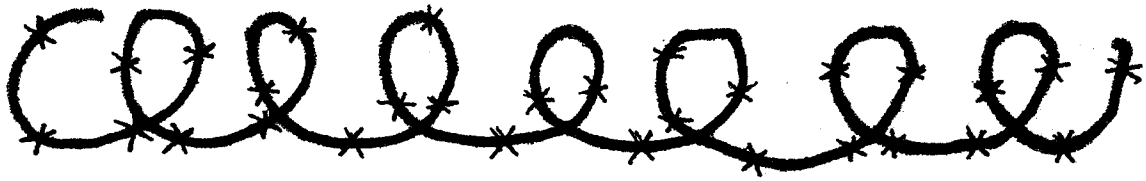
I WAS NO HERO BUT....



Lester K Edsall
([redacted])

:I WAS NO HERO

This book is dedicated to

My loving wife Edith, whose love sustained me in my times of trial,

and to the men and boys who sacrificed themselves and

gave their lives at my side.

Published 1987

Captain Lester Edsall - Inf. U.S. Army

PREFACE

I guess a preface in a book is written to somehow justify the writing of "another book". Each and every one of the millions who served in World War II has a story to tell. Some will never tell theirs. Some have told theirs, time and time again, over a glass of beer, in the fellowship of a club, and in turn have listened to others relate their experiences. Some have written books. I, too, have a story to tell.

At the end of the war, I returned home to resume my life with my wife and loved ones. There were none with whom I served in the 26th Division in my area. So, having no one with whom to rehash the memories, I promptly and completely dismissed them from my mind for the next fifteen or twenty years.

It might have remained that way for good, had it not been for a phone call one afternoon in the nineteen sixties. My daughter, Nancy, had just gotten home from school and answered the ringing telephone. A voice asked, "Is Lt. Edsall there?" Now, I had never talked about my war experience to my children, so she naturally asked, "Who?" She had never heard me called "Lieutenant".

By this time, my wife took the phone and found that it was Lyle Dudley, my messenger, calling from the Covington, Virginia factory where he worked. Through him, I once more established contact with many who served with me in the World War II conflict.

More years passed, and one evening during a holiday season, as our family was gathered in the living room, I had gotten my diary which I had kept when a prisoner of war, and was reading excerpts from it. To my surprise, they were interested in the contents and even totally fascinated.

This was apparent to my wife, Edie, too, and from that time on, she urged me, and finally insisted, that I translate and elaborate in a permanent form, the recordings of this diary.

How happy I am that her wisdom prevailed, because the necessary research, reading, and contacting of living buddies brought back happenings that were all but forgotten. Indeed some were entirely forgotten. Now each year as I meet with some of my former charges and we talk of those days, a spark is ignited and often another forgotten incident is remembered.

It has been interesting and amusing in another respect. In conversations when I would casually remark that I was "writing a book", I would catch the look of surprise, amazement, and suspicion concerning my capabilities. These looks didn't often offend me, but made me determined to give it my best shot. One genuine reaction from my niece, Ann White Kistner, was a simple, "that's great!", and I thank her for this encouragement.

It is easy to understand how an individual like Jesus Christ, because of his teachings and promises, could affect the millions down through the centuries. But how did some mortal I didn't know, manage to steal four years of my life along with the very health and lives of millions?

Hitler was at the extreme opposite apex of the pendulum swing of good and evil. His actions, and the consequences of his actions, would be felt by all families, races, and nations in the civilized world for years and years to come. Even many, who would never even know his name, would be affected in some way. Some were spared the trials and sacrifices of war and oppression. Many even prospered. But millions and millions suffered, adversity, tragedy, and death. Most of this remained unknown fully until the great conflict was resolved, and the full, shocking, gruesome story was finally exposed and recorded.

This book is not intended to be another documentary or detailed account of World War II. Many of those have been authored and printed in excellent works by renowned authors and experts.

I would like to say that it is the story of an illustrious, much decorated hero, but it isn't.

Rather it is merely a record of the activities, observations, and memories from the belly on the ground level view, of one infantry soldier, a young man from a farm community in Miami County, Ohio, and covers nearly four years of my life.

It is written with the encouragement and insistence of a loving wife who shared these experiences and years. The object is to pass on to my children and grandchildren and other loved ones, an account that answers the question "what did Lester Edsall do in World War II?" Already the war, which we were sure had ended all wars, has faded in memory and the young people read of it briefly in history classes. It would be a tragedy if humanity forgets the lesson of this great war.

If I can draw them closer to this great conflict through my experience, I would be pleased.

It has no intention or pretension of even appearing professionally done. Rather, as I write, I picture myself sitting with my family and relating the things as they come to mind. And so the story goes.....

Chapter 1

"GREETINGS-----YOU HAVE BEEN SELECTED"

I would start my narrative with something like "Well, I was no hero but.....". But, wait, I would like to start at the beginning.

In retrospect, I find it easy to record with apparent wisdom and foresight, the happenings and events leading up to the early days of the War. As a matter of fact, some of the records in this book were borrowed, and injected into this narration for the sake of continuity and clarity, but were actually interpretations and opinions of some of the expert analysts of the times. After all, a small town boy, living a secure life in the midwest, could hardly be expected to be worldly and wise about events so far away. Only, after all things are finished, when one can stand back and see the overall picture, can one understand how all the various things fit right into place. Many times from a narrowed point of view, things seemed very fouled up, and even chaotic.

However, though the years have dimmed some of the details, with the help of relatives, friends, and various records, the accounts listed here are reasonably accurate and not exaggerated.

During the time Hitler was planning his strategy and laying the groundwork for his exploits, I was finishing my high school years. I was busy with all the activities that go along with middle and late teens--sports, fishing, movies, dating. I had met the young woman I would later marry, One Edith Morrow. My parents had gotten me through the depression years of the early thirties with very minimum of problems and scars, compared to many. I worked part-time after school and upon graduation from high school, was immediately hired as a full time grocery clerk. I bought a car and things were going very well. The future looked bright, for it seemed that the depression of the 30's was now behind us.

Our community newspaper reported the economic news from Washington, D.C. with optimism and encouragement. The foreign news and world problems were indeed "foreign" and far away. Plans for the future were being formulated and moving ahead. Edie and I were engaged and were talking of marriage. The full time grocery clerk was now a grocery manager and it seemed that marriage was a safe and perfectly normal and reasonable thing to do. So we were married November 2, 1941 by our dearly loved minister, Dr. John C. Inglis.

Of course, we followed the newspaper and radio headlines and we heard about the Russo-Finnish war, so very far away. Surely, it was just a little skirmish. Another war so soon after World War I was unthinkable, but war had been unthinkable in the early nineteen hundreds, too.

In September, 1939, the German armies roared into Poland. Hitler swiftly and completely engulfed and annexed Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. With fear and apprehension, we began to hear the message of this madman. England and France declared a state of war existing with Germany.

Then in April, 1940, when winter had passed and favorable weather returned, the electrifying, thundering blitzkriegs moved through Denmark and into Norway. In May, with the full fury and support of dive bombers, tanks, and infantry, Hitler's troops moved through he Netherlands in five days. Belgium was a little harder, being helped a little by the British and French. They resisted eighteen days. The allies were separated and the British troops were pushed back to Dunkirk. The evacuation of the British troops is recorded in all the excellent histories of World War II. In June, "neutral" Italy entered the war against France, and in a couple weeks, France capitulated. Germany now controlled territory from Spain to Norway. It looked like the next and final step was a jump across the channel to Great Britian. To reinforce this fear, in August, the Luftwaffe began a regular bombing of England.

America awakened with a start. The rantings and ravings of this

maniac about world domination was not an idle boast, but had indeed become truth, and very threatening.

Conditions in the Far East had reached equally serious proportions at this time, also, but it was the European theatre that was my concern in the years ahead.

It must be surmised that the serious observations of the developments in the preceding paragraphs were certainly not those of a very young man from the heartland of America, so isolated geographically, and insulated from "life" with our lifestyles, social beliefs, and values. Most of us really didn't comprehend the impact of the happenings and events that were going to shape our lives. My generation didn't really know what war was. The nearest brush that I had with World War I was that a cousin, Travis Trittschuh, had lost his father as a result of military service in France. This tragedy happened early in my life and I barely remembered Uncle Ed.

Edie and I went about our daily lives as happy newlyweds, but then suddenly the sun wasn't shining over our shoulders so brightly. September 16, 1940, Congress had initiated the draft. Now this cloud was shutting out some of the sun, and some of our friends and relatives were being called, and it was slowly and surely working toward us. Finally the "Greetings" notice came. It was received with a very slight feeling of relief, for now the waiting, the anxiety, and uncertainty was over. Many times I have tried to guess if I would have ever volunteered for the service, if I hadn't been drafted. I always felt that I was patriotic, but no zealot. Then, too, at that time, I had not fully realized the world threat that actually existed for everyone.

We were bussed to Columbus, Ohio for our physicals and written tests. I didn't realize until later how important this day was to be for me. I scored well on the IQ test with a 132,and this one result would affect my entire military experience. I had been chosen out of all those men to be in charge of the bus.

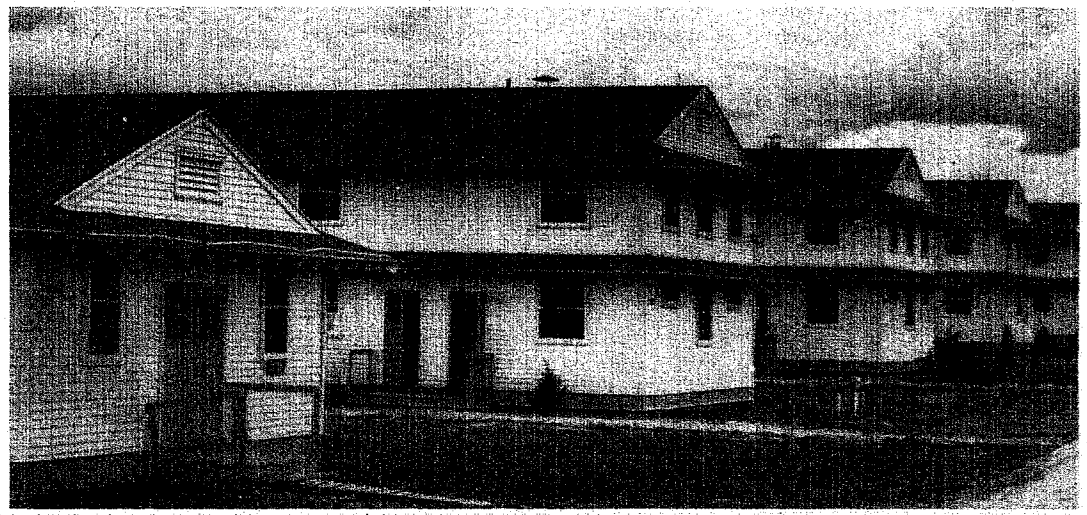
It was no big deal, but I remember being flattered and pleased about it.

We reported for service July 15, 1942. We then had until July 31st to wind up our goodbye's. I was not leaving with a flag waving violently in my hand. I had been drafted. I had no notions of heroism. I was not passionately patriotic. There was evidently a job to do, so let's get it over with, and let me get back to the normal, happy, peaceful existence I had planned for.

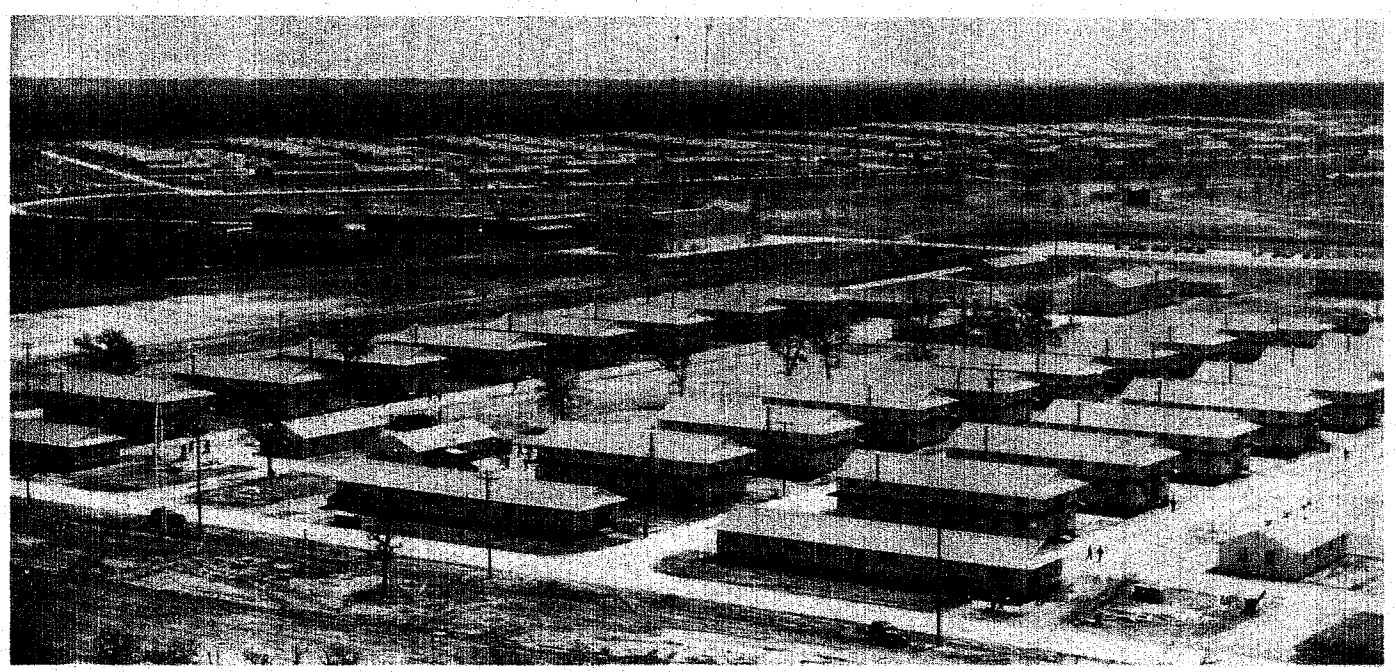
In the time preceding induction, various friends, about to leave, also, talked of the various branches of service, and with the little knowledge of the options, discussed their preference of service. Three Kroger store managers, Harold "Lefty" Applegett, Bud Martin, and myself, all from this area, were inducted the same day. We assumed that with our experience in supply and demand and handling of personnel, we would surely be assigned to Quartermaster service, which supplied all the needs of the military. I figured, too, that this would be relatively safe, in that supplies were usually handled well behind front lines, far from the mud, dirt, rain, and enemy fire. Chances of returning home were much greater, and that's what I wanted to do as soon as possible.

Big surprise!!! The military doesn't do things that way. After being stabbed with vaccination shots from all angles, in all parts of the body as we moved down a line, being subjected to humiliating scrutiny and examinations, supplied with dog tags and uniforms that nearly fit, we were declared privates in the Army. Now, we were actually Army property, and they could do what they wanted....Send us where they wanted, and they did just that.

At least two of the three who were store managers, were sent to Quartermaster. I was sent to an infantry training replacement center in Camp Croft, South Carolina. There we were exposed to many new experiences and bits of information. One of the first things established was understanding the identity and recognition of the supreme being.



ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACKS



Camp Croft S.C. - This shows the good housing accommodations

Mess halls are in the foreground at end of each row of barracks

To the surprise of many, it was not God, but turned out to be the platoon non-commissioned officer. We were admonished to obey him blindly and completely. He taught us to jump on command, how to march in unison, move en masse with precision and pride, how to disassemble and assemble a piece (rifle or pistol), and how to make a bed. We learned to peel potatoes by ourselves. We were taught how to protect ourselves from venereal disease, and how to conduct ourselves as soldiers, including how to salute an officer properly. We had to memorize our dog tag number (35409845). We had vaguely heard of SNAFU, KP, C and K rations before the service. Our vocabulary now increased to include such "goodies" as B.A.R., which was not the local pub, but was an excellent automatic rifle; MESS, a very apt word describing food, but with no reference to the cleanliness of the mess hall; PIECE, a rifle or gun, not the sexual connotation we had learned from street talk; PUP TENT, a two-man tent where infantry men lead dogs lives; DRY RUN, a practice operation or exercise, not an unsuccessful trip to the latrine.

Each took his turn at doing the menial work of the company. I was on KP only once in my entire experience. Basic training was a very busy time. With the daily schedule starting at or before dawn and continuing all day, about all there was time for was a quick trip to the PX (post exchange) for snack supplies, or a weekend movie on the post, Sunday Church, and letter writing back home.

Basic training lasted six weeks. At the end of which, I was selected for message center training. This was special training and relieved me of the daily duties of the company. Message center training includes all kinds of communication. Telephone, radio, visual, birds, personal messenger, and cryptography were some of the subjects. Miles and miles of telephone wire were strung and rewound. Installation of a command post was practiced. All this would be helpful to me sooner than I expected.

To understand my military progress, perhaps a little Army background information would be helpful.

In 1939, when German forces overran Poland, the United States Army numbered only 187,886 regulars, backed by National Guard strength of 199,491 and reservists numbering 119,773. Hitler's successes forced our government to take a closer scrutiny at our strength and preparedness, just in case. The Selective Service Act was passed by Congress. That's the one that began with "Greetings", You have been selected by a committee of your friends and neighbors...". The plan was to supply 900,000 selectees to train at one time, for one year, and none to serve outside the Western Hemisphere. The type of training and the equipment available to these first inductees was next to pitiful. They used World War I helmets, bolt action 03 rifles, vintage gas masks, even using broomsticks and branches for make believe weapons. The only thing not simulated was the marches.

Then at 2:55 on Sunday afternoon, December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was bombed. The thinking and plans had to all be changed, and growth and expansion rate were thrown into high gear. Overnight, the country converted to a total-war status, and the limited time and numbers of selectees were cancelled. The armed forces was to be increased by leaps and bounds to include millions where a very short time before it had numbered only in the thousands. There would be a tremendous need for officers and non-commissioned officers to train this gigantic influx of recruits. The experienced veterans could only supply so many. Therefore, where to find these leaders became a big problem. They turned to the Army scores of the IQ tests on which I had scored well (132).

There is now controversy as to what these tests actually show or prove. Some maintain that they don't really reveal the intelligence of the individual, but indicate an ability to absorb knowledge. Whatever the truth is, the Army had to try everything. It turned out to be fortunate for me that they decided on this course.

My training in message center was just starting to progress and the end was no where in sight, when I was ordered to go to Ft. Benning, Ga. where they were giving crash courses in officer training. The schooling lasted 13 weeks or 90 days (hence the "90 day wonder" we were identified with). One problem-- you had to be a non-com to be eligible for acceptance to the school. It took only a couple of days to complete the paperwork for my promotion to corporal, and then on to Benning, where I was assigned to the 14th company, 2nd Student Training Regiment about November 22, 1942.

Here, once again, we were to learn a new emphasis on the term "supreme being". The next 90 days revealed the absolute power of life and death (i.e., the success or failure in the course). The demand for absolute obedience; the infinite wisdom of all things military lay in the hands of our company officers and instructors. Their words were unquestioned and final. We learned that he who leads, must, also, know how to follow. He who gives orders, must know how to take orders.

There was no time lost in orientation or getting acquainted. The training started immediately. It became apparent, over the next couple months, why candidates, who hopefully were receptive to knowledge, were selected. Volumes of information was presented, many times hitting just the high spots. This was followed by extensive study of the many manuals and demonstrations in field exercises. I still have some of the issued manuals but have discarded many of the technical ones.

No one wore his enlisted rank. There were many 1st sergeants, warrant officers, sergeants, and corporals here but no one really knew. We were all officer candidates of equal rank. It was fairly easy to see who was familiar with the system, though. Experience really showed through from time to time, and these candidates were extremely helpful to the rest of us on many occasions.

We learned the organization of the Army, from the platoon squad to the top echelon.

We learned the fundamentals of company administration. (There are many problems to be solved in caring for 200 or so men). Supply problems were studied. The mission of an infantry company and platoon had to be thoroughly understood. It was necessary to know how the various units support one another. Therefore, an understanding and knowledge of all the weapons used, and their availability to the infantry unit was learned. It would be one of the jobs of the platoon leader, the position for which our instruction was preparing us, to teach the men in his command the complete care and use of the weapons assigned to this unit and to each soldier. Consequently, during this period, we took apart, cleaned, inspected, and assembled over and over, again, weapons such as the 45 pistol, MI rifle, 03 Springfield rifle, Browning automatic rifle, 60 mm mortars, light air cooled 30 caliber machine guns. These are all part of a rifle company armament. The famous MI rifle was being issued around this time. It was a semi-automatic designed to increase fire power of the foot soldier.

Since the success of an operation in war depends on coordination and cooperation with all services and personnel available to a unit commander, the platoon leader had to learn what was available to him from all sources of this Army team.

The candidates were instructed in field stripping and maintenance and firing the heavy 80 mm mortars. Likewise, the heavy water cooled 30 caliber machine gun, the 50 caliber machine gun, grenade launchers, bazookas, and anti tank 57 and 20 mm weapons. Courses and demonstrations on anti tank mines and mine fields and the related booby traps were covered.

Artillery officers were trained in a different camp, so we had no technical training with field guns, but we were introduced to the 105 and 155 Howitzers and taught how to direct the fire of same. A lesson that proved valuable to many an officer in combat. Tank exercises were planned to show how tanks and infantry compliment one another.

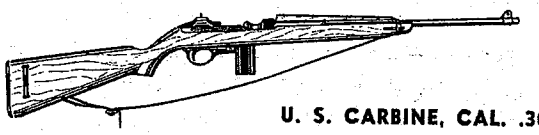
The Army wasn't fully aware of the formidable German 88 weapon yet. So our tanks weren't armed with the 90mm cannon they would later get to compete with the 88. But general tactics and strategies were taught.

Everyday, periods of close order drill were conducted for lengthy periods, with each candidate getting his chance to direct the group in any maneuver he chose. Of the roughly 150 men in the OCS company, it is not hard to imagine the variety of voices in this large group. A command had to be clear, project confidence and authority and be loud enough to carry across distances.

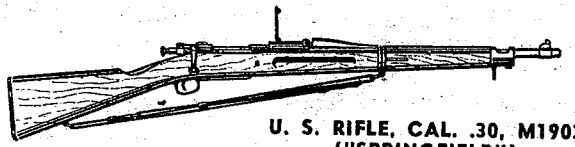
Reflecting on the experience at Ft. Benning, I remember this one area giving me the greatest concern. Having a more or less quiet and gentle voice, I found myself on the empty parade ground or parking lot, on many late afternoons and moonlight nights, giving orders and directions to my imaginary troops in the best voice I could affect. This gives one a very strange feeling of self consciousness, talking to oneself and performing the maneuvers to maintain the cadence. Nevertheless, many trips were made to the field, and much time was spent on this seemingly insignificant problem, but some of your leadership qualities are projected through your spoken command, and you need the confidence of your troops.

One cannot understand this attention to such trivial details unless he has experienced ultimate pressure. During the entire period of three months training, there was one common irritant that no candidate escaped. It was with them twenty four hours a day wherever they went. It was the extreme mental and physical pressure deliberately applied by the instructors and officers in every way conceivable. They seemed to be ever present, standing off to the side, observing, and writing things in their black note books, that everyone knew meant success or failure to every candidate. Many times, throughout the 90 days, upon returning from classes or field trips, one, two, or three bunks would be removed from the barracks in your absence, and the face that went with that bunk was seen no more. No farewells, no explanations, nothing.

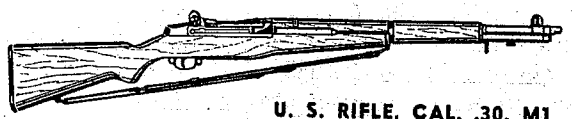
TYPICAL ARMS OF THE U. S. ARMY



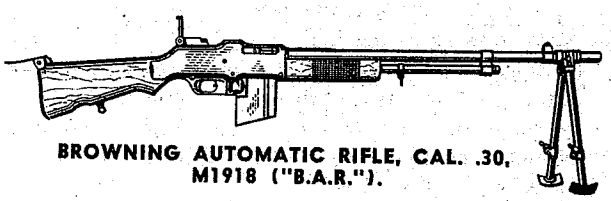
U. S. CARBINE, CAL. .30, M1.



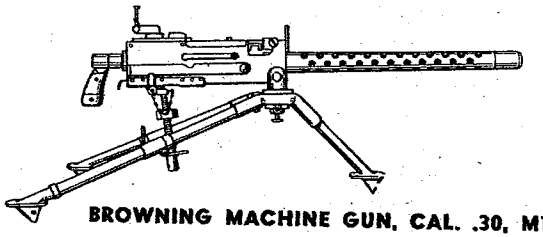
U. S. RIFLE, CAL. .30, M1903 ("SPRINGFIELD").



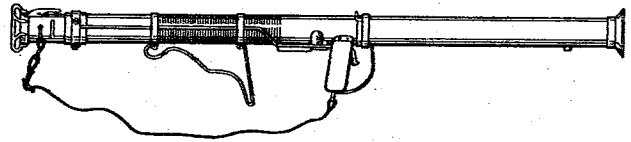
U. S. RIFLE, CAL. .30, M1 ("GARAND").



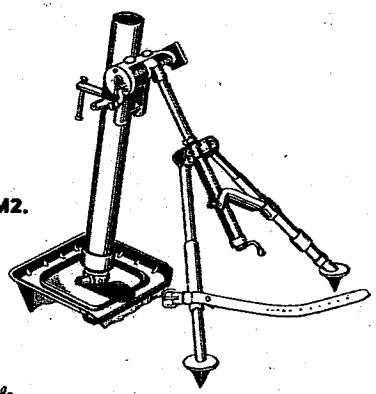
BROWNING AUTOMATIC RIFLE, CAL. .30, M1918 ("B.A.R.").



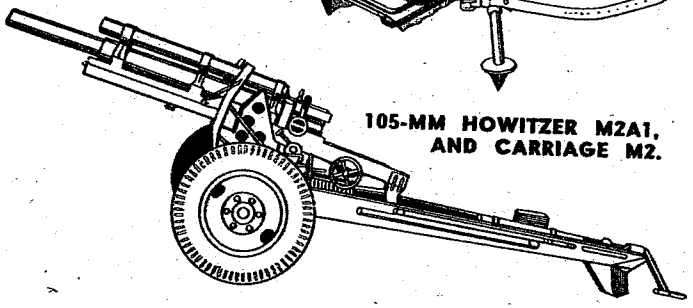
BROWNING MACHINE GUN, CAL. .30, M1914A4.



ROCKET LAUNCHER, 2.36-INCH, M9 ("BAZOOKA").



MORTAR AND MOUNT, 60-MM, M2.



105-MM HOWITZER M2A1, AND CARRIAGE M2.

These are the basic weapons of the rifle company

with the exception of the 105 cannon

A candidate would sometimes even be picked up in the field and transported back to the company area, never to be seen again. We all lived in fear of this and dreaded seeing the company vehicle arrive at an exercise.

There were no periodic evaluations or conferences, so no one knew where his critical weaknesses were, and the pressure was subtly applied to keep all areas of your training as high as possible. The candidates hated this pressure. But it was, also, a test for us, something we didn't understand until we got our own troops and were in combat with them.

Classes were conducted in map reading and aerial photography. Compass class ended one moonless night with a two man exercise through a Georgia swamp requiring the two man team to proceed through a lengthy course with readings to end up at a specific spot where the instructor waited to greet you. My partner and I came out on the spot, but many failed this exercise. Only those who have camped for recreation or hunted raccoons with dogs or a few who have been initiated into "snipe" hunting on those pitch black nights can appreciate what it's like getting through strange country filled with underbrush, bog pits, streams of water, gullies, and steep banks.

Some of these things were fun, but the outcome was serious. We covered personal hygiene, court martial proceedings, and proper uniform codes. We had to recognize enemy weapons from their planes and tanks to the individual arms of the foot soldier. Many would be on the receiving end of their potato masher hand grenades soon enough.

Day after day, the candidates were marched or bussed to bleachers, set up at strategic sites, where they could observe different field exercises and demonstrations. These would often start with a statement by the instructor, some of which would be satirized by the candidates privately between themselves. Something like "this is a solution, not the only solution, but is a solution". We pounced on these little gems, unwittingly given.

Often we were marched to various halls and buildings within the fort for the days instruction. After the demonstration or class, there would be periods of questions and answers. We were required to stand to present our question or answer. These produced another, "Thank you candidate, that answer is incorrect, sit down". Under the circumstances, none of us liked for this one to apply to us personally.

Probably, the most often quoted phrase was "How many days to graduation?" When we got our permanent assignment, the most quoted phrase was to be "How do you transfer out of this chicken s___ outfit?

The weather in Georgia is cold in winter. It was difficult to dress correctly for field trips and activities, prompting one candidate to note, "No wonder Sherman set Georgia on fire. It was the only way he could keep warm". Another caustic remark got to be "The uniform for today-----overcoat, raincoat, belt and canteen. No footlocker". Wherever we went by units, it was tightly timed. All instructors were used by the many companies of the school and were expected to be on time. It's difficult to believe "Take a five and a half minute break" actually happened. It's true -- 5 and 1/2 minutes.

Many written tests were given with standard quote preceding them "You will now take a graded test. As you know, the placing of your name..." As potential officers and gentlemen, there would be no cheating. The work was to be ours alone.

Finally to list one more class, but noting that many are not recorded, the river crossings proved to be very interesting and challenging. We slid by ropes, crossed on rope bridges, waded, and crossed on rafts, boats, and bridges built by engineers. The 13 weeks were the most concentrated period of learning I have ever seen.

It was a busy time. Always with us was the pressure, and with it, the sense of insecurity. But finally, the 90 days passed and graduation time came. A short time before the hallelujah day, the candidates were given a voucher, which was to be used to purchase officer uniforms.

Winter uniforms were relatively expensive, being made from an elastic wool cloth. Summer clothes were chino, a washable cotton cloth. All who had survived the ordeal to this point went to Columbus, Ga. to the various tailors to be fitted.

Even in these last days, the pressure was not eased. We would still hear "He's got that little black book out again." The pressure would last until we actually left Ft. Benning.

Graduation morning! Here we were, getting slowly dressed, looking splendid in our new uniforms, butterflies in our stomachs, cautiously congratulating one another. Spirits were high. The commanding officer of the company came into the barracks, with papers in his hand. He read from the paper that the man Edwards, the one who had bunked beside me for ninety days. The one standing beside me now, dressed and ready to attend the ceremonies was not graduating.

I remember the shock and unbelief that overwhelmed me. Within an hour of graduation, the rug was pulled out from under one that I had considered potentially a good officer and close friend. He had gone through three months of hell for nothing. It's no consolation to tell him he's a better soldier than when he arrived here. That's not why he endured all those days. He was encouraged to believe that he's a leader and could lead troops. A joyous day was almost spoiled by such a seemingly thoughtless decision, so ill timed. The wisdom of the system is now suspect in our minds. Surely a little coaching or attention by the company officers could have salvaged a good officer candidate who had really survived the 90 day training.

We had started with approximately 160, or so, and graduated about 125 officers. We were commissioned February 22, 1943 as 2nd Lts. in the Army. We received our assignments and traveling orders and said our good byes to the friends we had developed.

Almost all in the class were ordered to report to a 26th Infantry Division.

They were being collected and brought up to strength at Camp Blanding, Fla.

Most of us had never heard of the 26th Infantry YD Division. Its history is very interesting and intriguing. It was not known by the "Yankee Division" at the time of its organization back in the year 1639.

The indian threats to the colonists required an organized system of protection. This was its first commission. The unit fought under various names down through the years contributing greatly to the American Revolutionary cause, the War of 1812, the Civil War, Spanish American War, and then World War I. It was incorporated as the 26th "Yankee Division" on August 5, 1917. It served in Europe in World War I attaining recognition as an outstanding fighting force (see "History of a Combat Regiment 1639 to 1945").

The 26th Division was a National Guard unit of Massachusetts. In 1941, the Division participated in the Carolina Maneuvers. The country was at peace and training did not have a really serious theme. Even the equipment was second rate, but that didn't matter much. The troops lived in large tents and there was much time off. The maneuvers ended and they arrived home December 6, 1941 expecting to go back to the regular routine of their daily lives. Pearl Harbor was bombed the next day, and all the plans were changed. Life styles and life itself would be changed drastically for years to come.

Furloughs and discharges were cancelled with few exceptions, and all were recalled. The division was ordered to guard the Atlantic coast from Maine to Florida possibly to intercept spies and saboteurs that might be landed by submarine or other craft. The 104th Infantry Regiment, the one I was later to serve in, was assigned to patrol the coast from the Carolinas to Key West. They did this with motor patrols between designated points. A cruiser, with a number of smaller boats, was assigned to the regiment to patrol the large rivers and bays. Surviving various alarms, including the "Bull Island Invasion", and a hurricane on the Keys in Florida, the regiment was withdrawn from coastal patrol in January, 1943 to Camp Blanding near Stark, Fla.

I later would hear some of the older veterans of the 104th talk fondly of Vero Beach and other beaches, and of the happy times experienced during that time.

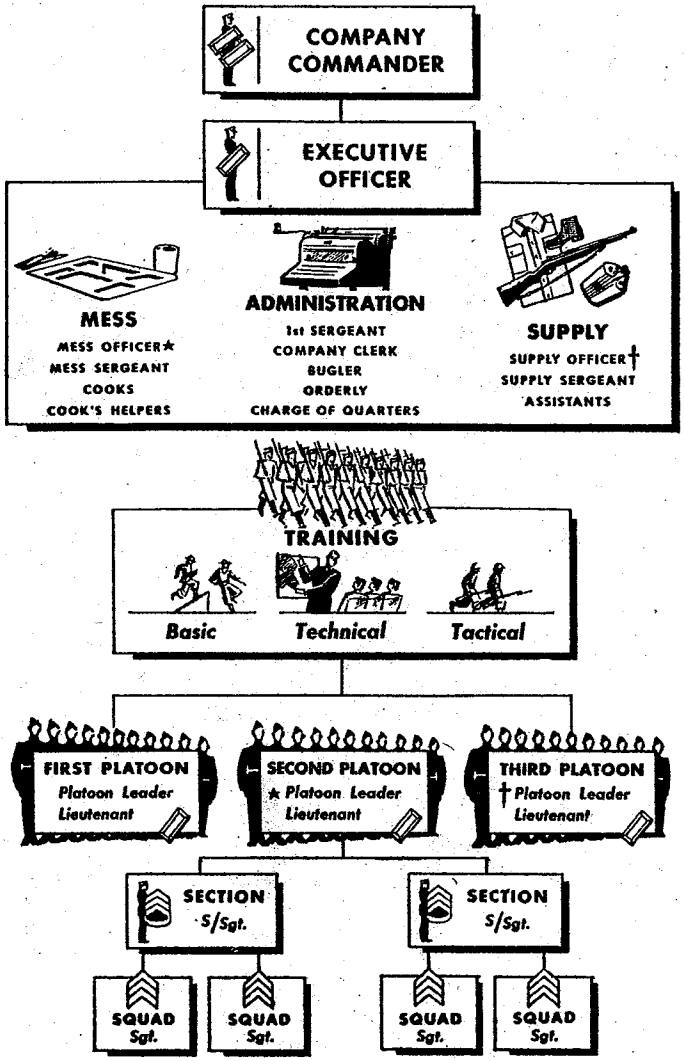
All during the time of coastal patrol, the unit was being depleted regularly by the selection of many of its qualified personnel to supply cadre and officer candidates for new divisions and officer candidate schools to aid the Army's rapidly expanding program.

Eight hundred selectees had arrived in Blanding from New York and Pennsylvania, Virginia, and W. Virginia as replacements for those who had been transferred out to start in bringing the regiment up to designated strength. Part of the depletion had been caused by draining of many from the 101st Regiment and the 104th Regiment. The two regiments formed the base of the 26th Division, and a 3rd Regiment was created because the table of organization called for three infantry regiments in a triangular division. This regiment was designated the 328th. The division would then be completed with the addition of service companies, artillery bns., quartermaster, anti-tank battalions, motor pools, and all the various units needed.

This was the point in time at which I joined this illustrious outfit, February, 1943.

With nearly the entire graduating class from O.C.S. reporting at the same time, the placement of the officers was not very selectively done. Alphabetically assigned does not give much consideration to special abilities or qualifications of the officers much less the special needs of an organization. Supposedly, the assignments were made to anti-tank, headquarters, and supply companies with adjustments to be made later. Indeed, there was much maneuvering, string pulling, and transferring to get the company of your choice. I was assigned to Co. "L", Third Battalion, 104th Infantry Regiment, 26th Infantry Division.

TYPICAL COMPANY ORGANIZATION



FIRST GRADE		MASTER SERGEANT AND FIRST SERGEANT	$138.00
SECOND GRADE		TECHNICAL SERGEANT	114.00
THIRD GRADE		STAFF SERGEANT AND TECHNICIAN THIRD GRADE	96.00
FOURTH GRADE		SERGEANT AND TECHNICIAN FOURTH GRADE	78.00
FIFTH GRADE		CORPORAL AND TECHNICIAN FIFTH GRADE	66.00
SIXTH GRADE		PRIVATE, FIRST CLASS	54.00
SEVENTH GRADE		PRIVATE	50.00

A company organization and monthly pay scale for the grades

With butterflies in my stomach and with much apprehension, I reported for duty to a stern looking Captain Rigsby, the company commander. He did indeed prove to be stern but understanding and helpful and fair. Because of these traits, he was well liked and respected by the officers and enlisted men. This was noted, and I, thereafter, tried to emulate those same qualities in my association with my fellow officers and especially my charges.

A Rifle Company consists of a company commander, who is a captain, an executive officer, a first lieutenant who, also, acts as weapons platoon leader. The three rifle platoons have 2nd lieutenants as their leaders. Thus when I joined Company "L", I was assigned to a rifle platoon with Sgt. Barnes as my platoon sergeant. I owe a lot to him because he was a tremendous help to me in applying my recently acquired knowledge to the practical everyday problem or situation.

So here I was, with my Army "family" for the next couple years. We would get to know each other pretty well as we, more or less, lived together through the extensive training ahead and enjoyed social contacts within the limits and restrictions required of the officer/enlisted man relationship.

My tendency, through the many months, was to visit and talk informally after hours and into the evening with the enlisted men of the company. I was reminded, from time to time, by the company commander that I shouldn't do this. It made the men nervous and uncomfortable to have an officer present. But how can you know and understand someone if you don't "live" with them, and listen to their problems and ideas? After awhile, they learned to relax with me, talk freely, and express their feelings honestly. Regardless of Army policy, I always felt that I gained more respect than I lost with this policy.

Meanwhile, the lessons and knowledge gained in the preceding months at Benning were being applied on the recruits.

At Camp Blanding, we taught them how to move in many formations on the parade ground, on long marches, on the local roads, and in company formations for inspection.

We taught them all about their weapons, how to conduct themselves as soldiers, how to dig the various foxholes, and conditioned them with field exercises and marches in the repulsive, ankle deep white sand that magically turned your feet completely black. Shoes were always filled with it, along with pockets, ears, eyes, mouth, and it even penetrated footlockers. It was everywhere.

Established military tradition down through the years has afforded officers certain benefits and privileges not offered to the enlisted man. Of course, some of these are dictated by economical factors. Officers, being paid more, could naturally avail themselves of some of the extras to make their life more comfortable and bearable. Consequently, I had Edie join me as soon as possible at Camp Blanding. Visitations were not as frequent as we would have liked, but friendships with other wives helped fill the days for her and kept her from getting bored and lonesome.

When the regiment moved by train from Camp Blanding on April 17th to Camp Gordon in Georgia, where the complete 26th Division with all its units was being assembled, Edie and two friends, Bernice Fine and Edith Drake, packed our sparse belongings and moved ahead to Augusta. The two Edith's found a little three bedroom house in the country and furnished it with a minimum of installment furniture. Happily, we could continue to see our wives at every opportunity. Lt. Arden Drake was a platoon leader, also, and his schedules were similar to mine, so we shared transportation between home and the base. It proved to be a welcome retreat to run to after a hard day or week of training.

There's always a certain amount of politics in any organization. New officers learned early on that a policy of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" was a wise one to adopt. Small favors could be rewarded with small favors. We learned to nourish the friendship of the first sergeant, the supply sergeant, and his immediate subordinates, and the mess sergeant.

If the officer played his cards right, many items that he was supposed to buy could be and were obtained through the supply room. Sergeant Rockwell and Pvt. Charley Granger proved to be my very good friends keeping me supplied with shoes, socks, underwear, and other goodies. If they didn't have it, somehow they traded for it from some other source.

This was, also, true of the kitchen personnel. Meat would be issued to the company in what we called wholesale cuts in civilian life. It might be a quarter or half beef or chickens or whatever. Being skilled cooks and butchers, they were able to cut many steaks from the larger piece and serve the rest to the company in stews and such dishes that lent themselves to serving large numbers. The steaks were then reserved for themselves, after their cooking duties were over, and for a late evening feast. Naturally, it was impossible to broil or grill steaks for a whole company. Sergeant Perry, many times, fixed a delicious steak and meal for me when I was officer of the day, or if I returned after hours from town, or upon returning from a leave of absence.

Officers were assigned, as part of their duties, to be a supply officer or mess officer. If there wasn't a good relationship, it could be difficult for the officer but most particularly the sergeant. One good turn deserved another.

Just as Georgia's winter was cold, now the Georgia summer, this year, proved to be extra hot. Training was rough and intensive. Each day, it didn't take long to completely saturate our uniforms with sweat in the extreme heat. No one will ever forget the glare of the sun on that red southern soil and that gritty, grinding taste between our teeth. Blisters in great numbers and large sizes on the feet were the norm rather than the exception for the soldiers after finishing the grueling and sometimes cruel marches, up hill and down, through the areas of large orchards and winding roads.

Those lucky enough to escape with healthy feet, might easily acquire an aching back from the heavy, full field packs on their back.

At one point in this time period, we acquired a new company commander, Captain Leo Monnin. He and his wife developed into good friends. He was a typical Frenchman from Louisana, and the one who introduced us to the strength and potency of chicory coffee beverage. He was with us through that summer.

When these things were happening, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that they would never be forgotten. They were indelibly registered in the mind, and there was no need to make notes or records. Alas, such is not the case. While all the details are not particularly vital, it is exasperating that time has erased so many things from memory. I find it difficult to recall times when events occurred.

For instance, during this training at Camp Gordon, one of the special classes assigned to me to teach the battalion was about booby traps. All sorts of booby trap situations and possibilities were to be set up and demonstrated. Some were in buildings, and others in paths and areas through which troops would pass. A helper would then proceed through and trip the switches exploding a 1/4 pound charge of dynamite implying death or injury to the victim. Concealment and trickery were emphasized in the placement and location of the booby traps trying to surprise the victim. The switches were improvised from spring clothes pins with electrical detonators. Wire was wrapped around each of the two tips of the clothes pin. Then a wood plug was inserted to keep the wires separated. A trip wire would pull the plug and complete the circuit.

One time I left one of the plugs out of the switch creating a closed circuit and when I touched the wire to the connection near the explosive, the dynamite exploded in my face. This nearly cost me my right eye. Only my glasses saved me from the dire consequences of my carelessness. The white portion of my eye was blood red for weeks. Later, on another day, in the excitement of an exercise, these same glasses were snatched from my face by a twig or branch, and I never missed them until the exercise was over. That's how hyped up and exhilarated we often got. I never found the glasses. From then on, I wore government issue glasses.

Sometimes, we pushed the men to the limits of their endurance. Even being a young man, the resilience of youth sometimes amazed me. We would get to the end of the week utterly exhausted and spent. Then the weekend offered cleaning up, inspections, and a few precious hours in Augusta or nearby town, and a couple hours rest, and it was back to the weekly training routine with a chance to eat some more of that gritty red soil.

Somewhere in this time frame, some volunteer transfers left our division to join a ranger unit being formed and trained. It must have been soon after we moved to Camp Gordon, for these rangers were in the Normandy Invasion and were later referred too fondly as the little YD. We lost about 200 men to the air corps and the 28th Division. A friend, Lt. Thomas Miller, was one of those who left, and he would turn up later in my experience in Europe.

It was relatively easy to get such volunteers from our division (even though a soldier learned not to volunteer for anything) because there were those who maintained that the 26th would never go overseas. After all, we had been shuttled all up and down the coast for some time. Consequently, the impatient young men, the young patriots, and many cynics all wanted to get to the action and get with it. As you can see, many were permitted to go. However, I feel that some were giving this hero act merely lip service. I remember Lt. Millard Anderson (a good friend) often complaining and declaring his desire to transfer overseas. Only after serving some time in combat, were we able to recognize this youthful zeal, and not the rational judgment tempered with good sense. This (keep in mind) will be referred to later as the action unfolds.

Just when that red soil was beginning to get some flavor and starting to taste good, when watermelon patches were located and noted, and peach orchards were scouted on all those marches we had taken, Major General Willard S. Paul assumed command of the 26th Division. He liked what he saw here, and he promptly promised that under his direction, he would soon have the outfit heading overseas.

He was dubbed "gangplank Paul" as a result of these promises and subsequent actions.

One of the first moves in fulfillment of these promises was in September when the division was ordered to Camp Campbell, Ky. We traveled by motor convoy in what was called shuttle movement, a sort of leap frogging by units. The company officers rode in the company jeeps as roving patrols helping breakdowns and moving stragglers. This type of activity was much better than riding in the large truck filled with soldiers. That must have been an uncomfortable, dull, and boring ride for such a long distance.

Upon arrival in Camp Campbell about the 10th of September, "gangplank Paul" initiated a program simulating, wherever possible, combat conditions.

Men were trained in marksmanship on the rifle range with the weapons they would use in combat. Officers were trained in troop leading with short field problems. Everything was to have the actual combat condition theme. These very conditions, particularly the weather and terrain of the central Kentucky-Tennessee border in the late fall and winter, turned out to be prophetic conditions we would experience later in the Lorraine area of France and the winter "Battle of the Bulge".

General Paul, to begin with, mercifully limited the exercises and field problems to a few days each time and spaced them far enough apart to keep morale high enough and still achieve the intended purposes.

Excellent accommodations, by military standards, such as; good barracks and service clubs and access to Clarksville, Hopkinsville, and Nashville on weekends kept the men fairly happy.

Edie had returned to Ohio to the home of her parents being six plus months pregnant with what turned out to be our daughter, Karen.

With the help of some extra "C" gas ration coupons supplied by my in-laws, I was able to make the ten hour each way trip for a stretched weekend, several times. This brief contact boosted morale considerably.

My life was beautifully touched one weekend in Nashville. I had gone there to get away from the troops and camp. Edie was back in Ohio and it was lonesome, alone in camp. After attending a church in Nashville, I was walking along on one of the streets in a residential area sort of touring that area before looking for a restaurant. An elderly couple, somewhat older than my parents, stopped their car. We exchanged greetings and they invited me to their house to share their meal. It was a wonderful time of sharing but not unusual for people of that area. When I left later that afternoon, I had to promise to return at the first opportunity. I visited them several times while stationed at Camp Campbell spending the whole weekend with them. Somewhere in the passing years, they were overtaken by death and names and addresses were misplaced or lost and contact was no longer possible. However, the warm spot in my heart remains to this day, and I can see them in my mind's eye. I guess now the name isn't important, the memory is.

I have always considered 13 as a lucky number for me. Edie, being pregnant, and knowing much time would be spent by me on training and operations, knew we wouldn't see each other very often. So she had gone home to stay for the delivery. Then one day, I received news that Karen was born November 13, 1943. What a happy day that was!! My lucky 13 theory was reinforced. I was able to be present at her baptism when she was about six weeks old. That might seem a little early, but in the uncertain times, we had to adjust to the Army's schedule not our's.

At Christmas time or shortly thereafter, the division supplied over 500 men for overseas replacement. Just a few from each unit. But when all units are considered, the total was a surprising number to lose.

January 22, 1944 was the day selected to start an extensive maneuver exercise in an area East of Nashville. There were three divisions involved, the 26th, 78th, and 1Ø6th. With the large number of troops and the amount of equipment used, and with working and living in the rain, mud, and snow for nine or ten weeks, we received a real taste of what war would really be like.

There was no going back to warm barracks and hot showers at the end of three or four days. Mud was scraped off boots and clothing, not washed out. C and K rations were often used instead of a nice hot meal from a field kitchen. Sleeping was mostly done in the foxhole or pup tent. Conditions were so rough and realistic that we all thought that the only difference between this and actual combat was the absence of live ammunition from enemy fire. Part of my maneuver experience was on detached service to Bn. Hdq. due to my ability to orient myself in strange territory. Consequently, most of the maneuvers, I rode in a jeep. This was my only separation from Co. L.

It was later reported that the command officers were excellent in their planning and execution. This was not <u>necessarily</u> true from my point of observation at the time. Most of the time, I thought that things were really fouled up. Really SNAFU. This proved to be the observation from the belly on the ground vantage point. The view is restricted. I learned later, after evaluations and results were finished, that the overall operation was excellent.

The way this is determined is by designating one Army red and one blue. Each is given a mission. Umpires with signal flags and notebooks ruled on each engagement or action as to who was victorious. The umpires declared soldiers as dead and units destroyed, and thus these were out of the action for the rest of that exercise. All the individual notes were collected and evaluated. Then it was announced if the mission had been accomplished. Each mission would cover a little less than a week, after which a few men by rotation selection would be allowed to go into nearby towns for showers and cleaning up.

It gave them a chance to refresh their bodies and, also, their memories as to what well prepared food tasted like and experience some "home" comforts.

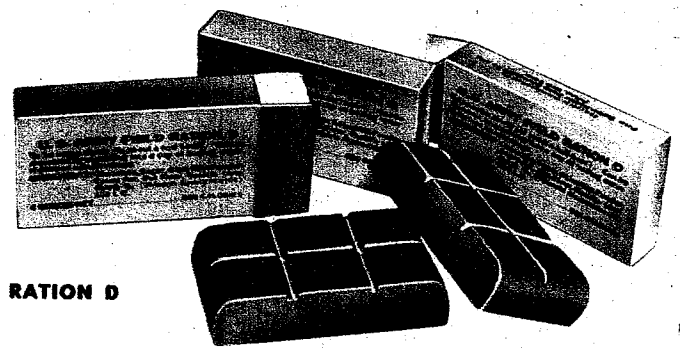
Of course, most of us had to stay behind to keep the organization running smoothly, also, to keep the small towns from being overly crowded.

On such a weekend, one of the soldiers named Swindle from one of the platoons in L Company hinted that he had connections in this area. I knew from talking with him earlier, that this was his home territory. He told me that he could get some whisky from a friend, who, also, had connections. I was assured that it was a name brand but would cost extra because good commercial whisky was rationed and hard to get in those days. He knew that I wanted a couple bottles. Even though I didn't drink, most of the old timers in the company did. Well, he said we needed transportation, and I easily obtained the company jeep. After traveling back roads, over hills, up creeks, along lanes, and through woods, we arrived at a ram shackle house. I was instructed to wait in the jeep while he went inside. After considerable time, he came back carrying a couple bottles of brand name whisky. I noted the seal was broken. He told me he had offered the seller a drink as a gesture of friendship and appreciation for obtaining this prize for us.

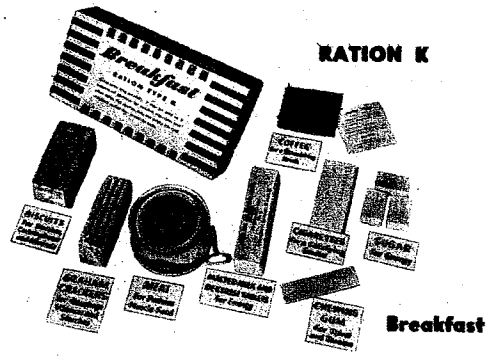
Remember, this officer is a very young, naive boy from the American heart land and not fully wise to the ways of the world, so I bought the story with reservations. I considered the fact that it might be watered down. After all, the liquor wasn't for me, it was for my supply and mess sergeants who stayed in camp a lot and was meant to reward them for some of the many little favors they had done for me. I was so proud to have located such an item in this God forsaken country.

Sometime after giving it to them, I asked them how they had enjoyed the bottles. They said it was great, but I detected a somewhat less than sincere tone in their reply. I could tell.

THESE ARE RATIONS SPECIALLY DEVELOPED FOR FIGHTING MEN



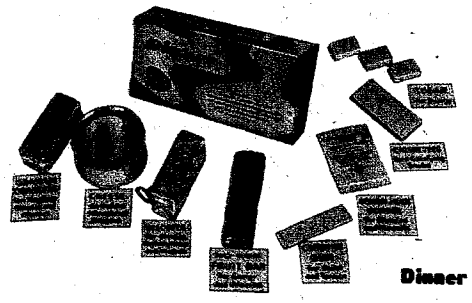
RATION D



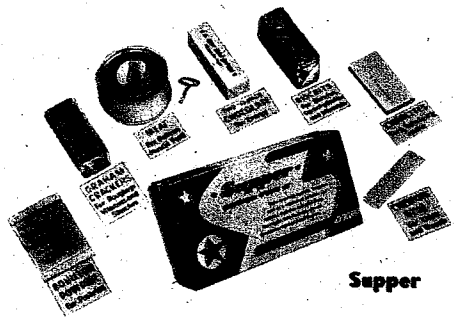
RATION K

Breakfast

RATION C



Dinner



Supper

These are the combat rations issued to troops when it was impossible to issue a hot meal. D Ration was a chololate bar, about 6 ozs. C rations were cans containing beef stew, pork & beans, & hash, with a can containing crackers, sugar cubes, hard candy & powdered coffee. K rations were packets designated for Breakfast, Dinner, & Supper. Breakfast contained biscuits, graham crackers, can meat, coffee, sugar cubes, cigarettes, chewing gum, & malted milk tablets. Dinner had graham crackers, can of cheese biscuits, fruit bar, chewing gum, lemonade powder, cigarettes & sugar. Supper was boullion powder, graham crackers, can meat, chocolate bar, biscuits, cigarettes, & chewing gum.

Pursuing this, I later discovered or figured out that the bottles were cosmetic. In fact, they were filled with Tennessee moonshine. The experienced drinkers had no problem recognizing this deception, but I had been taken. Even so, I believe they enjoyed the "white lightnin".

We were supplied in March with about 1000 ASTP replacements from Northeastern colleges. Imagine what it would be like to leave the life of a student on campus,with all its freedoms and comforts,and end up a day or two later as a foot soldier in a foxhole in cold, muddy Tennessee. They were above average in intelligence and were expecting better jobs in the Army structure as a result of their training in college. What a shock that must have been.

A personal shock was in store for me on one of the very last problems of the maneuvers, too. We were conducting an assault crossing of the Cumberland river. We had endured, with misery, so much rain in preceding weeks,and had so many times waded in water up to our A____kles. The river was extremely swollen. One of the boats collapsed and 20 men, mostly from Co. B, were swept downstream and lost in the high water. One of my fellow officers, 1st Lt. John Dunski, who had bunked just a couple bunks away during OCS at Ft. Benning, was one of them. It was very sorrowful because within days the maneuvers ended. Once again, tragedy struck our class at the very last moment.

We traveled by motor to Ft. Jackson, near Columbia, S. Carolina, where we could live in safety and relative comfort once again.

This presented the opportunity to have our wives with us again for whatever length of time it would be. Edie and our cute little daughter, Karen, joined me, and they found a place to share with Lt. Anderson's wife, Tina, and their young son, Butch.

I'm not sure when we changed company commanders again.

Somewhere along the line, we inherited a pompous, arrogant, very obnoxious Captain Lujan, who was one of those who thought we wouldn't go overseas. At least, he seemed to hope that we wouldn't. He was wrong, and unfortunately, he was the one we had to go into combat with later.

Somewhere in this time bracket, "D" Day occurred and our training and activity increased.

In spite of some of the predictions concerning the destiny of our division, indications strongly suggested that we soon would be leaving the states. Endless inspections of men and equipment were made each day. All personnel were given furloughs. Medical examinations and shots were completed. Records were checked and brought up to date. Promotions in rank were made to bring the regiment up to the allowed number of non-coms. It may have been at this time, but more probably earlier, that I was promoted to 1st Lt. A company is allowed one Captain, one First Lieutenant, and three Second Lieutenants. Promotions were mostly made from within the company or battalion to prevent outsiders from being brought in to fill the vacancy. This, also, supplied incentive to company officers. Whenever it happened, I remember the time vaguely, but the circumstances well.

There was a very capable 2nd Lt. transferred to our company earlier. He was a Clemson graduate, or at least he had attended Clemson and was very self confident, aggressive, wise in military lore, and a good officer. Except, he didn't know when to shut up. So many times, when he was talking and complaining, he should have been listening. Often his criticisms were well taken but not tactfully presented. In spite of his good qualities, he rubbed everyone the wrong way. Consequently, when it came time to fill the 1st Lt. vacancy in the company, I was chosen over him.

Only the weapons platoon is authorized to have a 1st Lt., who, also, serves as second in command in the company. So I was transferred to the weapons platoon, and this is where I served in combat.

Outside the house shared with the Drakes in
Augusta in Spring of 1943, after
moving from Camp Blanding, Fla.

This is the picture I carried with me all through
my overseas tour of duty. It was
taken in Columbia, S.C. in 1944 after maneuvers

L Company Officers
L.R. Lt. Duplis, Capt. Monnin, Lt. Edsall, Lt. Anderson

L Company men on break. Among them are ones that I learned to know. Eubank, Dalton, Dudley (my runner), Langmead, Damuracki, Camossi, Watson, & Rydell

WEAPONS PLATOON

T/O Strength 1 Off 34 EM
Actual Strength 1 Off 34 EM

PLATOON HEADQUARTERS T/O 1 Off 5 EM Actual 1 Off 5 EM			
	Edsall, Lester K.	1st Lt.	Platoon Leader
	Morrissey, James F.	T/Sgt.	Platoon Sgt.
	Rockwell, Dowell F.	Pfc.	Messenger
	Dudley, Lyle M.	Pfc.	Messenger
	Tibbetts, Merrill H.	Tec. 5	Driver
	Jensen, Blake	Pfc.	Driver
SECTION HEADQUARTERS T/O 2 EM Actual 2 EM			
	Kopec, John J.	S/Sgt.	Section Leader
	Snyder, Donald G.	Pfc.	Messenger
FIRST MORTAR SQUAD T/O 5 EM Actual 5 EM			
	Richard, Edgar J.	Sgt.	Squad Leader
	Hickman, George W.	Pvt.	Gunner
	Little, Hubert S.	Pfc.	Asst Gunner
	Kyak, Stephen G.	Pfc.	Ammo Carrier
	Buckner, Hoyt	Pvt.	Ammo Carrier
SECOND MORTAR SQUAD T/O 5 EM Actual 5 EM			
	LeComte, Norman J.	Sgt.	Squad Leader
	Stacey, Leon H.	Pfc.	Gunner
	Martin, Garnett V.	Pfc.	Asst Gunner
	Houston, Edward L.	Pfc.	Ammo Carrier
	~~Miller, Roy J.~~	Pfc.	~~Ammo Carrier~~
THIRD MORTAR SQUAD T/O 5 EM Actual 5 EM			
	Williams, Andrew J.	Sgt.	Squad Leader
	Linney, Mitchell G.	Pfc.	Gunner
	Langmead, Charles J.	Pfc.	Asst Gunner
	Bernhard, Harry	Pfc.	Ammo Carrier
	Church, John E.	Pvt.	Ammo Carrier
LIGHT MACHINE GUNN SECTION T/O 2 EM Actual 2 EM			
	Tobin, Albert R.	S	Section Leader
	Dawson, Herman S.	Pfc.	Messenger
FIRST LMGSQUAD T/O 5 EM Actual 5 EM			
	Jurek, Stanley P.		Squad Leader
	Bocock, John H.	Pfc.	Gunner
	Watson, Girdon L.	Pfc.	Asst Gunner
	Duritzo, Samuel	Pfc.	Ammo Carrier
	Yale, William H.	Pvt.	Ammo Carrier
SECOND LMG SQUAD T/O 5 EM Actual 5 EM			
	Tibbetts, William A.	Sgt.	Squad Leader
	Damuracki, John	Pfc.	Gunner
	Mubank, Otha B.	Pfc.	Asst Gunner
	Forshee, Alonzo V.	Pvt.	Ammo Carrier
	Lavigne, William L.	Pfc.	Ammo Carrier

An old platoon roster of mine,
sometime before reassignments for overseas

Eubank, Dawson, and my good friend
Charley Granger probably returning
from furlough, before going overseas

Some of my weapons platoon

Standing L.R. Carpenter, Eubank,
Bocock, Sgt. Tibbits.

Kneeling L.R., Dawson, Dudley,
Tibbits (driver) Jensen (driver)

Once again, I want to say that I'm not sure about the timing of this, but that doesn't detract from the over all story. I do know that I didn't have the weapons platoon very long before going overseas.

Some of the little items we had collected and kept legally or contrary to regulations for our comfort, or to make life more bearable or enjoyable, were sent home.

The troops were "fine tuned" with additional training. I qualified for the Expert Infantry Badge. That's the beautiful blue medal with rifle imprinted on it and garnished with a silver wreath, and it is worn on the left chest above the various ribbons and awards earned. The badges weren't available at this time and were presented later. However, the immediate reward for those who qualified was a $5.00 increase in monthly pay. It was a rigorous test and the pay increase was well deserved. The physical exercises, the foot races, the military courses, 25 mile hikes, and the obstacle courses certainly tested one's abilities, skills, and determination. Marksmanship was, also, a requirement in the weapons assigned to you. I qualified as expert with the M-1 rifle, the Ø3 rifle (which I think anyone could fire expertly because it was very accurate), carbine, automatic rifle (B.A.R.), and the bayonet. Fortunately, it was not necessary to qualify expert with the 45 automatic pistol since it was a close contact weapon. I found it difficult to hit the side of a hill with it. I scored only enough to make marksman. The B.A.R. was my absolute favorite weapon to fire. Its rate of fire and accuracy was phenomenal.

August came and there were still some doggedly maintaining "this outfit will never go overseas". This turned out to be wishful thinking on their part because one day we rolled up our full field packs and picked up our stuffed duffel bags and headed for Camp Shanks, New York. "Gangplank" Paul had us take one more big step toward the gangplank just as he promised.

At Camp Shanks, we got final examinations and field exercises including a small amphibious landing. The only good thing at Camp Shanks was a twelve hour pass to New York City. Lt. Anderson and I went into town together. We saw a Broadway musical and went to a night club afterward. It was a fun night. The unit was alerted and went by train to Wehawken, N.J. then by ferry to Staten Island where we boarded the ship SS Argentina on August 24, 1944.

One of the last sights of America was Kate Smith standing on the pier, microphone in one hand and a piece of paper held over her head to protect her from the rain, singing her parting song "God Bless America".

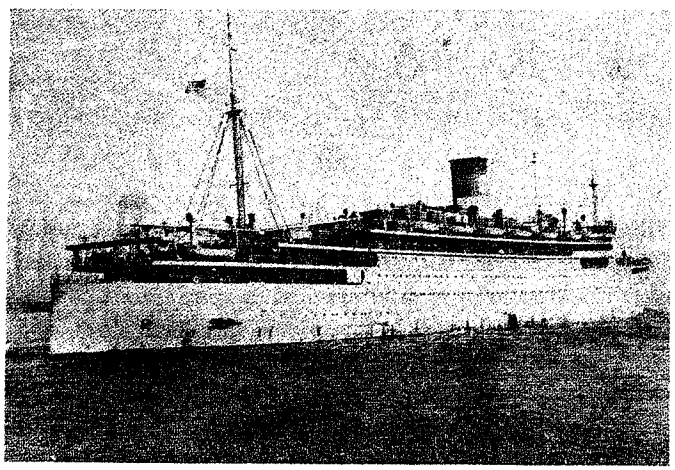
Lts. Edsall and Anderson
At a nightclub after a Broadway play on our
weekend leave from Camp Shanks, just before embarking

Chapter II

"THE YANKS ARE COMING"

This was a borrowed ship, although in these times, the word confiscated was probably more accurate. I'm sure the government paid more than necessary in lease payments for its use. I remember how the government "insisted" on the purchase of a Piper Cub plane from by brother-in-law, Robert White. They used those planes in artillery outfits to observe the target of their guns to adjust the firing and shell impact. Anyway, it was a large ship, nearly queen class. It was the next size smaller than the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth which were, also, being used to move troops overseas. Even with its large size, all the troops aboard with full equipment made for very crowded conditions for the men especially those down in the bowels of the ship. The men were crowded into tiers of hammocks, three and four high, deep inside the ship, and it was very stifling and stuffy. They ate down there, too, and it's no wonder many of them got sea sick and were unable to eat right all the way over.

As an officer, we had state rooms (shared, of course, with a couple other officers). We had a real dining room, four to a table, with linen tablecloths, stem ware, and printed menus. Our duties were to keep track of our men's welfare and to see that certain rules were not violated. One such rule was the smoking rule. Permission to smoke was given at particular times for safetys sake and only while "the smoking lamp was lit". The flare of a struck match can be seen for miles under some circumstances. Such a large convoy, as we were, would be considered a valuable prize for the German U-Boats plying the Atlantic. All precautions had to be taken to avoid detection, including irregular changes of courses, sort of zig-zagging across the ocean. We even had to throw the garbage overboard at midnight to avoid leaving any fresh trail for the German U-Boats to pick up and follow for a kill.



The S. S. Argentina before taking on its human cargo. "It brought us over to France". (Courtesy Moore McCormack Line).

AMERICAN REPUBLICS LINE

S. S. 'ARGENTINA'

BREAKFAST

Iced Fruit Juice.

Chilled Grapefruit — Stewed Fruit

Rolled Oats — Puffed Rice — Grape-Nuts — Corn Flakes

Shredded Wheat — Bran Flakes — Puffed Wheat

Steamed Salt Mackerel, Melted Butter

Country Sausages — Breakfast Bacon

EGGS: Boiled, Fried or Scrambled

Mashed Potatoes

Fruit Muffins — Fresh Rolls — Assorted Buns — Toast

Orange Marmalade — Assorted Fruit Jams

Coffee — Tea

SUPPER

Queen Olives — Snappy Snacks — Chow-Chow

Matjes Herring — Relishes

Potage Minestra

Fried Flounder, Tomato Sauce

Braised Ox Tail, Bouquetiere

Roast Long Island Duckling, Sage Dressing, Apple Sauce

Fried Egg Plant — Smothered Red Cabbage

Mashed or Roast Potatoes

Assorted Cold Cuts, - Dill Pickles

Hearts of Lettuce Salad, French or Russian Dressing

Dixie Cup — Pound Cake

Cheese and Crackers

Fresh Fruit

Tea — Coffee — Cocoa

The officers ate in the ship's dining room with linen, stemware, silver, and Printed menus

Limited salt water showers were permitted in the officers quarters. The salt water was used to conserve the fresh water. It wasn't really necessary to limit the showers for they felt terrible.

We enjoyed the company of a school of dolphins that swam along side our bow for several days. Of course, we were allowed on deck during the day, and we crowded the bow of the ship and watched them for long periods of time. They surely were exuberant.

The crossing was made in mostly good weather, but there were a few times when the sea got a little rough. Sometimes it was difficult to keep our china and silver on the table. Other times, those who never got their sea legs, had to be administered to. Do you know that men actually do turn green with seasickness? How pitiful looking they were, hanging over the rail. I guess my job was to keep them from falling or even jumping overboard. I never got seasick, but I guess when you do, you can wish you could die. After all, you've got the color for it.

It was noted later that the 26th Division in this convoy was the first troops to go directly from the United States to a port in France, which in our case, turned out to be Cherbourg. Also, it was one of the largest armadas ever assembled, to that time, consisting of 101 vessels of all classes.

As we approached the coast of Europe, the various ships of our convoy would "peel" off and head toward the many different ports of destination where their cargoes' were to be unloaded and distributed according to plan. It seemed like they just drifted away or were missing when daylight came and soon there were just a few of us. In hostile waters, we had sort of an abandoned feeling, and our Mae West life preservers were, for the most part, not operative causing us some concern all the way over.

With a feeling of excitement, apprehension, and curiosity, we strained to catch sight of our port.

The enlisted men were anxious to get out of the confinement of the inner ship.

On September 7, the coast of France was sighted and as the coast drew near, the sight that greeted us was not a pretty one. This was the first sight of actual combat destruction. Cherbourg harbor looked like a disaster area with all the crumpled docks and all shapes of bare steel sticking up out of the water. Many buildings were extensively damaged. The utter destruction of the harbor facilities was a combination of the D Day offensive and deliberate demolition. When the Germans were driven out, they destroyed docks and wharfs to deny their use to the victorious allied forces.

By the time we arrived on September 7, the engineers had floated portable concrete units clear from England to serve as docks. They sunk them in deeper, safer water to accommodate the expected supply ships now beginning to arrive. Ours had been the largest convoy to cross the Atlantic up to that time, but many were to follow.

The Argentina anchored a good distance from shore. Some of us were unloaded and had to reach shore via the swaying, rising and falling invasion type pontoon suspension connections between the sunken concrete bulwarks or piling. That wasn't the most secure feeling I've ever had. Many troops were unloaded in LST boats and brought ashore where the officers waited to collect their charges. Unloading was accomplished as rapidly as possible because the ships were still vulnerable as stationary targets. The Germans hadn't been completely cleared from the peninsula, and there were several pockets of resistance with a fairly large contingent in Brest on the west coast. Although the allies had air superiority here, it was always possible that there could be an attempt to stop the ships from delivering their cargoes'. Success might be worth the risk, and the enemy did send planes over once in awhile.

While the troops waited for the complete unloading of personnel, equipment, and motor transportation, they ate the "K" rations as their first European meal. It was no surprise when it began to rain.

As we found out later, the roads and streets were not exceptional to begin with. The rain and the damage of the shell holes in the streets quickly turned the surface to mud. Tennessee maneuvers again?

It would take several days to unload the equipment from some of the other ships so the troops were transported by truck to the Valognes staging area near St. Martin D'Audoville. Our area was area 55. Division headquarters was in Bourg de Lestre. French students can translate that, I suppose, to Lester's village. Of all places, it was weird that Lester Edsall would arrive at Bourg de Lestre.

We dug some slit trenches. These are the ones that are shallow but body length, ones in which you can lie down. Some of us were able to inherit trenches from those who had been here ahead of us. The CP was organized, and we were settling down when we were shocked to hear artillery fire. We knew there were Germans still present in the area. When we heard the cannon and the screaming shells overhead, we all dived into our trenches and started deepening and improving them. Not to worry though, we soon learned they were friendly guns, firing on distant targets. Later we learned to distinguish the difference between "incoming" and "outgoing" shells. Still, some of the more insecure slept in their mummy sleeping bags deep in their trenches that first night.

In spite of the bombing destruction and artillery and tank damage in the bloody hedge row fighting following the landing on D-Day, the area was beautiful. Small fields of farmland each surrounded with thick, tough, tall hedges. There were many small orchards. Under different circumstances in peaceful times, one could imagine the pleasure of strolling or driving down these hedge lined roads through small quaint provincial villages. One day while in the area, I fished a small stream, but got nothing. How relaxing, though, to be alone.

At my level of command, the large picture didn't matter much, but I learned that we were assigned to the 9th Army and were placed in Army reserve while Brest was being reduced.

It never became necessary to commit us.

Meanwhile, the rains stopped and the sun came out. To maintain our condition, we marched and did fitness exercising and training. This included hikes to the beach where we inspected the concrete pill boxes and beach obstacles encountered on D-Day. As I gazed out toward the channel through an opening from inside one of the pillboxes, I remember thinking that it's a marvel that the invasion succeeded.

The slick operators and traders of each unit had made their contacts with the locals, who were already used to trading with the Germans. They traded for eggs, homemade cheese, cider from the orchards, and Calvados, a remarkable, versatile alcoholic beverage. I think it is made from potatoes. It had many uses. One of which was that of a candle made by sticking a wick of some sort into the neck of the bottle and lighting it. We found it all across France. Once, some cheese I got was a lot like cottage cheese. We had already learned the value of American cigarettes as trading material in Europe, and all of mine were available for this purpose.

During this time, our division supplied a thousand or so men with trucks they could spare to an emergency truck unit called the "Red Ball Express". It was their job to move all the materials being landed, to the troops in the front lines. The Allies had fought their way out of the peninsula and stormed across France. General Patton was sorely in need because he had outstripped his supplies and had literally run out of gas east of Nancy and just west of the Seigfried line. As a tank specialist, gasoline was critical for his mode of operation. As an example of the great need, in one week in September, the daily consumption of gasoline in a 24 hour period averaged 665,360 gallons.

Our bivouac area 55 was just a short distance from the beaches where troops landed on D-Day. Some of the heavily mined areas had been cleared of mines, so that an officer could take groups of men on controlled hikes, through this historic bloody area.

On September 21, while on one of these excursions, Sgt. Richards and Pfc. Langmead from my platoon along with Lt. Schitter and two other men were killed by a German S mine known as a "bouncing Betty". I had chosen not to accompany the group that day. Before the casualties could be evacuated, a mine removal squad had to be called in to check the area for other mines. This stopped the casual visits to the beach area. In succeeding days and weeks, the engineers of the division removed about 7000 mines from the area.

At this time, remember, the breakout of the Allies had been accomplished and they had fanned out eastwardly into Belgium and Holland and across France where the German forces were taking cover behind the Siegfried Line. The Seventh Army and the French Army were coming up from southern France. Some Allied units had moved so fast, that many times, German orders were issued to hold positions that had already been passed by the charging Allied troops. Three months had gone by since D-Day, and the front lines had more or less stabilized by this time. All along the line there was a continual test of strength by both sides by probing and limited objective skirmishes. Mostly, though, it was a holding position situation in the interim between the Battle of France and the coming assault of the German homeland.

Our Red Ball Express drivers had been returned to us and had earned a campaign ribbon for the division. The plan to move the division to Cartaret on the west coast of the peninsula was cancelled on September 28, and we were alerted for active front line duty.

On October 4, the first units left St. Martin D'Audoville for a two day trip across France. Carentan was the first village we passed through. It was daylight, and we could see the results of all the fighting that had occurred here. Then we came to St. Lo. Many of the histories of that time, tell about the fighting for the breakthrough at St. Lo. We were not prepared for the example presented to us, of utter and complete destruction of an entire village, such as this. It had been saturated by bombs, shelled, and burned to ground level.

38 Illustration of utter destruction similar to St. Lo

Never before had I seen such a gigantic pile of rubble. Just the thought that a short time ago it was home to many families was very disturbing. We passed through other towns, but none so badly damaged as St. Lo. Our travel route went through Vire, Flers, Argentan, Verneuil, Dreaz, Houden, and Trappes. We bypassed Paris to the south to Versailles, Belle Epine, and Ponthiery. A half day stop at Fontainbleau gave some of us a chance to walk short distances in town. I must say that this mid west country boy wasn't ready for those open air toilets in the streets. Male and female could stroll down the street hand in hand. He could walk behind a chest high screen, relieve himself, and their conversation was not even interrupted.

The division continued on through Melun, Fontenay, Esternay, Sommesous, Vitry le Francois, St. Digier, Signy, St. Aubin, Nancy, Hoeville, Athienville and Arracourt.

This list of towns on our line of march was copied later because to tell the truth, I didn't see some of them since I was busy most of the time on the trip which included two nights of blackout driving. As an officer, I exercised the privilege of riding in the cab of the truck. This is the large personnel carrier truck. As we started toward eastern France, much of our driving was done after dark under strict blackout. The only thing visible to the driver was the little red recessed lights on the truck ahead which can only be seen from directly behind the truck,trailing, and the driver has to follow these tiny red specks. This blackout driving was practiced to conceal, as much as possible, the movement of various troops and supplies thus trying to maintain the element of surprise concerning the location of Army units and equipment.

The driver of my truck had just come off duty with the "Red Ball Express" where they had driven hours on end with very little rest or sleep. Frequently, as conversation would lag, I would see his head nod or jerk up abruptly. When asked if he would like some help driving, he replied in an anxious voice something like, "Oh could you?"

Of course, I could. He just didn't know that I had been issued a government drivers license back at Ft. Jackson after driving one of these trucks once around the motor pool. But I certainly could drive better with my eyes open than he could with his closed. I took the wheel of the truck with about 15 men and their equipment in the back and pulling a trailer besides. I never had tried blackout driving even with a more maneuverable vehicle. The truck shifting hadn't moved through the second shift before the driver was sound asleep. I was alone and on my own with no one to talk to or advise me with those two little miserable lights to follow and in pouring down rain.

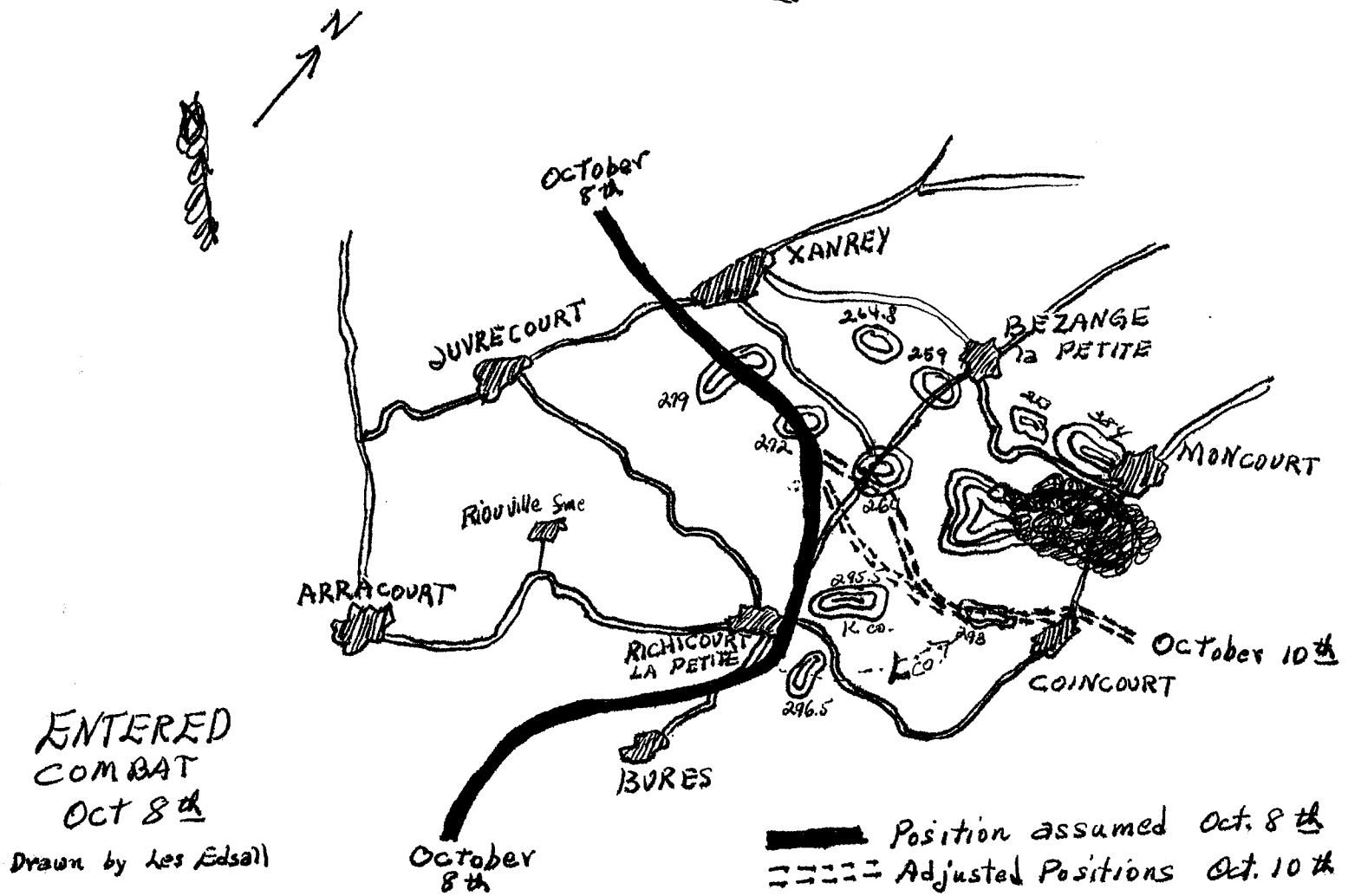
Late that night or early in the morning, whichever, the light ahead stopped. I stopped. Word was passed back that the lead vehicle had made a wrong turn, and the column had to turn around. Now there's no way I could turn one of these trucks around at night even if it wasn't pulling a trailer. I reluctantly awakened the driver, and he turned it around for me. He immediately went back to sleep. I drove for a while after that, and then he woke up feeling much better. He returned to driving while I caught a nap or two.

At the Moselle River bridgehead, Patton's 4th Armored had veered to the northeast. The German Fifth Panzer Army which included the 11th Panzer Division (Wietersheims Ghost Division and the one we got to know very well) was attacking northwesterly hoping to split the Allies in two. They met, and one of the severest tank battles of the entire war was fought with Patton the victor.

Having passed Nancy, evidence of increased resistance could be seen -- severely damaged buildings, dead animals, shell holes everywhere, and hundreds or perhaps a thousand disabled and destroyed vehicles from both armies (but mostly German) were throughout the area.

People had waved as we went by, but there was no demonstration of a liberation feeling.

MAP I



ENTERED COMBAT Oct 8th

Drawn by Les Edsall

I think they were being cautious because we had no large force there, and we just might be pushed out again by the Germans in which case, they would have to tolerate the German presence again.

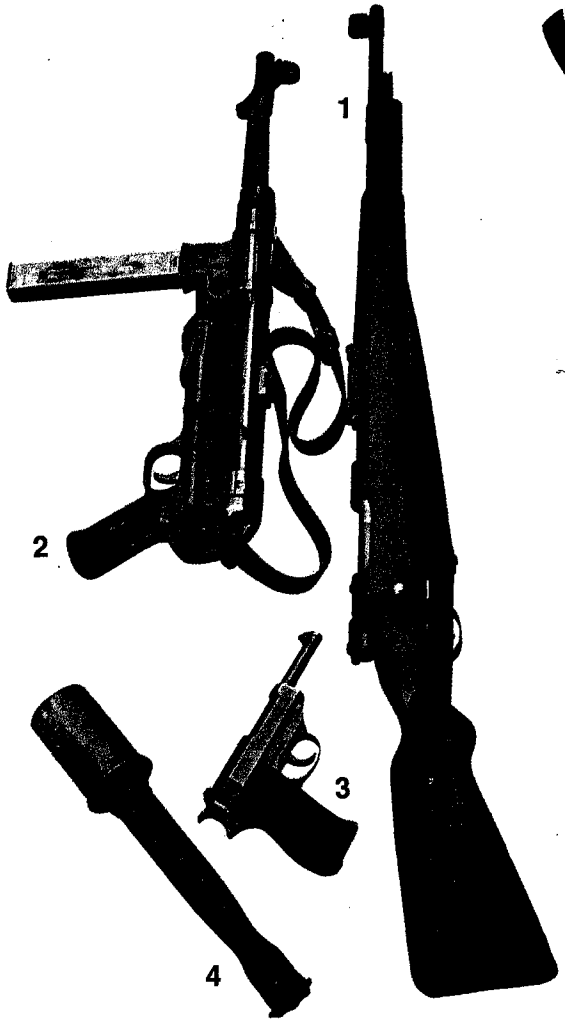
The 104th Regiment was to relieve Combat Command B of General Patton's 4th Armored Division which was one of his famous spear heads across France. This is where they ran out of gas, and they had been there for a while. After their gallant rush across France and the recent battle, they certainly had earned a rest.

By midnight, October 6, the 1st Battalion was committed. A couple hours later in the early morning of October 7, the 2nd Battalion was in its sector. With darkness dwindling, the 3rd Battalion, which included L Company, was bivouacked near Athienville. The following night on October 8, we moved into our positions. All the changes were made in the dark to conceal the change and, also, to keep from drawing enemy fire. It was very creepy and ghostly because the night was foggy at ground level, and there was a partial moon shining through the fog giving an eerie atmosphere. This condition proved to be appropriate because with the light of dawn, we were able to see shapes and bodies of dead men and animals in the half frozen mud in the open fields in front of our lines. The awful stench we had noticed in the dark proved to be the decaying bodies. It was rather nauseating.

The positions we occupied were on relatively low ground and were dominated by a ridge some distance away that was held by the enemy. The foxholes which we inherited were deeply dug and partially covered with makeshift covers or roofs. They had just a small entrance from which to fire a weapon or to enter or leave the interior. Having been here a considerable time, with not much to do but stay alert or just to pass the time, they had worked and improved the foxholes. The covers were certainly a good idea as we would soon find out.

My 1986 March-April issue of "Yankee Doings" contained an article by a Captain Johannes Schneider, the German officer who commanded the 2nd Battalion, Panzer Grenadier Regiment 110. This regiment was responsible for the defense on both sides of Bezange La Petite during October 6, 7, & 8, 1944.

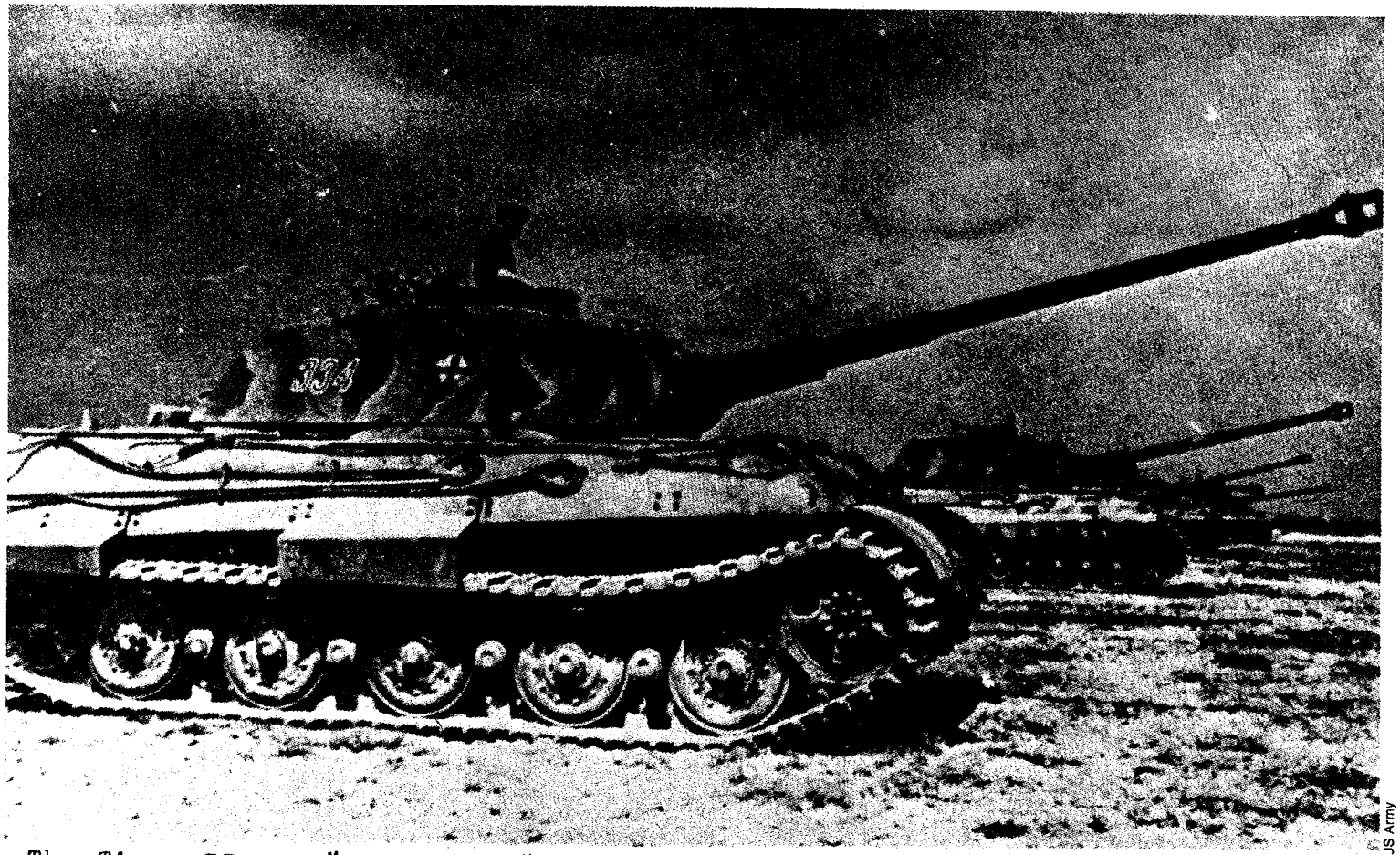
1. KAR-98K 7·9-mm rifle (5 rounds in magazine)
2. MP-40 machine-pistol (32 rounds in magazine)
3. Walther P-38 9-mm automatic (8 rounds in magazine)
4. Standard hand-grenade



German Infantryman

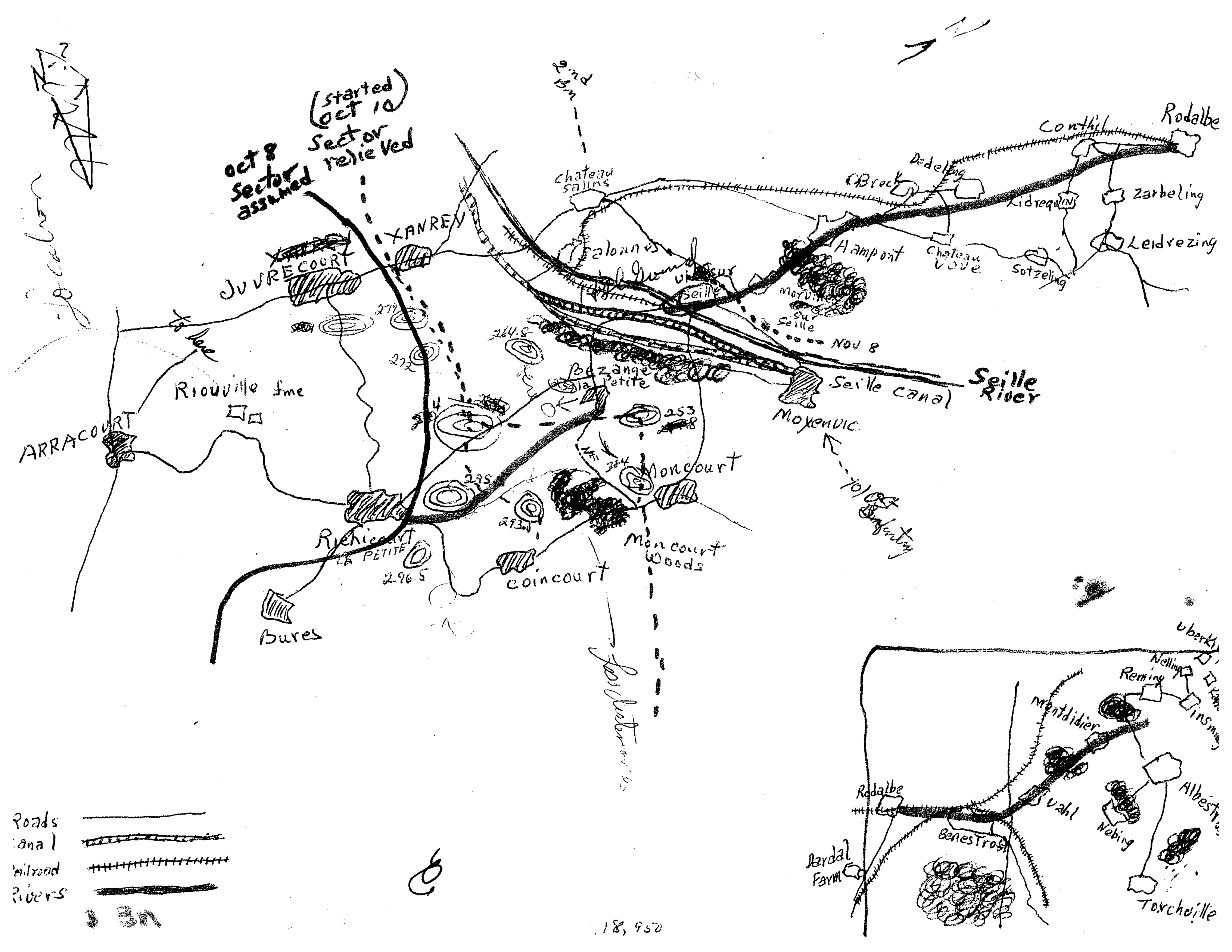
and his

weapons



US Army

The Tiger II, or "King Tiger". Its 88-mm gun had great range and accuracy. Its turret armour was 7 inches thick.


(started oct 10
Sector relieved
oct 8 Sector assumed
2nd Bn
Chateau Salins
Conthil
Rodalbe
Dedeling
OBreck
Lidrequin
Zarbeling
Leidrezing
Hampont
Chateau Vove
Sotzeling
Salonnes
Vic sur Seille
Morville sur Seille
NOV 8
Seille River
Seille canal
Moyenvic
XANREY
JUVRECOURT
to Nancy
Riouville fme
ARRACOURT
Bezange la Petite
253
Moncourt
384
295
264.8
279
272
293
Richicourt La Petite
296.5
coincourt
Moncourt Woods
Bures
Roads
Canal
Railroad
Rivers
Bn
18, 950
Uberkinger
Nelling
Reming
Insming
Montdidier
Vahl
Albestroff
Nebing
Torcheville
Rodalbe
Benestroff
Dardal Farm

In his article, he stated "that his command post was in a basement of a vault like construction in a farm house on the northwest edge of Bezange La Petite." He thought he was in a quiet position, but"during the night, we heard from the enemy side coming from the direction of Arracourt, loud motor and tank tread noise. Our first thought -- assembling of tanks for offensive"!

"With us, there was high tension. The night passed, daylight arrived, but nothing happened. On the following night, the same noises were audible again although reduced in volume. When daylight was breaking, there suddenly stood before us two young U.S. soldiers, with their mess kits, in front of our company on the left wing. The boys had missed their way! I had them taken to the regimental CP. What had happened opposite us? As we learned later, U.S. 4th Armored Division had been relieved in guard by 26th Infantry Division".

As we suspected, our changing over did go very well, and we really surprised the Germans.

Since the enemy held the high ground of the ridge, they could move freely behind their hill while we were confined to our foxholes. They could see our position and installations clearly with the freshly dug earth around each hole. They routinely fired artillery and heavy mortars at us. Occasionally, they must have brought a tank to the crest, and it would fire direct at single targets from its 88mm gun. We learned that this was not unusual because it was an extremely accurate weapon. Our earth covers protected against any air bursts, also.

My platoon was made up of two different support weapon units, the 60mm mortars and the air cooled light machine guns. I traveled with the machine gun section mostly which kept me on or near the front line, and my platoon sergeant, Sgt. Morressy, controlled the mortars which were usually deployed a little distance to the rear.

Since we had to keep in touch, there were two messengers, one for each of us, staying constantly at our side.

They were used between the Lt. and Sgt. or company commander as needed. Therefore, each time,we dug a two man foxhole, and obviously, they were larger than the ordinary foxhole. Of course, I was busy checking weapons emplacements and deploying my platoon, so this meant that poor Lyle Dudly, my messenger, did more than his share digging. I'm sure "Red" Dawson, Sgt. Morressy's messenger, did the same for him.

Being fully exposed in such a strange defensive position lent itself to very effective enemy sniper fire. The German rifle snipers could lay on the ridge, or behind a tree or bush, or at the edge of the woods and fire many shots before being located and driven off by counter fire. Very often, a tank would be brought up just behind the crest of the hill with just the thick armored turret exposed and would fire their 88mm cannon at any target presenting itself including individual soldiers. They were accurate enough to be used this way, too. These tanks had to be driven off the ridge by artillery. We used different shells with our cannon. Some were designed as armor piercing projectiles. Others would explode on impact saturating a given area with pieces of shrapnel. Still others were timed to explode either in the air or ground. We used a phosphorus shell to mark impact and gauge range,which was a way to adjust the targeting on enemy positions. We were particularly good at precision air burst shelling. The phosphorus shell explodes and immediately ignites thousands of little pieces of phosphorus giving off a pretty, white smoke. Burning pieces of phosphorus fell to the ground blanketing an area and penetrating foxholes, cracks, and crevices thus being almost inescapable. The pretty white smoke marked the target, but it was the burning pieces that were so frightening. They would burn until consumed,through clothes, into flesh, and sometimes clear to the bone. I learned later that these phosphorus shells were one of our most despised weapons.

Green troops make mistakes. One such mistake was a near tragedy the first night on the line.

One of my mortars was set near a group of trees. In our haste to set up and be ready for the enemy that night, and due to the eerie light and limited visibility, we discovered next morning that a tree branch was in the trajectory path of the mortar. Since mortar shells are impact shells and are armed upon clearing the muzzle of the tube, the branch could have exploded the outgoing shell, injuring or killing some of our own men. Fortunately, the mortar wasn't needed that first night, and we escaped disaster. You can be sure that we all swallowed our hearts and learned a lesson.

Just a few days later, having comfortably settled into our foxholes and remodeled them to suit our individual tastes, Dudley and I were huddled inside weathering one of the frequent, regularly delivered bombardments. Suddenly, there was a tremendous explosion and seemingly a mountain of loose dirt plummeted down on us. Gasping and choking, we checked with one another. I was O.K. -- Dudley was O.K., but we were both completely covered with dirt. Upon investigation, we discovered that an incoming shell had landed on the inside edge of our foxhole parapet, just inches from the opening into the foxhole. Since an explosion by impact is up and out, the fragments scattered harmlessly into the air. However, the opposing force of the explosion had "shoveled" all that loose dirt down on us, inside. Many times I had heard the game of football described as a game of inches. Dudley and I were now convinced that the war game is, also, a game of inches. Just two or three more inches of trajectory distance would have placed that shell right in the foxhole with us. Once again, we did what we would be doing many times in the future. We swallowed our hearts.

These first nights were a very nervous time for green troops. All through the night, there would be sporadic firing of small arms. If it occurred in my sector, I had to investigate each incident. Mostly, it turned out to be raw nerves and itchy trigger fingers -- a dangerous combination. Sometimes this posed a problem for small patrols returning from information gathering missions.

These patrols were sent out to observe or contact the enemy and bring back specific information. They were supposed to go out, gather the information, and return through a designated point. If they succeeded in doing this, everything was fine. However, anyone who has camped, spent time in the open after dark, moved about without a trusty flashlight or other light, knows how easy it is to get disoriented and even lost. So, if the patrol is returning off course or approaching the front line of inexperienced troops, the situation is very much touch and go.

The regiment found it had a problem. The high ground and hilltops held by the German forces provided excellent, direct observation of the road from Arracourt to Richicourt la Petite. This was our front line supply route for our Third Battalion sector. The trucks making this run always drew enemy fire,making it very dangerous and sometimes costly. The truck drivers didn't need this hassle along with the ever present mud. Always the mud. It seemed that just when it would appear to be drying up a little, it would rain again. Fortunately, winter had not set in yet, and it wasn't freezing. Our feet were always wet but not frozen.

From the bits and pieces of information gathered by the patrols, and from aerial maps which were always studied, it was decided that our front line could be straightened out somewhat. A few key hills could be taken to relieve the pressure on our supply route.

Due to the nature of this objective, it was to be limited action, and "K" Company was chosen to execute it. Consequently, "K" Company was the first unit of the 104th Regiment to gain ground from the enemy in World War II. Luckily, they met little resistance but did take four prisoners. Captain Tresca's Company secured hill 295.5 (see map) on the left and we in "L" Company, under Captain Lujon, moved over hill 296.5 to hill 293 reaching our objective along side "K" Company. The supporting tank destroyers stopped and dug in thus securing hills 295.5 and 293.

(These hill numbers were copied from our regimental history and are accurate and recorded there.) Contact was made with the 2nd Cavalry on our right just east of Coincourt, so now our flank was protected and our first action was completed.

In the meantime, while we were thus engaged, Company "C" was swinging around toward another hill east of Bezange la Petite. Patrols had reported the hill unoccupied, so "C" Company was surprised when they were met with heavy mortar and machine gun fire coming from a high hill north of the village. They were trying to deny them the hill. Many men were killed including Lt. Gallagher, who was the first 104th officer killed in combat in World War II, and they had to withdraw to the backside of their hill.

Captain Schneiders article records this action, thus. "On 12 Oct., approximately, enemy artillery, anti-tank guns and mortar fire grew more violent and, in the afternoon, the Americans attacked. Fifth Company was forced out of the trenches on hill 265 due west of Bezange la Petite and then defended itself from the houses at the west side of the village. I planned with Panzer platoon leader Lt. Rudolph a counter attack. When daylight broke, we started with 3 Panzer IV's accompanied by an infantry assault force. Shooting, throwing hand grenades, and shouting loudly we stormed toward hill 265 and were successful. The enemy had retreated and we were again in possession of our former positions. Approximately 15 noncommissioned officers and soldiers were taken prisoner."

At length, Company "E" commanded by my former C.O., Captain Monnin, finally was able to take the hill and occupy it until October 18. However, the enemy stayed on their high hill north of town, too, till we dislodged them in our November offensive.

Captain Schneiders article confirmed something I had always remembered but couldn't pinpoint. There was a cease fire once while wounded were attended to and bodies recovered. His account -- "Lt. Schwarze said, "Captain, on 265, your soldiers are standing together with American soldiers; are talking and smoking cigarettes."

"I ran with Lt. Hoffman and two orderlies up towards hill 265. Things were as reported to me by phone by Lt. Schwarze. Together with our soldiers, there stood U.S. soldiers smoking, making small talk, celebrating the cease fire!"

"A medical aid man, upon hearing loud cries for help, had run out waving his red cross flag and had bandaged about 5 soldiers with throat and head wounds and led them back. Thereupon, the Americans, too, were said to have come out and to, also, have recovered their own wounded men."

An incident occurred somewhere in this time frame that I can't quite pinpoint,either. We must have been moving our company position to support some action or relieve a company on line. I remember distinctly moving the troops along a road single file. We had come to a section of the road which had a stone wall constructed along side, instead of a berm, because there was a tremendous gully parallel with the right of way. On the opposite side of the deep ravine, we saw two or three Germans sliding and scrambling down the hill with their hands over their heads. We were new to combat, and this was our first chance to take prisoners. All dough boys want to confiscate a pistol or some other souvenir to take back home to show the parents or children. Seeing men willing to surrender excited us and caution was abandoned. Some of our men climbed over the protection of the wall to intercept them. They had started to descend into the gulley when the exposed Germans dropped down behind cover, and a curtain of rifle and automatic weapons fire sprayed our line of march. Fortunately, we sustained few casualties, and the skirmish was soon over. We captured some prisoners, but we surely learned a lesson the hard way about some of the rules of war. Just another little incident in troop seasoning.

These limited skirmishes were small in relation to the overall operation of the allies, but they were important for us. They answered some questions, dispelled some doubts about ourselves, and pointed out some strengths and weaknesses. It WAS combat, and men WERE getting injured and killed, so it helped season us for the later fighting.

We worked on our defenses, as you continually do in a static situation, while supplies continued to be brought forward. Mostly now, we exchanged artillery fire with the Germans.

Being the weapons platoon officer, I was somewhat more mobile than the rifle platoon leader. My responsibility covered the whole company sector whether it was one platoon on line or all three. Whereas, the rifle platoon was concerned with just their assigned area. Therefore, I did get to move around some. One such time, I was back in Richicourt doing something for the company. I enjoyed being in these little villages, and I was fascinated by the style of living in rural France. Believe it or not, the house and barn are the same building. In fact, some of the buildings are built in series like our row houses in the U.S.A. But in all of them, you could step right from the kitchen into the barn by merely opening the kitchen door. To their credit, I must add that the barns were cleaned daily and the manure was placed in front of the house in neat piles to be hauled to their little farm plot, in due time, outside the village and there were very few flies. The manure pile was a sort of status symbol. Its size indicated the size of the cattle herd, and thus the relative wealth of the farmer. In some localities, we saw these manure piles on our '76 and '85 trips to Europe. They looked like molded stacks with their straight sides.

There had been some combat in the area, and some of the buildings were badly damaged and vacant. Most of the residents had moved to a safer place, taking what they could, and had not moved back yet. I did buy a cheap linen tablecloth and napkins as a souvenir from one of the "rugged" residents in Richicourt, who had stood his ground.

For the next nine days, we held our positions. "L" Company now being just outside Coincourt on the right flank of the regiment. Division artillery poured barrage after barrage on Bezange la Petite and hills being held by the enemy near that village. The Germans in turn shelled our positions, and it was here at Coincourt that Venditti was killed by shrapnel in an artillery exchange.

House with arch is where I purchased table cloth and napkins for souvenir. The only difference - there was no electric then, streets were muddier and manure piles are missing 1985

Coincourt looking north. L Company was entrenched along hill at far edge of town. House on right where I spent evening with a family there during lull in fighting

During this time of defense, in spite of the regular shelling, the daily routine dragged somewhat. I was surprised and pleased one day when Lt. Anderson came up to the front lines to see me. When we were still in the states, he had often complained about state-side service and had threatened to volunteer for overseas duty. Many times I had calmed his feelings assuring him that we would some day get there.

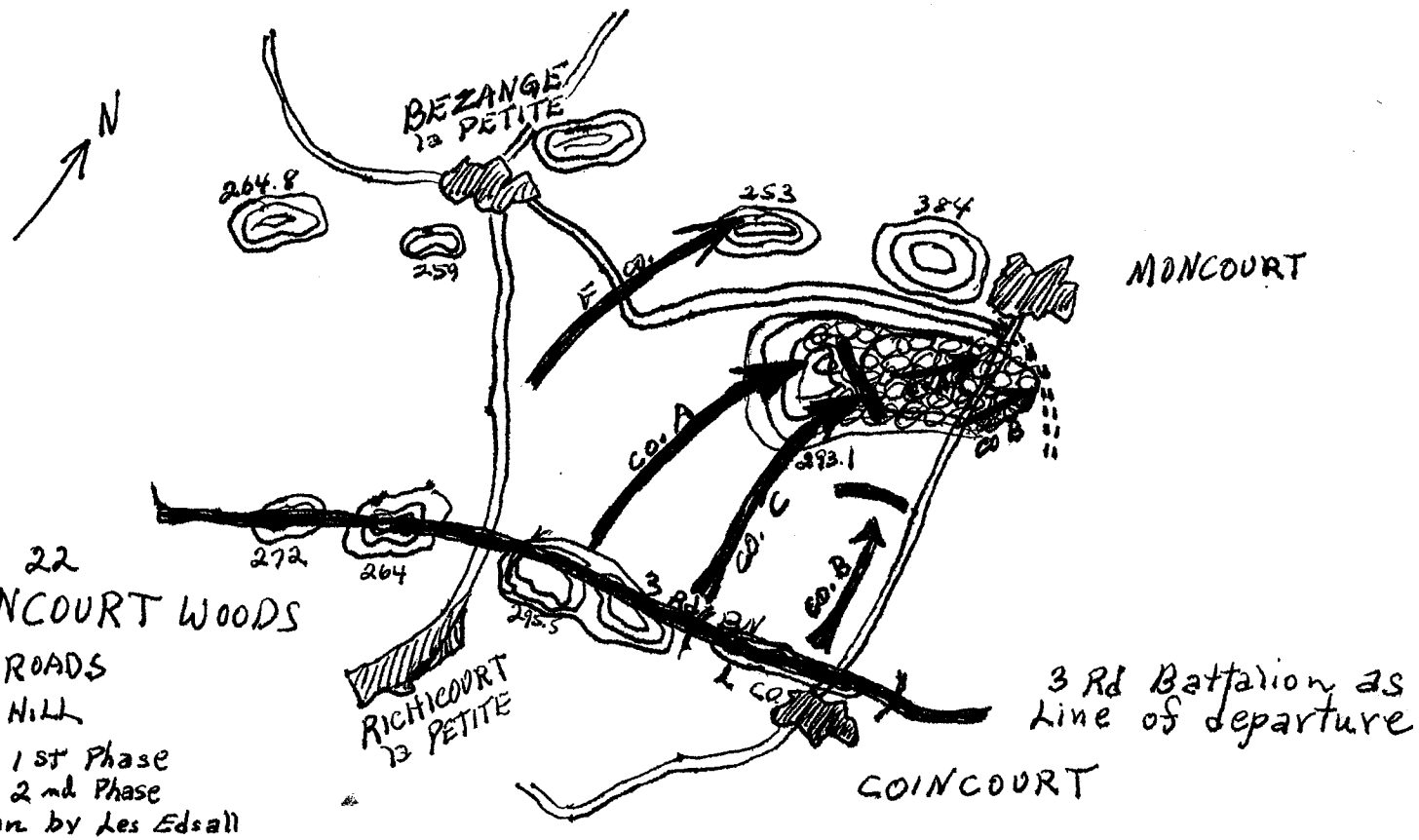
In our preparations for overseas, a regimental guard and band was formed, and he was chosen to organize it. So when we finally did get into combat, there he was stuck at regimental headquarters as far behind the front lines as possible in a regiment. I was happy to see him that day, and we had just started enjoying our reunion when the Germans started one of their barrages. Maybe it was a little more severe than usual, but he certainly got a good taste of life in the front lines. At the first opportunity, he left, and I haven't seen him to this day.

Many times daily, we would hear our 105 and 155 shells heading for hills 264.8 and 259. Then, the answering incoming shells would begin arriving.

Our line was pretty well straightened out (see Map). Enemy lines were pretty well identified and defined except for the area to our front. There was a large woods masking our whole regimental right flank. It was called Moncourt Woods. Behind the woods was hill 384, and behind hill 384 was the village of Moncourt. Every evening, we would hear much activity back there because the woods afforded the enemy excellent cover and mobility. Our high command deemed this unacceptable, and ordered this thorn removed from our side.

Major Donaldson's 3rd Battalion area of which "L" Company was a part extended roughly on a line between Richicourt and Coincourt on the right regimental flank. The 1st and 2nd Battalions were to move through our sector in the assault.

MAP II



Oct 22

MONCOURT WOODS

ROADS

HILL

1st Phase

2nd Phase

Drawn by Les Edsall

Lt. Col. Hansford's 2nd Battalion was to take hill 253 and hold it and then move over and clear out Bezange la Petite. Lt. Col. Tranquada's 1st Battalion was to take Moncourt Woods and hill 384 behind it thus eliminating our blind spot.

About mid afternoon on October 21, a group of planes skimmed in over us surprising and momentarily scaring us. We saw right away, much to our relief, that they were ours. I learned later that they were 9th Air Force P47's, They really clobbered the woods and the village Bezange la Petite with their "eggs" and strafed the village with their 5Ø caliber machine guns. From our positions on the front line, it was a fascinating and awesome display. It was like having front row seats at the theatre. We were just four or five hundred yards away.

Captain Schneiders description---"That was the commencement of an artillery fire of approximately one hours duration. We thought the Last Judgment had begun! There were only a few square meters on hill 265 and Bezange la Petite without shell craters. Our telephone lines were destroyed. One ambulance received a direct hit, driver and medical orderly killed!"

Captain Schneiders Battalion was relieved and later sent to the Chateau-Salins area and we were faced with the 11th Panzer outfit of General Von Wietersheims Division.

The account of this battle of Moncourt Woods I draw from "History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945" because after daybreak the next morning when Captain Carnevales' "B" Company and Captain Greyman's "A" Company moved through our line, the 3rd Battalion was delegated to reserve and withdrawn from the action somewhat.

"A" Company was to move on Moncourt Woods in a generally northerly direction along the road leading from Coincourt through the woods to Moncourt with "B" Company abreast on their left. They would move with the support of artillery and "D" Company's heavy machine guns.

Since the "M" Company's heavy 81mm mortars of our 3rd Battalion were already in place and zeroed in on that target, they would, also, be used for support. Mortars are desirable sometimes because they can be brought to fire much quicker than artillery on a given target, such as; a machine gun emplacement holding up an advance.

The German troops were well dug in and met the attack with brutal resistance. The 1st Battalion was stopped in a short distance, maybe 200 or 300 yards, the length of two or three football fields. The 2nd Battalion on the left was attacking on more open ground and succeeded in taking hill 253 with the attacking "F" Company. Then the concentrated barrage of artillery was shifted to Bezange la Petite to relieve any flanking fire on hill 253, while "F" Company was digging in to secure their gain.

Meanwhile, our 3rd Battalion was getting a stream of prisoners coming back from the front lines. We were called on to supply extra litter bearers to help handle the many casualties being suffered. Both sides were fighting stubbornly.

Still, at nightfall, the 1st Battalion had only been able to advance about one third of the way into the woods where they were stopped cold. Captain Breyman was wounded in this action and later died on the way to a hospital in England. The heavy enemy fire kept "A" and "B" Companies from advancing, but it, also, prevented them from retreating. They just hung on precariously trying to hold the positions they had struggled so hard for. In fact, the next two days were holding on days mostly with artillery fire delivered on the enemy positions in the woods and their positions to the rear. A return fire showered our troops, too.

Only in situations like this, can one appreciate the precision targeting of our artillery. Remember, that American troops and German troops are in this woods at the same time just a short distance separating them. The gun emplacements of the artillery are thousands of yards and even miles to our rear. Yet, they are able to shell the enemy just ahead of us with maybe 25 to 50 yards separating us.

"History of a Combat Regiment 1639-1945" tells of the German defenses of the woods describing some of the obstacles. The 1st Battalion was attacking massively thick earthen pillboxes, dense undergrowth, and barbed wire. There was a tremendous gully just inside the woods line that had not shown up in aerial reconnaissance photos. For a considerable distance, this gully could be crossed by ammunition bearers only at points where narrow pathways led up the steep sides. Down these paths, the Germans trained machine gun fire. They, also, had machine gun cross fire covering the entire edge of the woods with mortar fire zeroed in at the points where the bands of fire met. Eventually, "C" Company was committed to aid Company "A", and their commander, Captain Czarnovich, was badly wounded in this fight.

The 2nd Battalion which had an easier sector, had run into mines and booby traps in a ravine they had to cross. They, also, received flanking machine gun fire from Moncourt Woods which had them pinned down and slowed their advance. All in all, they had a much easier time after "A" and "C" Companies in the woods mopped up some by-passed positions firing on "F" Company. "F" Company could then dig in and was fairly well entrenched on hill 253.

After three days of fighting in the woods, a patrol directed by Col. Colley cleared the south edge of the woods, crossed the road, and mopped up the resistance on the east side of the road in the woods. He got the Distinguished Service Cross for this action.

Meanwhile, Company "A" moved to a road on the north edge of the woods, and the woods were cleared.

According to the division history account, the reason the 104th met such resistance at Moncourt Woods was that the German troops were ordered not to give up Moncourt Woods under penalty of death. According to the history book, these orders were transmitted directly by Hitler himself in consideration of the fact that he had fought successfully in his first combat engagement in these woods in World War I. We later identified our opposing units as the 11th Panzer Division and the 113th Panzer Brigade.

Being in the regimental reserve, I had been in and out of Coincourt for various reasons. While there, one time, I bought a rabbit from one of the civilians and fried it in my mess kit. The kit was aluminum and made a good skillet. On occasions, we had access to those little single burner gasoline stoves, so that is what I used. The rabbit was just reasonably good but certainly a change from the C, K, or D rations.

Rabbits were fairly common in rural France at this time. Since they reproduced and grew quickly, they were the easy way to get protein for the table. There was no marketing of livestock at this time, and everything was rationed. Then, too, the Germans had helped themselves to some of the local cattle to feed their troops. We had seen a lot of cattle carcasses in various fields as combat had destroyed many. The farmers had merely adjusted to the times with the rabbits.

One unforgettable sight in Coincourt is still etched in my mind's eye, and I chuckle every time I think of it. I can still see one of the ammo bearers scrambling around inside one courtyard bending over with pistol in hand chasing a rabbit he had bought for his skillet trying to shoot and kill it. Early in my Army training, I had experienced the unreliability of the 45 caliber pistol's accuracy. That's one reason I'd traded my 45 caliber weapon for the 30 caliber carbine. I'd found that anything over a foot away was safe with a pistol.

As I moved in and out of the village, I met some of the native people. They acted friendly enough, but they really hadn't faired so badly under the Germans. Now, some of their homes were in ruins partly as a result of our liberation efforts. This Alsace territory had been historically sympathetic to German rule. So it was hard to tell how they really felt. I always thought of this in the same light as the boy scout who helped the little old lady across the street. Actually, she didn't want to cross the street, but he had to do his good deed for the day. We, too, were going to free these villages even if we had to level them to the ground.

I did have a great time one late afternoon and evening when I was invited into this one home. Although I don't remember how many or of what age, the couple had some children. The meal was not fancy, and I'm sure I must have contributed something besides the probable "D" bar for the children. It was interesting and amusing communicating with them with the aid of the little pocket Anglo-French booklets we carried. Notice the word "communication" was used instead of "conversation". I tried to tell them about my wife and little daughter, who was nearing one year old. I had pictures to show which helped. Anyway, it was a pleasant visit. Before I left, she pointed out how wrinkled my uniform was. Not really surprising, when you consider that it was wool and was thoroughly soaked each day with the constant rain. She insisted on pressing my jacket having to heat the irons on a cooking range similar to one my grandmother had used. The jacket looked so much better, that she had me give her my trousers which she pressed, also. It was a nice family, one that a country boy like me could identify with.

While in reserves, I got to visit Divisional Headquarters which was located in a very large woods called Bezange la Grande. Areas such as these were generally considered safe enough for non-combat units to visit. Red Cross would send special trucks with goodies to pass out to the soldiers. While I was there, they brought donuts and coffee. What a treat that was! They, also, passed out cigarettes to the smokers. Sometimes there was entertainment.

About this time, I got my Combat Infantry Badge which I had qualified for before leaving the states. Some of the men put theirs on right away. We certainly had qualified many times over since arriving here. Charley Granger, in supply, got me a pair of combat boots, too. They're a lot more desirable than the shoes and leggings I had been wearing. They had a wide leather band sewed on the top of regular shoes. These bands buckled around your leg and the bottoms of your trouser leg could be stuffed into them. They were so much more convenient than leggings which had to be strung up all the time.

My notes tell me that a Lt. Simons left the company at this time. No further explanation. His wife and Edie had been friends at Ft. Jackson.

My liquor ration came. Officers got a monthly liquor ration when it was convenient for them to receive one. It was a fifth of White Horse Scotch, and a quart of gin. I had never developed a taste for scotch, so I passed that on to my supply and mess sergeants. Anticipating the ration, I saved the lemonade powder from the C and K rations and used the gin to make Tom Collins while it lasted. Just another little touch of home.

Reserve time is used for many things besides rest and recuperation. In the rest area near Arracourt, I was in charge of training some men to use the bazooka, an anti-tank weapon. Heretofore, we only had the launchers fired from the muzzle of our rifles, and they were weak and ineffective.

The bazooka is held and fired from the shoulder, delivering a shaped charge to the tank surface. Due to the shape of the charge, it penetrates the armor and causes all sorts of bits and pieces of metal to ricochet throughout the tank interior, hopefully doing mechanical damage, but mostly injuring or killing the men inside. Since the rear of the tank, where the engine is, is more lightly armored, a bazooka could easily damage the engine and stop the tank, too. Because of the characteristics of the weapon, it had to be used as a team weapon since it needed several ammunition carriers to carry the missiles.

During this training, the Red Cross truck, again, arrived in our area. This time I was a little slow getting to it, so all I got was coffee. The donuts always went in a hurry.

By this time, supplies had pretty well caught up to the front lines and had been stockpiled in certain accessible areas. This was in preparation for executing the plans being drawn up for the winter drive through the Siegfried Line into Germany. The Allies didnt' plan to let the enemy sit comfortably through the winter behind the Siegfried Line as the Germans were hoping to do.

The thickest part of the Siegfried Line was in the Yankee Division sector, and the German high command were counting on it to stop us. I really believe the Germans could see the handwriting on the wall even at this time. The theory is that they would like to hold on till spring when war, weary Allies might settle for less than unconditional surrender.

It must have been about this time that a boy in my platoon, Edwin Geoghan, brought in two German prisoners at the point of his automatic grease gun. He had picked them up in the foxhole right next to his.

We, of course, were sending out our information gathering patrols all the time. The Germans, too, were trying to find out what was going on. According to the Division History, an alert officer near Arracourt encountered a three man enemy patrol led by a German officer. This village was a mile or so behind the front line. They learned that there were many of these patrols, who were trained to infiltrate, determine position of artillery and troops, and return to their own lines to lead a patrol of forty men or so through our weak spots to kill or capture American soldiers. The artillery positions were relayed to their artillery and counter battery fire was set up to neutralize ours.

The history states that one such patrol left their lines about dusk, observed the positions of our foxholes, and chose their route. Once after dark, they were challenged by a soldier. They dropped to the ground and waited with weapons ready. The soldier, getting no answer, asked his buddy to cover him and moved forward to investigate. As he approached the patrol, the German officer called out in perfect English, "Halt". The procedure was for the person halted to respond with the first word of the passwords of that particular day which the American gave. The German then responded with the typical American expression, "O.K.". Feeling it was another American, the soldier returned to his foxhole.

The Germans continued on and, when halted a second time, gave the first word thus gaining the second word or countersign from the unsuspecting challenger.

Now, having both words, the patrol moved freely through American territory responding to several challenges and pursuing their task unmolested. They had, in fact, sat down in an open space without any effort to conceal themselves and ate their field rations. Fortunately, Major Boucher's alertness finally intercepted them before they could return with their vital information. The larger patrols would come later all along the line. This was one of the largest coordinated probes ever attempted.

It was now November and the cold rains continued to fall regularly. Those who were lucky enough to be able to sleep in tents, still cursed the rain. One can imagine what the foxholes were like in this kind of weather. I remember standing many times against a tree trunk in pouring rain, covered by my poncho, trying to stay a little dry while cursing the rain.

On November 3, 1944, some of the officers were driven back to a large field or clearing near Hoeville. It was here I saw General Patton in person, complete with pearl handled pistol. He spoke of the planned offensive, ordered a state of readiness, and wished us well. I don't remember him as the blustery type he is always pictured, but he was impressive. We were told our division objective was Benestroff, and we were to attack three regiments abreast.

The Allied drive had already started in other sectors. To the north, the British and Canadians drove toward Arnhem trying to flank the northern end of the Siegfriend Line. They were stopped short when the Germans flooded the lowlands.

We were to attack head on right into the heart of the Siegfried Line. According to the account in our history, the 104th was on the left, the 101st in the center, and the 328th on the right with the division protecting the XII Corp's and Third Army right flank. The First and Second Battalions were going to attack our sector with the Third Battalion in regimental reserve.

Pressure was building for we knew we were going to start an offensive soon.

VIC-SUR-SEILLE. Picture taken on 1985 trip of ambush house on right with our bullet holes around 2nd story window. Tank was stopped just past the turn

My machine gun placement just this side of tree. The houses on left and right are new, as are the electric lines. Road has been slightly improved.

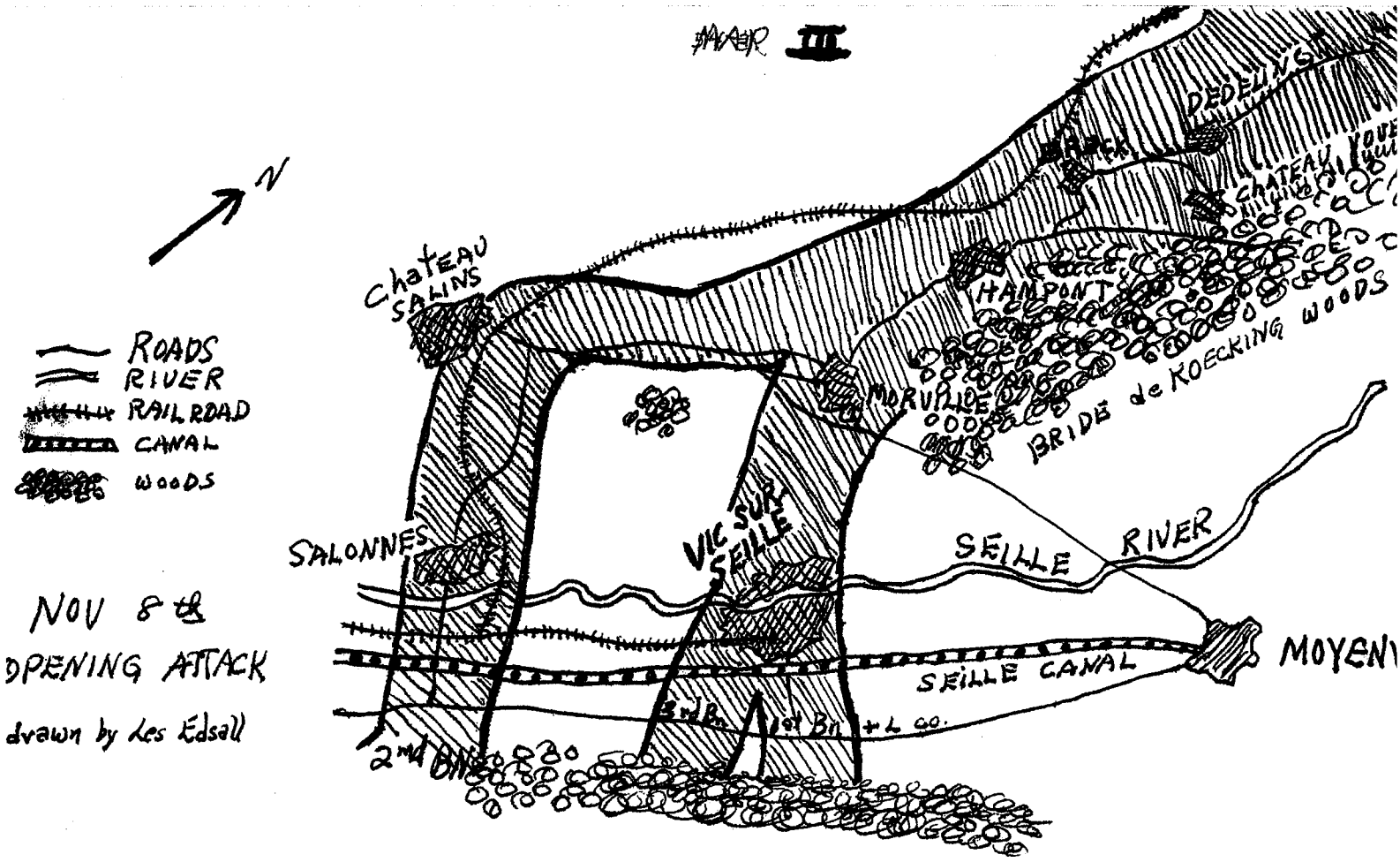
One night, I heard that one of the men in the company had shot himself in the foot. No one saw it happen, and I've always wondered it it was carelessness or perhaps done on purpose. Stressful times often produce irrational acts. Whichever, it ended combat for him.

By November 7, we were ready and moved to assembly areas. Next morning at 6 a.m., while it was still dark, and, of course, in pouring rain, I saw the men of the 1st Battalion move forward. They were dressed for battle, carrying only their weapons, and loaded down with ammunition, some K rations, and raincoats. They trudged through mud and fields flooded with rain and water from the Seille Canal. They crossed the Seille Canal and moved against the town, Vic-sur-Seille, meeting very heavy resistance. The troops were, by now, seasoned in combat, so they continued to drive toward the town. The 1st Battalion was being slowed down, so the Third Battalion was committed to assist them.

I remember crossing the canal on a foot bridge. There was a railroad, then up a hill through muddy fields, and through small orchards and vineyards toward the south entrance of the town. All this time, advancing through heavy artillery and mortar fire. I think the mortar shells are the most disconcerting because you hear incoming artillery, but the mortar is just a quick "whoosh" and "bang". That's it. Captain Tresca was wounded near the bridge.

We ("L" Company) went on into town with the 1st Battalion on our left fighting and moving cautiously from building to building having to clear and check each one. The rest of my battalion circled around the east edge of town and took the high ground just north of the village. They destroyed an artillery observation post that had a commanding view of the whole area,and had been directing fire on all of us. This took some of the pressure off us in town, and we could concentrate on just clearing the buildings now.

Tanks and infantry, in actions such as this, work as a team. The tanks, because of their armor, were immune to small arms fire. So they were used to advance against rifles and machine guns.



The top brass poses outside the Division CP at Vic-sur-Seille during an inspection tour of front-line divisions of the Third Army. Left to right: Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, CG 12th Army Group; MG J. S. Woods, CG 4th Army; Lt. Gen. G. S. Patton, Jr., CG Third Army; an unidentified major general; and Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy, CG of XII Corps.

Picture of Patton

This is action as I saw it in Vic-sur-Seille, an officer with one of his light machine guns clearing a town.

Troops moving to a new engagement, from Coincourt to Vic-sur-Seille

The rear was vulnerable and the sides were thinner, so they were good targets of anti-tank measures, such as; the 20mm and 55mm anti-tank guns with their armor, piercing shells. The new bazooka was proving effective, also. The infantry protected against the units designed to stop the tanks advance. It was a sort of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" arrangement.

I was following close behind the lead tank with my machine gun section supporting the advancing troops. We moved through the center of town which was sort of a small business section built around an open square with a fountain. Taking advantage of every bit of cover we could find, we cleared the center and moved across the Seille River which flows through the north edge of town. The street here makes a sharp left turn for about one half block, then a sharp right, up the hill, and out of town.

The lead tank had just made the left turn exposing its side to a row of houses along the street. A German soldier appeared in a second story window and fired a German bazooka point blank, hitting the tank and stopping it cold.

I was very near the lead tank directing a part of my company since Lujon had gone with the balance of the company flanking the village. I saw the tank get hit and directed fire on the building window, but the damage had already been done. A visit to this village in 1985 revealed that bullet holes we had inflicted that day are still visible around the window frame.

To this day, in my mind's eye, I can still see the hatch opening on the turret, the escape hatch underneath the tank, and soldiers slowly crawling out. I still see that bloody, chewed-up arm dangling with the barest support from one of them as he ran for cover. Another soldier was draped over the rim of the open turret. With all that armor protection, it is still better to be an infantryman and be able to hug the ground for protection rather than be confined in such a small, conspicuous target space.

While "L" Company and the 1st Battalion were fighting in Vic-sur-Seille, the 2nd Battalion was assaulting a small village, Salonnes, west of Vic-sur-Seille. Resistance was strong, but they succeeded in overcoming the defenders. They moved on westerly toward Chateau Salins in an out of zone attack designed to take pressure off the 35th Division on our left. On our right, the 101st Regiment had taken Moyenvic and had advanced into the Seille River valley toward Dieuze.

Our regimental casualties were extremely heavy that day, and aid stations were taxed to the limit taking care of the wounded. The companies on the line were reorganizing and digging in for the night, when once again, the rains started. This time it was a freezing rain. It was discouraging, for the men soon found, they were digging holes just for the rain to fill as fast as they were dug. Consequently, the night was spent under a steady, relentless downpour in our raincoats or ponchos, squatting or leaning against trees, or walking around cautiously behind cover. Those of us still in Vic-sur-Seille fared a little better. We were sharing the town with the last of the Germans. At least, we had buildings for cover.

Next morning, we, in "L" Company, finished clearing the northeast section of Vic-sur-Seille and moved in a northerly direction toward Morville. "I" and "K" Companies, with supporting tanks, attacked toward Morville itself. They won some high ground north and east of the village. We moved up and secured Morville where we dislodged a camouflaged German tank which had "I" Company pinned down with machine gun fire. Somewhere along the line of attack, Col. Dwight Colley, the regimental commander, was seriously wounded in this advance while coordinating the tank and infantry attack. He had an utter disregard for enemy fire. Many of us had seen him, time and again, move among the attacking units carrying that heavy cane of his. He was urging those who had slowed down or had sought cover, by tapping them on the helmet or rump saying, "Let's go son, we've got them licked. Don't stop now." His bravery was impressive and it inspired the men. Although, we all thought that eventually his luck might run out, and it did.

We felt that such a high ranking officer should be more careful, and let the heroics be performed by the company rank officers. Lt. Col. Palladino took over at this point and continued in the capacity of regimental commander to the end of the war.

All through this area of advance, we were meeting with one counter attack after another. The defense of the Germans was not necessarily one of stationary positions, but rather one of strong points which meant occupying hilltops and woods and controlling the areas and roads between points. Thus, he utilized his greatest skill, his armor and infantry strike force. These were used to support moving troops in their rear guard action. They could and did strike out at any time in vicious counter attacks. Each hilltop strong point had to be taken and held, one by one, knowing the expected counter attack would soon materialize. I am one of the first to recognize the value of artillery and support tanks as being indispensable, but the fact still remains that it is the infantry soldier that has to go in and clear and occupy the ground.

Our sector was a sort of hilly plateau, scattered with woods, called the Moreville Plain. There was a high woods covered ridge on our right, running parallel with our line of advance. It was called Bride de Koeking Woods and overlooked and controlled the whole Seille River, Dieuze Valley, and a network of railroads leading to Metz. This was on the right of the ridge. On the left, the woods covered ridge dominated the Moreville Plateau over which we were moving.

The front had narrowed somewhat so the 328th Regiment was sort of in reserve and was moving forward. They were following in our line of advance to be used where needed.

Our advance that day was a sort of "take a little, give a little", and we were always pretty close to the Germans, either attacking or defending. That evening, after taking some high ground, we had to stop and dig in again.

We had been moving, as often as we could, in company front. This means our attacking line was reasonably straight and parallel with the supposed enemy front. Consequently, vehicles traveled on roads, if possible, but the soldier had to move through open fields, through woods, and across ravines and streams. Always there was the mud and the wet feet. We couldn't move around much that night with the enemy so near. We didn't want to attract enemy fire or be mistaken for an enemy patrol and be shot at by our own troops. The night was miserably spent in foxholes getting whatever rest was possible. Sometimes, blankets from one of the company vehicles could be obtained, and Dudley and I took turns on watch while the other one huddled in the foxhole covered with the blanket. When the watch was changed, the snow or frost was shaken from the blanket and positions were reversed. It was miserable, but the Germans were suffering, too. Having wet feet constantly, week after week, the dreaded trench foot was catching up with us now. Next morning, many of the men couldn't bear weight on their feet and were carried or helped back to the medical aid station, suffering excruciating pain. I had learned to carry a pair of socks in my helmet and to change them at every opportunity. My men were instructed to do the same, therefore, they weren't too badly bothered with trench foot. This helps but isn't foolproof. Front line troops don't always have the opportunity to exercise personal hygiene,working as they did this particular year in such foul weather. Even when the foot would begin to lose feeling, there was no time to stop and check. When there was time at night, you couldn't see. Finally, all feeling left the limb and walking became impossible. Men were sent back to the aid station where, upon examination, the limb would be found to be dead and had to be amputated. Maybe, it just might leave the soldier crippled for the rest of his life. The division, as a whole, suffered many casualties from trench foot, and we received many green replacements to fill the vacancies caused by this terrible scourge.

One night, November 10 to be exact, we were faced with a woods in our zone and were ordered to make a night attack. We had never made a night attack before. Having experienced the chaos and confusion that goes with an ordinary daylight attack, I was very apprehensive.

I knew there must be a logical reason for the risk of such a maneuver, so we started in after dusk. A short distance into the woods, the unit I was directing and supporting with my machine gun section ran into automatic weapons fire. With the first burst of fire, I got hit in the left cheek. I was surprised but didn't feel real pain. I really didn't know how bad it was. It had felt like a powerful, sharp slap in the face. Anyway, the first priority was to find cover. Well, nighttime in the woods, to say the very least, doesn't afford very good vision except perhaps for those flashes of the gun muzzle and the tracer bullets screaming past. What you see is mostly darkness or outline. I immediately spotted what looked like a rise in the ground and promptly dove behind it. Right away, I sort of wished I hadn't. It was an area the Germans had been using for a latrine, and I'm in the heart of it. I was safe temporarily, but my first reaction was revulsion, turning quickly to anger, then to fury. I would like to get my hands on those guys and knock even more of this stuff out of them.

Shortly, we were able to get moving again, and we moved through the woods slowly, being stopped several times. Although, there was much more firing on either side of us, we got to the far edge of the woods and stopped. The action on either side of us had subsided. I decided we had better contact our flank protection, and check with my company commander as to the whereabouts of the rest of the company. There were less than ten of us, and I didn't want to leave the protection of the woods and move out into the open field in front of us. I decided to hold here and wait for contact.

Daylight came, and behold, with it, came two German soldiers approaching us across the open field, walking casually and talking with one another. We let them reach our position, surprising them, and taking them prisoner. One of our men spoke a little American "Dutch", and we discovered the shocking fact that they were indeed going to their front line somewhere behind us to relieve some of their men!!

I didn't know until then that the other units, on either side of us, had been stopped right inside the woods.

We must have hit another seam in their defense thus advancing clear through the woods.

This presented a real dilemma. While I was deciding and weighing the next action, the Germans brought up what was equivalent to our half track with a 20 or 40mm gun mounted on it. It fired shots down the edge of the woods in our direction trying to hit us or at least flush us out. We didn't return any fire. After firing many rounds, they must have decided there was no one there, and the vehicle backed off and went back the road it had come on. I really don't know to this day, if they knew we were there or just suspected something fishy. The men accused me of disclosing our position. They jokingly maintained that the Germans knew we were there because they could smell me. Having lived all night in messy clothes, I really couldn't contradict them. We now had a chance to work our way back to our lines and did so. The prisoners might have been a problem, but they indicated they would come along peacefully and even wanted to. We vacated our position and cautiously retreated without incident to the safety of our line.

I was touched at this time by the men with me. I have always been good at finding my way in strange territory, so I was going to lead my little group back to our lines. They insisted that they go first because of the danger in the area. So they led the way back, while I directed them from behind.

We turned the prisoners over to the company. I went to the aid station where they put a large bandage on my wound, giving me my purple heart on the spot, and dismissing me back to Company "L". I cleaned up with a fresh uniform and felt much better. Part of the bullet stayed in my cheek working itself out a month or so later. I still have the tip of the bullet jacket as a souvenir.

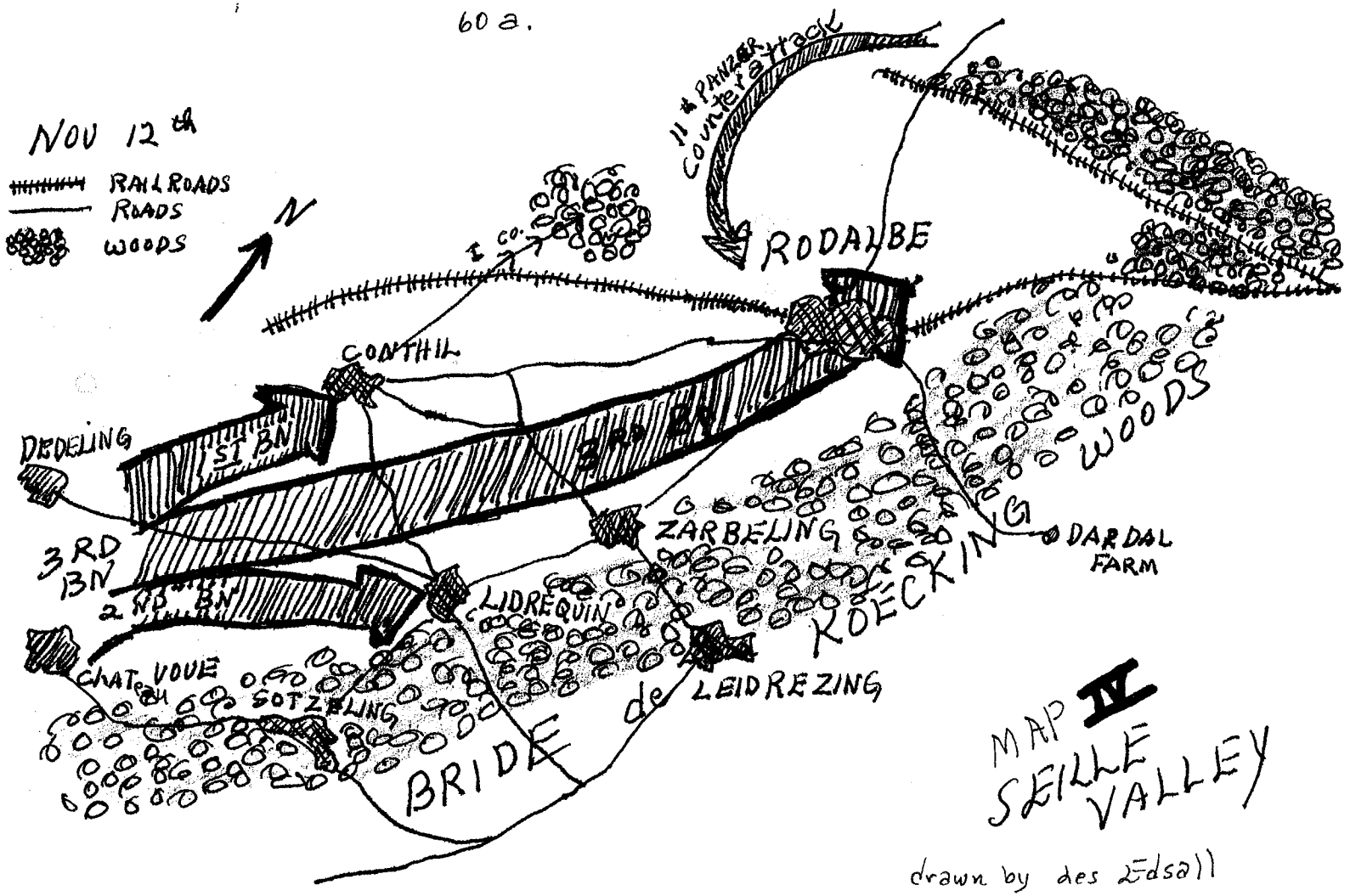
By November 11, we had broken through their line and had passed beyond Hampont, which was a German Division supply depot, then to Dedeling and Chateau Voue.

Evidence of the vicious fighting was everywhere in the aftermath of attack and counter attack as we moved forward and were driven back and moved forward again. We would see both American and German dead lying in crumpled lifeless heaps. Some had horrendous wounds from bullets and shrapnel. Faces half shot away and limbs missing. Some lying in pools of blood with wide open eyes seeing nothing, some lying face down in the ditch or mud, maybe along side a disemboweled horse that the Germans had used to pull their supply carts. They had used horse drawn vehicles extensively for close up supply delivery for their troops. There were disabled vehicles along the road. Because of our location in the battle, most of them were German vehicles knocked out by our tanks or artillery as we advanced. The price was extremely high on both sides.

"L" Company was just north of Hampont when the 11th Panzer outfit hit us again. This is the same pesky unit that resisted so stubbornly at Moncourt Woods and all through this area. We finally beat them off, killing or wounding hundreds and taking 60 or so prisoners.

Along the way, we had surprised a unit in a village and had taken up advantageous positions on a high ridge before they could come out of the village and man their prepared positions outside the town. We were trying to deny them their foxholes, so everyone was shooting. I think I might have gotten two of them with my carbine. It's the only time, I personally fired at the enemy. I moved to the right flank where my one machine gun squad had set up on a road looking downhill into the center of town. When many uniformed men poured out of a building in the center of the village, we opened fire on them. They were a good distance away and not easily identified but still in good machine gun range, so we wounded some of them. We discovered later that they were Italions, who were possibly prisoners of the Germans at this time, and they were included in the prisoners we took.

The Second Battalion on our right took Chateau-Voue, and the First Battalion on the left moved up to some high ground near Conthil. Then the 2nd Battalion moved on through Chateau-Voue, through Sotzeling, Librequin, Lidreizing, and Zarbeling.


NOV 12th
RAILROADS
ROADS
WOODS
N
I CO.
11th PANZER counter attack
RODALBE
CONTHIL
DEDELING
1ST BN
2ND BN
3RD BN
3RD BN
ZARBELING
WOODS
DARDAL FARM
LIDREQUIN
ROECKING
CHATEAU VOUE
SOTZBELING
BRIDE
de
LEIDREZING
MAP IV
SEILLE VALLEY
drawn by des Edsall

Since this action was out of my sector, I probably wouldn't have even heard of some of these towns without the regimental history as reference. It does give me a better perspective on the over all plan of advance. At the time, I was concerned only with our objectives in our immediate vicinity, and this is as it should be.

Meanwhile, "K", "L", and "M" Companies must have hit a seam in the defense. (At least I prefer this theory to the one of being suckered into a trap). We moved rapidly forward being deployed almost like a column on either side of the northerly road, and meeting very little resistance except for the problem of the constant mud. We entered Rodalbe just two and a half miles short of the division objective -- Benestroff.

The 3rd Battalion had been advancing with support from six Sherman tanks assigned to the battalion commander. Several times I had occasion to run into the artillery observation officer riding in his jeep near the front of the column. He indicated concern because he had lost radio contact with his battery, and we had been without artillery support for several miles. This disturbed me as we advanced because we had out distanced our flanking units. We had information that the 35th Division had been held up south of Morhange, and the 101st Regiment was stopped short of Deiuze in the valley east of the ridge of the Bride de Koeking Woods. Actually, we were sticking out like a sore thumb, and were very vulnerable without the total close support needed to hold such a precarious position. Of course, none of us at the platoon level, really understood how much of a predicament we were in, or we would really have been much more alarmed.

With a large, formidable looking woods about three fourths of a mile beyond Rodalbe, we were ordered to dig in on the north edge of the village with "L" Company on the left and "K" Company to our right where the large woods curved down nearer to the town. We were now getting lots of artillery fire from behind the woods, but it wasn't very effective at this time. Besides, we were used to incoming shells by now, so it didn't bother us a whole lot.

In retrospect, it should have because they must have been zeroing in for the upcoming action.

I'm not sure, but I think this is where I lost one of my ammunition bearers who was killed. I think, also, Ned Harwood picked up some shrapnel here, and Carrol (Chick) Holt dug it out of his leg. Those two are good buddies to this very day.

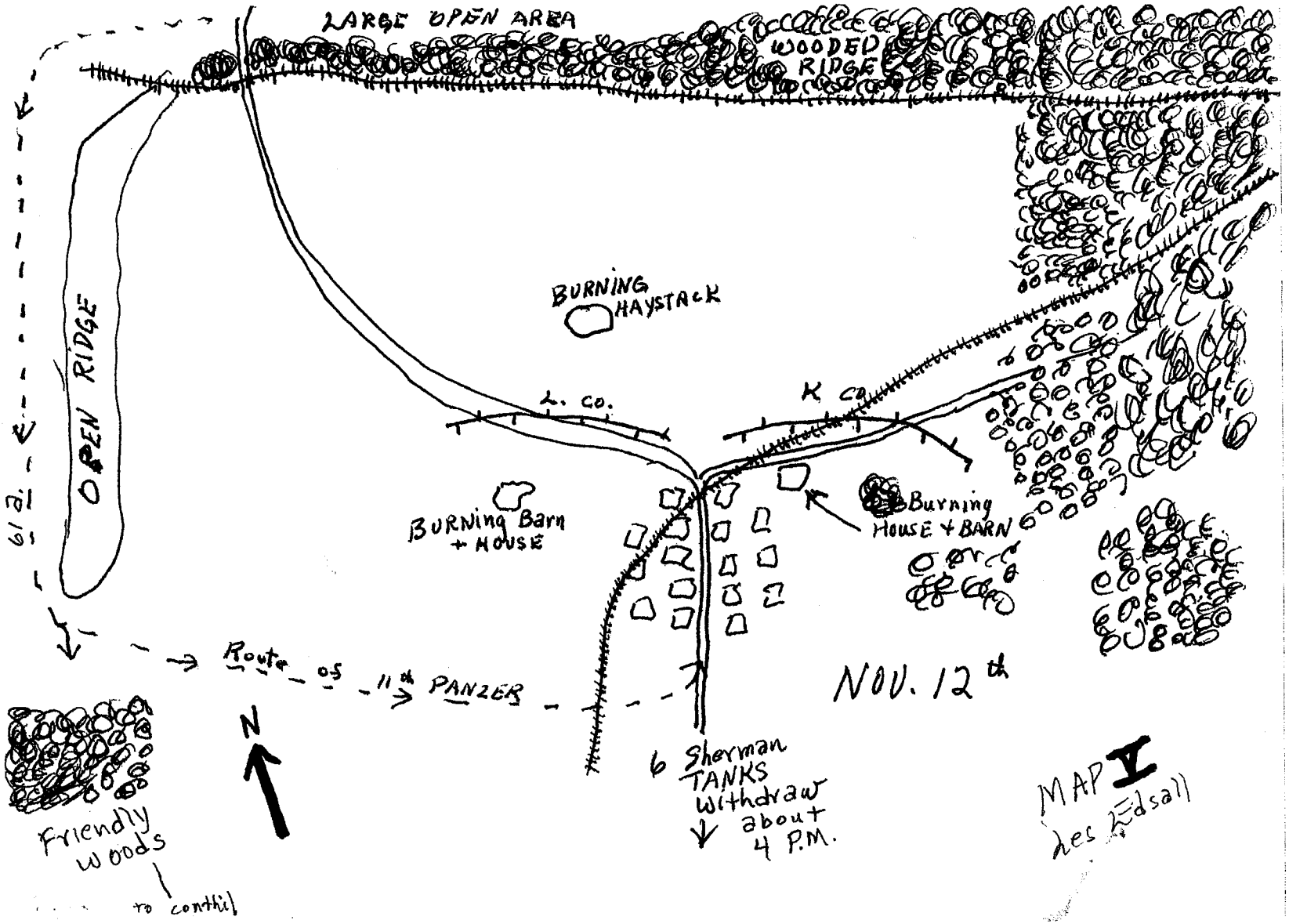
We had moved pretty fast all the morning of November 12, and we were rather glad to stop for awhile, even if it meant digging in the mud.

We were heavily shelled all day, almost without pause, and I could hear sounds of tanks moving behind the cover of the woods to our front. (They squeak, grind, moan, and rumble). Very late in the afternoon, toward dusk, there seemed to be movement around our left flank. However, the movement was behind the crest of a slight ridge extending clear around our left flank. We really couldn't see what was happening as our field of vision was only one half to three quarters of a mile.

A patrol would have discovered what was happening, namely that the German tanks and infantry were moving around our flank behind the cover of the ridge, and meeting no resistance because there was no one out there.

They had sent some troops over the ridge where they engaged our left flank. Private Bocock was one of the gunners there and alerted me by asking if he should open fire on them. I asked if they were in range since I couldn't see them, and he said they certainly were. They were repulsed for the time being but there was a continuous exchange of fire.

I naturally assumed that Captain Lujon, from his C.P. back in the village, could see the developments and the overall picture. For this reason, I wasn't particularly alarmed since no orders or instructions were issued. We on the front lines depended on support from our rear and exposed flanks. That's the way it is done.


LARGE OPEN AREA
WOODED RIDGE
OPEN RIDGE
BURNING HAYSTACK
L. CO.
K CO.
BURNING BARN + HOUSE
Burning HOUSE + BARN
Route of 11th PANZER
NOV. 12th
6 Sherman TANKS Withdraw about 4 P.M.
N
Friendly Woods
to contin
MAP I
Les Edsall

Center of Rodalbe - looking south from near L Company position.

German held woods and hill from the cover of which they
their flanking attack to our left. Taken from our position

About one hour before dusk, we heard small arms fire coming from a fair size woods to our left rear. By the volume of fire coming from the woods, I thought it might have been the reserve rifle platoon committed. Two of our rifle platoons were on line and one in the rear in reserve.

I found years later that it had been "I" Company with about forty men (less than one-third company strength at the most) coming up from Conthil to try to relieve pressure on us.

As I see all the pieces of this puzzle now, and in light of the information I just got this year, I wonder if Captain Lujon might have alerted the battalion commander of our precarious position. He must have been back there and not with his company. How else would "I" Company have known we were in trouble?

Our help was driven away by a heavy shell fire and frontal attack by the flanking enemy units. At this time, we were still holding and defending our position on the line with no change in orders. We were enduring extremely heavy artillery fire along with the frontal small arms fire.

Sometime during this flanking maneuver, the tanks that had supported us withdrew. Now, already without artillery support, we were without the heavy guns of the tanks. But, we, on the front line, didn't know this at the time. We didn't know that we would have to fend off the attack of twelve tiger tanks and infantry, of that pesky 11th Panzer Division once more, with only the small arms of the companies and the one remaining operative bazooka. A monumental task to say the least.

Shortly after dark, some rations which had been brought up in the afternoon were distributed, but there was no additional ammunition or orders. Both companies on the line were getting pressure from their flanks. Ours was mostly a clear area while "K's" was wooded which probably restricted tank movement although they, too, were being punished severely by artillery and small arms.

My machine gun section was down to four men and the mortars back in town had twelve. The First Platoon still had about twenty-five men, the Second about fifteen, and the Third about fifteen. Sgt. Smith, the Second Platoon Sergeant, had been killed about fifteen feet from me as we were exchanging views and ideas. We had been talking about the weird situation we were in which was costing us dead and wounded. It was somewhat like our very first position when we entered combat in October except we weren't protected as well from their artillery here.

Immediately in front of our foxholes (50 to 60 yds or so) where we were talking there was a large stack of hay burning. To our rear on the edge of town, there was a combination house/barn burning. Then on the edge of town in "K" Company sector, there was another barn burning. Of course, in the fall season, the barns were filled with dried hay which was burning with an unbelievably bright flame. "L" Company area was particularly well lit up because we were within the large circle of light. We, who were looking from light to dark, could see nothing beyond the ring of light. On the other hand, from enemy positions in the dark, they could observe our positions and personnel movements with extreme clarity. So they were picking off our men with not only small arms, but they had a habit of firing the accurate "88's" at individual foxholes. They were doing this with very little risk to themselves, therefore, we were taking casualties. That's how Sgt. Smith was killed as we finished talking.

Since the nature of my job required my being at or near the front line practically all the time, I, more or less, directed the defense or offense in the absence of the company commander. It had been this way all through combat, so it didn't seem unusual that I didn't hear from him unless there was a change in orders. My current orders were to dig in and hold this position.

We were still receiving much frontal fire, so my attention was directed toward that and to our flank. Also, a small road going off at an angle to our left front, which I thought was a likely tank approach, was being watched apprehensively.

Since we had had no communication or instructions from the company command post, we, on the front line, didn't realize that the encirclement of our position had been accomplished. We felt we were holding our own on the line and weren't alarmed. We had been in tight places before.

Nearing midnight, I had noticed that the one machine gun that I had deployed across the little road on our left flank hadn't fired for a while, so I went to investigate. I found the gunner had been wounded or was gone temporarily. Sgt. Jurek, the squad leader, had been firing the weapon but was slumped over the weapon. He was not dead but had a terrible head wound. I started back to get help for him. Behold, I met a German officer and his orderly, who was carrying a stick with a white cloth on it. I thought they might be surrendering since other Germans had surrendered this way. They asked to see the commanding officer. I was going toward town anyway to find a medical aid man, so I told them our CP was back this way and I would take them to my captain. He said the town was occupied by his troops, and the town had been cleared of our troops by his troops, and there was no one there. That's why he was looking for the senior officer on the line.

It must have been while the Germans were moving through town sticking the muzzle of the tank's gun in each window of the buildings and killing or flushing the occupant into flight that Captain O'Neill was able to fight his way out with about sixty of his men. "K" Company's sector had some woods and cover and wasn't lighted up so much by the burning fires. Since the attention would have been on the town, the pressure wouldn't have been as strong along side the woods on my right.

Having heard nothing from Captain Lujon, I had no idea when he left (I found out in October, 1986 that Captain Lujon had left in the afternoon with the tanks without notifying anyone).

I read in the regimental history that Lt. Hull from Company "G" led a patrol of twenty-eight men into Rodalbe trying to contact the front line companies.

The patrol got through, but only three men and Lt. Hull got back. Later, six more of that patrol got back and that was all. They never made contact if they were looking for me. Once more, the question arises, "How did they know our predicament unless Captain Lujon was back there?" That must be it.

I was surprised and shocked to find that I'm the senior officer of what remained of "L", "K", and "M" Companies. I was invited into one of the houses by the officer. I don't know his rank, but he was very articulate, neat, courteous, and very professional. That impression is still vivid in my mind. He explained, in perfect English, how they had taken the village. We went to the door where he pointed out how vulnerable we were in the circle of light, explaining how they would be able to pick off each foxhole from their positions in the cover of darkness. I told him we had wounded, and he assured me they would be administered to. Needing a little time to digest the impact of my position, I asked if I could go back to my area and explain the situation to the remaining men. He really wouldn't have had to, but he agreed, giving me a designated amount of time before executing his plan.

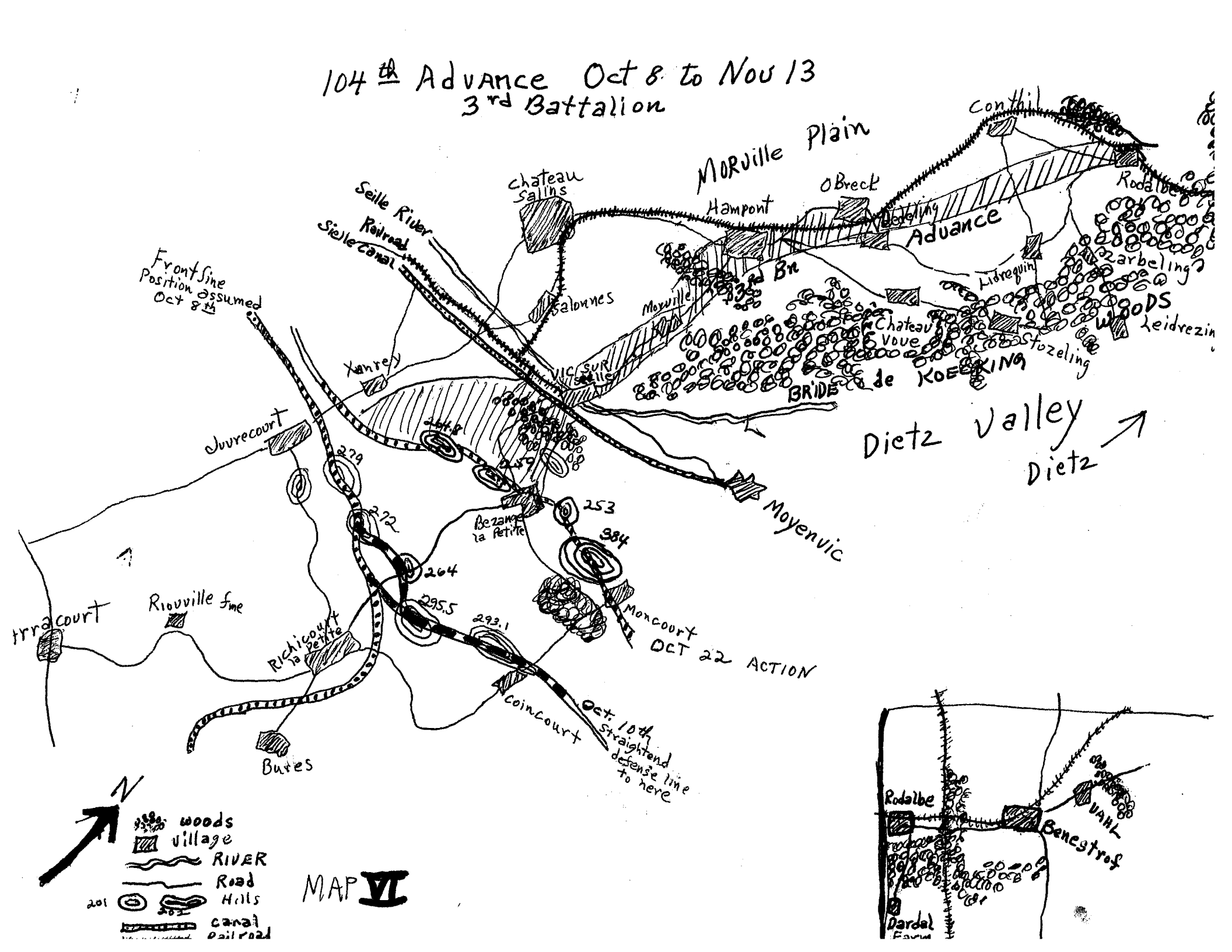
"L" Company had the worst of positions in this development. Although all units of my company were not exposed by the burning light, all front line ones were. As I gathered what leaders we had, some indicated they couldn't face the possibility of being a P.O.W. Sergeant Barnes asked for permission to get out if he could. I hoped that small units might have some chance of slipping through in unguarded areas, so I gave permission to those leaders, who thought they could safely lead some of the men through, to try.

One officer from "M" Company, Lt. McKinney, was one of the last that I talked with before going back to the German C.P. Later, he told me at one of our regimental reunions that I had volunteered to stay with the remaining troops. I don't think that's exactly the way it happened. I probably said to him that someone had to stay with the troops, and I was evidently the senior officer. Besides the German officer knew about me, and I was under a truce.

I dismissed the remaining leaders to their units, and I know that some of them, under cover of darkness, made it back. How many, I don't know. I know Sgt. Barnes and Lt. McKinney did. Some others did, too.

By this time, my granted time had expired and I reluctantly went back to my captor. I had no way of knowing how many troops were left since we were units of "K", "L", and "M" Companies, and I didn't know how many had tried to escape.

It was 12:30 or 1 o'clock on November 13, my daughter, Karen's first birthday, when I turned the remaining depleted units over to the Germans. The division history records over 200 casualties (wounded, killed, or captured) at Rodalbe. The humiliation of defeat, such as this, can only be tempered by the fact that we were captured by one of German's top fighting forces, our nemesis, the 11th Panzer Division.


104th Advance Oct 8 to Nov 13
3rd Battalion
Morville Plain
Conthil
Chateau Salins
Seille River
Railroad
Seille Canal
Hampont
OBreck
Rodalbe
Advance
Front Line Position assumed Oct 8th
Salonnes
Morville
3rd Bn
Arzarbeling
Libreguin
Woods
Leidrezing
Chateau Voue
Stozeling
Xanrey
VIC SUR Seille
BRIDE de KOEKING
Juvrecourt
Dietz Valley
Dietz
279
272
264
295.5
293.1
253
384
Bezange la Petite
Moyenvic
Moncourt
OCT 22 ACTION
Riouville Fme
Richicourt la Petite
Coincourt
Oct. 10th straightend defense line to here
Burtes
N
woods
village
RIVER
Road
Hills
canal
railroad
MAP VI
Rodalbe
Vahl
Benestroff
Dardal Farm

Chapter III

"KRIEGSGENFANGENER NUMBER Ø-78284"

The time immediately following capture is rather hazy and clouded. This is probably due to a sort of state of shock, or possibly due to preoccupation with events of the last few hours digesting what had gone wrong. I was convinced in my mind that what I did was right. I had stopped a senseless, inevitable slaughter of my men which we could not defend against. Years later, this decision would be endorsed by those who were surrendered at that time. They assured me they felt that I had saved their lives.

I only remember being loaded on a half track and being transported to a confinement place. I have no idea how long or how far we traveled, or even how many of us there were. We arrived at some military installation, and I was put in a cell-like enclosure. There was no mattress or covers for the wooden bunk, and it was very cold that first night. We had been searched immediately after our capture, and some items had been confiscated. I had carried a knife in my combat boot. Naturally, it was one of the things taken right away. I, also, had my first experience with German rations. We were given ersatz coffee and a small piece of bread. I guess "ersatz" is German for imitation.

The ersatz is a coffee substitute made with roasted and ground grain or acorns or something to simulate hot coffee. The bread was the color of rye bread with a sort of soured taste and a very coarse texture. We claimed later that it was mostly sawdust. Much as we disliked "C" and "K" rations, they had at least furnished us with 3500 to 4500 calories a day. The German ration would be a fraction of that, about 750 or even less. That would be the reason we would always be hungry in the months ahead.

From this camp, we were marched to Forbach. We were far enough behind the German front line now, so recapture was not likely.

Therefore, speed was not as imperative as it had been the first couple of hours of captivity. Besides, the vehicles were desperately needed on the front lines, so we walked.

Having been in a mechanized-oriented service where everything moved on rubber tired vehicles, I was astonished to see how many horses, carts, and horse drawn weapons were being used by the Germans. It was clearly evident why we had seen so many dead horses and damaged small carts as we advanced through France the last few weeks.

I was searched again at Forback where they took my watch, what little money I had, and my identification, giving me a receipt of sorts for all of them. I shared a cell with Lt. Drake and we rested once more on plain boards spending a cold night next to a cell full of Italians. They were, also, prisoners and were probably used for labor in this area. As I lay there, I remember thinking I had seen better behavior and conditions in pig pens back home. They had absolutely no pride or morals. To compound the cold and disturbing conditions, there was no food that night.

Next day, we were issued a little bread and meat and were loaded into boxcars. There were five officers and 100 or so enlisted men. There was no straw or floor covering, and it was very cold even though we were crowded so closely we couldn't move. The side boards of the car had spaces between most of them. As we passed through Koblenz, through these cracks, we could see the terrible pounding this important city was taking from our bombers. Food was issued a couple times, but there was no straw to sleep on, and this was a grim sample of things to come.

By November 17, we arrived at Limburg. We had to wait overnight in the cars to be marched next morning to Stalag XIIA located nearby. The German prison system had different camps for the different ranks and services of the captives. Stalags were generally for enlisted men. Stalag lufts were for air corps personnel.

MITT LUFT POST
NACH NORD AMERIKA
40 Pfg.

Kriegsgefangenenpost

STALAG IIC 7 GEPRÜFT

Postkarte

23.3.45.

MRS LESTER EDSALL

Gebührenfrei!

Absender:

Vor- und Zuname: 1st LT. LESTER EDSALL

Gefangenennummer: O. 18284

Lager-Bezeichnung: STALAG IIIA OFLAG

Deutschland (Allemagne)

Empfangsort: RR#3 BOX 138

Straße: PIQUA, OHIO

Land: U.S. AMERICA

Landesteil (Provinz usw.

Prisoner of War Camp

XIIA

(No. of Camp only; as may be directed by the Commandant of the Camp.)

Date November 23, 1944

I have been taken prisoner of war in Germany. I am in good health — ~~slightly wounded~~ (cancel accordingly).

We will be transported from here to another Camp within the next few days. Please don't write until I give new address.

Kindest regards

Christian Name and Surname: Lester K. Edsall

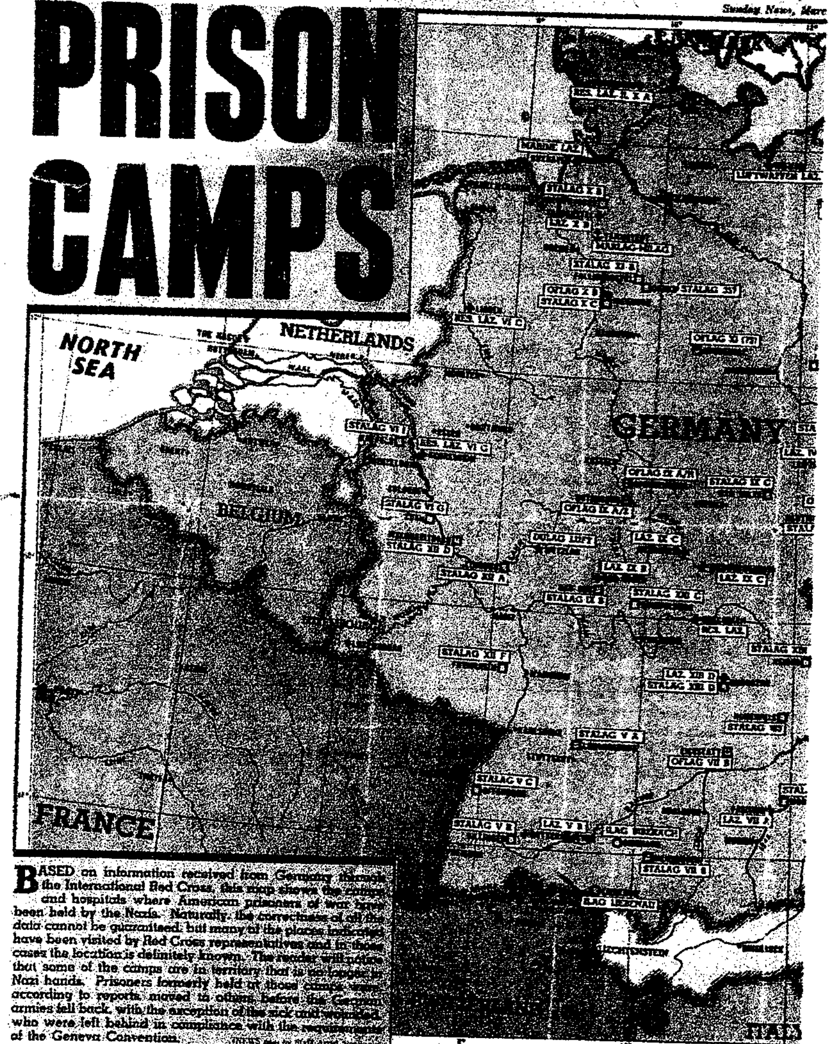
Rank: 1st Lt.

Detachment: _____

(No further details. — Clear legible writing.)

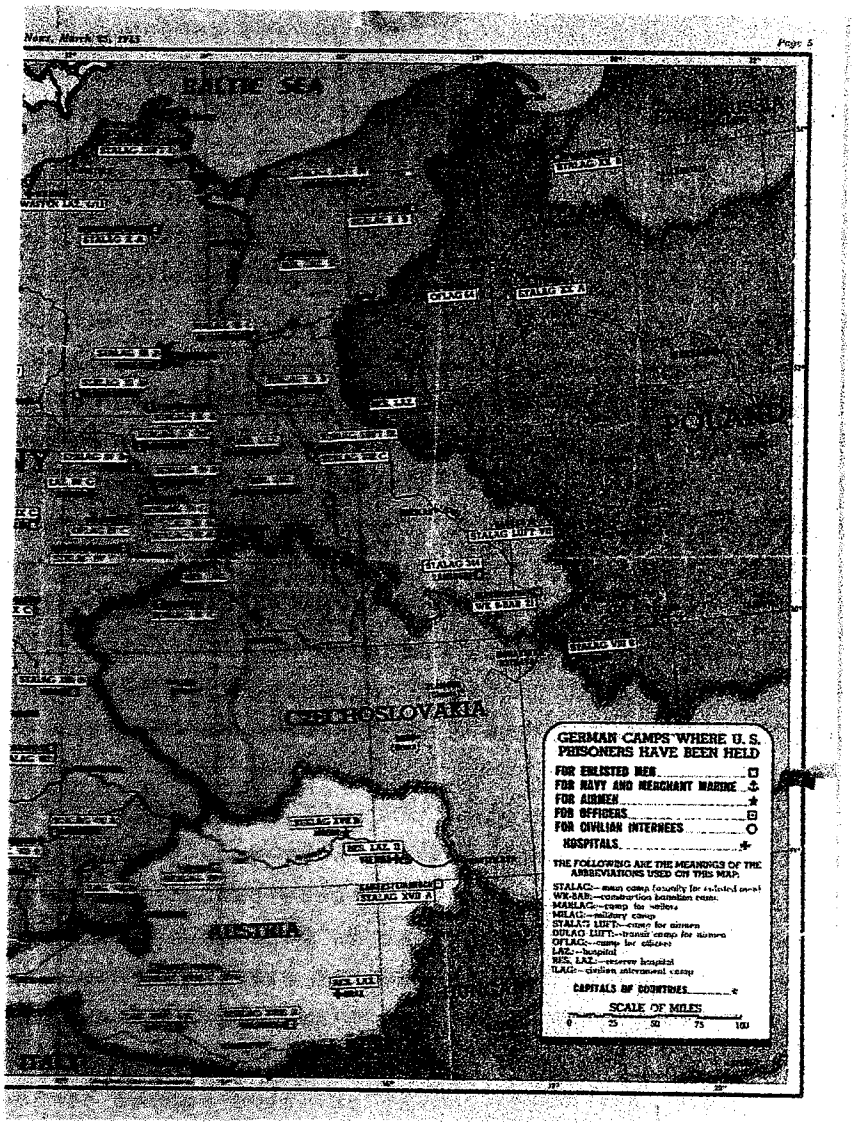
Postcard sent from Limburg announcing my capture
Sent November 23 and received February 28

PRISON CAMPS



BASED on information received from Germany through the International Red Cross, this map shows the camps and hospitals where American prisoners of war have been held by the Nazis. Naturally, the correctness of all the data cannot be guaranteed, but many of the places indicated have been visited by Red Cross representatives and in those cases the location is definitely known. The reader will notice that some of the camps are in territory that is no longer in Nazi hands. Prisoners formerly held at those camps were, according to reports, moved to others before the German armies fell back, with the exception of the sick and wounded who were left behind in compliance with the requirements of the Geneva Convention.

4


BALTIC SEA
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
AUSTRIA
GERMAN CAMPS WHERE U. S. PRISONERS HAVE BEEN HELD
FOR ENLISTED MEN
FOR NAVY AND MERCHANT MARINE
FOR AIRMEN
FOR OFFICERS
FOR CIVILIAN INTERNEES
HOSPITALS
THE FOLLOWING ARE THE MEANINGS OF THE ABBREVIATIONS USED ON THIS MAP:
STALAG—main camp (usually for enlisted men)
WK-BAB—construction battalion camp.
MARLAG—camp for sailors
MILAG—military camp
STALAG LUFT—camp for airmen
DULAG LUFT—transit camp for airmen
OFLAG—camp for officers
LAZ—hospital
RES. LAZ—reserve hospital
ILAG—civilian internment camp
CAPITALS OF COUNTRIES
SCALE OF MILES
0 25 50 75 100

Dulags were air force transient camps, and Oflags were for ground force officers. There weren't many Oflags, and they were widely separated. Then, they had a farm system for enlisted men who worked in small units throughout the country. Stalag XIIA must have been a sort of receiving, processing, and distributing camp because officers and enlisted men were still together here, and they seemed to be from units all along the front.

Upon arrival, we were searched again, and deloused in a large room. This is done by stripping completely and being powdered with some sort of powder. The clothes were treated separately. This process took some time, but we would learn later how pesky and dangerous these parasites could be. We were given some sort of very weak so called soup made from some kind of vegetation. It would be added to our vocabulary as "grass soup" or "once over the meadow lightly." The most you could say for it was that it was warm. We learned here about Red Cross parcels. Althought the camp had some, they were not issued as units. Instead, they were passed out a little each day. The meat in the parcel was taken out and passed to the kitchen where it was used to flavor the soup. The kitchen, also, made G.I. coffee taken from the parcel. They were able to serve five or six men with each parcel using this method. Some items were for individual use, so these items were distributed to individuals and this sparked a vigorous bartering business as each tried to upgrade his ration to suit his taste. Coal was rationed, too, but it all went to the kitchen for hot food. The barracks were so cold that we left all our clothes on all the time.

The next few days dragged while they were processing us and deciding where we were to be sent. We were issued postal cards to send back home notifying our family that we were guests of the German government. I found out when I got home that it hadn't been received until sometime in February. It was here I was assigned my POW number of Ø-78284. I always had been good about promptly memorizing the numbers which were important, such as; my enlisted number of 35409845, my officers number of Ø-1311993, and even my social security number 281-Ø1-9559 which was a fairly new thing at that time.

I never even made an effort with the POW number. I don't know if it was a mental block or optimism.

Things seemed chaotic and disorganized in the barracks, but it didn't really matter. Rations were unpredictable. One day, we got some warm milk made with the powdered milk from the parcels. Another time, we got some uncooked meat. Stewed raisins and prunes were fixed one day and the quality of the soup seemed to be getting better and better as the hunger increased each day. Ten cigarettes were allotted every other day, and I passed mine on to some of my men who smoked. An enlisted man, whose father was a minister, conducted church services on Sunday. Much time was spent in bed where I read the New Testament I had always carried. Bed was the only place where we could keep warm.

German food was very poor and scarce. My Thanksgiving day dinner was a small can of pate from a parcel. The next day I got a half D bar, and spent most of the day in bed reading the Testament. I was sure happy that I had it along. One of their doctors had looked at my cheek where I had been wounded a couple weeks before, and he said it was coming along all right.

Late in the afternoon of November 25, Lt. Hunker and I were taken to a nearby castle, Diez, for interrogation. Twelve days had passed since our capture and I can't imagine why we would be questioned at this late date. If they were able to get any information from us, most certainly it would be outdated by now. I had heard the derogatory term "dumb dutch" since childhood, and I'm beginning to understand this now as a reference to their seemingly illogical actions. I was a little provoked anyway because the rumor was that we were going to receive crackers and cheese that evening at XIIA. We got there after dark, but there was a meal waiting for us. We were put in small single cells with only a small window about eight feet or so above the floor, but they were heated rooms to the extent that the chill was taken off the room.

The days were spent in solitary confinement, and we saw no one, not even the guard with our food. The meals were better than I had received at XIIA. Breakfast was ersatz, sour bread, and jam. Lunch was soup, and supper was soup and ersatz. I read my Testament a lot, not in a serious interpretative way but just to pass time. After all the confusion at XIIA, it was really lonely here. There was much time to give attention and thought as to why you were in solitary, and to try to soothe that nagging concern of being singled out for this special attention.

The walls were covered with a patterned material. The pattern was hundreds of small dots in rows. Those who had been here before me had recorded with pencils many different large numbers indicating their total of the dots. Part of each day was spent counting the dots to see which was correct. The dots were counted many times and each time hoping for a different total thus requiring a recount. Other times were spent standing on a bed post looking out the window into a central courtyard of the castle. I would see an occasional bird flying by, but there was no activity in the courtyard at all. Occasionally, Lt. Hunker and I would talk across the corridor, although we weren't supposed to. I learned that he had been interrogated and was issued a Red Cross parcel afterward.

I was interrupted the next day, as I either read or counted dots, and was taken to a large sparsely furnished, office-type room in another area of the castle. Behind the desk sat a smiling, friendly looking officer. A few casual remarks were exchanged during which he claimed to be a graduate of the University of New York. Judging from the excellent English he used, it was possibly true. I was questioned and threatened subtly but not directly. For instance, he implied that if it was decided that I was a spy, I could be shot.

This solitary confinement was probably designed to soften a prisoners resolve. However, in my case and probably many, many others, it strengthened the determination to give only the name, rank, and serial number.

I know that both sides dropped people dressed as civilians or Army personnel of the opposing side behind lines to gather information. Somehow his threats didn't come across as being serious though, because he had a friendly manner and wasn't convincing in his accusations. Having been taken in battle in regulation uniform, I just didn't fit the threat he was trying to make. He did, however, have a most accurate list of the commanding officers of the 104th Infantry. He had a good record of all the moves and dates of moves we had made from the time we were activated in the states to the present time. Evidently, not all had given just their name, rank, and serial number. I made no comments on this information he presented, but he must have read a certain astonishment in my face as he read names and places. He then asked one question about our reason for using the phosphorus artillery shell, indicating that they really hated them. My answer only repeated what he already knew -- they were shells used to mark and adjust artillery impact. If Hunker acted as I did, and I'm sure he did, these interrogations had to be a flop by any standard. Nevertheless, I was issued a parcel and taken back to my cell where I ate the candy immediately.

Lt. Hunker left that day, so I was alone with my parcel. Somehow it wasn't quite so lonely with a parcel to gloat over. Someone earlier had penciled an observation on one of my walls which I read several times a day. It might technically be graffiti, but I'll never forget it. It said, "Be not dismayed, solitude brings greater joy at liberation." I returned to XIIA about 3:30 p.m. on November 29.

Prisoners moved in and out of the barracks almost daily, so there always seemed to be much confusion. I decided to do something about it and restore a semblance of order. It worked to a degree. The next few days weren't bad except for the food. I played some chess and watched card and crap games. Lt. Hunker planned an entertainment for one evening. On Sunday, I conducted church services assuring some of the Catholic boys that it would be nonsectarian. The attendance was very good, and they said the service was too.

But then, all of us were seeking comfort of any kind.

Next morning, December 4, Lt. Hunker, Lt. Watts, Lt. Dooley, and I were picked up by a German officer and taken to the train station in Limburg where we boarded a passenger train. We traveled comfortably in a large compartment. Conversation on the trip was amiable but cautious and no indication was given as to our destination. After many starts, stops, and periods of waiting on sidings, we arrived in Wetzler. We arrived after dark at the Dulag Luft (an air force transient camp) near Wetzler. Actually, it was nearly midnight when we finally got to the camp.

We were taken by two's to a large room. I estimated it to be about 25 X 25 feet or so. It was heated! It had a dining table and chairs! There was a tablecloth on the table! There were actual beds with sheets and pillowcases and a couple other pieces of furniture that I don't remember. Only two men were in each room! There was a warm meal on the table, family style at midnight!

We were stunned at such treatment and suspicious at once. We agreed quietly to watch very carefully what we said to each other for surely there was a motive behind all this. Early next morning, I was invited to hike with one of the German officers, a Lt. Burninghouse. We walked on trails and paths through a woods, and we saw three deer that morning. We talked of many things, but very little about the war and how it was going.

When I returned, there wasn't much to do, so I read, washed clothes, and slept. During our stay here, the food was much better than Limburg. The day's fare was soup and ersatz, potatoes and meat, or cabbage and meat and bread, and all in sufficient amounts.

During the night, a town or target nearby was really clobbered. The flash and sound of the exploding bombs, the searchlights, and the anti-aircraft fire was a fascinating show. Frankfurt was about thirty miles south of us and this was very near, so I don't believe it was Frankfurt.

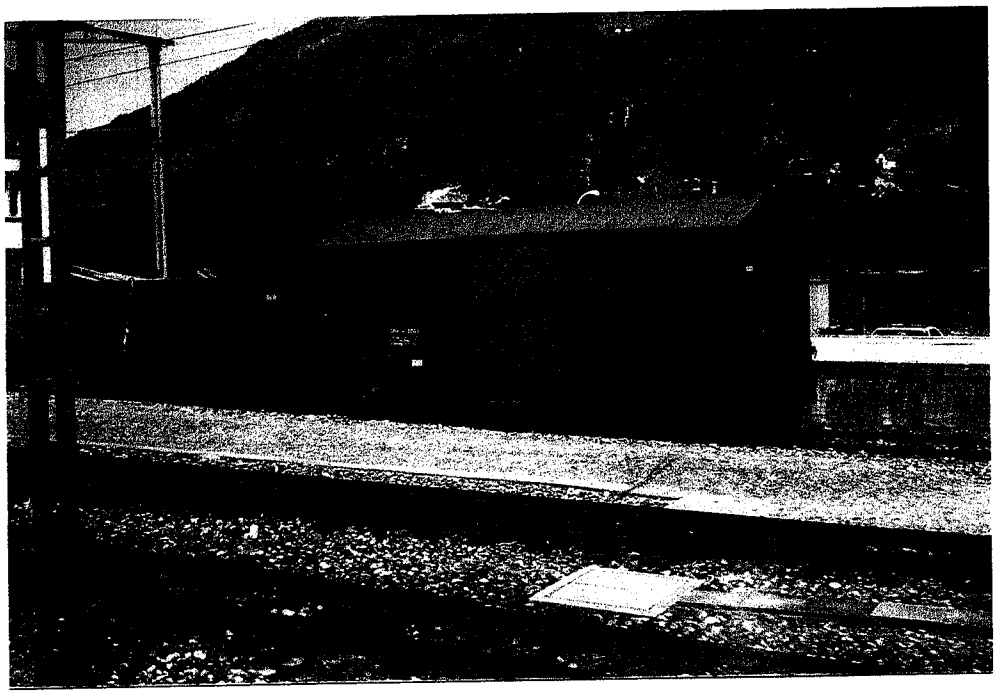
Maybe Wetzler was a rail center or supply center and a valid target. The guards all ran to shelters, so we guessed that we must have been next door to the raid. This was the second ring side seat I had to an aerial display.

I was invited to share the company of a Lt. Kirner the following morning. The conversation was casual and even pleasant -- not at all what I expected. There was no military talk except perhaps a reference to the episode last evening. I still cannot understand why they went to all this trouble on our behalf and apparently with no motive behind it. We never tried to discover if our room was bugged, so we'll never know. As far as we could see, it just turned out to be a short, pleasant vacation for the four of us. We were taken back to Limburg on December 7 having experienced another one of those "dumb dutch" actions.

Finally, on December 8, orders came for 45 officers to be transferred to Altburgund (or Schubin), Poland where there was a ground force officers camp called Oflag 64. We were able to shower and clean up and were then "loaded" into a small boxcar. Actually there were two cars and twenty-three of us were put into less than one half of a boxcar. The cars were divided by a wire barrier going from the edge of the sliding side door to the opposite side of the car. This allowed the guards to travel along with us and they were free to exit and enter the car at will and did not have to worry about any of us getting away. We boarded the train about 5 p.m. and of course, we sat in that boxcar for over fifty hours before we were picked up by an engine and started moving.

This aggravated us at the time, but now I understand how disrupted their transportation was as a result of our bombings. The only thing is that they used prisoners of war to repair the damage to the road bed and tracks.

We moved very slowly but fairly steady all night, and when daylight came, we found we were stopped in the rail yards at Frankfurt. We sat there till noon when a target about 500 yards away was bombed.



Picture of a similar 40 and 8 boxcar which was used to transport P.O.W.'s. The numbers elude to 40 men or 8 horses capacity.

Hitler Wanted to Kill All PWs

The Swiss Radio confirmed yesterday reports that in the last days of the war Adolf Hitler ordered all Allied prisoners of war shot.

Heard by BBC in London, the radio quoted Dr. Burckhardt, president of the International Red Cross. He said that the Wehrmacht had refused to carry out the order and that in March he had met representatives of Heinrich Himmler and obtained permission for the Red Cross to enter PW camps and prevent any last-minute executions.

Last March, at the time of Dr. Burckhardt's visit to Germany, reports that Allied prisoners in Germany would be killed were widespread but Himmler was blamed at that time. The reports never were officially recognized because of Allied concern over what might happen if Burckhardt's mission were a failure.

Dr. Burckhardt also said that Hitler always had wanted to renounce the international conventions relating to prisoners of war, and toward the last days of his life, his temper steadily grew worse.

It was low level type of bombing by either fighter planes or possibly the attack bombers and not the high flying strategic bombers. Of course, the guards had locked our cars and scurried of to nearby shelters. We were hoping our cars were marked some way, so that we would not be mistaken for a military transport. They must have been, because some of the less accurately aimed bombs seemed to be coming right down the tracks toward us, however, the nearest one landed about 200 yards away. Once again, I had a front row seat at the air show.

The noise was frightening, and the cars really bounced around and up and down. We escaped unharmed. We sat over 40 hours exposed in this target area in the yards before being shuttled to Vorbiel Nord to sit again until late in the evening of December 13 when we started to move regularly. We went northeasterly through Hunfeld, Neukirshen, Hersfeld, Bebra, and toward Berlin. We watched for and could see the names of the towns through the cracks between the boards of the walls of the rail cars.

A Sergeant Sorokin (I think that's spelled right) in another car had developed blood poisoning, but the Germans wouldn't drop him off at any hospital along the way. I suppose the one in charge had signed for a certain number of charges to be delivered and was afraid not to deliver that number. The sergeant had to make the journey unaided.

There were none of us officers who had enough rank to have any clout to insist that he be given treatment. We found later that high rank could be used to intimidate some of the guards.

There was no food the morning of the 15th, and we moved from early morning on. We passed through Bad Kosen and Liepzig to Falkenberg where we were issued a little bread and smelly cheese as our food for the day. About 6 a.m. on December 16, we stopped in Frankfurt on Oder. The noncommissioned officers cars, presumably one of which held Sergeant Sorokin, were left behind. There was a Stalag IIIB at Furstenberg just south of Frankfurt, and I suppose it was their destination.

We continued on and it was bitterly cold. Morale was very low. We tried to help ourselves and pass the time by singing Christmas Carols as we remembered that Christmas was just a week or so away. The bullet in my cheek worked itself out, and I was able to keep it as a keepsake or souvenir of my earlier close call. I still have the copper jacket tip.

We were now traveling across fairly flat country through Onesen, Hohensaliza, and Bomberg. The cold winds in this Polish corridor really got a good shot at us. I think someone left the corridor door open. We were miserably cold. Finally, we came to Altburgund late in the day of December 17.

After staying in our boxcars overnight, at the station, we were marched through the town Shubin arriving at Oflag 64 about 8 a.m. We were received in the recreation building and issued coffee, potatoes, and gravy. Later, we got soup and one third of a Red Cross parcel for lunch and spuds for supper. Later that evening, we were deloused once more, given a parcel, and taken to our assigned barracks. Mine was 2B cubicle 12. We must have been a sorry looking bunch having been through such an ordeal under such trying circumstances with very little food and no sanitary facilities.

The cubicles were formed by arranging bunk beds into room like areas, making them semi-private. There was very limited storage space, but we didn't have that many possessions. Lt. Castle from Oklahoma was our cubicle commander. There was Lt. Piecuch of Mass., Lt. Krall from Wyoming, Lt. Teel from New York, Lt. Baker from Penn., Lt. Gann from Ind., Lt. Hunker of Calif., and myself.

The daily schedule was explained. We awakened at 7:40, appel at 8:00, hot water at 8:15, lunch at 12:30, hot water at 3:00, appel at 4:00, supper at 6:00 and lights out at 10:30 p.m. In the days following, this proved to be a goal rather than a schedule and varied from day to day.

Christmas Red Cross parcels were passed out on December 20.

My parcel contained a can of plum pudding, a small can of turkey, honey, butter, tea, nuts, candy, vienna sausage, deviled ham, two fruit bars, three packets chewing gum, wash cloth, pipe, and Prince Albert tobacco, three packs of cigarettes, dates, cherries, bullion cubes, and jam. I traded my pipe and tobacco for a can of cherries. I would learn later about the value of tobacco as trading material. These were different parcels from the regular ones. The regulars, generally speaking, contained powdered milk, sugar cubes, two chocolate "D" bars, meat (salmon or corned beef which was taken from each parcel and given to the kitchen), pate, biscuits, box fruit, cigarettes, coffee, vitamin C tablets, cheese, jam, and oleo. There were minor variations to all these.

The following days were cold. One day, I just had to wash my socks in cold water. Another day, I went to the camp library for books to read, but it was so cold I didn't feel like reading. We had a good library with many books which had been furnished by the YMCA. We had athletic equipment which wasn't used in such cold weather, also, furnished by the YMCA. Ice skates were available to the hardy ones.

With Christmas approaching, the camp was decorated as best we could with what we had. I attended an orchestra program a day or so before Christmas, also, a Christmas program the day before Christmas. I wrote a letter to my wife on Christmas eve. I think the mail was picked up and delivered by neutral Red Cross members, who went from camp to camp. It wasn't a swift delivery system. I intended to attend midnight services that night, but it was so cold I had bundled up in bed and didn't awaken in time.

Appel was not until 11 o 'clock Christmas morning. Church services were exceptionally good. The special noonday meal was served in three shifts at 1 p.m., 2 p.m., and 3 p.m. Since I had drawn the 3 p.m. meal, I prepared a special dinner of my own from my parcel using small servings to tide me over to the middle of the afternoon. I had prune juice, mashed potatoes, gravy, dressing, turkey, toasted bread, butter, jam, honey, coffee, cream and sugar, candy, nuts, stuffed dates, and plum pudding.

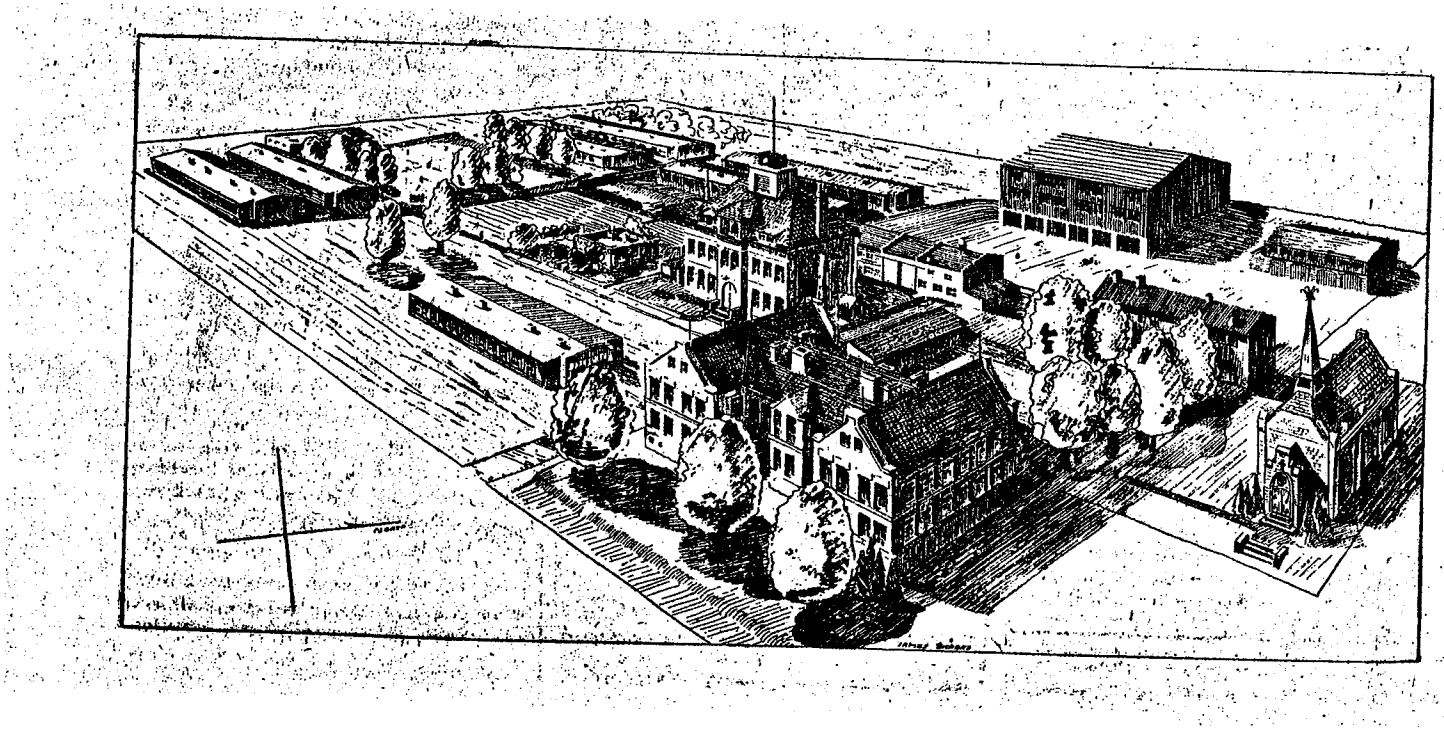
The servings were extra small, but you couldn't beat the variety. At 3 p.m., we were served scotch broth, mashed potatoes, meat hash, gravy, American coffee, and cabbage salad.

There was a Christmas show that afternoon and evening put on at hourly intervals featuring Russ Ford and the Glee Club and Bob Rankin and the orchestra. It was really good. That evening, I went to see Lt. Danielson, who was in our camp hospital. While there, I got a snack of crackers and jam that was passed out to patients and visitors. All told, it was a full day of activity, and it wasn't until later that night as I lay awake in my bed that thoughts of my wife and daughter, so far away, had time to get to me. I had to continually swallow the lump in my throat as I finally drifted off to sleep.

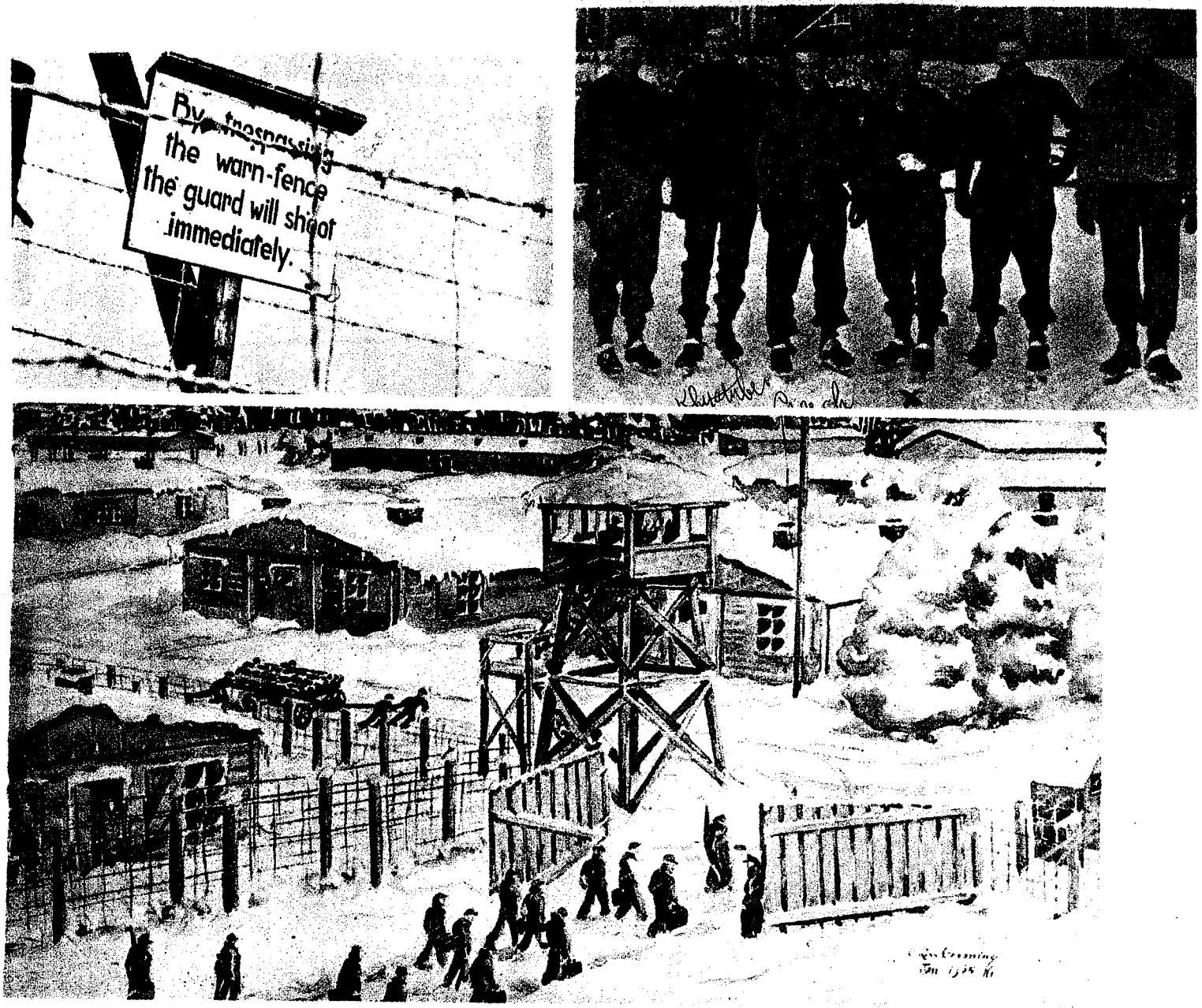
The days following Christmas were hungry times because the parcels were gone by now, and we subsisted on German rations of ersatz, soup, one sixth loaf of bread, and a few potatoes now and then. The little bit of flavoring put in the soup from the cans in the parcels didn't furnish much nourishment for 1400 men. Maybe once a week, we would be issued some parcel sugar, jam, or butter which gave us a few extra calories.

There were three or four clandestine radios in the camp, so we were able to keep informed on the progress of the war. We didn't know where they were located or kept, but news was brought to the barracks and read to small groups inside. Actually, we late arrivals didn't learn much about the operation of the camp because we were sort of on probation until we were cleared. The Germans, on occasion, had put their own people in incoming groups to spy on the camp prisoners to learn if any extra activities were going on behind their backs. It took awhile to satisfy the committee, and there was no hurry.

From the newscasts information, we would spend hours each day talking about the possibilities and probabilities of the Russian offensive and the Battle of the Bulge. I went to see Lt. Danielson several times. Showers were offered one day and they were always welcome.



This is a drawing of Oflag 64 without the wire enclosure and guard towers.



Col. Greening's illustration of prisoners arriving at a typical camp.

PROGRAM FOR THE DAY

CHRISTMAS DAY 1944

CATHOLIC MASS
8:00 — 9:00

GENERAL SERVICE
10:30

CHRISTMAS DINNER
1:00 — 2:00 — 3:00

CHRISTMAS SHOW
FEATURING RUSS FORD AND
THE GLEE CLUB AND
BOB RANKIN AND THE
ORCHESTRA
1:30 — 2:30 — 3:30 — 7:00 — 8:00 — 9:00

Served at 1500

MENU

SCOTCH BROTH

SNOW FLAKE POTATOES

TURKEY HASH A LA SCHUBIN

LIVER PATÉ GRAVY

AMERICAN CAFÉ NOIR

My meal at 1100
Prune juice
Mashed potatoes + gravy & dressing
Turkey
Toast Bread Butter, jam honey
cream + sugar
Candy
Nuts
stuffed dates
Plum Pudding

Christmas schedule and menu

Col. Greening's illustration of prisoners arriving at a typical camp.

Room Service

a comedy in 3 acts

by

JOHN MURRAY and ALLEN BORETZ

SCENES

the entire action takes place in Gordon Miller's room in the White Way Hotel.

ACT I

[illegible] afternoon in spri[illegible]

ACT II

[illegible] following day

ACT III

[illegible] five days later

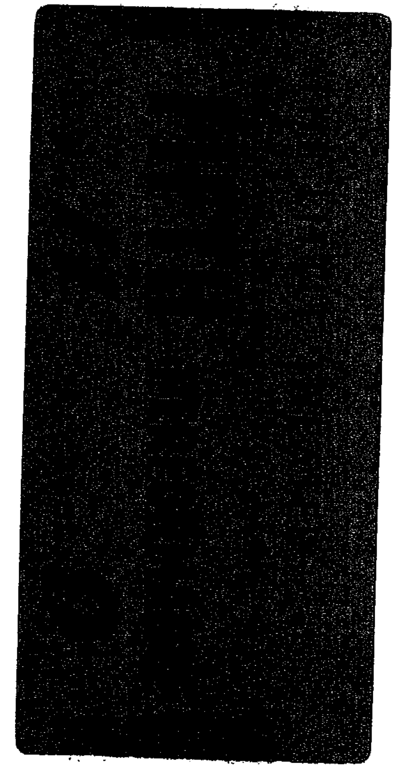
D[illegible] this [illegible] the curtain is lowered to denote the lapse of one hour and fifteen minutes.

Dec. 31, 194[illegible] thru [illegible] 1945

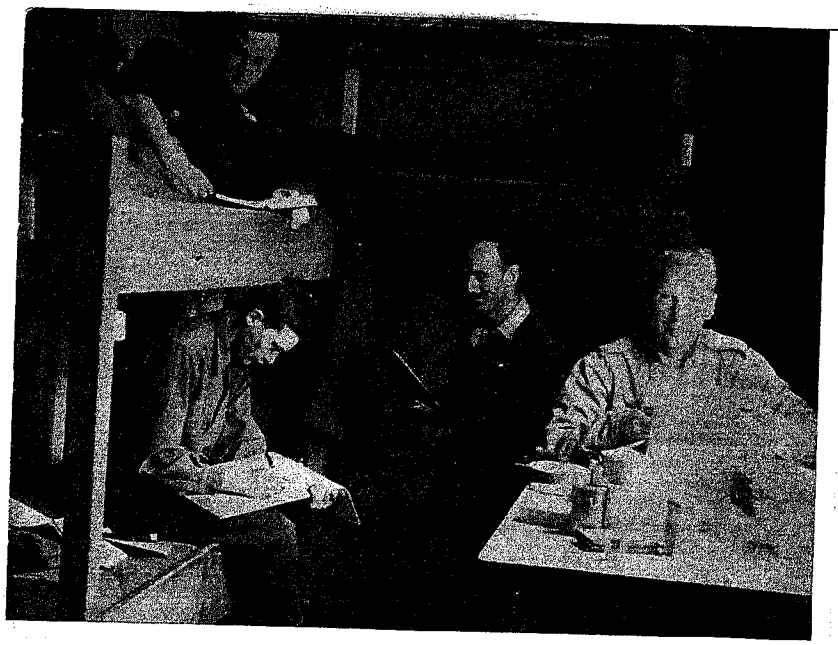
LITTLE THEATRE

CAST
(In order of appearance)

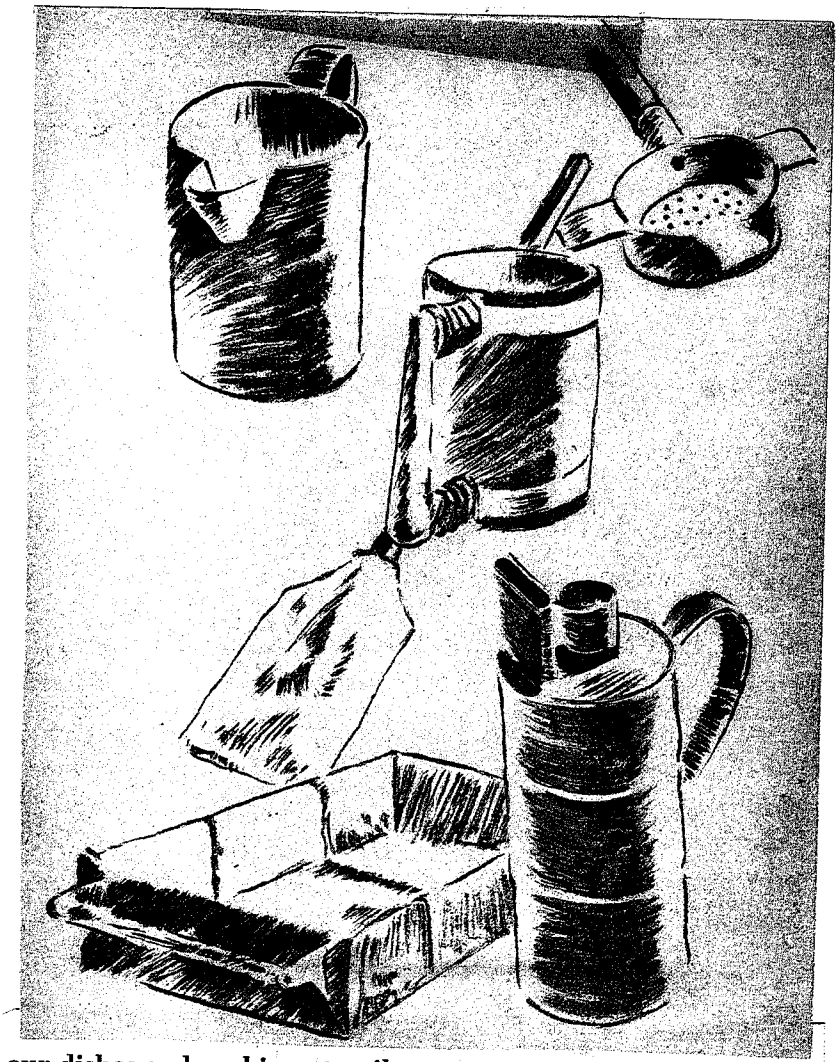
Sasha Smirnoff	Frank Maxwell
Cordon Miller	John Hannan
Joseph Gribble	William Swanson
Harry Binion	Gardner Simes
Faker Englund	Silas Bailin
Christine Marlowe	Wilbur Sharpe
Leo Davis	Danny Daniels
Hilda Maney	John Cramer
Gregory Wagner	John Glendinning
Simon Jenkins	Carlos Burrows
Timothy Hogarth	Wilbur Hooker
Dr. Glass	James Block
Messenger	Donald Himmler
Senator Blake	Howard Holder



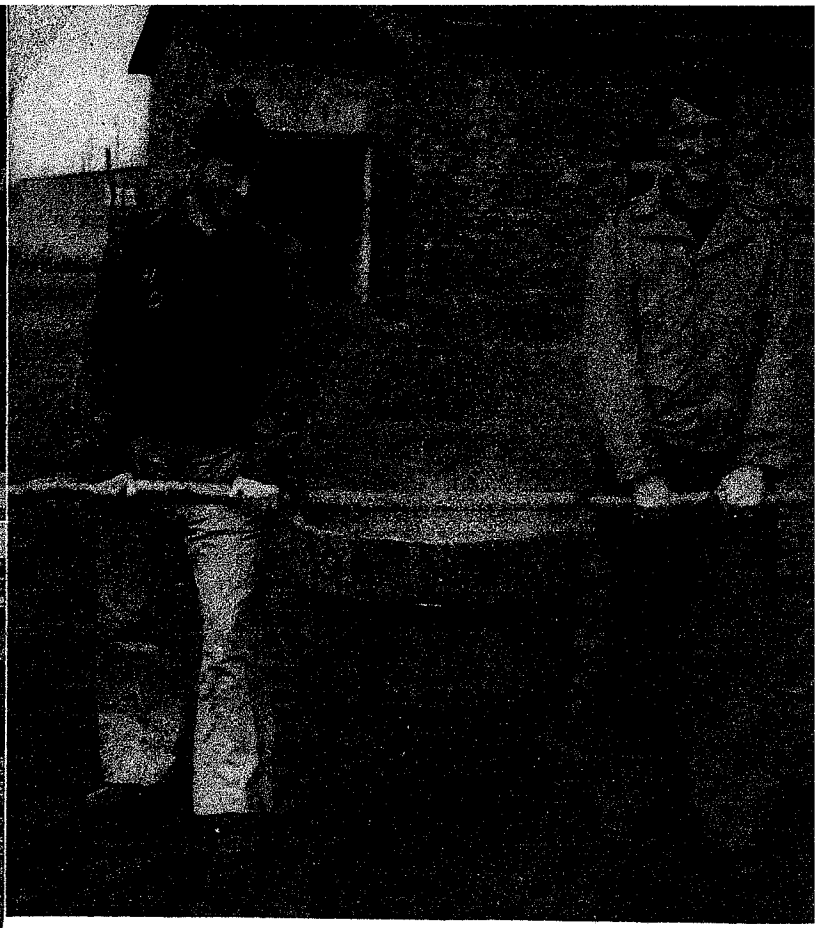
Program for one play "Room Service".

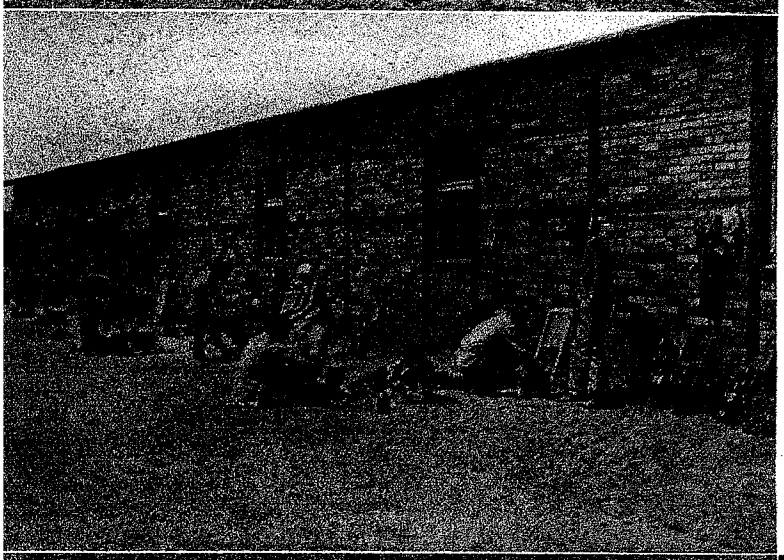


Here's a typical officers' room in Kriegieland. Sixteen men were jammed into it, but sometimes enlisted men had to sleep on the floor.

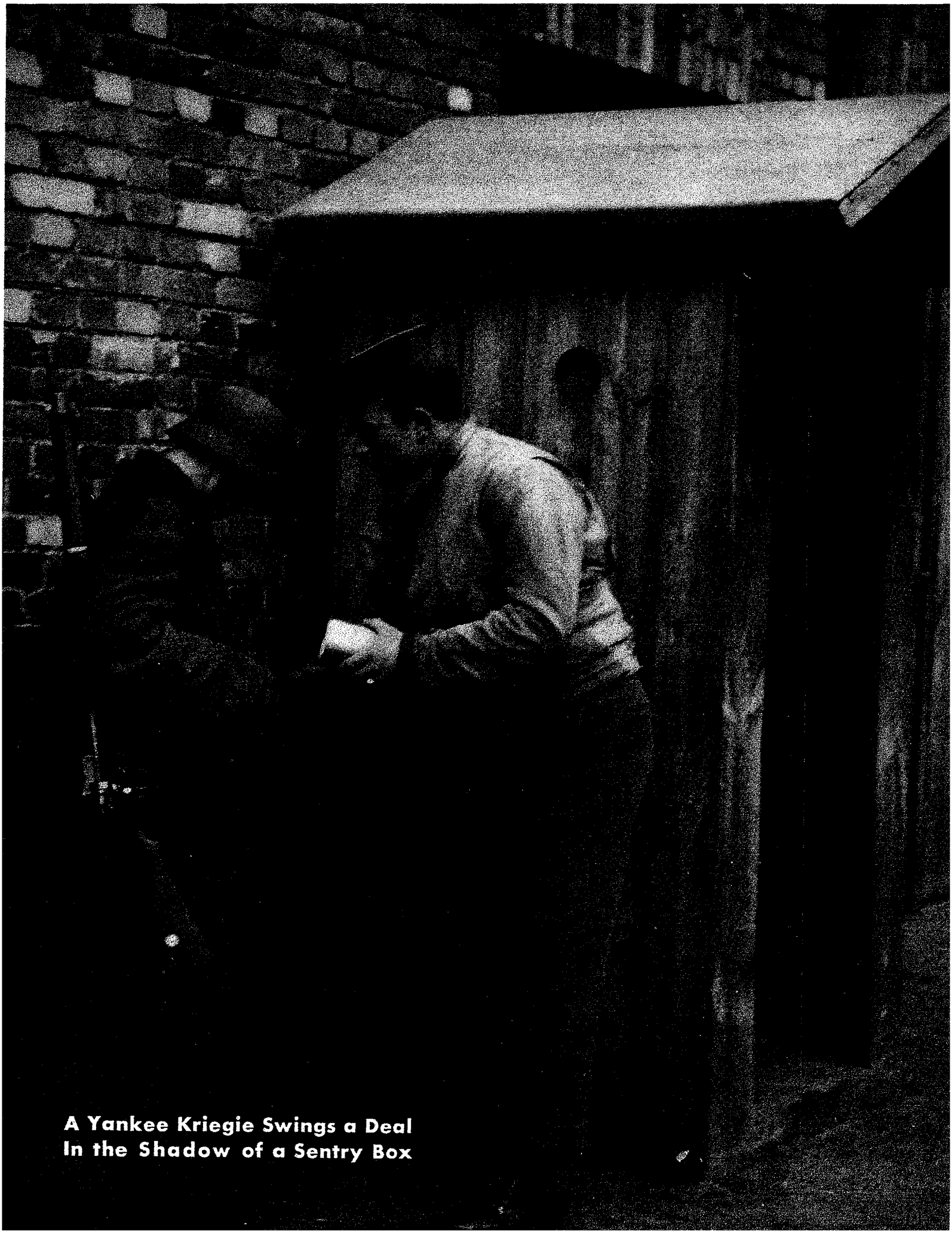


our dishes and cooking utensils were made from tin cans. They looked weird, but were mighty useful.





See that tub? It contains a thin stew for 120 men. When it had to feed more we just added water! At top left is one of the small gardens the men made trying to raise vegetables. The guards messed them up looking for tunnels or hidden escape tools. The cart contains the German ration of bread. The men along the wall are cooking their meals on high compression blowers, one of which is shown at the bottom of the page. Below you can see how we ate on festive occasions. Note, please, our dishes made from tin cans. Gee, you'd be surprised what you can make from an old tin can. Generally we ate in groups, by rooms, or "combines," but there were occasional lone wolves who preferred to eat by themselves, perhaps so they would not have to share their food. We gave them the "silent treatment," and it nearly always brought them around.



A Yankee Kriegie Swings a Deal
In the Shadow of a Sentry Box

A Lt. Karnes conducted services and preached, and I tried not to miss any of his Sunday or mid-week services. We read a lot and walked a lot around the compound to forget the signals from our constantly empty stomachs. New Years eve, I wrote to my wife and folks and stayed up to see the new year in. The middle of the night we were roused out to be deloused again. There was no logical reasoning to the German behavior. Had we known how some of the delousing rooms were being used in some camps in Germany to gas and kill Jews and other prisoners, we might have been more apprehensive about going into those rooms each time.

A new group of prisoners arrived New Years day. They told of a direct hit on the very building I had been held in in Limburg. Evidently, because of the crowding and large numbers passing through this camp, there were many killed. It is sad to have survived combat and then die like this.

Next day, we received parcels. That was always a happy day. A group of officers had been working on the play, "Room Service", and I went to see the presentation. I think the YMCA supplied the script and some of the props to put it on. The actors did an excellent job.

Normal days with regular routines were followed for a while. While talking one day, I was told of an incident that happened early in December before I got to the camp. The men had been cautioned by their superiors to be careful about leaving extra clothing laying around, and any unexpected appel should be viewed with suspicion. Sure enough, an unscheduled appel was called. Everyone put on all the clothes they could before going out. As it turned out, the barracks were searched for uniforms probably to be used in the Battle of the Bulge or in some infiltration tactics by the Germans.

I remembered my wife's birthday on January 8, but this time I could do nothing for her. For our anniversary on November 2, I had sent all the American money I had (which wasn't much) a month or so beforehand to Smith's Greenhouse in Piqua instructing them to send flowers on our anniversary.

They were very generous, and I have always been grateful to them for that. Now, I couldn't even send a card or letter.

Another parcel was issued. One days highlight was a shower and weighing. I weighed 143 pounds. Oatmeal from the parcel was fixed for one dinner and it was really a treat.

Days were whiled away playing Casino and learning more about Contract Bridge. There were organized classes held in the library, and I attended an agriculture class. I attended church regularly because I liked Lt. Karnes' delivery so much. We got another parcel on January 16. A variety show was being put together, and I was looking forward to that. Meanwhile, I was making preparations to start classes in French and shorthand.

We were sort of surprised on our regular Saturday inspection on January 20 with the announcement by our senior officer that we were being moved out, probably on foot. We were each issued a traveling parcel,and made preparations to leave. Some of our men were being left behind because they were unable to travel. Lt. Danielson was one of them.

About 1300 of us left Shubin on January 21 about 10 a.m. I wore a couple shirts and two pairs of pants and socks with extra socks in my helmet to keep them dry. I carried two blankets, the parcel, and what extra clothes I had. I had gathered together some extras, and it made a pretty large and heavy pack to tote.

We marched 21 kilometers, through Exin, stopping at a farm with large barns located on the Schneideberg road. We were divided into groups and assigned barns. Six men and I had to share a stall with five calves. Luckily, the calves weren't wild or afraid, and after our rough, cold march on snowy, drifting roads, we were able to rest and keep warm that first night out. There was no food issued, however.

Next morning, many found that they were unable to go on. I think they were taken back to Oflag 64. Lt. Plants of Columbus, Ohio recorded that 130 weak and sick fell by the roadside the first day, 90 dropped out the second day, and 50 the third. The rest of us started out about 8:30 toward Wertsitz. Since I hadn't been a prisoner very long, I was still pretty strong and in relatively good shape. I tried to stay close to the head of the column. Consequently, I was surprised with Plants' statistics and description of the actions of the guards. They were evidently pretty cruel trying to prod and intimidate the stragglers to keep moving and using gun butts to batter them, and threats of shooting them.

The roads were crowded with German refugees fleeing westward toward their homeland, Germany. Some pulled carts, if possible, but most were carrying their worldly goods on their backs just as we were. Poles were being herded along, too. Possibly against their will or perhaps it was some who had fraternized with the Germans and were fleeing their own countrymen. It was, indeed, a strange, sad sight with plump housewives, older males puffing mightily under their loads, and uniformed older men who might have been minor political appointee's back in the places they had just left. All these, along with our 1000 or more officers, must have indeed looked (as Lt. Plants suggested) like the winter march scene from the movie, "Dr. Zhivago".

That day walking through snow flurries, we crossed the Bromberg Canal. All day, at times seeming close, we could hear heavy artillery to our rear, and the guards were looking back over their shoulders a lot. Somewhere the Germans found some margarine, and we were issued one third pound as our entire food ration for the day.

After walking 23 kms, we stayed near a small town, Eichfelde. Warm water was provided that night. I stayed in a stall with six men and a colt. The colt was lonely, frightened, and very restless with all the humans so close. He whinnied all night, and I was still awake at 4 a.m. when the guards left us. In the distance, I could hear small arms fire, and I thought of being freed! That was not to be, however, because the guards came back about noon.

However, while the guards were gone, we had hot water that morning, and a hog was butchered to be used for that evening's meal. I suppose the butchering was done by American initiative because we had become opportunists and survivors, and very flexible in adapting to a situation.

With the return of the guards, preparations were made to move out immediately. I whacked off some meat from the carcass for myself. I found something that looked like whole wheat flour which probably was bran for the livestock, but if it was good for them, it probably would be good for me, too. Six of us found a small sled and confiscated it and loaded our belongings on it and moved out at 3:30 p.m. We moved only 7 kms to a town called Charlottesburg. We were in a stall again, but this time, we turned the horse out and had the stall to ourselves. Our ration was soup that evening.

The six of us on the sled, Watts, Stone, Burns, Davis, Ramsberg, and myself found this a fairly good idea taking turns pushing and pulling the sled. The going was fairly easy as we left at 9:30, and getting to Lobsens about noon. The citizens watched quietly and with curiosity as we walked by. They passed out little pieces of bread and butter, cheese, small, delicious cookies, and ersatz. The gesture was magnified, when one considered the fact, that they really didn't have anything to spare. We stayed in barns outside of town where I took the opportunity to fry up some of the pork for future consumption on the march. This was done by using a long stick and holding the meat close to the open fire where they were heating the soup, just as we used to toast marshmallows. Our issue this day was pea soup and almost a half a loaf of bread.

Next morning, oatmeal, soup, margarine, and bread were issued, but somehow, I didn't get any. I don't know how this happened because everyone is pretty good at scrounging by now. So, if there's anything available to eat, we find it. They must have had limited rations and ran out. We got moving about 9:45. We had been zigzagging towards Germany and must have been going in a slight southerly direction this day. We could hear artillery all day on our left, and it wasn't very far away.

Throughout the day, we had SS Troops accompanying us in our column.

About 4 p.m., we got to Flatow. This time I was quartered in a nice loft of a barn. There was an enclosed area up there which housed some people who helped on the farm. I got into the room and it was occupied by Russians. There was a stove and heat, and they were excited and happy to see us. They were nursing one of their group who had tried to escape but was recaptured and brought back to the room. He was in pretty bad shape and died sometime during the night. The guards claimed exposure, but we suspected physical beating or abuse. They had little feeling for the Russians except fear and hate.

Barley soup was the soup of the day, and the Russians gave us some milk from the cows they tended. Boy was that good!!! I fried up some liberated potatoes and some of my meat on their stove. I was actually full and warm that night.

Next morning, we were given some ersatz by the Germans. We stayed here all day, and I got a chance to shave. Some of the lame and sick were picked to go ahead to Luckenwalde by train. My feet were holding up pretty well to this point, so I remained with the column. Potage du jour was served at 6 p.m.

It had snowed heavily all during the night, and at 9 a.m. when we got under way, the walking was very difficult. Oberst Schneider seemed to think we were safely ahead of the Russians now. From Flatow, just inside Germany, we only walked 18 kms. to Jastrow. The snow had been deep and soft, so our feet were cold and sopping wet. Along with the daily soup, we were issued one fourth loaf of bread which was to last two days this time. I saw a road sign pointing west with the information that Berlin was 171 kms. away.

Except for being cold and hungry, I had survived reasonably well, but we knew our destination was still a long distance away and many hardships were still ahead.

We were roused early and had soup at 6 a.m. but still didn't leave until 9 a.m. They gave us one fourth pound of oleo to take along. The Germans were scrounging for food for us, and our large number complicated things for them. They took whatever they could find, so we never knew what to expect from them.

The day was extremely windy and bitterly cold, and roads had drifted shut to all traffic. It was so cold that my shoes froze on my feet. They were very stiff and rigid. They absolutely would not bend. On top of this, the drifts across the road made it difficult to walk much less pull the sled. At long last, we reached Zippnow where I was directed to a large church to spend the night. By the time I got there, there was no more room, so some of us were moved to a schoolhouse. As it turned out, this was better because the room was heated and I needed only one blanket that night. Davis and I were partners lately, and we really rested that night. The room had lights and water, also. Overnight, I was able to dry my clothes particularly my shoes which I covered with hog fat, thinking that would repel the melting snow and water in the days ahead. There wasn't much food available from any source here, but a little boy brought me a lard sandwich, bless his heart.

Soup was provided at 8 a.m. and nothing else. Before leaving the schoolroom, I confiscated a bottle of ink. I needed this for my Schaefer fountain pen to record in my diary. I reluctantly left the warmth of the school as we started to move about 10 a.m. There was a bitter, cutting wind just like the day before, and the drifts seemed even deeper. The sled was very difficult to push or pull. This constant struggle must have triggered the pain in my Achilles tendon because I really hurt that day, and it had really developed very rapidly. We passed a large, well- maintained Army compound. After just an 8 kms. march, we moved into Oflag IIB. This was south of Hammerstein inside Germany. It had been evacuated the day before by Polish officer prisoners. Judging from the way it was decorated and furnished, they must have been prisoners for years. A good roaring fire was built in the stove, and we burnt anything burnable including bed slats which we didn't have to hoard for the next nights lodging. Bed slats made us comfortable in a different manner that night.

We had sauerkraut for supper. Other than that, apparently, the camp had been stripped of food, and there was no evidence of any parcels of any kind. I shaved again which I tried to do whenever possible.

I'm not sure where I saw an abandoned small German bomber plane. I think it was their JU-52, a plane similar to our old Ford Tri-motor. It was in one of these camps we passed by. It might have been used by the camp commander but was inoperable for some reason or other and was left behind. I got to look inside it. It was almost austere being stripped of all usable equipment.

Ersatz was served. We didn't move out right away, so everyone was scrounging. I found some overlooked potatoes in an old mess hall, and I fried them to go along with the ersatz and dinner soup issue. It was so hard traveling the last few days that the six of us talked of abandoning the sled.

About 1:30 p.m., we packed up and moved out. Many men were left behind to be moved later because they just could not go any further. Many of us were concerned about staying like this in these out of the way places, if we were able to move at all. Staying or being left behind conjured up all sorts of possibilities as to what might happen once the protection of the column was gone. Some of those staying gave their extra blanket to those who had to face the terrible weather again since they had plenty to burn to keep warm in the building. I acquired one of the available blankets.

Nothing had changed weather wise. It was bitter cold, windy, and the roads were very bad making for very hard going. Conditions were rough.

It was easy to feel sorry for yourself as you trudged through the snow, cursing the weather, and having lots of thinking time. Then in the very depths of despair, you might see a lifeless body, frozen stiff, lying along side the road. It was stripped of overcoats or clothing and always with boots missing. You would say, "Hey, things could be a lot worse for me." There's always hope, and there's always a better tomorrow somewhere down the line. In fact, it's great to be alive.

Mochlin was reached about 7 p.m. where we were put in smaller wooden barns full of cracks. It was very cold and the extra blanket I had picked up came in handy that night. The farm people supplied hot water for us since we were in smaller groups.

January 31, we left at 9 a.m. for Templeburg with an issue of a whole loaf of bread. All my belongings were on my back because we decided to ditch the sled there. That turned out to be a good decision because a sudden warming trend in the weather arrived overnight and the snow was melting. Of course, that brought on sopping wet shoes and socks once more. I don't think the hog fat was such a good idea. There was much military activity on this road we were traveling and this slowed us some. So we stopped at a farm in the middle of nowhere on the Falkenburg road.

Hot water was provided, and we got a little food from the farmers. We were in a group of small farm houses, so our groups were small this time. There was straw in my loft, and it wasn't nearly as cold as the night before. Again, we had some food from the farmers for breakfast. Imagine sharing a meager food supply with 700 or so strangers who were just passing through, and who would probably never be seen again,with no chance to replenish the supply for five to eight months. The fact that they seemed to give willingly and even cheerfully throws a whole new light on giving and sharing. To this time, our ration from the Germans in charge, not counting the hot water or ersatz (neither of which had any food value) and the thin soup which had very little nourishment, was a total of two loaves of bread and one half pound of oleo. This was for ten days of walking in bitter cold and snow.

This morning, really thick barley soup with diced up potatoes in it was our soup of the day. All the snow we had labored through recently was about gone now. We left this area about 10:30 and moved to Heinrichslouf and some big barns. During the day, we had seen some Red Cross parcels in military wagons and had seen empty boxes strewn along the road. The Germans weren't supposed to have access to them. But we knew, by now, how hunger strains rules and causes them to be broken.

Now, we understood why we hadn't found any caches of parcels. As if this aggravating sight wasn't enough, a steady drizzle of rain had fallen all day and my coat and blankets were wet and getting heavier with the absorbed rain. However, an issue of a full loaf of bread and one fourth pound of oleo brightened the day a little. Later, when everyone had settled down and the farm supervisor was gone, I milked one of the cows in the barn. Since I hadn't milked a cow since staying on my grandmother's farm as a child, it was slow going but the end results made the effort worthwhile.

Soup for breakfast and the morning was spent resting, drying off, redoing our packs, and scrounging. Finally, we moved at 12:30 to a large farm at Zulchagney arriving there about 7 p.m. My walking was mostly shuffling all day because the freezing and thawing had taken its toll on my feet and they were hurting. The pack was getting heavier by the hour, too, because it rained most of the way, and the wool was really soaking in the rain. No food was issued.

Hot water only that day, and we were told that Stargard about 75 kms. distance was our goal. This was to be reached by walking 18 to 20 kms. per day. Next morning, we got ersatz which is just flavored hot water. We left early at 8:30 passing by Dramburg and on to Gienow which was a total of 17 kms. We saw American GI's working along the way in a village and some others on a railroad track. Sometimes, we would see them working in fields.

Sometime during the day, we passed some sort of concentration camp. It was gloomy and drab, and I don't believe there were any Americans it it. In fact, the whole countryside was drab, and the people looked less prosperous than some other areas we had passed through. I was surprised that evening when I drew a nice warm barn with a nice loft.

After starting at 8:30 on the 5th of February, we moved to Zietlitz and turned off the Stargard road and headed to who knows where. Many times, we saw horses that had been killed lying along side the road. Several times we noted that they would have large chunks cut out of the fleshy part of the hind leg.

I knew that we had been served horse meat back in Oflag 64, but this first hand evidence was very revolting. We realized the people in this area were struggling for survival just as we were.

We passed through and beyond Ruhnow for a total of about 20 kms. for the day. A late supper of kraut, potatoes, and ersatz tasted good. The Germans notified our commander that they had acquired rail cars for 180 men who could be shipped ahead to our destination of Luckenwalde. He urged all who had a reason to go on sick call to do so. After all the sick and disabled were accommodated, there was still space available, so I got to be part of the quota. The farmer gave us a little milk that evening, and about 10 p.m., we were taken by vehicle back to Ruhnow to the railroad. Forty eight men and three guards were loaded in each of four boxcars. The guards were given one can of meat for each ten men. Already, leaving the column began to look like a bad decision. Really, I could have walked a little further.

We stayed in the yards all night. Our uncertainties and the crowded car, along with the weather, made the night miserable for us. To the credit of the guards, they opened the doors to the cars in the morning, so we didn't have to just look at each other and the walls of the car. There was much activity at the station and soldiers were running all about. Of course, we drew some attention from the curious and bargaining was allowed. I picked up some meat spread, a little bread, and about one half pound of oleo, by using my priceless cigarettes for money. We got some ersatz, and I ate some potatoes I had stashed for an emergency. In our constant state of emergency, it was hard to know when to declare a special emergency.

About 9:15 that evening, we were switched just outside the yards where we sat all night until about 6:15 a.m. We started rolling only to stop again about 8:30. One of the cars had a bad wheel, so we received twenty more men in our already crowded car. Most of the occupants had to be standing at any one time. We were told that we could get two cars at Stargard, but we moved right through there without picking up any cars or rations. It was so crowded that we had to work out a schedule for taking turns standing and sitting.

At one opportune time during a stop, I picked up a little bread, some schmaltz, and honey spread using my precious cigarettes again. They were absolutely the best trading material because the Germans liked our cigarettes and would trade almost anything for them. I had an advantage over the smokers because I had never smoked and could, therefore, use mine for food while smokers consumed most of theirs themselves. As a result, I actually fared better than some prisoners along the way.

After moving all night, we reached Pasewalk and got onto a siding where we were fed a pretty good soup. It tasted good, but I'm sure the degree of palatability was in direct proportion to the degree of hunger and really had nothing to do with how good the soup actually was. The N.C.O. in charge of our car was not a forceful person and seemed to have little concern for our plight. He was not concerned at all when we weren't fed. If we hadn't intercepted an officer as he walked by our car one time, I doubt that we would have ever gotten the two cars that the officer obtained for us. One of those cars was heated and the really sick were put in it. We ended up with forty men in our car which was still crowded but better than sixty eight. We were able to sleep lying down that night using the old system of everyone sleeping on their side, and everyone turning to the other side, at intervals, in unison.

We moved into Berlin and there was no food for us. While waiting somewhere in Berlin, we witnessed through the cracks in the wall the birth of a baby on the hood of a disabled vehicle. They must have been refugees or misplaced persons and didn't know where to go. With all our self pity, scenes such as this almost tore our hearts out.

Finally, we went back to Templehof supposedly to be fed, but again there was nothing there. We picked up a different engine and moved to Luckenwalde, Stalag IIIA arriving there about 4:20 p.m. on February 10. We detrained at 5:20 and the Feldwebel marched us to the wrong camp which is on the opposite side of town from our camp. After walking those extra kms., there was no food provided when we arrived at Luckenwalde.

Instead, we waited and waited until about midnight when they started to delouse us. From there, we were put in bare rooms with nothing but stone floors and walls where we stayed until about 10:30, when we were searched and sent to a barracks.

There were no bed boards on the three deck bunk beds, so Lt. Stone and I slept on some straw on the floor. Soup and potatoes were our lunch. Tea, bread, and oleo was issued that evening. In another compound separated from us by a narrow corridor of barbed wire, I saw some of my non-coms. They had been walked here from IIIB which was the camp over near Furstenburg. They had no cigarettes, so I threw some of mine across to them along with some loose tobacco I had salvaged from the discarded cigarette butts of the smokers. It was a risky thing to do and had to be done when you thought the guards weren't looking. I think they were ordered to shoot anyone passing anything back and forth.

I think it was about this time that I began to be obsessed with the thought of chocolate cake. My diary mentions it quite often in succeeding days, almost to the point of monotony. It seems that chocolate cake was what dreams were made of.

This wasn't unusual. Food had long since taken first place in our thoughts in all our waking hours. Larry Phelan recorded it very well in a poem he composed back then to his girl friend or wife. It goes thus:

I dream as only captive man can dream
Of life as lived in days that went before.
Of scrambled eggs and shortcakes thick with cream,
And onion soup and lobster Thermidor;
Of roasted beef and chops and T-bone steaks,
And turkey breast and golden leg or wing,
Of sausage, maple syrup, buck wheat cakes,
And chickens, broiled or fried or a la king.
I dwell on rolls and buns for days and days,

Hot corn bread, biscuits, Philadelphia scraple,
Asparagus in cream or Hollandaise,
And deep dish pies -- mince, huckleberry, apple;
I long for buttered, creamy oyster stew,
And now and then, my pet, I long for you.

I was moved to another section of barracks which contained Air Force officers. Fortunately, I found some bed slats and a mattress, so I finally got a "good bed". Having made the necessary physical and mental adjustments, I settled into the camp routine. The most important thing was to keep busy doing something, anything. In the days that followed, I shaved in cold water with dull blades, bathed in cold water, played casino and rummy, wrote to Edie, stood the often screwed up appel, made entries in my diary, attended church as often as they had services, and walked miles and miles with a new acquaintance from Cincinnati, a Lt. Mark Weber. We talked about his upcoming marriage to Audrey when he got home. According to my diary, I read my Testament a lot. I, also, learned more about contract bridge and played chess. Bread and thin soup were the ration when we received any. Some of the men had lost up to thirty pounds and more. The camp was visited by a Swiss delegate on an inspection tour. There was no way to disguise the poor conditions in the camp, and he surely noted this.

The senior Allied officer in camp was a Norwegian General. A shipment of parcels had been forwarded to his men, but he gave five hundred parcels to be shared by the 2300 Americans there. That meant one parcel for five men and groups of five men would work out an equitable division of one parcel. I got nine crackers, very good cheese, small amount of meat, some molasses, Danish butter, sugar, and oatmeal. The quantity of each item was small but certainly a welcome treat.

The parcel went in a hurry over the next couple of days. With good food in my stomach, my morale and respect improved, and I got a much needed haircut. I discovered that along with lice and bed bugs, I had fleas, too. One day after half-heartedly chasing one up and down my bare arm awhile, I caught it.

The Germans offered us a lot of worthless PX items here. We had to purchase the items with a sort of prison money issued to the officers. In fact, you paid for them even if you didn't take them. Most accepted them thinking they might be trading items later. I was issued a small bread board, a small jar of face cream, an envelope of face powder, scouring tablets, washing powder, body powder, razor blades that didn't fit my American razor, cigarette papers, and other junk. What we needed was decent food.

Lt. Karnes was preaching in Luckenwalde, so I went to all his services. I finished reading the Testament completely through. Dreams every night were inevitably about chocolate cake and home. My daily diary entry included a chocolate cake wish. The barracks were always cold. Food was scarce, and Red Cross parcels were just a memory. All the barter materials had been used up so there was no trading going on. The days were long and monotonous.

March came in like a lion. It was so cold we had to stay in bed to keep warm. One of the problems this presented was that you had lots of time to think about your constant hunger and to feel sorry for yourself. The thin soup and one-seventh loaf of bread each day didn't require much mealtime, so it was back to bed again.

One of our "fringe benefits" one day was a visit to our camp by Max Schmeling, a former world heavyweight boxing champion from Germany. Our senior American officer was notified, and he called us together and forbade any demonstration of praise or admiration toward him and even suggested not going to see him. Consequently, all he got from the Americans was a cool reception. This must have aggravated the Germans greatly.

As close as I could tell, there must have been about five hundred of Oflag 64 officers at this camp at this time. Having about 1400 back at Oflag 64, left a large number unaccounted for. It snowed often the last of February and the first days of March, and I wondered if some of us were still on the roads being shuffled along.

When clothes and socks were washed, there was no hurry. For one thing, you were washing in cold water. For another thing, you were doing something different in a monotonous day,and tried to make it last awhile. I had started a mustache,and trimming it was a time consuming, delicate job mostly because there wasn't much there.

Everyday, food was the constant concern. My diary is filled with comments of the lack of food. Each day, we were going without any rations of any kind from four o'clock in the afternoon till about 12:ØØ or 12:3Ø the next day. This was a period of about twenty hours. Even then, we would get only 5ØØ to 7ØØ calories, total. Consequently, we accepted any possibility of receiving food with great excitement.

On March 7, a rumor came down to barracks level that we would soon receive a Red Cross parcel for each two men. What fabulous news!! I should have suspected something special that day because the day dawned bright and beautiful. We got oatmeal instead of weak tea for breakfast. The noon day soup was actually good. So far, things were going just great that day. Then, we were issued one parcel per man!! The Germans, also, issued a sugar ration that day, too. My diary noted that all I needed that day, to make to it super, was a letter from home.

Everyone indulged themselves, and some actually got sick from the richer food in the parcels. It was very difficult to restrict consumption and to portion the items over a period of time. Morale was raised, and once more, there was trading,with the receipt of bartering materials.

A few days later, the Norweigians gave us some of their Swedish parcels. They gave us one for each seven men. These were a little different and contained two kinds of bread, goose berry jam, cube sugar, powdered milk, two large cans of fresh cooked sausage, sardines, matches, a small porcelain cup, soap, a small spoon, and can opener. I won the spoon by drawing cards,and promptly traded it for two rations of goose berry jam.

Several days later, we received another of our parcels. We were leaning heavily on these parcel issues now because German issue was scarce (and tasteless when available), and even hot water was often not provided. Our occasional ration of potatoes was not reliable and the grass soup was tasting terrible. When I really needed one, I had to take a bath in cold water.

Parcels, more and more, became our main sustenance, and we hit them hard. About the middle of March, a shipment of parcels must have gotten through to us, and our senior American officer announced to us that we had 157,000 and would receive one every five days. This would take the pressure off the Germans for our food. The nation was really hurting, and now the prisoner would be eating better than the captor. Ironic!

I had learned from some source that Sgt. Jurek had died the night we were captured. That made me very sad. Lt. Rudel went for a preliminary repatriation examination. I didn't know how long he would have to wait to go home.

Once again, the Norwegians came forward with a friendly gesture of a fish dinner. I decided I would eat the fish if they killed me. I had to compromise my decision because they were terrible, and I couldn't eat them (perhaps in hungrier times I could). I gave mine to someone and opened a can of tuna. Overall, the Norwegians seem to be the best of all the nationalities in our camp. We were in country groups. We could visit back and forth, so we got to know each other slightly. The Poles had been incarcerated and persecuted so long that they were suspicious of everyone and had forgotten how to say thanks. The Italians were a crude, vulgar lot and reinforced the observation I had made at an earlier time in my captivity. The French could not be trusted and tried to assume the martyr role in the war. The British could trick you out of your shirt and often did. The Candadians were O.K., but there wasn't many of them. Fortunately, we didn't have to mingle much, so there were no serious problems between groups.

We did what we could to keep busy. A daily chore seemed to be cleaning the lice out of my underwear. They surely multiply fast. Mending uniforms took up some time, too, but even so, the days passed slowly. The Germans did the best they could supplying food. One couldn't count on a potato ration, and the soup varied from good to bad to terrible. So we really counted on our regular parcel issues.

I used some of my cigarettes to trade for a Canadian Battle dress which I thought I might eventually take home. They were a pretty blue, and cut with a flashy look so they looked nice. I had to do some sewing and repairing on it. After it was washed, it looked pretty good. As I write this account, I don't remember what happened to it. I don't think I got it home.

Church continued to be one of my regular activities along with reading. Once Lt. Karnes was ill and didn't preach, and I missed him. Due to limited physical activity and the regular issue of high calorie parcels, my pants started to fit more snugly. I wasn't getting fat off the German issue which was one seventh loaf of bread. Those loaves were much smaller than the ones in XIIA and Oflag 64.

One day, we had a rare treat. A movie was shown. I don't know where it came from. Probably, the YMCA representative brought it into camp.

The first day of spring was just beautiful. Being able to be outside comfortably was much better than being confined in the barracks. My new friend, Lt. Weber, and I spent much time walking and talking about his marriage plans. This relationship turned into a lasting friendship for us. Our families visited back and forth for many years until he died.

Once again, my diary is one of complaint with the lack of food from the Germans. Also, a criticism of the quality of it when we did receive any. We needed something to put into our stomachs for bulk if nothing else. That's about the only purpose the ration served.

I needed a haircut because I wanted to look presentable on Palm Sunday and Easter. My chest was X-rayed on Palm Sunday. That was a first time for that service. I never heard from it, so I guess everything was O.K. Reading and playing chess, along with baseball, pretty much made up the days activity. Turnips were one days issue, and they were delicious not to mention the welcome change in the menu. The Easter Sunday sermon by Lt. Karnes was particularly good. It was a comparison of ups and downs, good and evil, to Good Friday and Easter, and the final triumph of good. I always came away from his service spiritually moved.

I was able to bathe at last and made it a good scrubbing. I looked and felt so much better. I had washed my clothes, too. I'm not saying the new me was the reason, but I batted 500 that day playing baseball. Next day, I read all day. However, the day following that, I batted 400 again. Even my bridge game improved, and I bid and made a small slam (clean body, clean mind, clear head). Even so, I got an opportunity to shower a day or so later and jumped at the chance. I believe the cleanliness had finally penetrated clear to the new skin layer and it felt great.

The bread ration was down to one tenth of a loaf by this time, and the parcels were awaited anxiously. We were all finger printed one day. Now, why we were finger printed at this stage of the war, I'll never know. It was sort of fun activity and a change of pace, but it is difficult to understand the German thinking and rationale.

April 10, we received some unclaimed parcels, and they were distributed among the men. These were parcels that had been sent by parents, wives, and friends of a particular prisoner but were undeliverable for various reasons. I got some fruit cake and maple sugar. Also, I got a piece of chocolate cake (at last) made from one of the parcels (box cake mix).

There had been rumors for sometime that we might be moved, and we were sweating it out each day. Evidently, the rumors concerned the British because they moved out on April 12.

We don't know where they were to be taken or even why they were moved. I occasionally got to see and talk with my N.C.O.'s. They were faring about like everyone else.

American fighter planes were spotted overhead one day. These were the first we had seen for a long time, and we were encouraged because they were usually close support units, rather than long range, and meant the Allied troops were getting close.

The radio (which was carried from Oflag 64 by some of our courageous officers) and which we had secreted in camp, reported the death of President Roosevelt. This had quite a sobering effect on us, because we still had confidence in his leadership. We would not learn of the concessions he made at his meetings with Stalin at Yalta, concessions that would haunt us for many, many years. The church service that Sunday, in remembrance of Roosevelt, was very impressive. We had already had our emotions stimulated the night before with a dazzling display. We were approximately thirty miles, give or take a mile, south of Berlin and had often watched the night bombings of that city. On this Saturday night, a tremendous bombing raid was directed on southern Berlin or some target further south. It didn't seem very far away. We didn't exactly have front row seats this time, but we could see everything--searchlights, flares, bursting bombs, ack-ack, fires, and planes going down in flames. It was a brutal softening up of an area, and we speculated on ground troops arriving here by the following Tuesday at the latest.

That Monday, many German fighter planes were flying overhead, and we felt that we would soon be in the thick of the battle. Actually, things quieted down for a few days, though.

We received a few more personal parcels, and I had oatmeal or cream of wheat for a couple fo breakfasts. I had discovered some time before, that the hearing in my left ear was impaired. I finally had it checked on sick call, but they could do very little for it. It has remained a lifetime problem. I suspect the problem started when that shell exploded on the edge of my foxhole back at Richicourt la Petite.

April 20 was Hitler's birthday. I remember that it was a very quiet day which was spent reading and playing bridge. Discussions almost always included our guards. It was hard to believe that after all we had gone through in their hands, we could feel sympathy toward them but we did. So many of them were older men, some probably approaching sixty years of age serving as privates in an Army. Perhaps, it was an advantage for us, for I feel certain they had more tolerance and compassion for us, than younger fanatics would have had.

We could tell that the Russians were just a few miles away, because incoming shells were falling close to camp, and low flying German planes were skimming over our camp, on their low bombing and strafing approaches to the front. We felt we would be freed very soon, if not this very day. The thought of being free was a wonderful feeling, and emotion welled up within and filled our throats. Never again would that precious word be taken lightly by any of us, and especially by those who had been prisoners for years, and had survived this long and trying ordeal.

However, it was not over for us yet. Avoiding the camp, the attacking Russians bypassed us to the west and went around the town. As a result of this move, there wasn't much fighting near the camp, at this time. Of course, our guards had fled or had been ordered into service somewhere else, or had melted into the civilian population by changing clothes. Those poor fellows had probably served in World War I and here they had to risk their lives in another losing cause. The Russian prisoners in camp, finding themselves free, literally went wild, as they danced, shouted, and embraced one another.

The Russians sent a column through camp the next day, probably in a show of force, since the camp was not in their path of advance to the north and through town. All around the camp now, were pitched skirmishes with mostly small arms fire. I suspect that along with the clearing out of woods and buildings, there were executions being done on the spot. Such was the hatred between Germans and Russians. There was no longer a camp authority, and an uneasy feeling blanketed the camp, as if trouble might yet erupt, and freedom be denied.

Watching anxiously all day for a sign or indication of liberation made the day seem extra long. As evening approached, the battles increased in intensity. We could hear much shouting and screaming and learned later that it was indeed rape and massacre, of both soldier and civilian. The freed Russian prisoners were uncontrollable in camp. They were themselves committing atrocities on occupants of the camp, particularly the Poles, since their barracks were a sort of commune containing both male and female. Most of the Russian prisoners had been denied female companionship, perhaps for years,and their behavior was most barbaric. We stayed in our own area for safety's sake and didn't interfere, much as we wanted to.

The firing continued throughout most of the night, but finally quieted down toward morning. Our senior officer called us out for reveille the next morning. At the time, we resented this formality, but I'm sure he had a reason. It might have been a warning to the Russian prisoners of our unity and strength, I don't know. At any rate, there were no incidents that day and no food, so the day was pretty bleak. The following day, we stood reveille at 7:30 again. Somewhere food had been found, and we got one half litre of soup, one sixth loaf of bread, and a little butter. Later, we were issued one fourth of a Canadian parcel.

Evidently, the senior officers had made the decision to stay put in camp, even though there was no evidence of guards. We continued to stand reveille and wait for developments. The weather was overcast and gloomy. That, along with our uneasiness and uncertainties, dampened any good spirits we might have had. In fact, there was no feeling of liberation, even though guards were not in evidence. Finally, the sun came out, and the weather improved along with the food. I contacted some of my men and told them as much as I knew about the situation which wasn't much. Men were beginning to sneak out of camp. By April 28, the waiting was getting to us, and we were getting itchy and nervous. Many of us were thinking of leaving, even though our senior officer had told us not to. Reading was no longer a satisfactory way of passing the time. We moved nervously around camp in the safe areas, visiting, exercising our muscles, and walking off our anxiety.

I was intrigued by a large pen that was filled with cattle, hogs, sheep, and goats which had been gathered by the Russians in their advance and were to be slaughtered and used as food for their troops. I visited the enclosure several times just to look at the animals and talk to them and pet them.

Communion was served at church services Sunday evening. Next morning, I and several other officers were chosen to go into Luckenwalde on a sort of visible patrol or presence. We were chosen because our uniforms were clean, and we made a fairly good appearance as American officers. It was hoped that just our presence on the street would curb the looting and raping, and reassure the civilian that there was, in fact, law and order present.

Most people stayed inside their homes behind locked doors. There were some who ventured out when it was absolutely necessary. Their eyes were filled with fear for the Russians, and they continually glanced around and over their shoulders. Many times, women would hurry up to inquire about the arrival of the American troops wondering when they would arrive. Almost all the civilians on the streets were female or children, because they were actually safer on the streets than men were. Our radio had kept us informed, and I knew that the Allied forces had been ordered to stop at the Elbe River and not cross it. It was heart breaking to inform them that the Americans wouldn't be coming this far. They would break into tears and scurry back to their houses. The women leading cute little children down the streets made me homesick for my wife and child. How thankful I was that my family did not have to endure the danger and hardship that these people were experiencing.

I was on a busy corner on the main northerly street through town. There was a steady stream of military equipment and troops moving north through town and just about every piece was American made.

This was my introduction to the extent of the lend-lease agreement with the Russians. What an erroneous description of the agreement that turned out to be. This was actually gift equipment passing by for I'm sure they never intended to honor their war debt from the very beginning.

Luckenwalde was in the Russian line of advance. All this material and equipment was to be used in the southerly assault on Berlin and was being funneled through town, past me. Some of the Russian combat troops were female. They were just as robust and arrogant as the males, sitting on tanks and half tracks with arms folded defiantly and intimidating smirks on their faces. A few waved, but most ignored us as they passed. I recall wondering at the time, "are these our friends?" How prophetic the thought was, because in the years since, it became clear that while they were allies, they were never our friends. The planners had goals and knew all along what they wanted, and so they maneuvered to put their allies in a very disadvantageous position. A talent of theirs which persists to this day. With all his good points, President Roosevelt surely let Stalin snooker him time and again.

Moving in the opposite direction through town was a line of German soldier prisoners. What a bedraggled lot they were. They had been awfully busy the last few days fighting and defending themselves. Their uniforms were dirty and wrinkled. All were unshaven and unwashed and all had the beaten, subdued, slumping look,with that look of fear in their eyes. Many were only fifteen or sixteen years old from their appearance. They were probably Hitler youth who had been duped into fighting for the fatherland. This day in Luckenwalde was a very depressing day, but I appreciated the opportunity to have witnessed this drama. The incidents and faces are etched in my mind forever.

With the coming of the new month, May, also, came rumors that we would move to the other camp a couple miles away. There was still much fighting all around camp and in town. I was supposed to go on patrol again the following day, but it evidently was considered too risky since so many Russian soldiers had moved into the area. A stray shell landed in our sports plaza in the center of camp. I followed orders about staying in camp, all the while, questioning those orders in my mind. Some of the men were leaving daily, and I'm aware of their leaving as I read my Aesops Fables book (a book I had carried from the library of Oflag 64 and still have). I nap occasionally to catch up on my sleep, and all the while, wrestling with my feelings and doubts.

Lt. Rudel was finally picked up by an ambulance on May 5, after waiting all this time since his examination. Word was received by radio that seventy trucks were coming from the American lines to pick us up. A few trucks arrived early on May 6, but they were sent back by the Russians. There wasn't much the drivers could say or do, because they weren't supposed to be on this side of the Elbe anyway. The Russians realizing that they were going to soon lose the occupants of the camp threw an armed guard around the camp perimeter.

These two events were the last straws as far as I was concerned. It was quite clear in my mind of the intentions and character of our so called friends, so I decided to escape. Notice that we no longer could just leave camp, but now we had to escape the Russian imprisonment. I carefully watched the routine of the guards for a while and decided on the time of the attempt. I, also, wanted to be one of the first to try because I was sure that after a few attempts, the guards would become much more alert and hard to fool. At the first opportunity, I slipped out of camp to the nearest cover. The Russians guards were definitely instructed to prevent us from leaving because I was fired at by automatic weapons. Luckily, I escaped being hit, but I know they had every intention of stopping us, one way or the other. This conduct from our "friends" reminds one of the saying, "with friends like this, who needs enemies?" I don't know how many were still in camp, but I learned later that many Americans were repatriated through Russia.

I quickly headed in a westerly direction along country roads trying to avoid main highways. By choosing this route, I could move right along and didn't have to stop and hide very much. In time, small groups of us had drifted together, so we traveled in small units. We hid from anything moving on wheels because about the only one on wheels was the German or Russian military. We were very much aware that we could still be stopped or recaptured by the Russians. After quite a few miles, we finally came upon some familiar vehicles with drivers in uniforms we recognized as American. They were searching with binoculars and waiting uneasily for the arrival of any ex-prisoners always watching for the approach of any German or Russian soldiers.

The Russians were unhappy about any U.S. vehicles violating their territory, because they wanted all the glory of liberating Berlin and the surrounding territory. This was one of Roosevelt's biggest mistakes, stopping the Allied troops at the Elbe. Having extra "freed" prisoners gave the Russians extra bargaining chips in later settlement and disputes, too.

The nervous drivers would speed away as soon as their truck was loaded, or mostly loaded,leaving the unloaded trucks waiting for more escapees.

So the feeling of anxiety remained until the trucks returned back across a pontoon bridge on the Elbe, and we were once again under Allied control. The cheers must have echoed up and down the river as we released our tensions and feelings. Tears of joy streamed down our faces as we realized the feeling of liberation and freedom. Never again would any of us be complacent about the wonderful word "freedom".

Chapter IV

LIBERTY, SWEET LIBERTY

I enjoyed the luxury of a canvas cot that night and it felt great. Breakfast was almost like being home -- grapefruit juice, oatmeal and milk, white bread and jam, bacon, and good coffee. This stop was at Schonebeck, and we were moved to Hildesheim the next day where we were deloused. Then we were loaded on a C-47 and flown at tree top level to Nancy. Having one's first airplane ride in a C-47 is not recommended, particularly if piloted by a frustrated 2nd Lt. cowboy. A truck took us through Nancy to the railroad station. On the way, we met a G.I. bakery truck filled with loaves of white bread, and they tossed some to us when they found out we were X-POW's. Angel food cake never tasted better.

This was near territory I had fought in. Familiar names could be seen through the little train windows as we passed through the little towns on the way to Epinal. This was one of our supply hubs, and I was issued a complete new G.I. uniform, PX ration, and a Red Cross kit. I recognized a soldier named Thomas from Piqua, Ohio and, also, found my platoon sergeant, Morriessy. About 9 a.m., I boarded a train toward Le Havre and traveled comfortably by train to Camp Lucky Strike.

The shelters in Camp Lucky Strike were fairly large size multiple person tents arranged in large groups or sections. I saw other Piqua soldiers, Lee Lewis, Louis Ciriegio, and a Jim Houser from Troy, Ohio.

For the next ten days, I was pampered extravagantly. Besides our regular meals, we had access to the PX and unrestricted milk shakes and other goodies. All this, along with a limited amount of exercise, elevated my weight to 168 pounds -- the most I had ever weighed. We were questioned about our experiences of the last few months.

They asked for any information that might be helpful in locating and aiding other freed prisoners. I did take some time out from eating to attend several USO shows. I was moved to an area designated "D" for processing and preparation for shipment home. On the 21st of May, I left Camp Lucky Strike, which was close to Cany, moved to a holding area about five kms. from Le Havre. From there I boarded a pretty nice boat named "Monticello", and we sailed the evening of the next day. We had to stop at South Hampton to take on some hospital cases being transferred back to the good old USA. That done, we headed west, homeward bound.

The accommodations in this ship weren't as plush as the ones we had on the way overseas in the SS Argentina. There was no officers mess, and we slept in hammocks in tiers and ate below deck. None of this mattered though because we were headed toward the United States. The weather was pretty nice, and most escaped the trial of seasickness. This time, I got to see the Statue of Liberty as we passed by, and it was a pretty emotional sight for those of us who had been denied liberty for a time.

CHAPTER V

R AND R AND MOVEMENT WEST TOWARD THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Arriving in Camp Kilmer in New Jersey, June 3, 1945, I was immediately sent on to Camp Atterbury in Indiana. I then went home for sixty two days for recuperation, rehabilitation, and recovery. Those summer days passed quickly because I was among friends and loved ones and in an environment that I had longed for. All too soon, I had to report to the Redistribution Center on Miami Beach in Florida. One last part of the rehabilitation was a fourteen day stay at the Albion Hotel. The accommodations were for myself and my wife, and we had a glorious vacation. It was here we met the Kaspers, and we still enjoy their friendship to this day. The highlights of our stay were a couple deep sea fishing excursions. Edie hooked a nice bonita. By the time she subdued it and got it reeled in, the barracuda's had attacked and devoured over half of it. She finally landed the front end of her fish which was pretty chewed up.

All good things must end, so we bid farewell to our new friends as Lt. Kasper left for his refresher course at the Field Artillery School, and I reported to Co. 12, I.A.R.T.C., Camp Gordon, Ga. This was familiar territory for me having spent some of my state side service here with my Division. It was a short stay because orders were cut for me to report no later than September 12, 1945 to Ft. Benning, Ga. to attend Officers Basic Course #95. This course would bring us up to date on all the advancements the Army had made by trial and error at home and on the various battlefields. It was completed on or about November 10, and I returned to Camp Gordon to be promptly assigned to Company B, 130th Bn., 81st Infantry Training Regiment at Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Ark. presumably heading for duty in the Pacific area.

We (Edie, Karen, and myself) arrived there the 15th of November, 1945. Fortunately, the war ended in the Pacific before I was required to go. The bottom sort of fell out of things at replacement centers and demobilization started immediately. They tried offering top sergeants and often officers ratings, depending on your branch of service, to officers to entice them into making the military their career. I felt the job for which I had been drafted had now been completed, so my only interest was to go home and let the diplomats screw up the peace as they had always done before.

Each time an officer was transferred to a new station, he had to get a financial clearance form filled out and signed before he was permitted to leave his old station. I cleared Camp Robinson on November 27 and returned home through Camp Atterbury in Indiana. I had accumulated two months and nine days leave and was given four days traveling time to return home. This terminal leave time expired on February 12, 1946.

Meantime, my promotion to Captain came through, and I was separated as Captain L. K. Edsall even though I would never have a command with that rank.

As an officer, you were automatically commissioned as a reserve officer upon separation. I reluctantly tolerated this until I was able to negotiate a transfer to inactive reserve on October 6, 1949. Then, in December of 1952, a directory of the President appointed me a reserved commissioned officer in the Reserve Corps Army of the United States. This finally suited me, and I knew it was over at last.

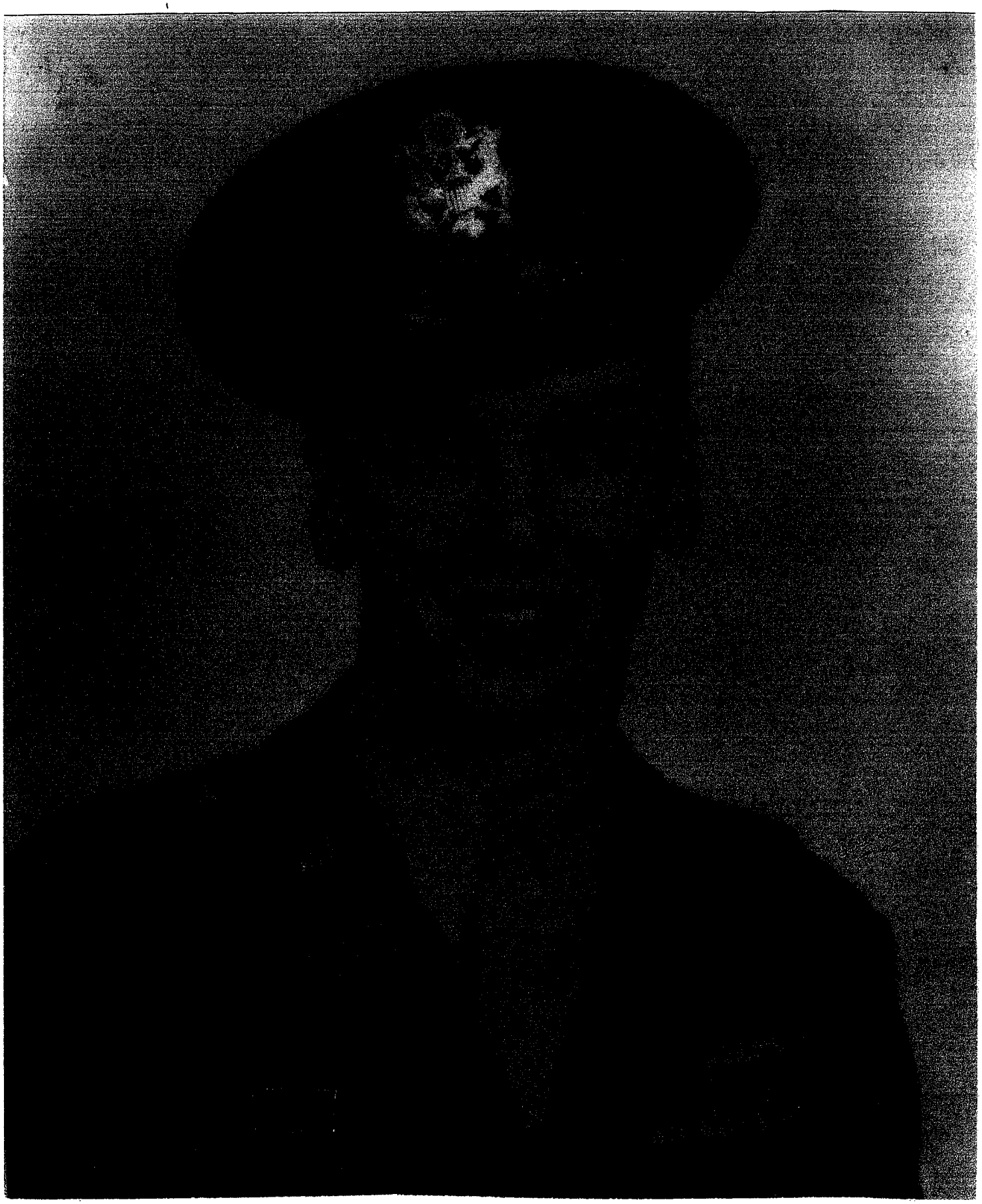
One last word about this period in my life. I was the only person in this area who served in the 26th Division. Therefore, I had no one to talk with and rehash the experiences of those times, and for many years afterward, I rarely thought about them. They were completely closed from my mind. Through a series of events, I have once more made contact with my regiment and fellow P.O.W.'s. Each contact will renew or recall some incident that has dimmed or was even forgotten as the years passed. There is no adverse feeling in my mind anymore about being captured.

One of the senior officers in Oflag 64 helped me overcome this with his message....

"Let no man believe that there is a stigma attached to having been honorably taken captive in battle. Only the fighting man ever gets close enough to the enemy for that to happen. That he is not listed among the slain, is due to the infinite care of Providence. Be proud that you carried yourselves as men in battle and adversity. You will be enriched thereby".

I can now enjoy the love and friendship of those I fought and served with, and those I struggled along side in the P.O.W. experience. I never really developed a hatred for the German people. In fact, a desire was sparked within me to someday return there with my wife to show her some of the country that was so much struggle for me. That wish has been fulfilled a couple times.

I wanted to tell of my life as a soldier, especially to my children and their children. I'm proud of my service to my country and my military friends. I was no hero but.....I had some trying times, some good experiences, and some close calls. So just like each of millions who served, I, too, have a story to relate.



Captain Lester Edsall - Inf. U.S. Army