried out to our locations by truck at noon, so we worked under what were almost union conditions.

Each day we passed the same familiar sights to and from work. Kornelimunster came first, followed by more Siegfried Line pillboxes, and then another small village around which some of the vehicles and men of the 3d Armored Division were grouped, followed by what must have been several radar units located in an orchard off the road. Two mechanisms that looked like searchlights mounted on trucks kept turning in circles, endlessly probing the skies to warn the many ack-ack batteries nearby of the approach of Jerry planes. Past artillery positions we rolled at top speed, past quantities of marked but uncleared mine fields, and past the same wrecked Jerry airplanes and dead cows that rested in peace where they had fallen in the fields. The route next took us uphill into the depths of the dark Hürtgen Forest. What had been a beautiful park where roads wound among hills covered with fine, straight pines, was then a cemetery of dying trees and dead soldiers with mud-clogged

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roads that were being ground up by the wheels of the American Army, bent upon driving the defending Nazis back from the banks of the Roer River.

Up front, the 1st, 8th, and 9th Infantry Divisions were watching and waiting for the signal to attack across the river. It was our task to help the engineers keep the roads behind those divisions open, so that supplies and equipment could reach them. Continuing winter rains made that task difficult, but it was far easier than sitting up there in a hole along the river, so the veterans among us, at least, made no complaints, even though we were supposed to be enjoying a rest period.

As we slopped away in the mud with our engineers' shovels, we noticed the quantities of equipment moving up to the line. Each day it seemed as though another artillery battery had been added in the large clearing near which we worked. Ammunition was stacked in piles or buried in dugouts for the big day to come. Replacements passed by on their way up to the front. They would bring the divisions up to full strength in time for the coming attack. Several times a 3-star general passed by in a neat, O.D. limousine. One looked like the pictures we had seen in Stars and Stripes of the U.S. 1st Army's Courtney Hodges.

The Roer dams had been captured by the 78th as planned, but the Nazis had set-off enough of the demolitions to cause the quantities of water behind the dams to flood the

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Roor Valley, as they had planned. So, the 1st and 9th Armies had to wait nearly two weeks before making their crossings on February 23d. That time was used to build up their strength and complete their plans.

The Nazis knew what was coming, but not just exactly how, when, or where. So, in spite of rainy weather, the Luftwaffe was called upon to supplement patrolling action along the River front to gather facts and figures on the size and location of our troop and vehicle concentrations.

Frequently, while at work, we would look up at the sight of Jerry planes coming in low under the clouds to photograph and observe. Each time, black puffs of ack-ack and ribbons of red machine gun tracers followed the plane's course doggedly, often succeeding in bringing cheers from our troops when its engines began to smoke and a "kill" had been scored.

Only once did German artillery shells fall near the road where we were working. But the complete ruin of the village of Hürtgen and the other community that neighbored it in that clearing were sufficient signs of the quality of the fighting that had taken place there. Not one complete wall of a house remained standing. To be sure, those village homes were mostly of weak construction, (outlines of timbers filled in with plaster, stone, and straw), in marked contrast to French farm houses we had seen. The village church had been made of stone, however, but only a vague suggestion of

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its size and shape remained; only its bell, still hanging precariously from one damaged wall of what had been the steeple, identified it as the ruins of a church. The nearest civilians were at least ten miles to our rear, luckily for them, for there were no places for them to stay among those dismal stones and shell craters.

On the morning of the 23d, several hours before daylight, we heard the thunder and saw the continuous flashes of the terrific artillery concentrations that preceded the beginning of the Roer River assault. On reaching our road jobs as usual, we learned what we had suspected, that the 1st, 8th, and 9th Divisions had "jumped-off" before dawn. The great drive across the Cologne Plain had begun. Noticing that the 3d Armored had disappeared during the night, we knew that our "engineering" days would soon be at an end. I believe we worked one more day, learning that next morning from a 1st Division officer that his outfit had advanced twelve miles beyond the Roer already.

The next morning, the whole Battalion headed back to Henri-Chappelle, running into a convoy of the 9th Armored's tanks while passing through the streets of Aachen. They were headed towards the Roer and the Rhine, and we were soon to follow and catch them. Reaching Henri-Chappelle in the afternoon, we were again greeted by our Belgian friends, but a growing seriousness was apparent in their faces for they had sensed that our stay was to have been brief.

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We learned then that the 7th A.D. had been assigned a supporting role in the approaching drive from the Roer to the Rhine, that it was to be used only if a break-through resulted. We were not at all distressed to hear that, for neither we, nor the Division as a whole had recovered yet from the terrific ordeals of the Ardennes Campaign. There were two more days in Henri-Chappelle in which to rest, remove the last of the white camouflage from our vehicles and equipment, and prepare ourselves mentally for the next action, -- for we had been around long enough in the "Lucky Seventh" to have become skeptical and distrustful of "supporting roles". (Incidentally, at that time, I changed from the old mortar squad (much to my regret) to the Platoon H. 2 Squad, becoming Squad Leader of the latter.)

It was early in the morning, as usual, when word came to mount our half-tracks and prepare to leave Henri-Chappelle for the last time. But it was not too early for the whole village to turn out and wish us "bonne chance" as the vehicles turned onto the main highway leading to Eupen. I wonder if it was more than just chance that placed one of the largest U.S. Military cemeteries of World War II in that small Belgian town. Certainly, a better spot could not have been selected, for the townspeople of Henri-Chappelle would cherish and respect that sacred ground as well as any of the people of the liberated countries of Europe.

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CHAPTER VII

From Roer to Rhine

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We clattered off down the familiar road to Eupen, passing other units of the Division that were parked along the road eagerly awaiting their turns to join the column behind us. In Eupen, we took a new route through unfamiliar countryside until passing by one of the several Roer River dams that had been captured in the past few weeks. Then the southern fringe of the Hürtgen Forest closed around us once more, but not for long, for we next reached some open country where the convoy turned down a wide paved road that took us south to Imgenbroich, the objective for the first day.

There we were in the middle of the Siegfried Line again. In fact, soon after our arrival, some scouting by Jim Menendez and Lt. Forges resulted in the discovery of a new type of home for two of our squads and the Platoon C.P. They had found a pillbox that had somehow been spared by our engineers when the advance had reached that far. Their TNT, however, was left behind in the pill box for hasty demolition, should the situation have warranted it.

While the Cologne plain was being penetrated by our tanks and infantry until Cologne itself was entered, we of the 7th A.D. remained in reserve west of the Roer River. The 23d had the privilege of resting several more days, this time on German soil, before joining in the rush to the banks

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of the Rhine. During those few days in Iugenbroich, besides enjoying hot meals, and a fair share of sleep, we took part in more training and had our first opportunity to examine the main Siegfried Line, particularly the type of pillboxes which the Nazis had built to compete with France's Maginot Line.

Of course, the pillbox in which we were most interested was No. 204(a), where our Platoon C.F. was located. There were two openings, besides the iron door, which would have been large enough to permit the Nazis to mount a machine gun on a pedestal to cover approaches to the fort. But, on attempting to look out towards the "dragons' teeth" located a few hundred yards in front, we noted the poor visibility that a German gunner must have had in attempting to deliver good defensive fire. No wonder it had been possible for our infantrymen to get in close enough to capture or demolish the forts, when those Nazis located in outposts outside of the pillbox had been driven off or killed by our artillery fire. There were many "blind spots", once that protecting screen of infantrymen had been compelled to take refuge inside with the rest of the fort's crew.

Inside our No. 204(a), there were four separate rooms altogether. In the one near the door there had been a stove and six canvas stretchers fastened to the walls in maritime fashion. A hand-pumped, or electrically-powered, ventilating system was still in working order. Two of the other rooms were "battle-chambers" with slits for the two guns, and the fourth room probably had contained food and

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ammunition. It was in the latter that Elmer Ostrander and I slept, (when not standing guard outside), on a bed spring which I had found in one of the badly damaged homes along the highway.

As soon as we knew that the Co. would remain there for a few days, the quest of a stove became the chief interest of each squad. The German homes in Imgenbroich had been well combed-over before we had arrived, but it was not long before all had found rusting stoves and pipes, or fairly suitable substitutes. Among the houses, together with a poor selection of souvenirs, some men had found "cooby-traps" which Jerry had left behind in the hope of blowing to bits any careless G.I.'s who stumbled into them. Luckily, there were no casualties, but the new men had opportunities to see why they had been warned to avoid careless souvenir-hunting!

Our training in Imgenbroich involved practice in squad tactics, during which we maneuvered in the fields among the fortifications or in simulated village fighting among the damaged homes along the road. Continual rain and wet snow flurries made those tactical days seem more like real front-line duty, for it had always seemed that we were caught in rain or snow whenever the 23d had headed towards the front. Besides squad tactics, there were more practice periods for shooting rifle-grenades and bazookas, classes in first-aid by the medical officers, and orientation talks by the Platoon

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Leaders. Lt. Forges held the attention of the whole Platoon with an excellent summary of the Rhineland Campaign, so far as it had progressed, and also an outline of the probable actions that would involve us in the near future. The last day before showing on again, we were given a chance to see the new light tanks, the M-24, which the 7th A.D.'s 87th Cavalry had just received from the war production lines.

In Imgenbroich, the Squad Leaders had a meeting with "Navaho", in which he explained what he would expect of them in future action. The frankness and sincerity with which he spoke to us increased our esteem for him, and we realized more than ever how lucky A Co. was to have had such an excellent leader. After talking of the Squad Leader's role in the Co., and the best ways in which to handle our men, he added simply that he hoped we realized that we were "the most important men in A Co." We doubted that, but appreciated the emphasis he had placed on the importance of that much-avoided position, -- leading a squad! Among other things, he cautioned us that the best way to meet and neutralize combat fear was to concentrate on our jobs, on the responsibility of looking after our squads, adding that he had seen far too many officers who had to be sent back as nervous and mental cases, simply because they had "thought of only their own skins, forgetting the men who looked upon them for leadership". That was sound advice from a fellow who knew

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what he was talking about, and we tried to remember it.

General Hasbrouck stopped in one day just before we left to see how his men were living. While examining the "mess hall" (two classrooms of the damaged village school house), he asked to see the menu. Karl Leutner, A Co.'s mess sergeant, told the general that breakfast that morning consisted of "fruit juice, rolled oats, hot cakes and coffee". The general insisted that Karl meant "oatmeal" not "rolled oats", but Karl remained firm, adding in his distinctly German accent that, "In the Army, Sir, we call it rolled oats, and oatmeal only in civilian life." Hasbrouck laughed and admitted that Karl was right, after all, when the latter presented the box for evidence.

That incident was characteristic of Karl Leutner, who was the best-liked Mess Sergeant that I ever found in the Army. For a Mess Sergeant to be really liked by the men he served was a strange exception to normal. But, the reasons were found in Karl's unflinching fairness, whether dealing with private or general, his keen interest and genial nature, and in his eagerness to belittle the task done by him and his cooks in comparison with the work of the men in A Co. who carried rifles up to the front line. Born in Germany about 30 years ago, across the Rhine from Strasbourg, Karl often talked with us about the prospects of the approaching assault across the swift Rhine. The information he gave about the terrain and the river itself didn't encourage us

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a bit. But, we would worry about that when the time came!

The advance across the Roer towards the Rhine had gone faster than expected, so ^{we} were ordered to move on and prepare to aid in the attack. From Imgenbroich, the Division convoy swung north to Lammersdorf and the Hürtgen Forest again. We passed by the same house that had been the 23d Battalion's C.P., when working with the 78th Division, and then followed the rain-swept roads through the forest up to the small village of Hürtgen. Leaving that rubble and stone behind, the route led to the Roer River, which we crossed at Nideggen on one of the pontoon bridges built by 1st Army engineers. There were the usual signs of tough fighting in that small river town, but upon leaving it behind, we reached out onto the flat, untouched Cologne Plain, where our men had advanced fast enough to spare most of the small villages and farming communities, leaving them almost untouched by the war that had rushed quickly past them towards the Rhine and the larger towns. Only here and there did we see a smoldering house or a blackened, punctured tank, where those attacking in front of our advance had met what was styled "light" resistance, irrespective of the inevitable costs that any advance entailed.

With C.C. "A" in the lead, we progressed as far as Goch (or Geich), near Zulpich. We were close on the heels of the divisions on the point of the 1st Army's southern spearhead aimed at the Rhine south of Bonn, so it was necessary to halt there for a few hours until it had been decided which

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would be the best direction to turn the potential striking power of the "Lucky Seventh". We had a few hours to rest, wait, and look around.

What we saw was an undamaged Rhineland town, where the German civilians had not yet recovered from the shock of our rapid advance. They were mostly sullen and surprised, but interested to see what we looked like and how we acted, after having heard so much about the "Amerikaner" on the Nazi propaganda broadcasts. Some were docile and ingratiating, seeking to win favor or disprove their guilt (i.e. membership in Nazi Party), but many were arrogant and remained aloof. Others had fled or remained out of sight. That a few had been willing to resist us as civilians by committing open acts of defiance was evidenced by the body of an old woman which lay in the gutter by the house where our squad rested. She had thrown a grenade at a truck-load of G.I.'s passing through town, and one of them had hurled one back more accurately. German civilians were drafted to bury their own dead after we had arrived.

There was time to warm up and dry out clothing by a coal fire in one of the houses, and "Slim" Smart and little Mike Garno prepared a quick meal of German fried chicken to take away the taste of the K-rations. The energy they expended in chasing after frightened Jerry chickens with fixed bayonets proved unnecessary, however, as Karl Leutner's efficient cooks had a hot meal ready to be served by supper

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time. After chow, in Lt. Col. Rhea's best manner, a formation was called in the courtyard to enable him to present "Mac" McDermott, "Chris" Chrisman, and Lt. Refers of the 1st Platoon ~~with~~ Bronze Stars for their good work in recent fighting during the 2d Battle of St. Vith.

It was nearly midnight that same day, when Lt. Forges returned from a meeting with "Navaho" to tell us that the time for the next move forward had arrived. Shaking off the first drowsiness before sleep, we climbed back into the half-tracks and Task Force Rhea led the convoy off into an unusually dark, rainy night.

That was a wild night, both so far as the weather was concerned, and also the nature of the trip. Our platoon of half-tracks followed a platoon of Lt. Cagle's tanks and more tanks followed behind us, together with the remainder of the Task Force. We had only a vague idea of the direction we were heading through that black windy night. It was a question of following the leader, while trusting that somebody ahead really knew whether or not we were on the right road. The first signs of life that we met were some U.S. Army Ambulances that passed us going in the other direction. The tanks in front of our 2d Platoon vehicles roared on, with the infernal racket caused by their back-firing engines making it almost impossible for us to hear ourselves think. Certainly we found no trouble keeping awake that night with the rain and wind blowing in our faces and the Shermans raising

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the dead from their graves, as they sounded the alarm for the advance of our Task Force.

Some distance further on, after clattering through the streets of several small, completely blacked-out, and seemingly lifeless villages, we saw fires burning across the fields some distance to our front. Approaching nearer at top speed, what had appeared at first to be burning haystacks turned out to be several flaming houses on the outskirts of Euskirchen, which had been taken that same morning by an infantry division with the help of the 9th Armored Division. Without slackening our pace, we roared past the heat of the wind-whipped fires engulfing those houses. I remember looking back to see the Sherman behind us silhouetted by the yellow and red flames that lit up the otherwise totally black street. The glow revealed several civilians, loaded with belongings, standing helplessly to watch their homes burn to the ground. The shadows swallowed us up again at the next corner, where we zigzagged through several short streets before hitting the main highway leading out of town.

Not so many miles further down the road, Lt. Cagle halted his tanks, and what remained of our convoy came to a stop in the small village of Miel. Some of the vehicles behind us had taken the wrong turn, so we would have to wait there until they retraced their steps and caught up to us. Lt. Forgas found a house where a group of artillerymen were sleeping, and after getting their permission to share the house with them, we proceeded to enjoy about two hours of

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sleep before dawn.

By the time we had awakened, we found that the rest of the Task force had entered town and was preparing for the attack that had been scheduled for that morning. There were men from the 1st Division in town also, and we found that they were to drive towards Bonn that same morning. The final plans were made. The task force was to advance to the Rhine and attack a woods on the western bank from which the 9th Armored Division was drawing fire. The 9th had entered Remagen and found a bridge still intact. There were unconfirmed reports, we were told, that some of the 9th's men had already crossed the captured bridge. At any rate, our support was needed, and pronto!

The 1st Platoon led the procession, riding in half-tracks, then came our 21 mounted on medium tanks, followed by more half-tracks, tanks, and T.D.'s. Task Force Rhea was off again, -- and with no encouraging farewells from the German civilians who gathered to watch us leave their town! Down the main highway past a column of wet, bedraggled-looking "houghs" from the 1st Division. Then a right turn off onto a small country road, and WHAM, WHAM!! From somewhere off to our left flank an 88 mm. seemed to be firing at the sound of our tanks. It was long-range fire, but exceedingly accurate, for several shells arched just over our tank to land not more than twenty feet away, -- right among us, for we who had been hanging onto the back of the leading tank, had jumped off after the first shell passed over.

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Luckily, they were A-P shells and thus no shrapnel showered us as we burrowed into the swampy ground just off the road. Several more followed the first two shells, as our leading tank tried to back off the road out of sight of the enemy gunners, only to get bogged down in the deep ditch. Then for some unknown reason, the Jerries ceased firing, and the other tanks hurriedly pulled our helpless one back on the road where it belonged. We ran forward to return to our waiting charger, climbed up into position behind the turret, and the column moved on again through that pool of knee-deep mud that was marked as an "unimproved" road on the map.

The half-tracks had to be dragged by cables attached to the tanks as we crossed open farm land towards a small community about a thousand yards away. If there had been Germans among those buildings in front of us, armed with A-T guns, they would have had great fun picking off our tanks and half-tracks during the painfully slow progress made across that sea of mud. But, by great luck, we had completely surprised the German High Command by advancing so rapidly with such great striking power in that sector. They had anticipated a drive straight across the Cologne Plain, and the combined British and American effort to reach the Rhine to the north opposite the Rhur, but not the surprising southern lunge of this spearhead of our 1st Army.

Again and again, in the small farming communities through which we passed that day, it was the same story. We could

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have had plenty of trouble, had there been a well-equipped, determined German Army placed to defend the western approaches to the Rhine. But we were met by only a few stray shots, quantities of abandoned equipment and supplies along the roads or in the woods; white flags and defeatism, instead of bullets and defiance. The people just stood and watched us in bewilderment and apathy, as our vehicles rumbled noisily up their small streets, scraping the sides off of houses to make the sharp corners. We watched for snipers or bazookas, but few were seen that day.

From one village to the next we raced on to the ridge of hills that hid the waters of the Rhine from our view. It wasn't long before we reached the woods along the first of those hillsides where the opposition was supposed to have been located. But, another task force of the 7th A.D. had reached it before us. While the men and tanks of that other force parked in the fields along the road, we were waved into leading position, and continued on to the east.

Up one more hill, then down a long, winding slope. With nervous trigger-fingers, we aimed at every likely hiding place, and the tank gunner swung the tank's 75 mm. from one side to the other, ready to fire at the first sign of resistance. Forges manned the .50 caliber machine gun, hoping for a chance to test his marksmanship. We could see carefully prepared trenches and positions, probably dug by the people of the neighboring village at the bidding of the local Nazi officials, who had hoped the

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Germans would rise to defend their homes and their Fatherland. Around two more bends, and there before us flowed the blue water of the Rhine River! What a sight that was! We had travelled twenty-five miles since morning, and reached the Rhine itself, on March 7th, almost without any opposition. It seemed unbelievable, but there ~~was~~ the great river about which we had heard so much for so long! Months of agony and misery, - and then the Rhine. Perhaps Berlin was a long way off still, but to reach the banks of the broad Rhine was a close second!

While we paused along the road leading down to the Rhine's western bank, the officers went ahead of the column by jeep to contact a reconnaissance car from the 9th Armored Division's cavalry unit that could be seen parked by the railroad bridge down along the river road. All of a sudden, an old Stuka dive-bomber, of the type which had helped so much to defeat the French armies in 1940, came gliding in at low altitude over our column of vehicles. We jumped off the tanks to take cover in the ditches in case the Jerry chose to come in on a strafing and bombing run to attack the column. He circled slowly, keeping just out of reach of the fingers of red tracers that stretched out to grab him, and then better judgment compelled him to return to his original mission, -- the bombing of the Ludendorff Bridge, which the 9th Armored's men were then crossing. We could see the bomb fall as he went into a steep dive towards the Bridge, roughly three miles upstream from where we were at the time. The resulting explosion was followed by a mushrooming

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cloud of dark smoke that spread upward from the eastern bank of the river. He had missed the vital bridge that time, but more planes would follow him, for the Nazi High Command had demanded that the bridge be destroyed at all costs, and before further crossings over it could be made!

With the smoke from the bombing still in the air, we advanced at top speed down the hill towards the river where "Navaho" had ordered the tanks to "make a sharp left turn and go like hell" to cover the distance of an exposed stretch of road between the railroad bridge and a town where we were to halt. The T.D.'s pulled ahead of us to follow behind the 1st Platoon half-tracks. Then our tanks thundered around the corner and covered the distance to the town ahead at full throttle. Through the gates of the partly-built road block of logs and stones, and down the cobble-stoned main street of Oberwinter we dashed until the signal to halt was passed back. We had reached our objective and captured the town without a shot!

It was no wonder that the Germans of that pleasant little Rhine River town were completely dismayed and dumb-founded. The speed and aggressiveness of our "attack" had made a great impression on them, in a way that Germans understood well. It had been quite a show! The shock it had given them was obvious, as we watched the expressions on their faces when they crowded to windows and doorways to look at us and mumble in hushed conversation with friends and families. They took it all in, eager to see what we and our Army really looked like, comparing us with

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the descriptions they had probably heard over the radios. The eyes glued upon us made us feel self-conscious, and we did not know quite how to act as conquerors, but we made an attempt at it, anyway, laughing and joking about the ease with which we had taken our objective and about the bewildered and muted expressions on the faces of the Jerries who seemed so fascinated by us and our noisy tanks.

But, we soon forgot about the Jerry civilians for a while, because it was necessary to get settled before it became completely dark, and before the Jerries who were not civilians on the other side of the broad River began to shell the newly-won town. The 1st Platoon and some of the tanks moved further down the River to Rolaniseck, about a mile away, but our 2d Platoon and the T.D.'s were ordered to take over the schoolhouse in the center of town. There were good firing positions from which the T.D.'s 90 mm.'s and machine guns could cover a section of the river front as well as the main street; and inside the school house there was protection and plenty of room for all of us to sleep, when not on patrols or standing guard.

That schoolhouse had not been used as such, for some time, for in two of the large, empty classrooms downstairs we found thirty or forty double wooden bunks. Down in the cellar we bumped into a dozen "Russkies". They had been quartered there by the Nazis, and left behind when the latter retreated still faster than we had advanced. With the help of Joe Mirkovich, a Yugo-slav by birth, and a member of my H. Q. Squad, we were able to converse with them a little. It seemed that they had

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been former soldiers of the Red Army, having been captured early in the war by the Nazis and put to work in laboring units which did dirty work for the German Army. They were strange, friendly fellows, different from any people we had yet seen in Europe. They seemed quite independent, almost indifferent to the normal flow of life which passed around them, singing and laughing among themselves, and finding humor which we never saw. The barrier erected by a completely unknown language prevented our knowing what really went on inside of those fellows' minds. Perhaps, they were not sure of it themselves!

Forgetting the Russkies, we set about the task of establishing at least a minimum of security for ourselves in that totally blacked-out town. Men were assigned to roving patrols that roamed the streets and walked along the water front day and night, while others took turns standing "watch along the Rhine" in case Jerry chose to try to come across in boats from the opposite bank. There was no question that our presence in Oberwinter had become known to the Nazis. The shells that crashed along the river road that night convinced even the most optimistic. But none came close enough that night to cause us any great alarm.

Early the next morning, we were awakened by the sound of tanks moving up from the Ludendorff Bridge area on the opposite bank of the Rhine. We could see the yellow panels fastened to the backs of the 9th Armored's Shermans as they attacked the town of Honnef opposite Oberwinter after having cleared Unkel,

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a short distance upstream. Through binoculars it was easier to follow the progress of the assault in the early morning haze that hung over the river valley. The crackling of our machine guns was frequently interrupted by long-lasting, rude bursts from Jerry's "burp" guns hidden among the houses. The tanks would pause a moment, pick out the suspected source of resistance, and then blast away with their 75's and 76's adding to the number of houses that were already burning after the artillery barrage which had preceeded the 9th Armored's attack. When the tanks had succeeded in making their way through the town to the other side, we could see infantrymen storming the steep hills behind Honnef, heading towards what appeared to be a large hotel or private estate which looked out upon the winding river below. Along the top of the ridge German artillery shells were bursting in efforts to thwart the efforts that 1st Army was making to extend and develop its Rhine bridgehead. Other Nazi batteries were concentrating on the bridge itself, for we could hear the low whistles of the heavy, long-range shells passing by Oberwinter in the direction of Remagen. They seemed to be coming from a good distance down-river in the hills near the Drachenfels, which we could make out vaguely through the haze.

Shells, or no shells, the advance continued day by day, until a larger and larger portion of Germany east of the Rhine was in American hands.

We left the schoolhouse early in the morning. Some of our men were assigned to search every home in town for German prisoners.

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firearms, cameras, binoculars, and anything that seemed to have even the slightest suggestion of military value. Others were assigned to patrols or given guard positions, while the remainder rested or roamed about town to see what they could find. Lt. Forges was one of the latter, and in the afternoon he returned to the schoolhouse with the orders to move the 21 Platoon C.P. to what was probably the most luxurious home in town. For it had been decided to spread the squads throughout the town, so as to be able to cover the area and watch the Germans better.

By some strange coincidence, Forges had selected the home of the Civil engineer who had built the Ludendorff Bridge during World War I. The old fellow, then in his 70's, was still living in his home, despite the fact that we were to move the Germans out of any houses occupied by our men. He had received special permission from one of our officers at Battalion H. Q. to continue living there, never leaving his bedroom from where he could look out upon the river which he had bridged. We had noticed a picture on his bedroom wall showing the old boy standing on his bridge, shaking Ludendorff's hand at the dedication ceremonies. It was then twenty-seven years later, - drawing towards the close of another World War. There he sat, slouched in his arm-chair, pulled up to the window, looking intently down towards the bend in the Rhine, beyond which his bridge still spanned the river during the most important ten days in its existence. He could watch the Nazi

planes dive through the clouds of ack-ack bursts and continuous streams of red machine gun tracers as they sought to destroy his Bridge. Frequently those same planes and their Nazi pilots would pull out of the steep dives only to burst into flames and glide crazily towards the dark hills where they crashed with great explosions and where their funeral pyres marked the end of their defiance. The Nazis tried everything they could during those ten days from March 7th until March 17th when the Bridge collapsed. All types of planes came over; the old Stukas, FW190's, ME 109's, and the new jet-propelled planes, but, together with their artillery fire, they failed to ward off the disaster that those ten days brought upon the German cause.

Neglecting the old German upstairs, we proceeded to make ourselves at home in his luxurious dwelling that second night in Oberwinter. There were sufficient rooms downstairs, so that each member of the H. Q. squad could have had a private bedroom. We collected mattresses and blankets from the beds upstairs and brought them down to the kitchen, hall-way, or dining room where we chose to sleep. The cellars were raided for preserved food and beverages, but the latter remained too well hidden. However, in a storeroom down the street there was enough good French, Italian, and German wine to satisfy even the most thirsty among us. No need to hunt for a stove or for fuel in that home. In fact, there was nothing that was needed which we failed to find. Those Rhinelanders had lived well, having been remote from the war, for the most part. We, in turn,

enjoyed the comfortable life they had been living during the war. It was a pleasant change from the usual front line existence!

The next morning we were told that all Germans, including the old man, would have to leave their homes and move elsewhere, if those homes gave them a view of the river. They were allowed to enter their houses, while accompanied by a newly-drafted auxiliary policeman, only from 8 o'clock until noon for the purpose of getting food and other supplies.

Shortly after that order had been received, two relatives of the old German returned home, having fled from Bonn. We permitted them to enter and allowed them to roam about the house to do what they wished, after explaining the new order. Both spoke perfect English, so there was no question of a misunderstanding. They even had a chance to read the new issue of Stara and Stripes which told of the 1st Army's new gains and of the fall of Cologne. I purposely left it on the dining room table where they could not have missed seeing it. Both acted quite decently at the time, but we could tell that they were annoyed at the "disturbance" we had caused, and that they failed, or much more likely, pretended to fail to comprehend the full implications of the situation in which defeat had placed them. Their stubborn arrogance spoiled the fine polish of the outer surface which education, wealth, and sophistication had painted over their characters. They left peacefully enough, saying that they intended to return later on to get "the old

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gentleman", as they referred to the owner of the house. But they were wrong. The old fellow left alone!

Lt. Forges, who was sorry that we had allowed them to return home at all, met the lady and man coming up the street the second time. In fluent German he explained clearly and precisely that they could not return that afternoon. The woman lost her composure, and shouted angrily, "You think you have things pretty well under control, don't you? Well, just wait till our boys get back!" At which Forges uttered some German phrases that were probably unprintable and said he would shoot her on sight if she ventured inside the gate again. Knowing his profound hatred of the Nazis, I am sure he was not exaggerating!

That incident revealed the kind of reaction, the true feelings, of most of the people of Oberwinter, no matter how much they smiled and how cooperative and docile they pretended to be. No matter how many times they told us they hated Hitler and the "Nazis", it made no difference, for they were guilty of supporting their leaders and their armies. Not one deserved our trust, until the A.M.C.G. had had time to examine their records thoroughly, and all should have been constantly watched for treacherous or criminal conduct. They were rotten to the core!

Oberwinter became a test case for our Battalion during the two weeks that we spent there while "vacationing on the Rhine," for it was the first German town that it had been called upon to occupy where all the civilians still remained

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behind. The military government officer, our own officers, and we, the men of the Battalion, were confronted with the control and administrations of a living German community for the first time. It is fortunate that most of the Germans in town did not know that, for if they had, things might have been much worse. Even when considering that it was the first time we attempted such a task, I cannot help but feel that we did only a less than fair job. The reasons were as follows:

(1) As I have said, the Germans were really impressed with the high quality of our military accomplishments when we entered town. But, it wasn't long before they began to see that we were not so well disciplined, so orderly and efficient, (and not so dangerous) as they had first thought when our unbelievably rapid and aggressive advance brought our tanks roaring down their main street. Orders were issued, then revoked, then changed a third time. It became easy for them to "play dumb" when even we who were supposed to enforce the military government's orders did not know exactly what they were. They discovered many ways to avoid the letter of the law, confusing us that much more, and regaining confidence in themselves.

(2) They were quick to learn the magic of a smile, especially the admittedly good-looking German women and girls. We had been ordered not to fraternize with the Germans in any way at all, but there were many who did, even in those

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days. When men who have just come from the battlefield where Nazis were shooting at them could smile and make friends with civilians who could easily have been the families of those same Nazis, one can imagine how well men in the Occupation Army would obey the no-fraternization order. While making friends with us, the Germans were bound to lose respect for their conquerors, and the trouble began from that point on.

(3) Looting and drunkenness helped to tear down any respect that the civilians might have had at first for their so-called conquerors. I don't mean to say that it was wrong to enjoy ourselves and indulge in the luxurious life of plenty that suddenly embraced us. But, it was wrong to appear drunk, undisciplined, and uncontrolled before the German populous, and to thus destroy the dignity of the U.S. Army. The same could be said for the open and wholesale looting that took place during those first few vital days, when we made our impression on the people. It was too late when strict orders were finally issued to end all this "officially".

(4) The confusion that was created when succeeding units entered the area around Oberwinter, the engineers and the U.S. Navy, -- each with new sets of regulations, or more likely none, so far as the control of the conduct of their men was concerned, -- all helped to add to the unfavorable (for us) elements in our occupation which played into the hands of the Germans and increased our troubles. To be treated in such a

manner after defeat must have been a pleasant surprise!

On the whole, I believe it was a poor showing. Further performances of a similar nature, - poor administration, lack of discipline and control, and fraternization -, throughout the Allied Occupation Zones of Germany may have helped to spoil our victory in Europe again. Should the Army fail to carry out a successful occupation of Germany, however, I feel that civilians at home are just as guilty, for the Amies the U.S.A. sent "over there" to fight and occupy were no different in character from the remainder of our people who stood by and watched.

During the days of the expanding Rhine bridgehead we watched Oberwinter change from a "front line" into a "rear echelon" town. The troops across the River pushed the Nazis back, so that their artillery could no longer interrupt the efforts of our engineers to build bridges across the Rhine or hinder the ferrying operations of the U.S. Navy. Units of both flocked into Oberwinter and went to work without delay, while we rested, stood guard, and watched their progress.

In spite of Jerry's persistent bombing and strafing, work went on under the cover of artificial smoke and the forests of protecting AAA guns which were clustered about that vital area. And, by the time heavy traffic and continual shelling had caused the collapse of the Ludendorff Bridge, several pontoon and tread-way bridges had been stretched across the swift Rhine to take its place. Nothing held back the great preparations for further

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advances into the heart of Germany. While the most terrific concentrations of ack-ack fire that we had ever seen kept Jerry's planes from causing any great damage to the many bridges during the daylight hours, at night tanks mounting searchlights lit up the water on each side of every bridge to prevent any Nazis from swimming down the Rhine to place explosives on the bridges. Armed guards also patrolled them, watching for any possible attempts to destroy our lifelines. It was even rumored that the Nazis had tried to send small submarines up the Rhine to undo the good work of the 1st Army Engineers, but whatever they tried proved useless. We couldn't be stopped!

Among the troops of the infantry divisions which the Navy ferried across the river in small assault boats, we were surprised to see whole units of Negroes for the first time. They had finally been given the chance to volunteer for front line infantry fighting, and had jumped at the opportunity to dispel any doubts or prejudices which still lingered from the last war about the fighting qualities of American Negro troops. They had been formed into separate battalions and attached to regular, proven divisions, such as the 1st and 8th Infantry Divisions. Even the Southern boys with whom I talked agreed that the colored battalions had done a first-rate job, winning the respect of those who fought along side of them.

During the last few days before our Division crossed

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transport plane. As we watched in utter fascination, the two sailed gracefully up over the Rhine towards Remagen, and then off to the west. After that first successful plane-glider "pick-up", many more similar trips were made to speed up the evacuation of the wounded from the units fighting east of the Rhine.

When our occupation duties diminished with the coming of other troops into town, it was decided to launch another training program, the chief item of which was another mock attack on the small village nestled in the hills just behind Oberwinter. The "Attack" was carried out with infantry mounted on the backs of tanks again. A dash down a steep hill towards the village, after rushing out of the overlooking woods where our plan of attack had been formulated, gave us a taste of the kind of action that came up later, on the other side of the Rhine.

During our "vacation" in and around Oberwinter, none of us failed to appreciate the beautiful and picturesque scenery into which the rapid advance had brought us. The warm, sunny weather of spring along the Rhine Valley did much to make our stay there a more enjoyable one, and I doubt if any of us will forget the beauty of those hills that rose above the broad, blue river. It was while on outpost duty during the days when we had been warned of the chances of Nazi parachutist activity behind our lines that we had a chance to get the most impressive view of the Rhine Valley. Our squads were

placed at various points along the highest hill overlooking Oberwinter, from which we could follow the course of the river for ten or fifteen miles in each direction. The boats on the Rhine below us looked like children's toys, but the atmosphere was so clear during those days that it was possible to pick out the many old castles and ruins that still clung to what seemed to be inaccessible peaks and precipices. It was a glorious sight, one which many of us hoped to see again some day under more favorable circumstances!

Our sojourn in Oberwinter-am-Rhein had to come to an end sooner or later, much to the regret of us all. I believe, it was the night of the 22d of March that the first elements of our Division actually crossed the Rhine. Our Task Force Rheas was among those first elements. All our shoulder patches were removed and the division markings taped or painted over on the bumpers of the half-tracks. It was supposed to have been a secret move.

In bright moonlight, we headed upstream along the western bank past palatial estates of Rhinelanders and the Appolinaris monastery until reaching the outskirts of damaged Remagen. There, we moved slowly out across the water on one of the engineers' pontoon bridges protected by brilliant searchlights on each side. We could feel the bridge yield under the weight of the heavy vehicles and hoped the taut cables would hold fast and keep the bridge sections from being carried away by the swift current rushing by the pontoons underneath us. It

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gave us a queer feeling to be crossing that great river, for we wondered if we would ever cross back to the American side in safety.

Once across, the leading half-tracks of our 1st Platoon turned south along the river road, it wasn't long before we clattered by the twisted structures of the remains of the Ludendorf Bridge, still left where they had fallen when the Bridge collapsed. Every few feet we came upon another ack-ack position, either wrecked German guns, or still-shooting ones of our own forces, that were constantly watched by their crews, so as to be able to furnish protecting screens of ack-ack fire during those vital days when men and supplies were pouring across to the 1st Army bridgehead. We continued on down the road through Linz to another shadowy village where the convoy headed up away from the Rhine into the wooded hills along its eastern bank. It became noticeably cooler as we climbed up into those hills above the Rhine Valley.

On reaching the top of the first hill, we came upon the scene of a recent tank battle. There were six or eight dark tanks scattered about out in the open, moonlit fields, still left in the positions where their crews had fired their last shots. The column halted a moment at a road junction and then continued on across the top of the first ridge of hills towards a road that led us into a thick woods. It was in that location that we were to wait until the remainder of the "Lucky Seventh" crossed during the next two days.

Our half-tracks were parked in among the trees along the

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edge of the woods and camouflaged with dead leaves and branches. When that task was completed, we took time to survey the situation. From the edge of the woods we could look across a broad valley of rolling fields and patches of dark trees to see a ridge of hills parallel to the one along which we were then bivouaced. The late evening barrages from both our and the enemy batteries lit up that ridge with clusters of bright flashes that were followed many seconds later by a deep rustling, as if there had been one continuing explosion. We estimated that it was about five miles to the frontline where the shells were bursting, for we knew that at that time the Rhine bridgehead was roughly thirty miles long and ten miles wide. We had no sooner curled up in our blankets alongside of freshly dug-slit trenches when we were shaken rudely by the terrific muzzle-blasts from a battery of 155 mm.'s placed a short distance behind our woods. Their projectiles sounded like the rush of fast freight trains passing over our head. We watched patiently for the flashes, but their targets were beyond the ridge and out of sight. It was quite some time before the burst on impact came like a distant echo out of the night. In spite of such interruptions, we enjoyed a pleasant sleep, disturbed by no incoming shells. Either we were undiscovered as yet, or Jerry didn't have the ammunition to hurl at us!

For the next two days we sat around and talked, ate two meals a day, and "sweated out" the next assignment. Finally,

we were told what that was to be. It was this! While we were sitting there in the woods, enough units had crossed the Rhine to make the total concentration of troops and equipment in the small area of the bridgehead the greatest that there had been at any point during the war. Three corps of the U.S. 1st Army were ready, waiting for the word from Gen. Bradley to launch the final relentless drive into the heart of Nazi Germany. Our mission was to spearhead that drive down the Rhur-to-Frankfurt Superhighway to meet the forces of Gen. Patton's 3d Army, which had crossed the Rhine, too, and were heading north from Frankfurt. We heard that second morning, also, that the British and Canadians had crossed the Rhine north of the Rhur, together with the U.S. 9th Army. This was it! Berlin bound, at last!

We slept(?) on that information during that second night and then were ordered to move again to the final forward assembly area the following afternoon. The 99th Infantry Division was fighting to secure for us a clear entrance onto the Superhighway. We travelled a few miles further sought through recently captured, badly damaged villages and took up positions in some fields a few miles from the 99th's front line, which extended across the great highway by that time. A terrified Jerry, who had been hiding in the woods, came running out in a great hurry to surrender to our squad, and the half-tracks and tanks scattered out over the bivouac field. Forges questioned him and found that he had been a former army

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veterinary who had been given a rifle a few days before and sent to the front to fight. An old fellow, he was definitely not 33 caliber.

We spent the evening getting acquainted with the tankers from C Co. of the 17th Battalion with whom we were to team up for the dash down the Superhighway. They seemed like a fine bunch of fellows, good men to work with, well-sprinkled with veterans who had taken part in that other wild steeple-chase, the 7th A.D.'s record-breaking drive across 620 miles of France in only three weeks. Quite fittingly, their Platoon Leader was named Patton, (no relation to his high-ranking namesake). We asked each other questions to make sure we each understood the part to be played by the other half of our tank-infantry team, and then settled down for a last night's rest, stretched out on the ground in G.I. blankets along side of our slit trenches.

The nervous tension and excitement that evening was much the same as that experienced by a football team before the biggest game of the season, only multiplied many times. That was understandable, for in the dawn of the next day, we were to take part in the launching of the biggest operation of the war in Europe, with the exception of D-day in Normandy. This was to have been the "one more, big, coordinated heave" about which Churchill had spoken when he visited the area of preparations for the British and 9th Army's crossing of the Rhine. We didn't know just how tough it would be, or how far we could spearhead the drive without meeting a stone wall of

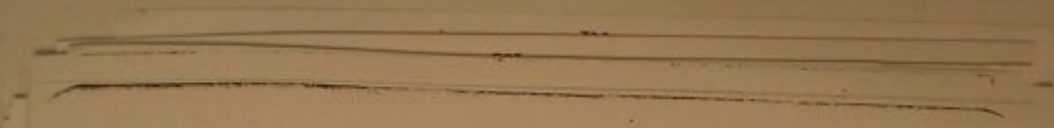
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determined resistance. It was to be decidedly a big gamble, in which the high stakes that General "Ike" would be shooting for were a quick victory with minimum costs in lives and resources. Fondering our chances of "riding-out" the approaching storm, we looked up sleeplessly at the stars that stood out so clearly on that March night, succeeding to drift off into sleep only after several hours of trying.

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CHAPTER VIII

The Big Rush

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Shortly after we awoke, "Navaho" came up to me in the dark to say, "McBride, you have the lead tank for the first two hours". That meant that I was in charge of the point of the U.S. Army as we rushed south down the autobahn. Lt. Forges and his squad rode on the second tank immediately behind mine.

When we came to an overpass, I would tell the tank commander to stop. I would jump off the tank and use my bayonet to slash the red and white demolition wires attached underneath the bridges. Lt. Forges would help me. We neutralized the threat to our advance. Fortunately Jerry did not blow up the bridges while we were doing this.

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CHAPTER VIII

We awoke while it was still black to eat a hurried breakfast, mount our assigned tanks, and move off across the field towards the country road that led to the famed Autobahn. The roaring and backfiring of the herds of lurching, spinning, and weaving tanks almost deafened us as we tried to collect our thoughts for the coming attack. Soon completely wide awake, we began to become accustomed again to the situation in which we found ourselves. Finally a column of tanks with infantrymen clinging to their backs in various positions and degrees of comfort became organized out of what had seemed like certain chaos and disorder.

With Task Force Rhea leading Combat Command "A", which was in turn leading one of the two advancing columns of the 7th, we passed through the lines of the 99th, circled a small minefield through which the engineers had cleared a safe road, and turned onto the beautiful, concrete, six-lane highway. CC "A" was ordered to advance boldly down the highway, while CC "B" took another parallel route off to the left flank, and CC "R" brought up the rear in reserve behind us.

With our 1st Platoon and the tankers' 1st Platoon of Shermans in the lead for the first two hours (platoons alternated in becoming the point of the spearhead every two hours), we made fairly good progress, but were held up frequently by the demolition of underpasses and overpasses. Each point

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where roads passed under or over the main highway had been prepared for demolition when the Autobahn had been built. Those Nazis were realists, having foreseen the possible entrance of enemy armies into the Reich, inspite of what they had told their people. But, demolitions or no demolitions, the advance went on. Our 33d Engineers rushed up to the head of the column at every obstacle met, in order to clear away mines, logs, and stones, build temporary bridge sections, or help the tanks back on the main road again. They furnished us with great support, helping immeasurably to speed the advance.

At the lapse of ^{several} ~~the first two~~ hours, during which time we must have travelled six or eight miles, it became our turn to lead the column ^{again.} Lt. Patton ordered his five Shermans to advance at top speed until we reached the head of the column where the engineers were laying down a temporary section of treadway bridge across a partly-destroyed underpass. The leading tank, to which our H. Q. Squad was clinging, paused there until Lt. Col. Rhea and Lt. Cable waved it across the new bridge, shouting to Patton to wait until he had advanced 200 yards down the road, and then start firing every weapon he had.

With those instructions, we thundered ahead at a fast pace with the other four tanks of the 2d Platoon following a short distance behind, staggered in column so as to have wider angles of fire to the front and flanks. All five tanks sprayed

the sides of the road with .30 and .50 caliber machine guns, and bounced 75 or 76 mm. shells along the road in front of us, so that they would ricochet off the pavement, burst in the air, and hurl shrapnel in a wide circle. Any suspicious area where Jerry gun crews or bazooka men might have been hiding drew prompt fire of all five tanks in the Platoon. We that rode on the backs of those noisy, fire-spouting monsters, kept our rifles ready to pick off any Jerries that might have been able to avoid being hit by the fire from the tanks.

The Autobahn avoids all towns and villages between the large cities which it connects, so we passed mostly through woods and fields that day, but off to the flanks we could see the patches of white sheets and clothing hung from the windows in every village, just as our radio programs had told the Germans to do if they wished to have their towns spared. Any house flying no white colors was immediately under suspicion, but these were few and far between during those first few days of the big rush. Out to either flank the hills and woods were full of the sounds of advancing tanks, and no wonder, for pushing out into Germany with us that day were the 3d and 9th Armored Divisions of those three Corps of the U.S. 1st Army. It must have been a terrifying and awe-inspiring warning of the impending disaster which an enemy army was bringing into the heart of Germany for the first time in over a hundred years.

We had advanced several miles without having had to call upon the engineers, and without having found anything more

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interesting to shoot at than a wagonload of frightened
Jerries escaping across the fields away from the highway,
a few haystacks, some farm buildings and several patches of
woods. Suddenly, we came around a corner to see two farming
villages, spread out in a small valley below us, one on
either side of the road. A demolished underpass compelled
us to turn off the road and head down past a grove of pines
to a steep hill leading down to the nearest town. We dis-
mounted and searched-out the woods, while Lt. Patton's
gunner took a few shots at what appeared to be an A-T gun
position on the hill across the valley. Waving the tanks
on again, we ran to our respective mounts and climbed up
to take our positions once more. We had no sooner got
seated when the next underpass a short distance down the
road blew up in our faces. However, there was still a
third underpass to cross if we were to avoid going near
the town. Lt. Patton headed his tank in that direction, and
then hesitated, having changed his mind when no more than
50 yards away. His good judgment and quick decision to use
a detour saved the day for us, for just as our leading tank
stopped, that third underpass blew up in the air, and the
force of the explosion flung great chunks of concrete over
our tank to fall all around us. Apparently the Jerry who set
off the charges by pressing an electric switch from a hidden
position in one of the houses saw his prize was not to be a tank
and a squad of G.I.'s, but decided to set off the charges any-

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way in an attempt to thwart our advance.

But his efforts were in vain, for, angered by the close escape we had had, Lt. Patton sent his tanks charging down the hill, firing away at scattered houses in the village to scare the Germans out of further resistance. More white flags appeared, and blubbering Jerries came scampering out of many of the burning houses. Forges and I jumped off to examine the two small bridges along the road through town to see if they had been prepared for demolition. Finding no charges placed around them, we waved the tanks forward a second time and off we went, ignoring the bewildered Germans who peered fearfully around corners of houses to watch us roar past. We found a way to scale the bank leading up to the Autobahn, which we then crossed, so as to be able to fire on the second village located in that valley. One of the tanks set on fire a haystack which had partially shielded an ack-ack gun from our observation. When the tanks had all reached the other side of the road, we saw a Jerry waving a white flag from a long pole around the corner of a barn. We motioned to him to come out, which he did, after hesitating at first for fear that we would shoot him down. We never learned whether the underpass had been destroyed by him or not, for he was quickly herded towards the rear with other frightened Jerries.

Flushed with the capture of two more villages, Patton radioed back to Cagle to hurry the column along, so that we could start off again. When the first tank of the next pla-

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toon came in sight, off we dashed up the hill to the Autobahn. There we found that what we had feared might be an A-T gun position was only a pile of brush. Relieved by that discovery, we headed around the next corner with renewed confidence that all would go well.

Then suddenly, not more than 200 yards away, two German vehicles drawing two A-T guns wheeled out onto the road in front of us. Patton was the first to recover from the shock, and while jumping around excitedly in his turret, he shouted directions to his gunner, "Doc" Malecki, who quickly had our first shot on its way to score a direct hit on the first Nazi gun. Then several more H.E.'s and a few A.F. shells, and both guns were of no more use to the Jerries, who had scurried off the road after the first direct hit.

In the meantime, we jumped off the leading tank, and galloped up through the woods to find the Jerries. Forges and I were in the lead, both of us shouting the German phrases which he had tried to teach the Co. at Clemens. The tanks had stopped where the firing began to wait until we rounded-up the prisoners. We reached the wrecked guns and burning vehicles, but saw no Jerries. Then, I happened to look down into a large culvert leading under the road. There I saw three Germans huddled together in the dark. They understood enough of what I said to come out quietly and quickly, where Forges interviewed them briefly to get any pertinent information about their units which their conversation might reveal.

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It turned out that they were some artillerymen from the German 26th Infantry Division, which our Division had bypassed along the way that morning. They had been attempting to escape via the Autobahn when we had cut them off. After a further search of the surrounding woods for more Jerries, we returned to the Platoon of tanks and continued on our way.

The tanks roared on again, firing all their guns as they advanced along the highway. A short distance ahead we came to the last obstacle met that day, a high overpass that had been well destroyed by Nazi demolitions. The tanks pulled up to a stop, each one facing so as to cover its share of the possible danger zones on both flanks and to the front. Each time the tanks stopped, we always fanned out to search the woods on either side of the road, for every one of those obstacles which forced us to stop could have been part of a scheme for ambushing the point of our column. That stop was no exception, so Forges ordered us to climb over the wrecked overpass and advance along each side of the road for several hundred yards to form a protective screen. Our relief was due, but it was necessary to outpost the area where our tanks had stopped until the 3d Platoon could move forward and take over the lead.

Cautiously, we advanced through the trees and underbrush along the edge of the road. Those leading fired a few shots every few steps, and called out in German to urge any Jerries that might have been hiding in the area to come out with their

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hands over their heads. We had reached the next curve, about 400 yards from the damaged overpass, beyond which we could see another town in the distance, when our calls succeeded in tempting about a dozen more Jerries to leave the bushes where they were hiding and surrender. I searched them hastily, placed them in a column along the road behind a fellow who appeared to be the leader of the delegation, and then ordered them to "marchez". They pretended not to understand at first, for there is nothing a German hates worse than to have someone speak to him in French. With a little prodding, however, they soon marched off under the guard of one G.I. I began looking for more who would be willing to become prisoners and soon saw another eight of them crouching behind some logs and bushes. I could tell they had been hugging the ground for fear of the fire of our advancing tanks. Keeping them covered, I called out, trying to get them to come out to where I was standing near the road. They had all just risen to their feet, when the B.A.R. man in York's Squad behind me cut loose with a burst of automatic fire that scared them out of their wits. They ran off through the underbrush. It would have been foolish to have gone into the woods after them, so I gave up the quest.

Moving further up the road to where we could get a better view of the town off to our left flank, we began to hear tank engines in the distance. They were probably some of our own from C.C. "B"'s column but we couldn't tell for sure. I reported that information to "Navaho" who came tearing up in his jeep to

look over the situation. Behind him came our 3d Platoon mounted on their tanks, and all ready to take over the position of point for C.C. "A."s column. We waved good luck to them, and headed back to find our own tanks and the rest of the Platoon. We came upon them where they had stopped by the obstacle.

The fellows up front drew some A-T or tank fire from the vicinity of the town on our left, so the artillery battery was called forward from the rear of the column. In a few seconds after all six "priests" (name given the self-propelled 105 mm. armored artillery howitzers) had pulled up into position in the field near our tanks, the first shells were "on the way". First, a few "air-bursts" to help the observer adjust the estimated range to his target, then a "battery-one-round" fire-order followed, and that was followed by more of the same until it was thought that "Jerry would permit us to advance" a little further.

Off again, with the 3rd Platoon attempting to equal the blistering pace we had set, - (over 11 miles in two hours). There were no more demolitions met that day, and we really made time for the next few miles. Soon we noticed a column of vehicles coming onto the Autobahn from a country road on our right flank. On getting closer, we saw that the column in question consisted of vehicles and men from the 9th Armored Division. There had been some exchange of tank fire up front, we heard later, for our men had not known the 9th was to use the same route, and had also not been able to tell at first

whether the approaching tanks were friends or foes. It was luckily, however, a case of mistaken identity which caused no casualties, for the fire of both had been inaccurate at long range before they finally found out that they belonged to the same army.

The two divisions continued side by side until we ^areached Montabour, where the Colonels in charge of the two leading columns conferred over their maps by the side of the road. We were told later that the two divisions, the 7th and 9th - each in a different corps, had been given the same objective, --Lisbourg. Either someone had made a mistake along the line of Command, or else it had been thought at first that it would require both outfits to capture that town. In any case, it was decided on the spot to let the 9th A.D. continue on to Lisbourg, five miles ahead, while the 7th A.D. cut due east along the back roads towards Wetzlar and Giessen in the Lahn River Valley. That was the new plan agreed upon!

It was another task force's turn to take the lead, so we pulled off the highway near Montabour to permit them to pass on by our column. We were up on a hill at the time, and from that point it was possible to look back the way we had come and see the long lines of tanks, half-tracks, and trucks, that were bringing the striking power of the American Army into Germany. What a sight that was! If the Nazis that still stood in front of our spearheads had been able to gaze at the strength represented by those hundreds of tanks and

thousands of fighting men, I am sure that V-E Day would have been much sooner than the 8th of May.

In Montabour, we had the great satisfaction of releasing some of our own 7th Armored men who had been captured during the 1st Battle of St. Vith in December, as well as men from other divisions. I didn't see them, myself, but some of our tankers who went through the town brought back the report. We rested there a few hours, and watched the others roll by, while we warmed up some K-rations over gasoline fires alongside the tanks.

It was dark when the order came to advance, but that failed to slow up the progress we had made. In fact it seemed as though we made much better time during the first hours of that moonlit evening, for the tanks streaked across the countryside towards the east, avoiding the larger towns where resistance might have been met. The tankers all took turns relieving the driver, so that they could get some rest, while still rolling forward into Germany, and we did the best we could to relax in all manner of strange positions in the limited space behind the gun turret. It was cold and damp, but by huddling together we benefitted from the body warmth of those fellows next to us. At one point, I walked up to where there were some light tanks in our column, hoping to find a more suitable place to stretch out. I bumped into Lt. Zang, my friend from Camp Croft, and he invited me to enjoy the warmth given off by the ventilating system of

the engines in the new M-24 in which he was riding as H. Q. Mortar Observer. I accepted his invitation!

During the night, we had seen one wrecked Nazi convoy after another, with quantities of dead horses and smashed supply wagons outnumbering by far the still smoking trucks left in the wake of the hard-hitting point of our spear-heading unit. Often we paused in villages long enough to make sure we were on the right road, and we watched the startled and bewildered Germans crowd along the road to talk in muffled voices. Sometimes, a few of the then liberated slave laborers in each farming community would cheer and shout out, "Ruski" or "Polski", to make sure we understood that not all of the bystanders were Germans. We waved sleepily and shouted back a greeting of some sort, and then the tank engines would turn over, drowning out further conversation, and we would be off once more over the dark, hilly countryside. Other times we took the wrong turns, or had to retrace our steps when we came to small country bridges that would not have supported the 32 tons of our medium tanks. But, it made little difference in the end. Each mile we were covering another mile of German territory, and in the morning, the red line of the tactical map revealed an impressive advance for the first 24 hours after breaking loose from the Rhine Bridgehead.

In the foggy dawn which enveloped us, I walked back to find Lt. Forges. The column had stopped for quite some time,

and he felt it would be wise to examine the woods that bordered the road. Armed with his .45 automatic and my one grenade, we started out together to see what we could find. We had not walked far before coming upon two tremendous Jerry artillery trucks, one of which had a carriage behind it which supported the largest gun barrel I have ever seen. Its diameter was nearly half again as great as the length of my size 11 shoe, when held up to the muzzle. There were probably more vehicles in the convoy that had been hidden in the woods, but there wasn't a Jerry in sight who might have given us the information. We did find, however, some heavy German Army blankets that added to the comforts of our travels from that time on. Also, a pile of German packages met our eyes, giving us the chance to make up for some of the three-quarter million Christmas packages which the Nazis had captured during the Battle of the Bulge, but the contents proved to be a wholly inadequate breakfast. We didn't care for their ersatz cake and cookies, and Forges' quest for Jerry sardines, which he always craved, proved no more successful.

A short distance further along the road, we passed a grove of trees that had obviously been a German Army bivouac area. Scattered about on the ground amid the usual assortment of abandoned equipment were the remains of hundreds of American Red Cross packages, the kind which contained a variety of preserved foods for the nourishment of our prisoners of war in Germany. The Nazis had decided that the packages were

fitting prizes of war and had issued them to their own men, according to the evidence we saw there. Only a few whole boxes remained unopened. These we sampled and found far better than the contents of the Jerry mail opened before.

Continuing on that morning, we began to pass more and more German prisoners that trudged wearily down the road towards the rear of our column, raising their hands quickly as each Sherman rumbled past them. They had feared to show themselves at night, lest they be shot while trying to surrender, but during daylight hours, they flocked down to the roads to meet the advancing armored columns. Most of them were a sad looking lot, for the best units were either north around the Rhur or being held in reserve further to the east for the Nazis last desperation stand. However, some could still carry themselves erect, glaring insolently at us as we went by. All along the way, too, we began to see that day many places where the Germans had planned to resist to the last man, only to change their minds upon hearing the approaching thunder of the hundreds of roaring tanks heading towards them. Such sights as abandoned anti-tank gun positions, where both guns and ammo had been blown up to avoid capture, when the crews manning them thought it better to save their own skins, or half-finished road-blocks and entrenchments, -- such sights as these were common that second day. But, here and there, the yet unburied dead of each army revealed that some Germans chose to fight. And it wasn't so very much

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further, that we finally came upon more than a few who chose to do so! The fact that we never knew when or where that would be made the job of leading the column a particularly nerve-wracking one!

By noon, we had made our way into the gently rolling country-side of the Lahn River Valley, which is bordered by good sized hills that helped to channel the streams of armored vehicles and men, as they flooded across the rich farming country found in that part of Germany. For the first time we could see clearly the slave laborers that had been greeting us in the dark the night before. Together with Allied prisoners of war, they formed a warm reception committee in each good-sized community we entered. The light in their eyes, the understandable gratitude in their expressions, and the unrestrained cheers they shouted as we passed were spine-tingling and uplifting in the enthusiasm and feeling with which they were given. We waved, smiled, made V-signs with our fingers, and shouted back greetings and encouragements to the varied but united international groups of faces that crowded into the streets along our route of advance. Each group wore their tattered but still distinguishable uniforms on that day to celebrate their liberation. Here we saw some berret-capped Frenchies, who shouted out "Francais", "Vivre la France", or "Vive les Americains", as we rushed past; there a gathering of G.I.'s, a lieutenant from the 9th Division smilingly holding up his shoulder patch for us to see, or some

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Air Force pilots still wearing their cherished "wings"; in another group some British Tommies laughingly shouted to us to "keep 'em rolling, Yanks". Russkis and Poles, and countless other less easily distinguished nationals chimed in to add to the over-all picture of noisy, happy, former war prisoners and slave laborers. In marked contrast to those groups who greeted our arrival with such spontaneous enthusiasm were those who formed that other "reception committee", the quiet, sullen, and dismayed German villagers who suddenly found themselves engulfed in the tide of our advancing armies. It was amusing to compare their glum and bewildered expressions with those of our Allies who pushed through the ranks of Germans to rush^{up} and shake our outstretched hands, when the tanks slowed up sufficiently, or stopped along the village streets. To see such sights during those days helped to make up for the months of miserably slow and costly advances that had been endured by the luckiest among us. The days of the first rush of that great advance across Nazi Germany gave us a wealth of such sights and experiences, which even the most casual observers could never forget. Those days were worth living!

It was not long before we left the main road, along which we had been travelling up the Lahn River Valley and headed across-country up into the hills again. The purpose of that change of direction, we discovered later, was to enable us to swing around to approach Wetzlar and its neighboring villages

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from the north, instead of moving further along the road which led directly to the town. Taking the less-expected approach, we made our way through small country roads and trails in the woods, which we would have thought normally impassable for medium tanks and T.D.'s. However, with the combination of good reconnaissance and skillful driving by the tank drivers, we took advantage of the cover offered by woods and hills to confuse the Nazis who might have been attempting to estimate the probable directions in which our columns were heading. And the only planes seen in the sky above us on that clear sunny day were our own small Cub observation planes and the high-flying formations of bombers and fighters intent upon bringing a final whirlwind of destruction upon the Reich.

By late afternoon, Task Force Rhea came to a halt in a patch of woods behind a high hill bordering the Valley. From the top of the hill we could look down upon a good-sized town, not far from the outskirts of Wetzlar. Lt Col. Rhea made his plan of attack from the crest of the hill, after having Forges question some Jerry prisoners about the probable strength of any forces that were in the area. The two young Nazis, who claimed to be officer candidates from a near-by school, told Forges that there were "about forty men still in town, armed with only rifles and Panzerfausts". (These were powerful anti-tank weapons, which looked like fourth of July Roman Candles, and their explosive projectiles

containing about 7 lbs. of T.M.T. were greatly feared by our tankers, who found them effective against our Shermans). The plan of attack was completed quickly, and then Forges and Menendez returned to the tanks to tell the squad leaders how we were to meet the situation. In the usual procedure, the squad leaders passed on that information to their men, and we were ready to go.

The three rifle platoons of A Co., mounted on three platoons of tanks, led the attack, bursting out from our hidden assembly area in the woods and dashing down the hillside to approach the town from three different directions. Seeing scarcely any white markings hanging from the windows, we didn't hesitate to fire away freely, as the tanks came within close range of the first houses. At the edge of the town, we dismounted at once and advanced quickly through the streets ahead of the tanks, which crept along slowly at a safe distance behind. We had to be careful to avoid shooting our own men when calling for supporting tank fire, or when advancing from one block to another. Keeping contact between squads and platoons was one of the most difficult things about street fighting in large towns. Radio helped to maintain close coordination between larger units, but from Company level on down to the squads themselves, hand signals, shouts or contact by scouts and runners were absolutely necessary if the attack were to progress smoothly.

Through the middle of the town ran the Lahn River. To be

sure, it wasn't very wide at that point, but it was an obstacle, and required our reconnaissance to find a suitable point where the tanks could cross without bogging down, for the bridges had been blown. We reached the river, after clearing those houses not already set on fire during the approach to the town. Most of the Jerry civilians and a few prisoners were hiding in several large caves along the face of the ravine above the river. Joe Kirkovich, Messersmith, and I had discovered the caves and decided to order the civilians to remain there until we had captured the whole town. Most of them didn't have to be urged to do so!

At the river's edge, we ran into "Navaho", Forges, and the rest of our platoon. After a short delay to enable the other two platoons to catch up to our line of advance along the river, we dashed out from the cover of the railroad station and moved quickly across the wrecked bridge, with the two rifle squads leading the way. The platoon's two machine guns were placed near the remains of the bridge to help cover our advance up the street on the other side.

The squads were divided, as usual, into two- and three-man teams which leap-frogged one another, taking the next house on their side of the street ahead of the team that was in the lead at the moment; the process continued with each other team in turn until the whole block had been cleared. Then, when the platoon on either flank had finished with their

blocks, all three crossed the street together and started the same business all over again, until the whole town had been cleared. At least, that was the way the attack was planned, but the actual practice during the attack seldom resembled the plans, for unavoidable difficulties arose (loss of contact, unsuspected enemy resistance, etc.) to compel immediate alteration of the original design. That was the point where initiative and good leadership came in, or the attack failed.

For the most part, the care we had taken to avoid surprise and the ammunition we had spent were unnecessary, for the majority of the town's garrison had fled or remained in hiding to be taken prisoner. The noise and aggressiveness of our approach to the town had taken the fight out of all but a few of the Jerries who remained behind. Those that did resist were easily and quickly disposed of, being greatly outnumbered.

The tanks advanced across the stream and took up good defensive positions along side of the houses on the outskirts of town which were outposted by our squads. We rounded up any suspicious-looking civilians and the small number of prisoners that were found, and then we prepared to spend the night in town, or at least, the few hours that were granted us. We found some food and proceeded to cook a quick meal on the still-warm stoves. Some fellows collected a batch of freshly-baked bread from the town baker, who had just finished

his afternoon's work.

The few civilians that had not already fled at the distant approach of our noisy tank columns were haraless enough, and many attempted to make friends with their conquerors, offering us food and beds to sleep in, anything to make us happy. We ignored them unless they had something we really wanted, and when that was the case, we hardly asked if they minded our taking it. But, that didn't bother them at all. They continued to smile and nod, uttering frequent "Ya's" and "Goot's", as we downed their food.

In the house where our Platoon C.F. was set up I was surprised to find what I assumed were six dashing uniforms of at least a colonel in the German Army. However, closer scrutiny and questioning of the absent "officer's" wife and daughter disillusioned me. It turned out that the small silver acorn in the center of the Nazi insignia on his high-peaked cap meant that the owner was only a lowly State Forester.

Once again, we found German homes that were cluttered with religious paintings and crucifixes, but quite incongruously, for the many sentimental paintings of Iron Crosses with dead German soldiers lying peacefully beside them, and the dates 1914-1918 at the tops of the pictures, were clear evidence of their stronger faith, the worship of nationalism and militarism. It didn't seem to occur to them that their "two" religions were utterly incompatible. Neither professed religious faith, nor the undeniable beauty of their country have done anything so

far to calm the German spirit or stifle their reverence for the sword and the national standard. Perhaps they will have learned this time! Let us hope so!

While we rested that evening, ammunition, gasoline, and even some good old K-rations were brought up to us by the supply trucks which always trailed our columns on advances such as that. The officers conferred about the schedule for the coming day. When Lt. Forges returned from the meeting, we were told that a city by the name of Giessen would be next on the list. Luckily, we had a few hours to rest before mounting the tanks and shoving off again at dawn.

On the way, it was necessary to pass through what was left of Wetzlar. Task Force Weemple was in the lead that morning, so we missed the first excitement on entering that industrial town, home of the Leica Camera. Weemple's tanks had met some resistance, so it was only after about a half-hour's delay that Task Force Rhea arrived at the point where one of the leading force's tanks was still burning, across the road from the Leica Factory. The plant, itself, seemed almost untouched by the bombs of the air force, but the residential districts nearby were nothing but piles of rubble divided by huge bomb-craters. Bull-dozers had to make a path for our tanks to permit us to continue on towards Giessen.

After leaving Wetzlar behind, we continued up on the Lahn River Valley through more small villages covered with clean white sheets and towels to signify that their citizens wanted

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their homes spared by our tanks. We were leading the Division's advance towards Giessen along one road, while another task force had crossed the Lahn to work up towards the city from a different direction. We could see the other tanks working parallel to us across the valley every so often. Overhead the faithful Cubs served as the long-ranged eyes of the Division, watching for enemy units to the front and flanks. I remember seeing a whole train-load of German artillery pieces sitting peacefully along a siding, and with no engine attached to the long line of cars. The Air Forces had done a fine job!

On further, the column of advance was halted by opposition just ahead. The Cub plane flew forward to see what the Nazis had to offer in the way of resistance. It found out in no time at all, when four black puffs of ack-ack explosions bracketed the small plane, causing it to dip gracefully and glide out of the danger zone just above our heads. The observer hadn't seen where the fire originated, so he circled about and headed forward fearlessly into another barrage of ack-ack fire. How he avoided being hit we couldn't imagine, but he seemed to have learned the location of the 88's the second time, so he flew back to radio the information to the artillery units behind us.

It was only a short time later that two full batteries of the 7th's self-propelled 105 mm.'s roared past us to take up positions quickly in a field just a short distance ahead of

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our platoon. A few seconds later, their first shells began to search out the many batteries of triple-purpose 88 mm.'s which had been clustered around Giessen to protect its important factories from air attack. That day their barrels were lowered to meet our ground attack.

The order was shouted back to us from the head of the column to prepare to advance to the next town, a suburb of Giessen. To do so, it was necessary to travel along an open stretch of road between the two towns. Not knowing what was ahead, we jumped on the tanks, and followed our 3d Platoon down the street and around the corner past our artillery batteries, which were firing away in preparation for the coming assault. There before us was the open stretch of road, perhaps a mile from one end to the other. Hugging the tank's turret and crouching down as low as possible, we got set to run the gauntlet of fire. Up ahead, we could see several bursts hitting in the trees, their smoke hiding the 3d Platoon's last tank. Roaring at top speed past a burning half-track we reached the danger point. Two shells burst sickeningly close, a few feet behind our leading tank, and then we reached the relative safety of the first few houses of the next town, pulling to a stop behind the other vehicles in front of us. We had made it safely, together with the other four tanks in the 2d Platoon.

We waited in that suburb of Giessen for about a half-hour.

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CHAPTER IX

A Pocket of 20,000

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while Lt. Col. Rhea and some of his unit commanders made a quick reconnaissance. Glesseen was no more than a thousand yards away, so we had a fine view of our artillery's "air bursts" breaking above the roofs of the buildings, as the observers sought to lay down a good preparatory barrage for the coming attack. Lt. Col. Rhea had a close call while making his reconnaissance, for a sniper had caught his jeep in a burst of machine gun fire, compelling him and his driver, "French Frog" Fortune, to take cover in the ditch until Rhea's accurate fire with the rifle he had grabbed from the jeep put an end to the Jerry sniper. They somehow managed to get the jeep to limp back to where we were waiting. Soon after, the plans were completed, and Task Force Rhea prepared to attack.

The 3d Platoon, mounted on their tanks, started ~~at~~ first, with the mission of clearing out that section of Glesseen situated on our side of the Lahn River, over which it would be necessary to pass to get into the main part of the city. Their five tanks advanced cautiously towards the houses near the damaged, but still standing, bridge. They had not gone far before drawing fire from behind walls near the first houses. The tanks spread out and began firing point-blank into the buildings in front of them.

At that point, our 2d Platoon, also mounted on tanks, was signaled forward to assist in stamping out the resistance holding up the advance. We moved up behind their tanks and began at once to fire all our weapons at selected targets

where other snipers or bazookamen might have been hiding. The increased firepower soon disposed of the Jerries firing around the first houses, so both platoons branched off to the left towards some factory buildings and several rows of workers' houses. The tanks began hurling shells into the factory, puncturing the walls with large, ugly holes. Suddenly from behind a wall just in front of the 3d's leading tank a Jerry bazooka's blast interrupted a lull in our firing, and we were minus one Sherman tank. Most of the crew got out safely, and all of the doughs jumped off the stricken tank before its ammunition began to explode. A Nazi paratrooper, his surrender having been paid for with one tank to his credit, came out from behind the wall to give himself up. Angrily we waved him on to the rear, circled around the 3d Platoon, and continued on.

We knew that it was to be no "soft touch" that day. We began firing again in all directions as our tanks raced on to reach a field, where we dismounted and prepared to attack on foot towards the river, while the tanks remained behind to deliver supporting fire. We formed a skirmish line and rushed forward towards the rows of workers' houses. The civilians came up from their cellars when the tanks ceased firing to wave white cloths at us. Holding our fire, but watching out for snipers, we ignored the civilians, and searched the area around the houses. There were no prisoners yet, so we moved ahead towards the river through gardens and

backyards. Along the bank of the river we found a few Jerries who had been hiding there in fear of our tanks. Then, after making contact with the 1st and 3d Platoons, we were ordered to advance over the damaged bridge into Giessen. The tanks had to wait until the engineers did some hasty repair work, but we didn't hesitate, for a delay would have given the Nazis time to organize a better defense. Following the 3d Platoon across, we branched off into our own assigned sector of town upon reaching the other side. With Forges leading the way, we moved cautiously past badly damaged buildings until reaching what looked like a large school of some sort. There we were greeted by two Germans dressed in such dashing uniforms that we presumed they were certainly the high ranking officers in charge of the garrison in Giessen. But, to our disappointment, a quick questioning by Forges revealed that they were only officers on the city's police force.

Gladly they led our platoon to the town hall, a few blocks away, and there, the chief of police talked briefly with Lt. Forges, and then shouted down a cellar door. Shortly, the whole police force of over a hundred men filed peacefully out into the courtyard, stacking their weapons in one pile, their ammunition in another. One fat old fellow hurled his loaded rifle to the ground disgustedly. It fired upon hitting the ground, shooting its former owner in the stomach. The old fellow died in a few minutes, and was stretched out in a corner of the large courtyard by his fellow policemen.

The German Chief of Police was cooperative, doing all he

could to help us keep order. The other squads had left to continue the hunt for more Jerries, so there were only about a half dozen of the H. Q. Squad left behind to guard the prisoners, who kept appearing one by one to add to the numbers already crowding the courtyard. The members of the Wehrmacht were kept separate from the policemen. Many were drunk and disorderly.

"Navaho" and Lt. Col. Rhea appeared in a jeep to survey the catch of the 2d Platoon. They said that help would be on the way soon, as the bridge was nearly ready to support the weight of our tanks. The other platoons had met some opposition, but were making fairly good progress. The other task force, which was to have entered Giessen from the south side of the city, had not yet arrived on the scene.

After they had left, someone from one of the other squads came back to say that the mortar and machine gun squads were pinned down by sniper fire, and then the report came that York's and Chrisman's squads were also having trouble. It sounded as though the 2d was in for another tough fight. Forges set out with Ostrander to try to reach the street where our men were in trouble. Before leaving, he had sent word by runner to the 3d Platoon to see if Lt. Grundy could possibly spare us some men. I was to lead them up to meet Forges after Elmer Ostrander had returned to show us the way.

A short time later, two squads from the 3d platoon appeared on the scene, and then "Navaho" showed up again, having got

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word over the radio that our Platoon was in trouble. Jim Menendez and Mezatis had been wounded by sniper fire, and had just been evacuated before we left to try to find Forges and the rest of the 21 Platoon.

The Chief of Police had urged his men to note that we removed one of the wounded Jerries with one of our own fellows on the first medical jeep that could be spared. He was probably playing his cards smartly to make a good first impression, but his words of praise for our decency (in German to his men) sounded sincere, and the Jerries seemed impressed, watching the episode intently.

Ostrander hadn't returned, but "Navaho" thought we had better start out and meet him on the way, so he and I led the two squads along the streets of Glessen in the hope of finding our other men. We met Elmer and he showed us the direction in which Forges had headed when last seen. Down the deserted avenue past a park, and then a left turn along several streets of empty shells that had once been homes. But, still no Forges. We pushed on, with "Navaho" in the lead, a white scarf tied around his neck in cowboy fashion and the pair of German binoculars that I had given him held in one hand, his carbine in the other. Glessen seemed a dead city of ruined walls and empty streets, for in covering ten blocks, I doubt if we had seen more than ten civilians, not counting the unburied dead.

We had reached the railway tracks on the far side of town,

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without finding Forges and without meeting any resistance. Suddenly, "Navaho" spotted a German Army car approaching towards us several hundred yards away. We had not yet been seen by the driver, apparently, so it was decided to try to ambush the Jerries. Hiding along the houses on both sides of the street, we waited as it came closer and closer. Then, when about 150 yards away, the car stopped short and pulled to the side of the road. We had been discovered! Several of us stood up and peppered the small car with bullets, as the occupants leaped out and dashed behind some houses up ahead. The car burst into flames, but we had missed the Nazis.

By this time the machine gun squads from H. Q. Co, for which "Navaho" had previously called, had arrived to help us out. They had no sooner pulled up behind us, when some snipers cut loose with a volley or two from hidden positions somewhere to the rear. Several more men were hit, including the young lieutenant in charge of the machine guns. We took cover as best we could near the railroad tracks, and returned their fire, aiming at some windows where one of the snipers had been seen. The machine guns began to spray the houses on both sides of the street to our front to keep the Jerries from causing any trouble there, too.

Luckily, the first of our tanks came up to join us a few minutes later, and we soon had control of the situation once more. "Navaho" left to contact the rest of the Co., while we continued to push on towards the factory district across

the railroad tracks, supported by the tanks which advanced with us, firing as they went. After passing the last houses on the street and coming in full view of the factories, we suddenly saw hordes of civilians pouring forth from the buildings where they had been hiding.

As they came nearer, we could see that they were some of the thousands of slave laborers that the Nazis had been using to keep the production lines moving in Giessen. Those most easily identified were the Russians who wore green jackets with faded, white "S.U."s painted on their backs, so as to distinguish them as Russian prisoners-of-war. All of the others could be identified only by their shouts of "Polski", or "Français", and the rest tried to explain what nationality they were, but we failed to understand in the confusion of the noisy celebration that promptly took place about our tanks. We were hugged and kissed by some, had our shirts stuffed with looted cigarettes and cigars by others, and were overwhelmed with bottles of French Cognac that were thrust at us eagerly by still others among the boisterous crowd. Led and paced by the irrepressible "Russkis", the yelling, laughing, and screaming crowd completely overwhelmed us for several minutes, adding to the confusion and disorder already caused by the recent fighting by the R.R. tracks. It was a wild performance! I finally shouted to the tank Platoon Leader, while elbowing my way through a gathering of more than slightly inebriated "Russkis", that I thought it would be a good idea if we tried

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to "escape" and return to the area of the courthouse. Just then, an order from "Navaho" came over the tank's radio, telling us to return at once.

The tanks turned around amid the flocks of celebrating laborers, and we climbed up on the nearest ones at hand. But, the trouble was that the "Russkis" insisted on climbing up, too, each armed with at least one bottle of Cognac. Neglecting the barriers of different languages, we tried to explain politely, then firmly, that we were "soldats", and that only "soldats" could ride on tanks. The Russians understood enough to shout back that they were "soldats", also, so, lest an international issue develop, we accepted our self-invited "guests", and the caravan started off, followed during the first few blocks by the soberest members of the crowd who could find no space on the tanks. They all shouted and cheered louder than ever, much to the utter disgust of the sullen Germans who had appeared from hiding to watch us pass. At the sight of each Jerry civilian, the former members of the Red Army would shake their fists and fill the air with blood-curdling cries of "STALZEN", "STALEEN", and then flow off into what must have been unprintable Russian phrases.

The wild-looking caravan finally rounded the corner of the street by the courthouse, permitting the "Russkis" to see the Nazi police force gathered in neat ranks in front of our few guards. The tanks hadn't stopped before every Russian was off

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towards the Nazis. With their bare fists, they tore into the terrified Germans, knocking them down left and right. It took about three G.I.'s to control each of the wild "Russkis" before order was restored. After seeing that performance, we all felt that some of those Russian soldiers would have been good fellows to have had around when there was any fighting to be done.

By the courthouse, I found Forges and what was left of our 2d Platoon. They had had some rough going, but had finally been able to get back to our starting point, after dealing with the Nazis.

It was necessary to consolidate our positions in Giessen before it became completely dark, so "Navaho" organized his platoons and their attached tanks into separate forces, and then dispatched them to various vital points throughout the city. Giessen was no small burg at that, (probably inhabited by 150,000 people before the war), so the only way that a task force as small as ours could attempt to hold such a city was to rely on a defense consisting of groups of isolated strongpoints, instead of a front line.

The Second Platoon was ready to leave first, so we climbed up on the two T.D.'s assigned to us, and started off through the dark streets towards a large road junction on the other side of the city. Feeling that our work was done for the day, we sprawled casually over the backs of the two Tank Destroyers while taking in the sights of a different part of the dead,

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bombed-out city and comparing the experiences which each of the other squads had had during the day. The only living civilian that was seen during that trip was a girl who darted across the street and behind a wrecked building to our front just before we reached the road junction where our Platoon was to remain for the night.

A few seconds later, there was a bright flash and a loud explosion by the wall across the street, not more than ⁵⁰ fifty feet away. I remember seeing what looked like a large flower pot sailing through the air just above our heads as we sat on the leading T.D. Before the projectile hit the sidewalk to explode a few feet away, I had leaped from my position astride the 90 mm. gun barrel, and joined the others along the wall of the nearest building. ~~Before we had recovered enough from the nearest building.~~ Before we had recovered enough from the shock of the Panzerfaust's first explosion, another projectile careened through the dust-filled air to burst on the street just in front of the first T.D., and then all was quiet again, as clouds of dust settled around the scene of action.

The crews of the two vehicles had abandoned their positions when we had first leaped clear of the explosion, but one of their gunners volunteered to return to the second vehicle in order to put its 90 mm. in action. Shouting directions to him, we picked out likely targets where it seemed possible that Jerry might have still been hiding, waiting to fire at us a third time. Forges grabbed someone's B.A.R. and sprayed the

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wall by the cemetery, while we held our ears to keep from being deafened by the terrific muzzle-blasts of the 90's. When several shells had battered large holes in the buildings across the street, the T.D.'s ceased firing, and we rushed forward towards the cemetery with K.A.P. leading the way. A thorough search of the area enabled us to find only one wounded Nazi. Whether he had fired the Panzerfausts we never learned, for he was soon beyond the questioning stage!

All was quiet again, so we returned to the "Y" of the three large streets which our Platoon was to outpost, and waited for the approach of our 2d Platoon tanks which were to join us in that position. It was at that time that Lt. Forges was injured by a falling wall, while riding on the back of one of the T.D.'s as it backed off the street into a position from which it could cover the road junction. Before K.A.P. was evacuated, he turned the Platoon over to me.

We wished him good luck and then began to select positions in which the squads could outpost the area best. In the middle of those preparations, the 1st Platoon came along, mounted on their four tanks. They started up the street along the cemetery and had only progressed about 200 yards when met by the rattle of machine gun fire and more Panzerfausts. The tanks and G.I.'s returned the fire, shooting in all directions, as they backed slowly down the street to avoid being hit by any of the Panzerfaust or bazooka projectiles. It was a noisy

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show with tracers flying in all directions in the dark, and the bright flashes of tank fire lighting up the street. They escaped with few casualties, luckily, and all four tanks.

Lt. Refers decided that it would be best for his Platoon to join ours for the remainder of the night, for there was no point in getting into any more trouble in the dark in a strange city. When the platoons became organized ^aagin, we assigned the squads to areas, and picked out the cleanest cellars in the nearby buildings as places to rest when not standing guard.

In the morning a battalion from the 99th Division came into Giessen in trucks, or mounted on the few tanks that accompanied them. Both the 99th and the 9th Divisions were moving up behind our spearheads to clear out sections of country and points of resistance which our columns had avoided for the sake of speed. That battalion took over Giessen, and we prepared at once to move on further into Germany. Lt. Reed, a young, inexperienced officer, was assigned to our Platoon in the morning to take the place of Forges. I became Platoon Sergeant for the next few days.

We mounted the tanks once more and returned to the area of the courthouse, where the Co. assembled. From there we made our way through bomb-blasted streets heaped high with rubble until we reached the outskirts of Giessen where the remainder of the Task Force joined us. Our half-tracks came along to join the column for the first time since leaving the Bridgehead on the Rhine. A welcome sight they were,

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for we were weary and stiff from our two days and nights of continuous tank riding. However, inspite of their arrival, we continued on the tanks for the remainder of the day.

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CHAPTER IX

With one of the other Platoons in the lead that morning, we left Giessen, and headed due north through more farming country and small villages. In each town that we passed through, it was amusing to note that the local Nazi H. Q. was conspicuously vacant, the former occupants having hastily departed, once their efforts to whip the local populous into a patriotic frenzy for the defense of the village had failed completely, again and again. Those German farmers were too practical, too realistic, for that sort of thing. The colorful posters seen in each town portraying the old farmer, dressed in the uniform of the Volksturm, standing in the background behind his Army son, seemed to have failed "to sell" their moral to the local communities. Instead of the stern-faced, fiery-eyed, old Volksturm, we saw crowds of peaceful people lining the streets of most of the white-bedecked villages. Only occasionally did we meet any resistance. When we did, the tanks set on fire six or eight houses to repay us in part for each Sherman tank destroyed by bazooka fire. Because of the chance of meeting such resistance, being mounted on the leading tanks of the Task Force was still, however, a nerve-racking assignment, so we were always glad to remain in the rear with the half-tracks.

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Along the road we still met hundreds of Jerry prisoners. In each community, a few men from our column would be left behind to gather the stragglers together in one spot, so as to be able to pass them along to the over-worked M.P.'s when they caught up with the advance. Sometimes those Jerries were collected behind the same barbed-wire fences, in the same "Chicken coops" where the local slave-laborers had been herded like animals each night after the day's work in the fields.

It was just after passing one such gathering of Jerry prisoners that we rounded a corner in some village to see an old farmer bandaging up the stump of his wife's arm, while she sat on a barrel in front of their blazing house. Some soldiers garrisoned in the town had fired a Panzerfaust at one of our tanks from behind the farmer's house. Of course, his house was destroyed at once, and his wife injured in the process. The old fellow turned to see us rounding up some of the captured Jerries. Overcome by the suddenness of his personal tragedy, he shook his head disgustedly at the Nazis, while saying something to them about "Hitler". We needed no translation, for it was obvious that he had had enough of the war at that moment.

As was always the case when resistance was met, we had to pause and search the town for prisoners before going on. In most cases, the German civilians went out of their way to cooperate with us, for the show of military strength informed

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them that we meant business. They opened the doors for us, jumped out of our way, and did all they could to help, smiling and uttering frequently "nix soldaten". After a hasty search we returned to the tanks and continued the advance, for speed was still the chief objective.

In another village north of Giessen, we met a rather formidable obstacle in the presence of five anti-tank guns that were manned by a group of determined Nazis, who were quite willing to die for Hitler and the Fatherland. One of the other platoons in A Co. was leading at the time. We heard later that, upon leaving the small village and heading across an open field towards the woods, the Nazis suddenly opened up with their 88's, hitting our leading Sherman with their first lucky shot. The other tanks immediately left the road, spread out across the field, and began firing H. E. and W. P. (white phosphorous) shells into the edge of the woods. Before the Jerries could hit any of the ^{other} four tanks, all five A. T. guns were wrecked, and all their gunners killed. It had been a perfect example of good initiative and fast, aggressive action on the part of the tankers. None of our men who had been on the tanks were hit, when they immediately jumped off and deployed quickly, so as to add their fire to that of the tanks.

We arrived on the scene about ten minutes after the last shot had been fired, and the one Sherman tank and the Nazi vehicles in the woods were blazing away furiously, as we pulled to a stop in the field. The task force paused there long enough for us to change from the tanks to our own half-

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tracks once more. And what a relief that was!

It was only a short distance to the fields along side another German village where it was decided to halt for the night. We had just begun to place the vehicles in well-scattered positions, when a Jerry plane swooped down out of the overcast to take a look at our own men and vehicles. Those not actually firing machine guns back at the Jerry hugged the lowest bits of ground that could be found, as the intruder circled around to come in on a strafing run. One attempt was enough for him, as our tracers streaked the sky close to his plane. Followed persistently by the fire from other task forces spread about in the large valley nearby, he had disappeared in the clouds as quickly as he had come. We had been discovered!

It gave us a queer feeling that night, as on all others during the spearheading days, to be out in the midst of enemy territory without knowing what was waiting for us in the next town or over the next hill. But, it was encouraging to have seen so much ack-ack fire from other units of the Division whose presence there had been unknown to us until the Jerry plane had appeared. We didn't seem quite so alone, after all. To be sure, the 3d and 9th Armored Divisions were also not far off to our flanks, but they were usually out of hearing, and nearly always their tank columns were out of sight behind the hills of that rolling countryside. That type of warfare was far different in other ways from the more

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static front-line fighting. One of the most pleasant differences was the lack of enemy artillery fire during the first days of the rapid advance. It was not until reaching the southern fringe of the "Ruhr pocket" that we had to endure enemy artillery shelling again.

At dawn the next morning we rolled out of our G.I. blankets that had been spread out in two-man "beds" around the half-tracks. We ate a breakfast of K-rations while en route, for Lt. Col. Rhea was anxious to get an early start. We were off again, heading through a forest in the direction of the Eder River Valley, leaving the Lahn behind and avoiding the large city of Marburg. The 7th Armored's objective that day was the dam at the western tip of the Eder See. The mission of C.C. "A.", of which our Task Force Rhea was a part, was only a supporting role on that day, so we could relax a bit, letting someone else ride the point of the spearhead for a change.

More prisoners, more villages flying their white colors, and only a few instances of light resistance, was the picture of our advance. However, I remember one particular episode that was a bit unusual. In one small village passed that afternoon, we saw a large crowd gathered around a man standing on the small balcony above what appeared to be a general store. That fellow was a "Russki" of the type seen in Giessen, and he seemed to have the situation well in control. Apparently, as soon as our leading tanks had reached the village, he and his fellow ex-slaves, ex-soldiers, had "taken over" the town,

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compelling the stunned and bewildered Germans to take orders from him and his wild-looking henchmen. The local "dictator" then set about disposing, more or less equitably, of the loot taken by force from the store. As we passed by, he was shouting away in Russian about "STALEBN", and hurling packages of food and merchandise to the large crowd of freed laborers standing below his balcony. We continued on our way, leaving the wild Russki to be dealt with by those units following more slowly behind us.

By evening we had ^a village which could not have been more than 15 to 20 miles from the Eder Zee and the dam. As I remember, that particular stopping point was close to the fair-sized town of Allendorf, one of the many Allendorfs in Germany. We scattered about in the fields on the outskirts of the village, hoping we might be lucky enough to spend the night there. The chaplain had even prepared to have an evening church service, the first since leaving Oberwinter.

However, word reached our H. Q., just at the service was about to begin, that the other Combat Command had run into another pocket of SS troopers around the dam. Our assistance was needed at once! We were used to that sort of thing, and had not really thought that we would be lucky enough to rest that night.

Off we went again, into the darkness that had surrounded us already. Through Allendorf and other villages, then up the Eder Valley to the town near the dam. By great luck (for us)

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these in the lead had taken the wrong turn at one point, for they picked a road more correctly called a trail, that turned out to be a dead-end. The confusion caused by turning about a column of vehicles on a road bordered by a steep precipice on one side and a thick woods on the other delayed us for over an hour, so the S.S. boys had been dealt with by the time we finally arrived.

Our mission was to assist the 48th Battalion of the other Combat Command in forming an outpost line along the top of the ridge of hills above the dam at the end of the Eder Zee. The dam seemed an imposing structure as we crossed it in the moonlight that night to take up our positions, but it was not until daylight the next morning that we were able to appreciate its size. There were demolition wires stretched along the walk leading across the top of the dam, but, just as at Remagen, someone had slipped up again, permitting us to capture the structure undamaged.

The next morning we came down from the hills after combing the woods near the dam with only one meek, old Jerry ack-ack gunner to show for our efforts. From the hill top we had seen the 9th Armored moving north at a good clip.

It was not until that afternoon that we left the fields near the dam and the many ack-ack guns and searchlights clustered about the area. Our route was retraced back almost to where we had been the preceding day, for our CC "A" was still in reserve and our presence no longer needed by the Combat

Command that remained in the lead after capturing the Eder dam.

We enjoyed a day and night of rest, Easter - by the way -, during which time our only duty was to protect the supply route of the 3d Armored Division which passed near our bivouac area. Patrols rode luxuriously in half-tracks, keeping the highway under constant observation, lest Jerries still hiding in the neighboring woods place demolitions on the road or ambush some of the 3d's supply "trains" which rolled past in the direction of Faderborn, the 3d's objective. Between turns at patrolling and standing guard, we enjoyed some needed rest, hot meals from our mess truck, and wrote our first letters since leaving Oberwinter on March 22d. "Big Jim" Sears returned from the hospital to rejoin our 2d Platoon. No one was more happy to see him than I, for he took over the position of Platoon Sergeant, relieving me of that head-ache!

The next afternoon, Task Force Rhea was ordered north to Medebach. The 7th Armored had come in contact with a pocket of roughly 20,000 Nazis, including a good percentage of SS troops. That pocket was just south of the main Ruhr Pocket, around which elements of the 1st, 3d, 9th, and British 2d Armies had formed an iron ring. Together with other units, including the 104th "Timberwolves", and the 7th A.D. was assigned to reduce that pocket of Jerries, for they were attempting to escape to the east.

It was in the middle of a dark, rainy night that we con-

tacted in the 104th in Medebach. Just before dawn, A Co. was spread out in a line on the outskirts of town to await the Nazis seeking to push through Medebach to the east. Later in the morning, we mounted our same tanks once more and pushed out into some woods west of the town to take up new defensive positions. A regiment from the 104th was to circle about one flank and drive some of the Nazis towards our prepared positions where we would take them prisoner or send them off to join their ancestors. Another unit from our division was to circle about the other flank for the same purpose. However, inspite of all the elaborate preparations, pitifully few Jerries turned up to join the ranks of the F.W.'s. We seemed to have been wasting our time. That story about the "pocket of 20,000" seemed to be turning into another false rumor. At night, we returned to Medebach, thoroughly disgusted to have spent a day out in the rain for nothing. We hardly bothered to stand guard that night outside of the school house shared by most of the Platoon.

In the morning, it was decided to "dig into the Pocket" in further efforts to try to find some of the much-talked-of 20,000. Task Force Wemple led off down the highway towards some rugged hill country northwest of Medebach. It was ideal terrain for defense against intruding armored columns, which were confined for the most part to the few roads leading through the forested hills. Only here and there were there

enough fields around small farming communities to justify their existence.

It wasn't long before Lt. Col. Wemple's tanks and G.I.'s ran into more 88's and Jerries than they could handle alone. The "Focket" had materialized! So, we were called forward as far as the village of Kustelberg, where we assembled for an attack to help relieve the pressure on Wemple's column. It was even necessary to run a gauntlet of fire from nearby 88's in order to get into Kustelberg itself. There we abandoned the half-tracks again, and sought the 2d Platoon of tanks. "Navaho" and Lt. Col. Rhea conferred quickly with Lt. Cagle of the tanks, and then the platoon leaders were told the plan of attack. A village by the name of Hildebach (or Hildesfeld) was the objective. Our three platoons were ordered to assault while mounted on the three platoons of Shermans. Before we left, a terrific hail storm began. It helped to conceal us from the enemy.

When all was ready, "Navaho" waved us ahead, and off we went behind the 1st Platoon, the 3d following us. It was necessary to avoid the road and head cross-country through about two miles of rolling farm land, bordered by a wooded ridge on the right flank. Upon leaving Kustelberg, the tanks began at once to fire into the woods, hoping to either scare Jerry out of his wits or, at least, compel him to reveal his position by answering our fire. No reply was forthcoming, so we waited nervously until the village appeared in front of us

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after passing over the last hill. Several of the 1st Platoon's tanks had bogged down in the marshy ground through which we had to pass, but our tank growled angrily and made its way slowly but surely towards the village.

We could see some white flags flying among the few houses which our tanks had set on fire, but no Jerries could be seen, until suddenly, a wooden cart drawn by two horses shot around the corner of a house and off over the hill beyond Hildebach before our tank gunner had seen it. At the edge of town, we ceased firing as we came up alongside the one tank from the leading Platoon that had been able to get through the mud.

Dismounting quickly, our H.Q. squad rushed forward to survey the situation before the other squads appeared on the scene. The 1st Platoon took one side of the L-shaped village, and we the other. There were no more Jerries seen at the moment, but around the corner of one house was an abandoned 3.F. (self-propelled gun) and down the street were two captured American half-tracks. Here and there lay German bazookas, rifles, and grenades, so it looked as though we had come too late, that Jerry had left again before we could catch him.

However, as soon as the rest of the Platoon appeared and our squads were broken down into the usual teams for searching houses, plenty of Nazis were discovered hiding in the cellars. Our tanks' fire had scared them out of offering any resistance, it seemed. In one house that was clearly marked with two red cross flags, we captured two doctors and their medical assistants,

Leaning on Jim's shoulder with one arm and on a Jerry farmer's shovel with the other, I managed to make my way back up the street to the house which the Germans had been using for their Aid Station. Inside we found Mike Sarno and Cliff Dolan, for they had taken shelter there during the mortar shelling. Someone called out to Jim that several men in the 1st Platoon had been hit also. Since Jim was the only aid-man with the Co. at the time, he dashed off at once to find the other casualties.

Only a few seconds after he had left, the mortar shells began to fall again. They must have seen us entering that house, for in the next few moments the Jerry gunners proceeded to blast the top floors off the clearly marked aid-station, completely ignoring the red cross flags which they, themselves, had placed over the door. The concussion of the first shell-burst outside the open door knocked Cliff unconscious. Mike rushed over to help him, and then we descended into the cellar, where the German family was already taking refuge. With some help; I managed to sprawl out in the large potato bin. Several more direct hits demolished the house above us during the continuing barrage.

We stayed there for about another hour until "Navaho" stuck his head in the door to find out whether I could get back to the barn on the outskirts of town where the wounded were being collected for evacuation. With the help of Mike and Cliff, I climbed out of the cellar, crawled over the

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in what must have been their Aid Station. Further along the street, more Jerries staggered out of the cellars to give up.

Murphy, Morin, and I were moving across the backyards from one house to another, when suddenly some mortar shells landed behind us, just as we were crossing a fence to reach the next house along our Platoon's street. The first shell landed about fifteen feet behind me, its fragments striking me in the back. It felt just as though someone had whacked me with a flat board. My knees buckled, and I sagged to the ground, just as three more shells dropped all around the backyard where I lay. "Murph" and Morin dragged me inside and sent word back to Jim Potter that he had a casualty on his hands.

At that point, about eight Jerries came filing out of the cellar, stepping over me to offer themselves as prisoners. I had a word or two for them! Before they had been herded up the street after a hasty shake-down search, the front door opened, and in came our Platoon medic, Jim Potter. With the help of one of the other two fellows, he took off my ammunition belt, dressed the wound, and fed me the eight sulfa tablets carried in every man's first-aid packet. After a shot of morphine had been injected, I told Jim that I thought it would be possible for me to walk back to that part of the town where the prisoners and wounded were being collected. The mortar barrage had ceased for the moment, so it seemed reasonably safe to make the attempt.

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wreckage that blocked the doorway above, and then headed back along the same street to the large barn.

There we found the captured medics, including the two doctors, who were helping Jim care for the wounded. The German doctor made out a German evacuation ticket for me, after insisting that it was advisable to give me another shot of morphine and also a tetanus injection. It wasn't long afterwards that I began to feel dozey and sleepy.

After perhaps another hour, one of the medical evacuation jeeps appeared on the scene. A fellow who had been shot in the neck by a sniper and I were loaded onto the first two stretchers, and off we went across the muddy fields. It was a matter of life or death for the fellow with the neck wound, so no time was lost. I can remember bouncing at least a foot into the air on several occasions, hanging on for dear life with both hands gripped to the ends of the stretcher, lying on my stomach. The other fellow was strapped down tightly, while lying on his back. On the way, we passed reinforcements headed up towards Hildebach, which was covered with smoke from another heavy barrage. They looked back enviously at our jeep, as it roared past the tank on which they were riding. I am sure they longed for the comforts of a good hospital bed too!

At the 231 Aid Station in Kustelberg, the two Battalion doctors went to work at once to save the life of the fellow lying next to me. A hasty glance at my back, and another shot of morphine, and off I went again, this time by ambulance.

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I must have lost consciousness for a while after leaving Kustelberg, for I have no memory of stopping at the clearing station.

The next stop was the 45th Evacuation Hospital. There I was stripped, X-rayed, and hastily examined while waiting my turn to proceed to the operating room. It was early the next morning, I found out later, that a 3-hour operation was performed to remove the shrapnel from my back.

I awakened the next morning about 11 o'clock to find myself in a long Army hospital ward-tent, outside of what appeared to be a former tavern of some kind, which then provided the receiving and operating rooms for the 45th Evacuation Hospital. I believe that that hospital was the first of its kind to have been moved in completely by air, into the vicinity of Giessen, in order to keep up with the rapid advance of our armies across the Rhine.

After getting several injections of Penicillin and eating lunch, I was loaded into one of several waiting C-47 transport planes at the air strip near our hospital tents. There were twenty-four of us in the plane. All type of men: Yanks, Tommies, French Bengalis and Morroccans, and two "supermen" (Nazis.) To care for us en route, the Air Forces provided a pretty, young nurse, who was trained for service with the Air-Evacuation Corps. Her presence helped a lot!

In spite of our conditions, we were determined to enjoy what was for most of us our first trip by plane. We all had thought upon leaving Germany, that the next stop would

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be a hospital in Paris, but the nurse soon informed us that the destination was England. Many were disappointed, after having heard reports from men in their outfits who had had 3-day passes in the French capital.

But, it was too late to turn back then, as the plane glided out over the English Channel after passing over the patchwork of neat French fields and hedgerows near the Normandy coast. A short time later, the wheels of the transport touched ground on an air field not far from Salisbury.

There followed four weeks of hospital life in England at the 158th General Hospital. I could see the tower of Salisbury Cathedral from my bed during those days, but that was about all the sight-seeing there was for me. On the third of May, we were taken by ambulance convoy to Southampton to board the Navy transport, U.S. Gen. Meigs for evacuation to the "zone of the Interior", the U.S.A.; finally arriving there May 15th, after hearing the proclamation of V-E Day while at sea! Home again, back where we had started from!

After I left the Seventh Armored Division on April 4th, it continued its advance on across Germany during those final days before victory on May 8th. Though not forgetting how lucky I have been to return safely to the States, I still wish that I could have remained with the outfit until the final concluding day of Victory. For in that way, I could have continued to enjoy the companionship of the good friends I made in A Co.

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In conclusion, let me say that I hope all went well with the "Lucky Seventh" during those last days of the war, and that few additions were made to its long lists of casualties. I hope, also, that the friends we all have made during the fighting overseas will never be forgotten, and that our pride in our outfit will remain a strong bond, helping to unite us and make still firmer the ties of friendship.

THE END

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