

712 West Pierce Street  
Kirkeville, Missouri  
U.S.A.  
September 27, 1949

Dear Mr. van Deal,

I read and very much enjoyed your letter in the Workshop News of our 7th Armored Division Association for April 1st, 1949. I am particularly interested in the battle of Overloon because that was the first major attack against the Germans in which I participated after joining Company "C", 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion. I have been meaning to write to you for some time since I read your letter but have been busy with my college work and haven't done so until now--I have been thinking very much of Overloon and the other places we fought in the Netherlands, since it will soon be five years since those dark bloody days. As yet I have never had the opportunity to go to a reunion of the 7th Armored Division Association, but two of my friends who have attended one tell me that they are wonderful for renewing the comradeship that existed while we were fighting the Germans.

The 23rd Armored Infantry Battalion was fighting in the forests around Overloon during most of the American phase of the battle, and I really couldn't say how close we got to the town itself. I believe I remember seeing a church steeple sticking up over the tree tops and suppose it was the church of Overloon, but I couldn't be certain. We were told before the battle started that our objective was Venlo and that we had only twenty miles to go before reaching that town--little did we know that Venlo would not be taken for five long months! Our company (mounted in half-tracks) along with some tanks from the 31st Tank Battalion moved out towards Overloon late in the afternoon. We were fired on by German 88's before the last vehicle had left the forward assembly area, and the spearhead was forced to stop due to the fact that our heavy vehicles could not maneuver in the soft ground of the fields. (The Germans, with wider tracks on their tanks, had the advantage over us in this respect) We of the infantry dismounted and advanced in single file up the ditch toward a road junction, being accompanied by three tanks. When the lead tank reached the road junction (I am enclosing a sketch map so that you may be able to tell me just where we were at the time) it fired into the woods and began to make a reconnaissance by fire. However, as it turned in front of a house a Panzerfaust hit in its motor compartment and set it afire. The crew escaped but one man was shot through the leg before he could reach our infantry. The other tanks were forced to retreat when the infantry was taken under very heavy mortar and artillery fire which necessitated a temporary but hasty withdrawal. We fell back down the road until we reached a deep ditch which ran under the road through a concrete culvert. Our vehicles were parked in single file at this point and here we waited for darkness.

Shortly after dark the order came to advance and we again went up the road in single file, this time keeping in the ditch and passing several burning buildings on the way. Upon reaching the road junction where the tank still burned, we spread out into the fields and dug in for the night. During the hours of darkness we were shelled by mortars several times and two of our men were killed by a shell which made a



direct hit on their foxhole. When morning finally came after a wet, sleepless night my platoon (the 2nd platoon, commanded very ably by Lt. Charles L. Amos of High Point, North Carolina) moved across the road to the left and prepared to "jump off".

The attack started soon after we had gotten into position, with "C" Company attacking on both sides of the road. We advanced without resistance until we had gone some distance into the forest, at which time we were taken under heavy machine gun fire. At first we were "pinned down", but by a heavy answering fire the enemy guns were put out of action and the advance continued. This occurred at least twice before we were stopped completely by the heavy resistance of the Germans. When we were held up at last it was decided that the company should fall back in order to let the artillery fire on the Germans, and so we withdrew perhaps one-quarter of a mile and dug in again. While waiting for the artillery barrage it grew very quiet and most of us climbed out of the foxholes and sat down with our backs against the trees. Being tired and very new to combat, I immediately went sound asleep. I awoke perhaps ten minutes later at the sound of several shouting voices and on first looking around thought myself completely alone. Then, when I looked more carefully I was astonished to see that the rest of the men were crouched down in the holes. Somebody yelled, "Get in that hole quick, you big lug, there's been a sniper shooting up this place for the last five minutes!" Very frightened, I quickly jumped into the hole I had dug before asking any more questions. I soon realized what the situation was however, for a burst of fire from a Schmeisser machine pistol rattled through the trees around us. I was very lucky that I wasn't killed due to my lack of discretion in going to sleep, and this episode taught me a good lesson.

At Overloon I saw more dead men than I have ever seen since, for our 434th Armored Field Artillery Battalion fired into a German counter-attack in the woods there, and every burst was at tree-top level. I don't know the name or number of the unit which was caught by the barrage, but they were evidently mounted on bicycles, because we found hundreds of good bicycles lying among the dead in the woods and along the road. Our own battalion commander, Major Johannson, was wounded (he eventually had to be evacuated, though he made every effort to remain with us) and the captain who commanded Headquarters Company lost a leg when the Germans out-flanked us with an 88 and fired down a fire-break which crossed the road.

I can well see why Overloon has become known in Europe as "the second Caen", even though the 7th Armored fought there only a few days compared with the months that the British slugged it out in that sector. I shall always remember the apples in the orchards we passed through--they proved to be a very tasty addition to the monotonous field rations. I am also grateful to a Dutch farmer who offered soup to five of us while we were in the rear waiting to lead the 38th Armored Infantry up to the line. At the time we could trust no one and hence were afraid to eat the soup, but now I can see that he was trying to be as hospitable as possible under very adverse conditions.

Someday I hope to return to Europe and to Overloon, for I would like very much to see again the places in which the 7th Armored Division met the Germans. I would particularly enjoy seeing your war museum and talking with all of you who live in Overloon--I have never met you but regard you all as my good friends.

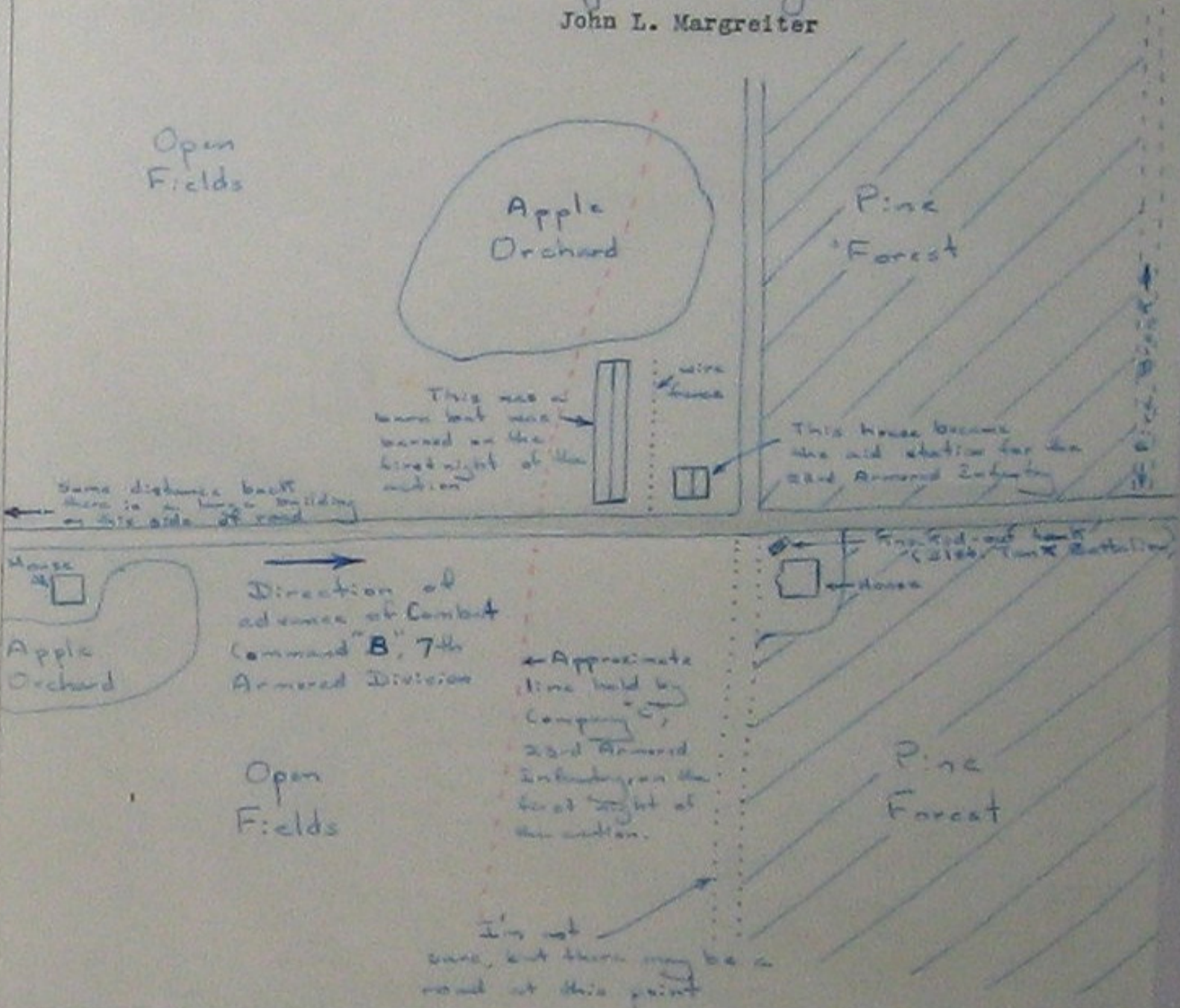


I was only a lowly infantry private and hence didn't know too much about the major aspects of the battle of Overloon, but I hope that this letter is what you wanted when you asked to hear from the men of the 7th Armored. I correspond irregularly with Dr. Jan H. Weejels of Meijel, and I would like to hear from you if you have time and care to answer this letter.

I was wounded in the leg during the counter-attack at Meijel but returned to the front in time to see action in the German Ruhr, though I later had to have a second operation. I have been pensioned by the government because of my wound and have been going to college since the spring of 1946. I expect to become a doctor in June of 1951, but will not be permitted to go into practice for myself until I have served an internship of a year in a hospital. As soon after that as I can afford it I hope to return to Holland for a visit, and I can assure you that I will see you if and when that time comes.

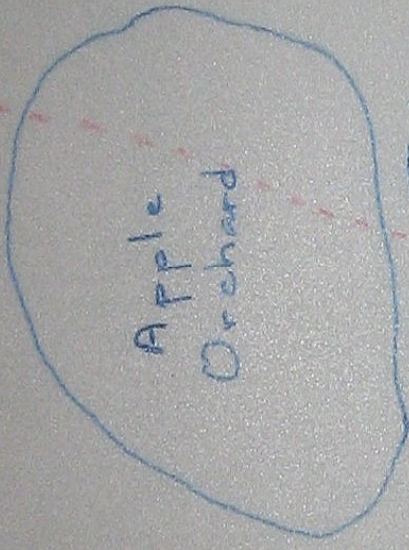
Your American friend,

*John L. Margreiter*  
John L. Margreiter





Open Fields



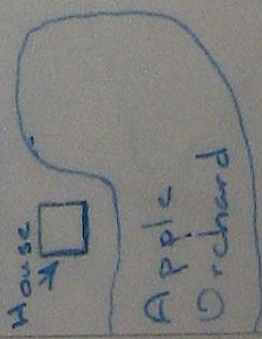
Apple Orchard



This was a barn but was burned on the first night of the action

wire fence

Some distance back there is a large building on this side of road



House

Apple Orchard

Direction of advance of Command "B", 7th Armored Division

Open Fields

← Approximate line held by Company "C", 23rd Armored Infantry on the first night of the action.

It's not sure, but there may be a road at this point

Pine Forest

This house became the aid station for the 23rd Armored Infantry

Knocked-out tank (31st Tank Battalion)

House

Pine Forest