

AN ACCOUNT BY
A WORLD WAR II Combat Infantryman

John Thornton Dorsey Jr

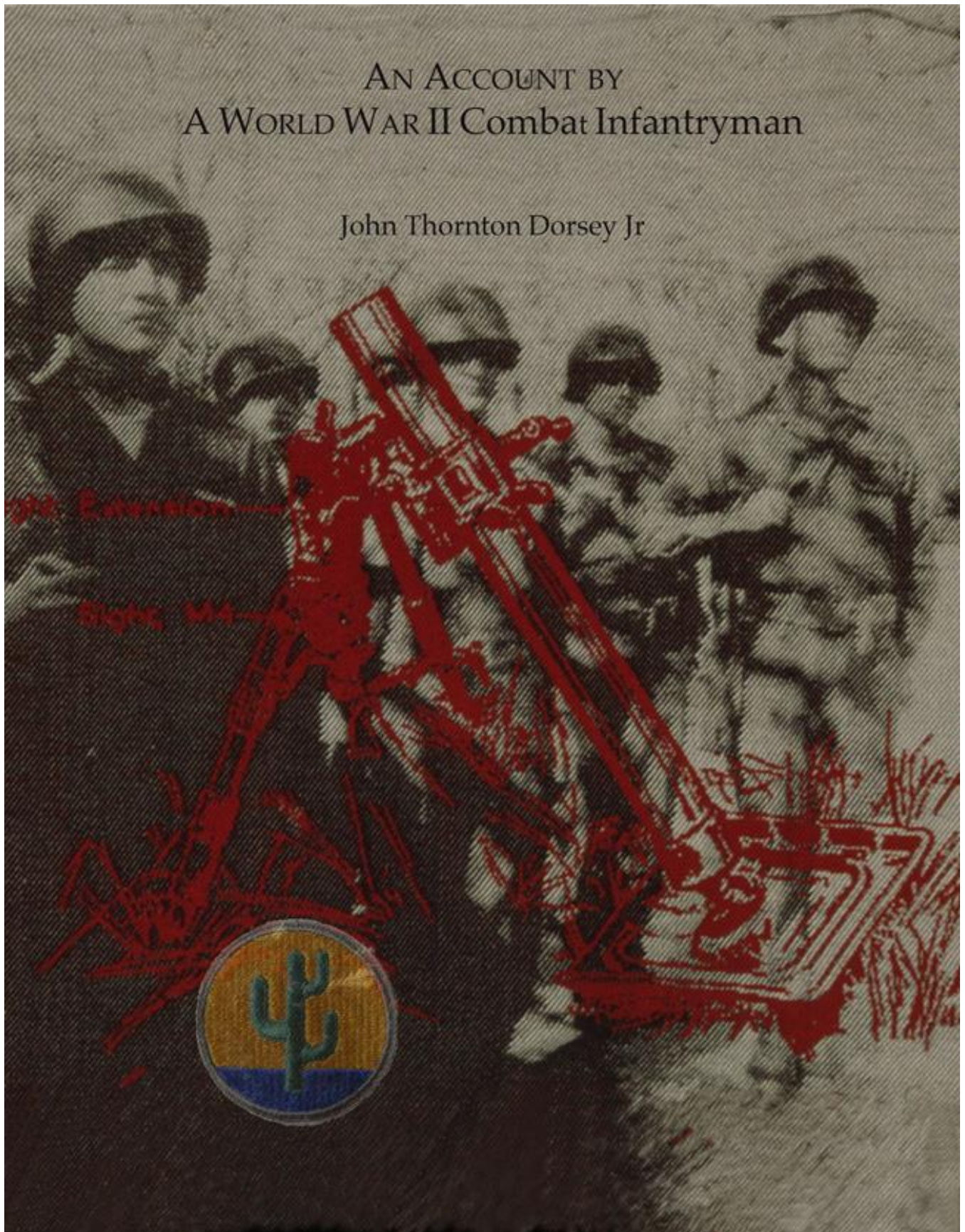


Table of Contents

President’s Forward, <i>Cranston R. Rogers</i>	ii
Biographical Sketch of John T. Dorsey Jr., <i>Frances Dorsey</i>	1
An Account by a World War II Combat Infantryman.....	1
Preface	2
First Day of Combat, November 16, 1944	3
November 17, 1944.....	4
Saulcy to Barr, November 22-24.....	5
Outside Barr, near Epfig: Wick and Uppy	6
Siegfried Line: Night of the Trench	7
Shafe	8
Christmas 1944, Morsbach, Lorraine	9
Bernard Pock	10
Sessenheim, January 19, 1945	11
Danny	12
Nieffern, Alsace, Night of February 13, 1945.....	13
The Beginning of the End, March 15, 1945.....	14
One Long Day and Night.....	15
Landsberg	16
Afterword (<i>written in 1975</i>).....	17
Miscellany	18
“Highty Tighty”	18
Two Takes on Survival	19
On Tough Generals, Admirals, and Other Officers	20
Afterword, <i>Frances Dorsey</i>	21
Postscript—June 2011, <i>Frances Dorsey</i>	22
103d Infantry Division Rifle Company Battle Casualty Statistics.....	23
Locations and Activities of K Company, 411th Infantry, March 1944 – July 1945.....	24
Contributors	25

President's Foreword

The 103d Infantry Division WWII Association is pleased to assist Frances Dorsey in republishing her father's written account of some experiences while he was serving with the 103d Infantry Division, assigned to the US 7th Army in the European Theater in World War II. John T. Dorsey Jr's career experiences were notable when we couple it with his World War II military experiences. John Dorsey was drafted upon high school graduation and went overseas as a Pfc (private first class) gunner in a mortar squad. After four months of combat, he became the mortar section leader as staff sergeant. On a critical company night raid on an enemy strong point, Dorsey volunteered to participate in the raid, took command of his group when his group leader became incapacitated, and was awarded the Silver Star Medal for the manner in which he performed his responsibilities. After the war ended, he was a Fulbright Scholar, studying at Paris's Institute of Political Studies, and was subsequently the first to be granted a doctorate degree in Political Science at the University of Alabama. Most of his teaching career was spent in the Political Science Department at Vanderbilt University. Dr Dorsey taught, did research, and put his ideas into practical application in several different countries during his career.

After witnessing the severe casualties experienced by a black American (segregated) tank destroyer unit in Alsace, he became a deeply committed lifelong advocate of civil rights. In the late 1940s, he ran for president of the student body at the University of Alabama on an integration ticket and was soundly defeated.

Like so many of his comrades, John Dorsey's performance in his short period of World War II military service proves the point that young intelligent Americans are able to make excellent soldiers with only moderate training when called to serve in the defense of their country. The 103d Infantry Division Association is pleased to bring his experiences to your attention.

Cranston R. Rogers
President
103d Infantry Division WWII Association
July 2012

JOHN T. DORSEY JR. (1924-1993) grew up in Opelika, Alabama. Drafted in 1943 after graduating from high school, he completed infantry basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama and studied at Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University) through the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). In March 1944, he was assigned to K Company, 411th Infantry Regiment, 103d Infantry Division at Camp Howze, Texas. When the division shipped out to France in October 1944, he was a gunner with rank of private first class in the mortar section of K Company's weapons platoon. He was promoted to mortar squad leader and then mortar section leader with rank of staff sergeant. For heroism during a military operation on February 13, 1945, he was awarded a Silver Star, the third highest combat decoration that can be awarded to a member of the United States armed forces. He was discharged in December 1945.

Moving through Climbach, where a platoon of the African American 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion had suffered heavy casualties, proved to be a pivotal moment for John. He recalled, "Very bad scene. Many dead black men—blood, carnage, mangled bodies." As he noted the skin color of the slain, he reflected, "Why are you here? What stake do you have in this?" He brought home this insight.

After the war, John received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Alabama, where he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He ran for student body president on an integration ticket, earning death threats but not too many votes. This was the beginning of a long career as a civil rights advocate for people of color, for women, for any whose human rights had been trampled upon by the powers that be. He was a true patriot, a quiet believer in the fundamental principles of freedom and equality for all, upon which the United States was founded. At the end of his life, he said that of all the honors he had received, he most valued the Combat Infantryman Badge, for it represented that he had put his life on the line in the defense of liberty.

A southern boy who had rarely met a "Yankee," John came to know soldiers from many backgrounds, snow, really cold weather, and an inkling of European culture and history. The range of ideas and points of view he encountered must have engaged an already questioning mind, as he eventually earned the first Ph.D. in political science (1955) granted by the University of Alabama.

In the Army, John came to love the people and language of France. In 1947, he married Ann Waller, a doctoral candidate in French literature. In 1951-1952, they, with baby Frances in tow, went to France, where he was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Paris's Institute of Political Studies. Several return visits to France followed and it was only the onset of cancer that prevented his last planned trip.

Fresh out of school, John joined the faculty of Michigan State University's political science department in 1953. Seeing a window of opportunity to bring democracy, stability, and prosperity to one country in a region mired in political instability, violence, and poverty, he was part of a loose circle of World War II veterans-turned-academics eager to take ivory-tower theorizing into the field of practice with the Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, a U.S. State Department-supported program to assist South Vietnam in building and improving its public administration, police administration, and economy. Taking his family—that now included son Jefferson—to Saigon, he did two tours of service (1955-56 and 1957-59), first as a member and then chief of Michigan State University's advisory group on public

administration. The public administration division advised Vietnamese government officials—even helping to write the new country’s constitution—and greatly expanded the country’s civil servant training program and library. John completed his overseas service before the advisory group’s scope of work and influence dramatically shrunk—eclipsed by the South Vietnamese government’s lapse into dictatorship and North Vietnam’s commencement of military operations in the South. As the advisory group’s work and reputation unraveled, John’s initial optimism and confidence in development administration ebbed into mistrust of university-government partnerships and disillusionment about U.S. government intervention as a means to propagate democracy in the developing world.

Although grateful to Michigan State University for the chance to get his foot in the academic door and the university’s “Vietnam adventure” of overseas technical assistance, John and most of his colleague-friends eventually moved on to other universities. In 1961, he was appointed associate professor of political science at Vanderbilt University. Moving from East Lansing, Michigan to Nashville, Tennessee was also about going home—returning to a more comfortable climate, culture, and society.

In 1964, John was a visiting professor at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. In 1967, he became a full professor at Vanderbilt, a position he held until his retirement in 1986. In addition to his scholarly publications in the field of public administration, he was well known for his unstinting guidance and support of students undertaking doctoral dissertation work.

John was a member of the Joint Committee on Latin American Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. He served on the editorial boards of *Administration and Society* and the *Journal of Comparative Administration*.

After the untimely death of Ann in 1983, John married Claire Lindgren Lerman, who had three adult children. He took great delight in all of the ensuing grandchildren, cherishing each of them.

In Nashville, John was president of the Tennessee Jazz and Blues Society. He helped found the Peace and Justice Center, served on the steering committee of La Casa (Central America Solidarity Association), and was a member the Nashville Peace Alliance. He particularly enjoyed, in his words, “activities as troublemaker for misguided governmental policy-makers.”

John died on August 3, 1993 at the age of 68.

—*Frances Dorsey*



opposite page top: John Dorsey 1943

bottom: Steinach, 1945, clockwise from top left; Andrew Fultz, George Sink, Bill Tscherne, John Dorsey, Hugh Brown

this page: Nashville, 1989, from left: Francis "Red" Shedd, Glen Wainwright, Seymour Gabiner, Hugh Brown, John Dorsey



Weapons Platoon, K Company, 1945



First row - left to right: Glenn Wainwright, Philip Villareal, Hugh Brown, Bill Tscherne, George Sink, Frank Desposito, unidentified, Ken Schaeffer. flag holder is Patsy Mastromico

Second row - left to right: Bob Sandlin, John Dorsey, Seymour Gabiner, Bud Smith (Walter), Thomas Lowe, Reuben Weaver, unidentified, unidentified, unidentified.

third row - left to right: all unidentified

Preface

By the time I was introduced to the direct blood and slaughter side of it, the European part of the Second World War seemed well on the way to a conclusion. Indeed, it turned out to have only about six more months to go. Most of the large-scale campaigns of the Western Front were past: North Africa, Sicily and most of Italy, D-Day and Normandy, and southern France, in particular. As each of these resulted in German defeats and/or retreats, it seemed fairly clear to those of us in the 103d Infantry Division (brought “on line” in the Vosges Mountains of northeastern France on November 11, 1944) that the Germans had been losing the war for about two years and couldn’t possibly turn things around.

We’d have been even more certain of this had we been aware that 90 percent of the German ground forces’ casualties were amassed on the Eastern Front (or had we heard of the giant tank and air battle of Kursk: more decisive than the battle of Stalingrad). But our view of the war was not, unfortunately, shared by the German troops, especially the middle and lower level line officers. Yet, on later reflection, those of us raised as grandchildren or great-grandchildren of Confederate soldiers shouldn’t have been puzzled. Some of those soldiers, taken prisoner and asked by their Union captors why they fought—particularly if they were not from slave-owning families—answered simply, “Because you’re here.” By late 1944, German troops were beginning to have to fight on German soil or were very close to that circumstance.

Nevertheless, while the great majority of the German forces we encountered made things very difficult for us, managing to inflict casualties of more than 100 percent on K Company during our six months from November 16, 1944 (date of our first attack against their line) to May 8, 1945 (VE Day), we need to keep matters in perspective. K Company was only one of more than 1,200 U.S. rifle companies in Europe, 27 of them in the 103d Division and nine of these in the 411th Infantry Regiment of that division. (The other 18 rifle companies of the 103d were in the 409th and 410th Infantry regiments.) Geographically, the 103d Division was active in a relatively tiny area in far northeastern France and in a fast-moving line of advance through a portion of western Germany to the Brenner Pass in Austria. But when an infantry division is “active,” rifle companies form both the cutting and the bleeding edge of that action. The bloodiest battle of the war is the one my company is in today, if lead and steel are flying and men are falling.

What, then, are these rifle companies, which make up the bulk of the combat forces in the infantry? In the Second World War, an infantry rifle company in the U.S. Army consisted of four platoons (three platoons of riflemen and one “weapons” platoon). In each rifle platoon were three squads of twelve men, eleven carrying M1 Garand semi-automatic rifles and one carrying the twice-as-heavy Browning automatic rifle or BAR. Each squad was led by a staff sergeant. A technical sergeant was the highest noncom in the platoon and was called the platoon sergeant. A second lieutenant was the officer in charge.

The fourth, or weapons, platoon consisted of two “light” (air-cooled) .30 caliber machine gun (MG) squads of five men each and three “light” (60mm) mortar squads of five men each.

The five squad leaders were sergeants—sometimes called buck sergeants. The machine gun and the mortar sections were each led by staff sergeants. As in the rifle platoons, the platoon sergeant was a tech sergeant, and a second (sometimes a first) lieutenant was in charge.

The company commander (CO) was a captain (sometimes a first lieutenant). Assisting him was the second-in-command, called the executive officer, who was usually a first lieutenant. The highest ranking enlisted man, the first sergeant, managed the company's routine administrative business—assisted by a clerk. The first sergeant also supervised the mess sergeant and the supply sergeant. Each of these had a small staff of two to four enlisted men: cooks, clerks, a radio man. In addition, a couple of jeep drivers, two medical technicians ("medics"), and three or four runners (messengers) were attached to each company headquarters.

In all, then, a rifle company consisted of about 190 men, of whom eight or ten were rear echelon support people. Seldom would a cook or supply clerk be called upon to fire a weapon. Sometimes they were subjected to enemy artillery, but not very often.

The company of which I was a member was K Company, one of three rifle companies in the 3d Battalion (the other two were I and L) of the 411th Infantry Regiment. A fourth company in each battalion was called "Heavy Weapons"; they had "heavy" (water-cooled) .30 caliber machine guns and 81mm mortars. Three regiments—the 409th, 410th, and 411th—made up the 103d Infantry Division.

I had been transferred to K Company of the 411th Infantry Regiment of this 103d Infantry Division in March of 1944. It was then located at Camp Howze near Gainesville, Texas, north of Dallas and Fort Worth. The division, having been activated and having trained since late 1942, had just shipped almost all of its privates and privates first class as replacements to Europe. Most of them probably went to units building up to full strength for the D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944. This left the officers and noncoms as a skeletal organization—a cadre—to train a new batch, of which I was one.

This new batch consisted of young men from the recently terminated Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), a program of college training leading mainly toward engineering competence for some vaguely specified subsequent military purpose, and young men from the Army Air Corps, many of whom had been pilot and other aircrew trainees. I had been, since the preceding fall, a member of the ASTP assigned with a couple of hundred others to a unit at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. We were all loaded on a troop train on March 8 and shipped to Camp Howze and the 103d.

This created a rather unusual type of infantry division. Most of the officers were reservists or "ninety-day wonders" from Fort Benning, Georgia, with a sprinkling of regular Army careerists. Most of the noncommissioned officers were reservists, regular Army careerists or draftees with a year or two seniority over the rest of us. Almost all of the privates were now from the ASTP or the Air Corps, assignments to each of which had been based in part on IQ tests. The noncoms and officers did not particularly like college punks, which we were all presumed to be. We, the privates, did not particularly like Army careerists, which we considered all the noncoms to be, and many of whom we considered less than bright and, at

best, ignorant. Although not articulated by anyone at the time, this also represented a social class cleavage. It took a while for some of us to recognize that some of our noncoms and officers were quite intelligent and capable—but not all. It took some time for many of them to recognize that college punk types could be fair to middling infantry soldiers—but, again, not all.

Finally, a few words are possibly needed about my own path to this particular branch of the service. One factor was my teenaged attitude that, if I were going to be in the service, I wanted to be in a combat branch where the war was actually being fought. One part of that attitude came from four years in high school junior ROTC, where a certain amount of drill and infantry tactics was absorbed. Also absorbed was the attitude that infantry still won and lost wars. Still, my first preference remained the Air Corps, which enjoyed all the romance that movies and other mass media could impart—not least in newspapers, which, in reporting the Battle of Britain, inevitably glamorized the Royal Air Force. But, as I had feared and privately known, my eyesight was not close enough to 20/20, without glasses, to meet the requirements. Thus, my second choice was the infantry, where, I “reasoned,” my four years of ROTC training, through which I had advanced to the highest position awarded to cadet officers, could not but stand me in good stead. When inducted then, along with most of the males in the graduating class of ‘43, I requested and was sent to infantry basic training.

About midway through that sixteen-week cycle, the company commander called me aside one day and inquired whether I would be interested in going to Officer Candidate School after completing basic training. I told him I’d think about it a day or so and then give him an answer. But I already knew the answer and only wanted to let him know I had taken the inquiry seriously. By then, the military caste system had given me my first real experience in viewing the world from an underdog’s perspective. My experience with discrimination based on the uniform and insignia of the enlisted ranks was fairly profound, and I had little respect for many of the officers (not all!) I’d come into contact with. I took some satisfaction in thinking that my father would not hire some of them as a yard boy. So I cast my emotional lot with the enlisted ranks.

When I informed the CO of my decision, he told me something about the Army Specialized Training Program and inquired whether I’d be interested. I answered with a flat “No,” adding that I had not joined the Army to go to college. Thus it was to my genuine chagrin and disappointment that, after completion of infantry basic training, I was transferred to the ASTP and sent to Oklahoma State to join its detachment of a couple of hundred other soldier-students. My attitude was scarcely conducive to serious study, but my vanity would not allow me to flunk out. In March of 1944, after almost two quarters, I prepared a written request for transfer to an infantry division. The company commander chuckled when he read it and said I should relax. He had it from the grapevine that the ASTP was just about to be terminated, with all its members being transferred to the infantry. Sure enough, the very next day he read the official order to the assembled contingent of troops. The news was received with considerable consternation—very few shared my attitude.

The following narrative account of one person's experience in the Second World War was begun, in part, while that experience was being acquired. Overseas, I carried a map, taken from a school-book, of northeastern France and a portion of western Germany. Contrary to regulations, I traced the movements we (my company or battalion) made. One can know so little, in those circumstances, about what is going on, what the "big picture" is, that some notion of where I was and where I had been seemed to reduce the anxiety and intermittent terror that were an integral part of the combat infantryman's daily life. Then, during the first year after the war, I began making notes and short summaries about events, people, and places. Memories were vivid and detailed then. Indeed, for many events, people, and places, they remain so today, many years later. In subsequent years, and very spasmodically, I began to draft narrative accounts of particular episodes or blocks of time.

These efforts were aided by an excellent history *Report after Action: The Story of the 103d Infantry Division* (Innsbruck, Tyrol, Austria: Wagner's Universitäts-Buchdruckerei, 1945). Of the two authors, T-4 Ralph Mueller and Pfc. Jerry Turk, the artist, Pfc. Bill Barker, and the two chief photographers, Pfc. Glenn Marshall and Pfc. Bert Sanders, all but one had significant line infantry experience. The book thus has a perspective and flavor that are quite congenial to the combat infantryman, especially those of the enlisted persuasion. It successfully evokes a good bit of the atmosphere and feeling of various aspects of combat. The place-names, events, and dates given in the book also provide a framework of fact against which to check my notes and outlines in spelling out the present narrative.

Another source, much less ambitious, is a fourteen-page pamphlet, *From Bruyères to Brenner: The Combat Story of the Fighting 411th*, prepared by three members of our regimental headquarters staff. Although brief, it contains a useful map and some data on several of the regiment's combat episodes.

My aim has been to provide an account that would show how a line soldier in this part of the war (or this line soldier) passed his days and nights. I wanted to keep it as free as I could of tendencies to dramatize, romanticize, or propagandize. In writing of events from a different stage of my life, I have also tried to keep the perspective as it was then, without allowing knowledge of subsequent events, or viewpoints developed later, to color the narrative. Clearly, these aims were not fully achieved—but I thought it could be useful to the reader to know what I was trying to do.

First Day of Combat, November 16, 1944

We had slept the night before in pup tents several kilometers to the rear, not far from where our heavy artillery kept up intermittent firing. It was like thunder a mile or so away. There we left our duffel bags and full field packs. Now in addition to our weapons, ammo, an entrenching tool (a neatly contrived little combination shovel and pick), a small first-aid bandage packet, and a canteen of water, we carried only combat packs containing clean socks, two or three boxed meals of K-rations, a raincoat, and a canvas bag holding a gas mask. Trucks took us to the foot of the next-to-last ridge before the Taintrux River. Our battalion, the 3d (of the 411th Infantry Regiment), was to attack across the Taintrux at 0900 hours near the village of la Bolle. This was just west of the city of Saint-Dié, in the Vosges Mountains of northeastern France. It was near dawn when we left the trucks in the woods and started along the narrow road toward the climb over the ridge.

It was cold and still almost dark. The little road under trees that we followed for a while on foot had been churned into thick, sticky mud by trucks and jeeps. The muck was over six inches deep in places—step in it and it tried to pull your boot off when you took the next step. I was glad when we left it to move through a field going up to the ridge. But already I envied the now-distant truck and jeep drivers, whose task after we unloaded was only to turn around, get through the mud, and move on back into the safety of the rear area.

There was little talking as we made our way, double file up the ridge. Most were, I suppose, preoccupied as I was with the peculiar mixture of dread and fascination of moving closer with each step to the event for which all the past months of training and indoctrination were supposed to have prepared us. What will this new reality be? Not what will it be “like,” but what will it be? Will I be alive by nightfall? Objectively, one knows that some (how many?) will inevitably be killed or wounded, maybe maimed for life if they survive. Subjectively, everyone probably has to believe it will be someone else who gets it—“not me.” While I refused to doubt the latter, I was nagged by the thought that a more sensible attitude in the circumstances might be “To hell with it; what will happen will happen. I can’t really control it. So if I accept that the worst is likely, I won’t be surprised or disappointed. And anything other than the worst will be a pleasant surprise.”

But will I be able to handle this new reality? Will I be able to function, do what I’m supposed to do—or will I panic and lose my self-control? Or maybe just be paralyzed by fear? Intentions are one thing; the reality might be overwhelming. Can’t know in advance whether it’ll be too much. I surely hope not.

And, of course, I thought about God, in whose Methodist church I had been raised. But this already made me a little uncomfortable. I had no sense of His immediate presence or protection, and I had the idea that He wouldn’t necessarily approve of what we intended to do to whatever Germans we could get in our sights. (I had seen a souvenir of World War I belonging to one of my uncles: a large German army belt buckle, perhaps for a dress uniform. On it were the words *Gott Mit Uns* (God with us). For all I knew, a lot of these present-day German soldiers could

have the same belief.) Did God actually favor one side over the other? And keep it secret, letting humans go through a war like this only to find out by the outcome whose side He had been on? Something was wrong with that idea. I would have to come back to it later and try to figure it out.

My attitude was not skeptical. Actually I wanted to believe, wanted to know that God cared for us and would take steps to protect us. But when I insisted on that thought in my private mind, I knew that nothing much happened—I did not feel any warm rush of certainty to signal that I was on the right track. I knew that a number of the others in the company were more devoutly religious than I was and supposed they were saying prayers. Supposing that it couldn't hurt and might help, I did so too. The only words that came to mind were "Thy will be done. I hope it is Thy Will to protect me."

And that took me back to the fatalistic thought already mentioned above. Somehow I did not think it proper to begin asking God for special favors just because I was getting close to a dangerous situation, much less to offer him a deal ("I'll be good and obey all your rules for the rest of my life if you'll get me through this scrape unharmed"). He'd see right through that and know I was only getting so scared I'd agree to anything. If his will was already set as to what would happen to me (and everyone else), why should I think he'd change his mind? He must be getting applications from hundreds right here and now to make exceptions in their cases. I really did not think I was more deserving than anyone else.

One intently reassuring thought was supplied the day before in the "briefing" our officers had given us when announcing this forthcoming attack. They told us the kraut outfit opposing us was made up of "old men and young boys, whose morale was so low they had to chain their machine gunners to their guns." (As best we could tell later, this was nonsense—probably something they told every new outfit before their first attack. If it were so, those old bastards and children did a lot of damage to us before they were through.) Whatever our thoughts as we topped the ridge, trees providing some cover against our silhouettes, and started down to the woods where we were to take position for the attack, nobody dropped out. A dim dawn had caught up with us somewhere along the way, but it was overcast and gray. And many of the trees here were different. It was not that there were no leaves, even brown ones; it was November. Many did not even have small branches. Others were shattered, broken, or blown over—a blackened, ruined forest. Artillery (theirs? ours?) had worked the area over.

The far side of these woods bordered a meadow through which the Taintrux flowed. (It was just a creek by Alabama standards—hardly a "river.") When we approached that side of the woods we got the word to stop and dig in. About then our artillery opened up from the rear and began to work up and down the edge of the woods across the field on the other side of the river. As green troops, we were much encouraged by this, thinking such a barrage must be devastating the defending krauts, and that those who survived would be traumatized. But as this and much subsequent experience would prove, artillery got few of them and didn't faze the rest. They simply sat in their well-prepared holes and dugouts, letting the barrage run its course, then waited for us to come walking or running into their well-prepared fields of fire.

When we had halted to wait during the artillery preparation, everyone had sought some

kind of cover: a depression, a sizable log, a hole already dug by someone in the outfit we were relieving, which had pulled back from these positions the night before. Mine was a slight depression shielded by a log on the front side. But trying to dig a hole there I found rocky ground and couldn't get more than about a foot down. I decided to try to extend it horizontally to make a slit trench, but didn't have time. For then it began—a series of very big explosions, ear-ringing blasts, very close by.

German artillery was raining into our sector. High-pitched, descending glissandos of whining whistles—a very distinctive and immediately ominous sound that we were to learn were 88mm artillery shells—briefly preceded the sharp and alarmingly loud blasts of shells exploding nearby. I experienced a flash of terror as I crouched in my little hole. They knew exactly where we were! In all the uproar of exploding shells, I thought it must have been a barrage of a hundred or so; later I realized it was probably no more than a couple of dozen.

There was a brief silence—then a cry of “Medic! Medic!” from several dozen yards away, down toward the right. A few other less distinct shouts from farther along the line. My God, people were getting hit already. Who? How bad? I got on my knees to try to see. But not for long. The telltale whining whistle announced another barrage, and I curled up in my hole, my heart pounding. These were close; the sharpness of the blasts hurt my ears. I was overcome by the awareness that my thinking, breathing, feeling, hearing, seeing life could, after all, come to an instant end right here in these miserable woods. This was not supposed to happen to me! It was a powerful sensation, combining terror with anger and frustration. I wanted to stand up and shout, “Wait a minute! Stop! There's been a big mistake!” But I didn't. I just tried to make myself shrink enough to fit in the very bottom of that most inadequate hole in the ground.

Gradually I realized that the explosions were no longer cracking in my immediate vicinity. Johnny Stromberg, my squad leader, called out to ask whether I was OK. I answered, and he went down the list of the remaining three of the squad, Bud Smith, Hugh Brown, Bill Tscherne—all OK.

I had to take a look. Raised my head to where I could see ahead and down to the right where the shelling had moved. About thirty or forty meters away I could see the brief white-red-black—actually more of a dirty white and orange-red—flashes of shells exploding in trees or occasionally on the ground. Almost hypnotized, I began to distinguish mortar bursts in the shelling. Mortars don't whistle or whine as they come in—only a brief whisper of a whoosh just before they hit. The exploding smoke from mortars is smaller but blacker. And fairly close up, their explosion sounds different—sort of like the sound of an automobile hood when it is slammed down hard when you are standing close to it. Only much louder and sharper.

During these interludes, a few shell fragments from tree bursts and bits of stone from ground bursts whistled in my direction, but usually overhead. When the whines and shell bursts moved in my direction, I would duck again in my so inadequate hole, terrified, until they passed over, or slacked off. None exploded within fifteen or twenty yards of me, but I knew that a tree burst even that far away might rain shrapnel down on me. I became conscious of a peculiar sickly-sweet, but slightly acrid odor that seemed to suffuse the air. It was not very strong, but was quite distinctive. It was from the German gunpowder. During each lull, more

calls for a medic, but I could only occasionally see movement. I wondered who in the company were hit. Don't know how long this went on. Time seemed to have slowed.

The shelling had so filled my attention that, only when it slackened did I hear, ahead of us, machine gun and rifle fire, and realized it had been going on for some time. That meant that some of our rifle platoons had gone out into the meadow. The two machine gun squads from our platoon had been assigned to cover the two rifle platoons leading K Company's attack. But the machine gun fire I was now hearing was markedly more rapid than our light .30s could fire. So they must be kraut MGs. What did this mean? Did they have better machine guns? What was happening out there, where I couldn't see for the trees?

Time wore on. I exchanged an occasional word with Walter ("Bud") Smith, the assistant gunner, five or six meters off to my right, or with Johnny Stromberg, the same distance to my left, who would also check on Hugh Brown and Bill Tscherne, the squad's ammunition bearers. But there was little conversation; everyone was probably preoccupied, as I was, trying to absorb and integrate this new reality of sounds and images, and this awareness that some of us were being hit and wounded or killed, as evidenced by the calls for a medic. But who? The question nagged. And why weren't we moving? We should long since have been told to move out, following the rifle platoons into that meadow that we couldn't even see yet.

The intervals between flurries of shelling were now becoming longer. During one, Ray Wick (mortar section leader, a staff sergeant, from Chicago) crawled into view to say something to Johnny Stromberg. I crawled in that direction, to be able to hear what he would say.

"Everything," he explained grimly, "is all fucked up."

"Ah!" said Johnny. Then, without a trace of sarcasm or even irony in his voice, but with a grimness matching that of Wick, "And what else is new?"

"First and Second platoons are pinned down out there," Wick continued, "and our two MG squads are with them. First Platoon is strung out on the far bank of the stream — when anybody moves the kraut MGs open up on them. Second Platoon is near a farmhouse this side of the river, with no cover to let them get to it. Kip (Technical Sergeant Stephen Kipgen, our platoon sergeant) and one of our squads are out there, but they made it to the house. Is everybody OK here?"

"Far as I know," said Johnny. "My squad, anyway."

"So what do we do now?" I ventured. Wick turned a withering gaze on me, and was silent for a few seconds. Then he spoke, only a slight smirk tempering his sarcasm.

"Well, Dorsey, I haven't decided. Maybe I'll call in the Air Corps to come bomb these bastards out. Our artillery didn't quite get all of them. Or maybe I'll just let you lead the company in a banzai charge on those MGs. Unless, that is, you have a better idea." The tension was broken, and Johnny and I managed a weak laugh.

"How many out there have been hit?" Johnny asked.

"Jeez, who knows?" said Wick. "A lot, to judge from all the calls for medics out there."

We learned later that the total was around 32, nine or ten of these being killed. The first casualty in our platoon was a 17-year-old, Bill Leverett, from Georgia. He had lied about his age when he enlisted, and had joined the company just before we left Texas on the way to ship over.

He was an ammo bearer in one of the machine gun squads that went into the meadow. A machine gun bullet got him in the chest, and Kip pulled him to the “safe” side of the farmhouse out there. Kip tore open his jacket and pushed a wad of bandage from his first aid packet over the bloody hole. The kid said nothing—he just died.

Phil Villareal, one of the ammo bearers in another of the mortar squads near us in the woods was also evacuated. He’d taken a piece of artillery or mortar shrapnel in the shoulder, but wasn’t hurt very seriously. For the first time, I felt a tinge of that envy so many (if not all) of us felt for those who were legitimately out of it with a serious wound that was not permanently disabling or disfiguring. But Phil rejoined the platoon after a month or so in a field hospital. His was not a million-dollar wound—one meeting those same criteria, but just serious enough to get you sent back to the States.

Afternoon came and slowly passed, and we were still stuck. Not much shooting now, only occasional eruptions from one of those fast-firing kraut MGs. Once in a while, a few 88s came in, but not in our immediate sector. From a good bit farther down to the right, we could sometimes hear more action. Companies I and L were down in that direction, but we could not tell from the sound whether either of them had gotten across the Taintrux.

We were able to move around a bit, and by late afternoon I had found a much better hole, two-man size, and was sharing it with Bill Tscherne. The hole was one that had been dug by someone in the outfit we had replaced.

Johnny Stromberg came along with word that we’d be spending the night here. Where possible we were to pair up, preferably in just such two-man holes as ours, so one man could be awake at all times. He told me to join him in a nearby one that he had been in by himself, and got Bud Smith to pair with Tscherne. This would leave Hugh to pair with the odd man in the nearest of the two other squads.

Johnny and I each opened up one of our K-rations: a small tin of processed meat, another one of yellow cheese, three or four cellophane-wrapped crackers, and some powder to mix with water and make lemon juice, a little box with four cigarettes, a small folder of matches, and several pieces of folded toilet paper—olive drab in color. In truth, the meat, cheese, and crackers were not all that bad—if you were hungry, and didn’t have to make too many meals in a row of them. We had both skipped lunch—forgot all about it while the adrenalin was flowing.

The hole we were in was a nice one. It was about five-by-two feet at the surface, and about five feet deep, with ledges to sit (or stand) on at each end at the bottom. A further hole in the center, for feet, went down another foot at the bottom. With trees nearby, roots had had to be chopped through to get it as deep as it was. Dirt from it had been packed at the surface along one long side and at both ends for extra protection, leaving the side facing forward (toward the edge of the woods and the field) clear for firing. The hole would be safe from artillery and mortars except for a tree burst directly overhead. Johnny and I regretted that we had not had time to scout the area for holes before the shelling had started in the morning, already so long ago.

After our supper, we lit cigarettes and, for the first time all day, talked a bit about things other than the immediate situation. Sitting still in the dark for a time, with our feet in the damp

mud at the bottom of the hole, we became more conscious of the cold, which would only become more so through the night. Already we speculated hopefully about how long the war would last, why the Germans continued to fight when they were being so heavily pressed on the western front by the Allies and in the east by the Russians—didn't they realize they were headed inevitably for a total defeat? Didn't they want to live? Maybe they would see the light when we got to the boundary of Germany, which couldn't be many weeks away.

And we began to trace the sequence of events in our not-all-that-long military careers that had brought us to this particular hole in the ground, rather than to some safe assignment in the rear echelon. It was odd that he'd been my squad leader since March, and we'd never talked about this. Johnny, from the Detroit area, had been in since 1942, more than a year longer than I had. His parents were Norwegian. He saw his situation as the luck of the draw—it was just the way things had worked out for him, and nothing could be done about it, so he accepted it.

I was less able to blame fate, or bad luck, for the truth was that at several times since entering the Army, I could have chosen or allowed myself to be transferred to some branch other than the infantry, or probably could have wangled more of a rear echelon infantry assignment than a rifle company. But instead I had taken the not very mature position that if I were going to be in the armed services during the war, then I might as well be in a part of it where the real action was going to occur.

I had hoped to be a fighter or bomber pilot in the Air Corps, but, as I had feared, my eyes were not good enough. So second choice was the infantry, where at least I had the advantage of some knowledge of drill and tactics from four years of Junior R.O.T.C. in high school. So when inducted, I went by request to infantry basic training. (About two months into basic, my CO asked if I would take a transfer to Officer Candidate School and come out as a second lieutenant. By then I had a bit of experience with such ninety-day wonders and knew that I did not want to associate with such people. Many were thugs, others just little pissants, all designated "gentlemen" by Act of Congress, and I knew that few merited the designation. In the enlisted ranks, at least there was less pretense on that score. By then I had thoroughly cast my lot with the enlisted ranks, the victims of these phoneys and fakers.)

My basic view about what to do in the armed forces came from a no doubt exaggerated (and only now was it beginning to dawn on me, possibly a less than completely sane) sense of self-worth that required that I be willing to go the entire way if I were to be involved at all. If I should come to regret it, by now there was nothing that could be done about it. At least that was the way I understood it then. But I was unwilling to say much of this to Johnny, or any of my friends in the platoon. They might not believe me, or they might think I was just dumber—or crazier—than I might have seemed otherwise.

Then we began to hear people walking, not very fast, along what must have been a path that passed twenty or thirty feet away and went toward the rear. From the muffled, and occasionally not so muffled, noises, we could hear that they were medics and others bearing stretchers on which were those from up ahead who had been wounded or killed. We could hear the heavy breathing of the stretcher bearers, and an occasional curse from a stumble. Some of the wounded moaned or cried as they went by. One in particular was howling with pain and rage,

the intervals between howls filled with screamed profanities and obscenities. We recognized the voice immediately as that of Red Long, who for a time in Texas had been in the machine gun section. He was a burly and tough redhead from Oklahoma, who had entertained us with tales of his bootlegging past. One of his feet was almost torn off by a chunk of shrapnel. We never saw him again; he later wrote someone who passed the word that the lower leg had had to be amputated. Definitely not a million-dollar wound. But it did get him back to the States and, in time, a discharge.

Eventually, after all that procession was over, Johnny said we'd better begin to get some sleep. He left the hole to check on the other three in the squad, and with the two other squad leaders. When he returned, he offered to take the first two-hour turn of staying awake and on his feet. My Swiss watch, a high school graduation gift from my parents, had fluorescent numerals and hands, so I let him have it to measure the time.

I was conscious of great fatigue. The day had not been all that hard, physically. All the tension and stress must have multiplied the normal tiredness. I thought I had barely gotten to sleep when Johnny shook my shoulder to tell me the two hours were up and it was my turn to stand and keep eyes and ears open. It was not hard to stay awake and keep my head up to try to see anything that might be moving, that first time. But the time dragged, and I was looking at my watch every four or five minutes the last half hour. On my next turn, I had to struggle to stay awake. I longed for my seat at the bottom of the hole, where I could lean my head against the side and relax. The third turn came early—gray dawn was beginning, and it was time for everyone to be awake and ready. I remember a small sense of relief that after the first 24 hours, I was still there, still OK. And so were most of the others.

But the relief was brief. The "first day" was yesterday already, and we had made no progress, no advance. Now another day was ahead, and after that, how many others? We were all in "for the duration" of the war or of a possibly short life . . . or until one of those million-dollar wounds . . . but maybe it would just be a bad, permanently painful, and disabling wound. The new day was not exactly cheering.

November 17, 1944

Nothing, however, seemed to be happening. I had feared that daylight would bring more shelling, but all stayed quiet. Johnny and I got out of the hole to relieve ourselves, then he went off checking on the others. I began to look cautiously around the area a bit.

Thirty or forty yards away, approaching a small clearing that had not been visible the day before, I became aware of a slight odor. It was mainly the lingering trace of the acrid yet sweetish smoke from yesterday's shell bursts, but now it was a little different. There was an overtone, just a suggestion blended in, of something else. The overall effect was somehow foreboding, ominous. A few more steps, and I froze. Almost in the middle of the clearing lay a dead German soldier. He was on his back, arms flung wide, with one leg extended, the other bent at the knee and the foot almost touching his other knee. Shocked, I started to turn away. I felt embarrassed, as if I had accidentally violated a privacy—as if I had stumbled into someone's presence while he was tending to some private task. But a thought halted me: "I need to get used to seeing such . . . can't afford to be shocked . . . could be distracting in the future when I'll need a cool head, self-control." So I turned back to stare at him and approached to just a few feet away.

In my entire life, I had seen but one human corpse. That was a childhood friend of about six, a playmate who lived across the street. She had died after a brief illness, the name or cause of which I did not know. My mother had taken me across to call upon the bereft parents. In the dining room, from which the table had been removed, she lay on a bench against the wall. We took seats in chairs, and my mother began speaking to the parents in a low voice—words of grief and sympathy which I heard only indistinctly. I was trying to avoid staring at my friend, feeling that it was somehow improper for her to be put on display like that, feeling sorrow but also embarrassment for her. But I could not refrain from furtive glances in her direction, glances that were slow enough for me to see that she looked almost too natural, dressed in her Sunday best: a white dress with a few bright pink ribbons, white socks and shiny little black shoes. Her face was a normal color, lips slightly colored but normal; not a hair on her head out of place. I knew nothing of the undertaker's arts—she was as if asleep. I looked closely at her chest to see whether it might not move as she breathed in her sleep. I even imagined that I saw this, and had an impulse to tell them the good news. But I realized that this was grown-up business, that the parents probably knew better than I did and could not have made such a terrible mistake. I said not a word, and was very relieved when time came to leave.

The man sprawled before me now was quite different. His eyes were closed but his mouth was open, teeth visible. The striking thing to me was the very grey pallor of his skin—almost as grey as the uniform he wore. Clean-shaven, no stubble. Light, not quite blond hair. His posture, color, and expression spoke of nothing but sudden and violent death. He had been a handsome enough man, large and muscular from the look of his head, throat, wrists and hands. Probably in his mid-thirties. He was wearing an overcoat which was unbuttoned and thrown open. He must have been there for several days (long enough to begin decaying?) even in this cold but

not yet freezing weather.

But someone, presumably from the outfit we had replaced, had gone through his pockets, for their contents were scattered about him. I did not like that; such scavenging was for buzzards and hyenas. Among these things were a couple of photo snapshots. Leaning over, I could see a family group in one and a pair of children in another. For a moment my image of him wavered from that of a lifeless object to that of a recently living person. But I forced myself to stare him back into the image of a mere object of curious observation, one for which I felt no more embarrassment, neither sympathy nor revulsion—complete disinterest in his life or death. He meant nothing other than one less of them to be shooting at us.

I pulled my eyes away, looked around. Not many feet away, partly hidden by a log, I was half-startled to see another corpse. This one was on his side, facing away from me. I had no desire to examine him more closely—instead was chagrined that I hadn't looked over the whole clearing more closely before stepping into it. "Don't move into a situation before checking it out" was this one's lesson for me. This ain't training or playing games anymore. Thanks, buddy.

"Dorsey! What the fuck are you doing over there?" Startled again, this time by the loud voice of a sergeant from Third Platoon.

"Looking," I answered.

"Looking . . . for souvenirs? You keep away from them stiffs!"

"I am not a fucking ghoul," I responded, much irritated.

"WHAT?"

"I said I'm leaving. Just checking the scene out."

I turned, a trifle depressed, and headed back toward the hole. The sergeant moved on.

At the hole, Stromberg was sitting on its edge, feet hanging in. He was opening a K-ration, and I sat down to do the same.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing much," I said. "Coupla dead krauts over there."

"Yeah. I seen 'em. Musta been there two, three days." He took a swallow from his canteen cup and made a face. "Damn this Nescafé in cold water. Can't even get it all dissolved."

I nodded, chewing on a piece of canned yellow cheese on a cracker. But my mind was still on what I'd seen. No wound or dried blood had been visible. Must have taken a piece of shrapnel in the back. No sign of any combat equipment, and he did look a little too neat and clean to be a line infantryman. That made it less likely he'd been hit by rifle or machine gun fire. Probably a mortar; he'd have heard any artillery coming in and hit the ground face down. And that odor—post-explosion smell, tinged with that of a decaying body: an appropriate combination. I was never to smell the former again without its association with death.

Johnny told me (he'd already passed the word to the others) that one of the other companies in the battalion had gotten across the valley after all, late yesterday. We'd be moving out soon. He also said he'd seen Kipgen, who told him about Leverette. And one of the casualties yesterday had been Technical Sergeant Morgan, an older regular Army career man who was detested by most of those in the First Platoon, of which he was the platoon sergeant. A natural bully, he justified his sadistic tactics during training on the grounds that he was trying

to “toughen the men up” for the harsh reality they’d have to face in combat. But Morgan had not been killed or wounded yesterday. Instead, he’d blown his stack, cracked up. When Kip saw him, he was stumbling around in a daze, without rifle or helmet, sobbing. A medic eventually led him to the rear, and we didn’t see him again. And as time went on, we could not help noticing that most such “super-tough” old regulars cracked under the strain.

Soon the word came to get ready to move out. But not before I’d found a pair of grey German mittens that seemed relatively new, lying together almost under a nearby log. I put them in my pack to use when my GI woolen gloves wore out. Mine already had a few holes from cigarette burns.

This time, instead of skirmish formation, we moved out across the now peaceful meadow in a double file. When we reached the small stream, which I’d have called a creek rather than a river back home, we were able to cross on stones or in shallow water without getting very wet. But a number, including me, managed to take at least one step in water over the top of our boots and get a soggy sock to walk in for the rest of the day.

Across the valley, we entered another woods, and passed some of the dugouts with heavy logs, earth, and camouflage covering them, from which the kraut MGs and riflemen had been firing yesterday. They looked well-built and protected from artillery, which had damaged most of the trees on the edge of the woods. The krauts must have made an orderly withdrawal during the night and were probably digging in somewhere ahead to wait for us again.

Then came a long climb up what seemed at first only a small wooded mountain ridge. It was steep in places, and our path zigzagged upward, sometimes on a trail and sometimes through underbrush and trees. Much of it was not steep, but always the incline was upward. It was slow going, and every hour a halt was called for a ten-minute rest. Some in the file up ahead began lightening the load—we began to see gas mask kits that had been dropped along the way. It was particularly hard on our ammo bearers, two per squad, each of whom carried a sandwich-style front-and-back-hanging bag holding 12 three-pound mortar rounds, in addition to his combat pack and weapon (a .30 caliber carbine).

As gunner, I carried the mortar barrel and bipod, totaling only 29 pounds, and the assistant gunner, Bud Smith, carried the almost 13-pound base plate and six rounds of ammunition. He and I were armed with .45 caliber pistols. The three mortar squad leaders got off lightest, each carrying only the mortar sight and light cleaning equipment for the gun and a carbine. They often helped their gun crew by carrying the base plate, so that gunner and assistant gunner could separate the tube and bipod, each taking one or the other. After two or three hours, Ray Wick, section leader, told each ammo bearer to dump a couple of rounds, which brought their loads down closer to mine and Bud’s. Sometime later, that day or another, we all dumped the clumsy gas mask bags, supposing (and gambling) that we wouldn’t need them. The same was eventually done by everyone; I wondered later whatever became of the hundreds of thousands of gas masks that littered the trails of fresh U.S. infantry divisions in Europe.

Somewhere along the side of a narrow, rutted road, we passed a dead GI. He was lying face down, over his rifle, as if he’d been hit while running forward, although one of his legs

stuck out at an unusual angle.

I noticed the helmets of those ahead of me in the double column; all heads turned to stare at him as we passed. No one spoke. And I was aware that my own feeling was different from that of the morning, when I'd stared at the dead German. This one was one of us—could be any one of us. Me. Later today, or tomorrow, any one of us might be lying just like that, with a passing column of troops looking down, saying nothing as they passed. The truth of our situation sunk in, more than it had last night as the dead and wounded were being carried out on stretchers near our hole.

But was I dreaming? We'd heard no shooting, no mortars or artillery coming in. Already past him, I glanced back at the body to confirm that it was there, that this was no dream. It was, but how could it be? Maybe a patrol from the outfit we'd relieved yesterday had gotten that far behind the kraut line and had run into trouble. We never heard an explanation. But others had been as chilled by the sight as I had. I had even forgotten my cool resolve of the morning to get accustomed to such things, so that they would not rattle me in the future.

At higher levels, there was some snow on the ground in places, and in the trees. There were a lot of evergreens. And we passed a few indications of human occupancy—sawed logs, about three to six inches in diameter, stacked in cords between trees in the forest. It was reassuring, pleasant, to picture civilians, sawing or chopping wood there with no thought of artillery and machine guns. It only dawned on me later that the wood could well have been cut to cover kraut holes and bunkers.

Finally we passed over the ridge and started down. This was a relief—no more climbing. Soon, however, the experience brought to mind what I'd learned in infantry basic training in the foothills of the Appalachians near Fort McClellan, Alabama. Going downhill carrying a load can be as tiring as climbing. Different muscles are put to work and begin to ache. I'd forgotten all about this in training on the Texas plains of Camp Howze. The ten-minute breaks every hour were even more welcome than they had been in the morning.

Late in the afternoon we came out close to the bottom of the valley on a narrow unpaved road, rutted by muddy wagon tracks. It was only one lane in width, with tall trees growing close enough to it to make it seem tunnel-like in places. But before long, we halted. Soon, everyone was moving off each side to sit down or stretch out, with no word of how long we might be there.

I must have dozed, but was snapped out of it quickly when Johnny Stromberg shook me, saying, "Cap'n Himic wants to see you at the head of the column—on the double." Astonished, I passed the mortar tube to Bud Smith and went trotting along past the rifle platoons. What had I done—or not done? Why did Himic, the company commander, want me? I hadn't seen him today—or yesterday, for that matter. I was totally mystified. And nervous, as I approached him in a little group of officers and noncoms.

He started to speak to me before I came to a full stop. "Dorsey, you're going to be my interpreter. I've got a job for you."

“Yes, sir,” I said with a flood of relief and a flash of remembrance. Back in the bivouac outside of Marseilles, First Sergeant Scruggs had inquired of the whole assembled company one day whether anyone spoke French. No hands went up. “Well, didn’t any of you bastards study any French?” Halfheartedly, on the basis of my two years of high-school French, I had put up a hand. I knew I was the only one in Weapons Platoon who had admitted this, but thought there were at least a couple of others in the whole company who had. Scruggs had taken my name, and that was the last I’d heard about it—until now.

The truth was that I had spent a good bit of time on the troopship crossing the Atlantic in serious study of the Army’s French phrasebook that had been passed out to each of us after we got on board. I’d been pleased with the news that we were going to France rather than to Italy—or anywhere else—and since landing, I had taken every opportunity to try to strike up conversations with any French people I’d encountered. One thing that I knew painfully well was that after I tried to say something in French, it was rare that I could comprehend much of the response—I was far from any conversational ability in the language. The sentence which I knew better than any other was “*Priez de parler très lentement et clairement—je ne parle pas bien le français*” (Please speak very slowly and clearly—I don’t speak French well). So as Himic’s word “interpreter” sunk in, I gulped. Tried to say that I didn’t actually speak the language very well at all, but he wasn’t listening; he’d already started telling me what I was going to do.

That was, in brief, that I was to go with the executive officer (Himic’s second-in-command, First Lieutenant Edward Bray) to a house at the edge of a village only forty or fifty meters away—which I now noticed through the trees for the first time—and tell the occupants the whole company was going to pass through the house in groups of fifteen or twenty at a time to dry our wet socks at their stove. Bray, who had at one time back in Texas been leader of the Weapons Platoon, started off toward the house, and I followed. Apparently, he and Himic had satisfied themselves that there were no German troops in the immediate area.

When we got to the door, Bray knocked, then stepped back, saying “OK, it’s your show, Dorsey. Tell ‘em.”

The door opened a few inches, and flickering lantern light showed the face of a middle-aged woman. “*Nous sommes américains*” (We are Americans), I tried. It worked. The door swung open, we were invited inside, where we were surrounded by several more people who all wanted to shake our hands, all smiling and talking rapidly. There were three or four women and a couple of older men. I went through my routine of saying, slowly, that I could neither speak nor understand French very well, and that they would have to speak very slowly and simply to me. Then I told them that there were about a hundred and fifty of us, that many of us had very wet socks, and that we would be very grateful if they would allow us to come in a dozen or fifteen at a time and dry our wet socks. All this required a number of tries and restarts and much gesturing, pointing to the fireplace, etc.

When they understood, they were all smiles and making sounds of welcome. By then they had us sitting at a table and were pushing large cups of light brown, steaming *café-au-lait* toward us. Bray said something about not having time for this, but I suggested that it might not

be a good idea to reject this part of their hospitality, since they were so willing to put up with the inconveniences involved in letting the whole company pass through to dry socks. He looked at me with a crooked grin and raised eyebrows, signaling that he was aware that we both knew that, in Himic's mind, we were not requesting a favor but were instead doing them the favor of telling them in advance what we were going to do. But he then shrugged, turned back to his cup of café-au-lait, said "Merci" to our hosts, and began to drink. I followed his example and discovered that this was not real coffee, but some kind of ersatz brew, made drinkable by the larger quantity of real milk with which it was mixed and heated. These people probably had not had real coffee for several years. On balance, this substitute was not all that bad, if, when drinking it, one did not think of it as would-be coffee.

The warmth and pleasantness of the situation more than made up for any shortcoming of the refreshment.

Bray and I returned to the company and reported to Himic. The dry-out began, but before much time passed other houses were opened up so that the whole operation did not take as much time as otherwise would have been required. Himic told me to stick close by him, in case he needed an interpreter again. Fortunately, a young Frenchman turned up not long afterward who spoke English notably better than I spoke French. Himic was willing to accept him as an interpreter, but told me to stick around anyway, "to listen and make sure he gets everything right."

Himic set up the company command post in a nearby house, which delighted me with the prospect of sleeping indoors—the first such night since arriving in France. The house was far from elaborate, and was furnished simply, even rustically. But the room was warm, and that made it palatial as far as I was concerned. Whether the remainder of the company would also be told to find and arrange indoor billets, I did not know. By that time, I was so tired and sleepy that I could concentrate only on finding a space to lie down where I would not be stumbled over nor stepped on; this turned out to be under a table that stretched along one wall. As I was unbuckling my combat pack and belt with pistol, ammunition, canteen, etc., the Frenchman who spoke English sat on the floor next to me. We chatted for a while. His name was Marcel Godart, and he said he was with a local unit of the F.F.I.—French Forces of the Interior, a name adopted by many segments of the underground opposition to the German occupation. I told him that I hoped he would tell me more about that the next day, then apologized for my need to get some sleep. In a very short time, I was asleep.

Saulcy to Barr, November 22–24

[draft]

The day did not start very well. We were already apprehensive. Kipgen had come back the night before from a meeting at Company CP with the scoop that we'd be taking part in another large attack. The 409th and 410th (the two other regiments in the 103d Division) had moved into the city of Saint-Dié, thereby completing the division's mission that had begun on the 16th. Now, during the night, the 36th Division on our right flank would start an attack across the Meurthe River, upriver from the village of Saulcy. Early in the morning we, the 411th, would move around to the right, but still to the left of the 36th, and attack Saulcy itself.

After the usual (by now routine) kraut shelling around dusk, which we sweated out in our holes, we ate what little K and C rations we had to share among us. Still had not been resupplied with rations, and went to "bed" hungry again. But they had gotten a new item of equipment to us: light sleeping bags. These were bags made of one thickness of Army blanket, encased in light, water-resistant canvas, with a long zipper down the front and a hole, for the face, below a closed and rounded top for the head, with enough space there to allow wearing a helmet while sleeping. Since they were not much larger than the body, they were confining and a bit awkward to sleep in, but were a considerable improvement on trying to wrap a single blanket around the body, with a raincoat spread underneath, slumped in a cold and sometimes muddy hole. The new bags could be rolled up tight and strapped onto our combat packs.

Bud Smith and I had slightly enlarged our two-man hole, so that while one of us stood (with head projecting above ground level), the other could rest or sleep in a curled-up position at the bottom. Early in the morning, well before light, I had finished one of my two-hour watches and was getting into my sack to sleep. Bud, standing, was finishing up the cigarette he had lit shortly after I woke him. I decided to have one more weed myself, and Bud lit one for me from his. I had a sudden sensation of claustrophobia, and jerked upright. My head hit his hand with the freshly lit cigarette, and a bit of hot ash fell into my right eye.

The eye would not stop hurting and watering, and I could not sleep. At dawn I left to go in search of the medic's hole, which I finally found. He had no such thing as eye ointment, but he dampened a rolled-up strip of bandage and tied it around my head. It didn't do much good. Asked him whether they would have anything better at the battalion aid station, but he said he doubted it. I wanted to try them anyway, and ran into Kip as I made my way back toward my hole. He said there would not be enough time before we moved out for me to get there and back; I'd just have to lump it until it got better. I was not hopeful that that would be anytime soon. It ached dully, in between the sharp-needle effect when my eyeball moved.

The problem was that this was my right eye—my "good" eye. It measured about 20/30 for my glasses prescription; the left eye was much more myopic, something like 20/60 or 20/70. Both were corrected to 20/20 with glasses, but I didn't always wear them. Now I couldn't, because of the bandage. After a time, I took it off so that I could wear the glasses and see reasonably well with the left eye, trying to keep the right eye closed most of the time.

As usual, things didn't happen on schedule, the Army's basic pattern for almost every action being "hurry up and wait." Back at the hole, Bud and I mixed a canteen cup of cold instant coffee; one of us had saved a little packet of the Nescafé powder from a previous ration. It was a cold and overcast day, and drizzle began. This continued intermittently through the morning and part of the afternoon. Soggy slogging.

We finally moved out about mid-morning—had to shift around to the right about four kilometers. It went slowly—start and stop, wait, start and stop. Meanwhile, we could hear the artillery preparation (ours) for the attack we were to make.

Finally we came to the edge of a woods—large trees, not too close together—from which we could look out over a plain, about a thousand meters or so (almost two-thirds of a mile). Beyond it, a ridge ran from left to right. We could see the little town, Saulcy, at the base of what must have been a gap in the ridge, with some of the buildings spread up its slope a bit. The river must go through that gap, I thought, although we couldn't see the gap that clearly from our angle of view. Some of our artillery was going into the village, but was also ranging back and forth along the foot of the ridge and back up on it, on both sides of the town, where the krauts must have been dug in.

We had a long wait, but evidently no one had expected it to be so long, for we didn't get any word to dig in. So we remained tense, waiting for the attack across the plain to begin. It did not get any warmer, and the drizzle came and went. The eye continued to hurt and was less uncomfortable only when I could keep both eyes closed and still.

Then, when the drizzle let up and the sky was a bit clearer, although still dull grey, a couple of Air Corps P-47 fighter-bombers, or "Jugs," as they were sometimes called because of their thick, heavy bodies (I knew this only because my cousin Ike Dorsey, based in England for a year or more, had until recently piloted one of them), put in an appearance. They flew back and forth, and fairly low along the ridge, sometimes on our side of it and sometimes on the far side, occasionally dumping in a bomb. Then they'd go away, and after a while, come back and repeat the exercise. They were not running into any anti-aircraft artillery ("ack-ack") fire, as far as we could tell. Someone speculated that either there were some unusually juicy targets there or that this was a particularly important attack, or maybe both. We did hope that their runs along the far side of the ridge were working over kraut artillery, remembering how seemingly ineffective our artillery had been on that score on our first day in combat along the Taintrux.

After the planes left, however, the kraut artillery began to come in on our edge of the woods, sending those of us who hadn't already found any toward whatever cover might be near. Kenneth (Bud) Brown—yes, another "Bud," this one the gunner in Shafer's squad—and I both went for a shallow ditch near a big tree, close to the edge of the woods. We heard two or three cries of "Medic!" after the first batch of shells. I remember noticing afterward how reflexively instantaneous our dives for cover had been. As inadequate as the little ditch was, we'd been into it at the first whining sound of the incoming shells and were flat on the bottom well before the first explosions. We'd have been in trouble if a shell had hit the branches of the tree hanging over us. But, otherwise, it was as good a place as any near enough to reach on such short notice.

After a pause, another barrage came in. It is hard to describe the fear as one listens to that downward-sliding high-pitched whine—a perfect glissando—or several at once, each of a different pitch, according to how far along its trajectory each shell is. When the pitch descends below a certain level just before the blast, it is a “safe” one, because it is not hitting in one’s immediate vicinity—fifteen or twenty meters, or even less, if you have any kind of a ditch or depression in which to take cover. The closer by they hit, even the memory of the whine seems to be blotted out by the force of the explosion. A few really close blasts would set up a ringing in my ears that blotted out all other sound for a few seconds or more afterward. But the beginning of each whine, whether alone or a second or two after another was first detected, immediately tightens the tension of terror—would this be the one that would get me? Absolutely nothing to do but wait and see—or feel—or not see or feel, should this be the one.

Many times, then and later, I wondered how long that degree of stress could be tolerated before my mind would snap and I’d lose control of myself. We’d already seen that, for some, the time was not long. I hoped (later, when I had time to think about it with a little more detachment), that I could begin to get accustomed to it, be less terrorized by it, for if I’d learned anything by now, it was that the worst thing would be to lose control of myself. Those who did, who jumped up screaming and stumbling or dashing around, usually got caught in the next pattern of shells to come in. Or the loss of control could be paralyzing, so that one could not get up and move fast when that turned out to be the necessary thing to do.

Finally it was quiet in our immediate sector again and slowly we began to relax. Bud and I took out our entrenching tools and deepened our ditch a bit—didn’t make a real hole, but one that would offer more protection if they shelled us here again. Then, as we rested and smoked, Bud took out a couple of letters from girls at home, and wondered out loud if it wouldn’t help both of us get our minds off the immediate situation if he read them to me. I nodded, so he started reading one of them. It was fairly vacuous and I remember nothing at all about it. She was, Bud explained, a coed at Purdue or Notre Dame (I think), where he had started before being drafted and where he intended to return after the war. Bud, from Muncie, Indiana, was a large, athletic type, probably considered handsome by women. I didn’t know him well and thought of him as a bit self-centered, with a shade of insensitivity, even arrogance, in his attitude. But in those circumstances, I felt a certain warmth toward him for wanting to share something of his life to help rest both our minds. For a short time, I forgot about my aching eye and impaired vision.

However, this did not last, for we finally got the word we’d been awaiting: get ready to move out onto the plain to attack and take Saulcy. This time K Company was leading, along with I or L on our right flank. Two of our rifle platoons started out abreast but separated, in skirmish formation, followed by Weapons, then the remaining rifle platoon in reserve. Nothing happened as we walked forward in staggered lines, eight or ten meters between each man. Once out on the plain, the whole company covered a front of perhaps sixty-five or seventy meters, and we stretched about 120 meters or so from front to rear. With the Weapons Platoon in the middle, that put the point riflemen about sixty meters ahead of me.

Once we were all out on the plain, however, and another company on our right flank (and

another battalion to the right of them) the krauts opened up. First was the artillery, with shells falling mostly within our loosely-structured formation. Everyone, hearing a batch coming in, would hit the ground until a few seconds after the explosions, then get up and run forward, hunched over, until the incoming whines announced another, then dive to ground again. My field of vision was not wide, but almost each time a shell hit ahead of me, not everyone who had gone down got back up. Some were still as I ran past them; some were moving on the ground, but obviously hit. A few were screaming. I had a glimpse of one company medic, stripping out bandage and trying to stop bleeding and bind up wounds. I kept moving, trying to keep the distance between Johnny Stromberg ahead of me and Bud Smith behind me about the same.

Ahead of me about thirty meters and a bit to the left, I saw a rifleman as he jumped up and started forward. Evidently he didn't hear the shell that I heard, for as I started down I saw him leaping up just as a shell-blast occurred precisely where his head was. Not many seconds later, when I had gotten up and rushed past where he'd fallen, I saw his headless body gushing blood from where his neck and part of his upper trunk had been. Later I learned that this had been a fellow named Timmins (?), a rifleman whom I knew only slightly. Even with all that much artillery falling, it's rare for anyone to take a direct hit. Shortly afterward, as we neared what I thought was about mid-point in the plain, a rifleman up ahead jumped up after another shell had hit not far from him and ran screaming crazily off to the left, without helmet or rifle. Someone tackled him and held him down, I suppose until a medic got there with a shot of something to sedate him. This was Pederson, a nice-looking guy about my age, whom I did know slightly. He had, as we said, "blown his top" and was eventually carried away; he was not returned to the company.

The krauts must have abandoned their positions on the near edge of the village, for there was no machine gun or rifle fire coming our way, only artillery. But they were still in the village, with at least artillery and mortar observers left in higher houses to direct the fire. For now mortar shells, arriving with very little advance warning, began to fall among us. By then, we were all breathing pretty heavily, running more slowly with the various loads we carried, down, wait for the blast, get up and run, down with another blast that hadn't announced itself, up and run, pretty well covered with mud by now. The mortar tube and bipod were growing heavier; I wanted to drop them. I tried to concentrate on closing my eyes to rest them as I went down each time, and sometimes to keep the right eye closed for brief moments as I moved. More than once on the ground I didn't want to get up, didn't think I could. Then I'd struggle up and try to close the increased gap with Johnny Stromberg ahead.

A farmhouse, still some distance from the village and standing alone to the left as we passed, took a couple of 88s through the already half-wrecked roof. A woman appeared screaming at the door, blood running down her forehead. "Docteur américain! Docteur américain—c'est mon enfant, mon bébé . . ." I didn't know what to do—wanted to stop, but knew I couldn't. I yelled as loud as I could for a medic to go to the house, but in the general uproar and confusion I don't know whether I was heard. I ran on, didn't look back.

The rifle platoons had finally reached and entered the village. Luckily, they didn't run into

any resistance in the first houses, otherwise the rest of us would have been held up in the open before getting to the cover of buildings. I lost sight of Johnny ahead, thought he'd cut slightly to the left to get the cover of the nearest house, so I ran that way too. Shells were still following our advance, coming in fast, and a couple exploded on the roofs of nearby houses. When I got up, to my considerable surprise I saw Brigadier General Pierce getting off the ground, looking as scared as the rest of us—but not nearly as muddy or tired. Pierce was second-in-command of the division, and that was the closest I'd ever been to him. Briefly, I wondered what the hell he was doing in a place like this and how he'd gotten here. I was sure he hadn't come with our company, so he must have come with the other attacking rifle company in our battalion—or maybe with the other attacking battalion, and they must have gotten to the village before we did.

But that was a brief moment, just a snapshot image, for as I ran around a shed attached to the house I heard a couple or three more 88 shells coming in, and these were going to be very close. I dove, and just as I hit, one of the shells exploded in the tiles of the house roof ten or fifteen feet from me. The edge of the roof deflected the fragments over my head.

Lying there for a number of seconds, I realized that I had hit the ground, not in nice clean mud, but in a manure bed about six or eight inches deep. Alsatian farmyards often had such piles, retained by planks in an area eight or ten feet square, to use as fertilizer. So when I did get up, I was covered with a nice mixture of pig shit, cow shit, and possibly horse shit. But I did not much mind. I was much more relieved to have been that close to the wall of the building when that shell hit above.

But I'd lost contact with Johnny, and moved ahead through a covered area that looked as if it opened on a street. Just as I got close to the opening, Kip ducked in—we almost collided. He recoiled, then chuckled slightly. "Jeez, kid, what happened? Krauts get you with a turd bomb?" I told him briefly about the manure pile. Then he asked about the eye. I told him it was still pretty rough. "Yep," he said. "You must be half-blind, takin' dives in big shit piles. Just stick close—but not too close to me—'til that crap dries. You seen Totoro anywhere?"

I hadn't. Totoro was a machine gun ammo bearer, a buddy of Glenn Wainwright, Red Shedd, and myself. They knew he'd made it into the village, but had not been seen since. (It turned out that Totoro had decided he'd had enough, and hid out in one of the houses, waiting until we'd passed on. Then he went over the hill.) I asked where Stromberg was and learned he was across the street, taking cover along a low wall. I looked out, spotted him, Bud Smith, and Hugh Brown, and ran across, becoming aware that no shells had come in since those that sent me into the manure. The others of the mortar section were all there. I had been the only one to lose the way and go around the left side of the house. I took some more wisecracks about my innovation in camouflage and was given lots of room by all. (I was already accustomed enough to the odor that it didn't bother me very much.)

We stayed close to that wall for over an hour, most of the time just lying there, waiting. I used part of the time to scrape off as much of the dung from my clothing and equipment as I could, using the blade of my large hunting-type knife. (This was a knife issued to those of us who, not carrying an M1 rifle, did not have a bayonet on our belts.) Our only activity was

finding places where we set up the three 60mm mortars for firing. There was sporadic rifle fire coming from the other side of town, but we were never given a target. And only occasional mortar shells came our way—no more 88s, so the krauts must have folded them up and moved them back to wherever their fallback position was.

An aid station was set up in a house back along the street, on the other side. Loaded stretcher bearers sometimes came in from up ahead of us. I remember thinking how nice it would be if the company were to move out and just forget to let the mortar section know—just leave us back here in the rear echelon. What the hell, they might as well for all the good we were in this attack.

By then it was late afternoon. No more drizzle, but it was getting colder again, and the clothes, damp from sweat and mud (and, for me, the manure, which no doubt also contained a certain proportion of piss from the same animals, I reflected) helped the cold to penetrate. I was able to keep my eyes closed and still for minutes at a time, trying to doze. But the ache continued as well as the sharper pain when the right eye moved. And my nose was running.

Shortly after dark had fallen, we finally got the word to move out. It was start and stop again, particularly after we rejoined the rifle platoons a few hundred feet along the street and around a corner. We'd closed up to only a couple of feet between each man, with strict orders to keep quiet. Then, we moved only a few hundred feet more when the file turned into a fairly large house. It had been shot up by the artillery—ours, no doubt. The whole company was led into the cellar. It was totally without light, and as we sat down we were packed like sardines. But everybody

Sergeant Kipgen was platoon sergeant (tech sergeant) and had been with the outfit from the early days. A street-wise guy from Astoria, Long Island, he had no problems with us young college types because he was a natural leader, knew what he was doing, and knew what was possible in the army, and what was not. Platoon lieutenants came and went but Kip pretty much ran the show.

He saved our lives a number of times. The first was early on, the first time we fired the mortars in combat. It was after dark, we were on a march and the riflemen up front had run into some resistance. We set up the mortars and fired about a dozen rounds. Kip had us immediately break the mortars down and move off about fifty yards. Five minutes after we had moved, the Germans landed an artillery salvo on the spot we had fired from.

Later on, after we had captured a bunker in the Siegfried Line and were using it as company headquarters, I was standing guard outside the door when German mortar shells started falling in a pattern, climbing the hill towards the bunker. Kip grabbed me inside and slammed the steel door as a shell landed right outside. It severed our communication line at the point where I had been standing.

—Hugh Brown

Hugh Brown and John Dorsey went overseas in the same mortar squad, with John as gunner and Hugh as first ammunition bearer. At the war's end, Hugh was squad leader and John was mortar section leader. In 1989, Hugh, John, and three others from their weapons platoon reestablished contact and had a moving reunion in Nashville, where John lived.

was so tired, and relieved, that no one even commented on what remained of the stench from my manure. No one, I'm sure, had a stronger feeling of pure gladness and gratitude at the prospect of spending the night under a roof, sleeping at last. I sat against the wall between Glenn Wainwright and Bud Smith. One of them offered me a bite from a tin of processed cheese from a K-ration, which I savored before going immediately to sleep.

It was a short sleep. We were wakened about 11:00 p.m. and told to get ready to move out. Once outside the house, we shuffled off in a column of twos, closed up to maintain contact. Once again the order was to keep total silence. My eye was acting up, and keeping it closed while squinting through the left eye, I couldn't see well at all. But who could, as dark as it was? When we encountered rough footing, Bud Smith moved ahead of me and led me by the hand. Hugh Brown and Bill Tscherne followed. Shortly out on the road on the far side of the village, we came to a narrow makeshift wooden bridge that someone (engineers?—hadn't seen any around, but we'd been dozing in the cellar) had thrown across the Meurthe River. The river did not seem very wide, maybe ten meters or so, but it was evidently deep and swift. I could hear the water rushing through the narrow channel. Hugh Brown remembers that the footbridge was just downstream from a low dam. We were jammed up together as those ahead of us crossed single file.

Our turn came, and Bud went ahead of me, holding my hand. There was an unstable rope for a handrail to hold onto, so we walked slowly, cautiously along the also-less-than-stable planks. The sound of the water rushing just a couple of feet below added to my sense of instability. I was carrying the mortar tube, slung on its strap on my left shoulder. As Bud stepped up on the opposite bank, we lost our mutual handgrip just as I let go the rope and was shifting the weight of the mortar, and I lost my balance and went into the river on my right side, the upstream side of the bridge.

As soon as I felt myself falling, I automatically inhaled and held my breath just before hitting the water. The current swept me under the bridge, and my right arm hit one of the piles. I was able to grab it. I clung a few seconds. The thought of letting go, drowning, being done with it all, went through my mind, simultaneously (it seemed) with a contradictory thought of floating downstream to a quieter, peaceful place, where I could crawl ashore in some other land. Then I felt a tug at my collar. It was Kip, lying on his belly on the bridge, trying to get a better grip on some part of me. But the current was too swift. My left arm was outstretched—I thought I was holding onto the mortar strap, to judge by the strength of the pull on the arm. But I unclenched my fist, and the current snapped the glove off. Pulling my arm back, I found that the mortar was long gone, that the pull on that arm was due solely to the fast-flowing river. Kip hung on to my collar with one hand, while his other held him in place on the bridge; my right hand had lost its hold on the piling. Evidently my weight, augmented by the force of that crazy river, was too much for even him to pull out. For a few desperate seconds, I knew that his grip on my collar was my only link to life—and by then I was desperate to get out safely.

Then I was aware that someone had poked the butt of a rifle toward me so that I might get an arm hooked through the sling. This I managed to do, and with that help Kip was able to pull me from the clutch of the roaring water. Once on land again, I tried to thank him, and at

the same time told him I'd lost the gun. "Don't worry about that, John. And getting' you out was no big deal. Just wanted to leave you in long enough to wash all 'at goddamn pig shit off. Catch up with the column—you're holdin' up the fuckin' war."

I sloshed fast along the road, shaking water out of my ears. Strangely, I had not lost my helmet—I suppose my head had been aimed upstream the whole time, so the flow only pushed it down on my head all the more firmly. Soon I overtook the last man in the column, Bud Smith. He was walking hunched over, crying, thinking he had done me in by losing my hand on the bridge. He had tried to keep contact with Johnny Stromberg ahead of him and had missed the rescue. (Kip, who must have been standing on land at the end of the bridge to make sure all his platoon got across, may well have told him to go on. Bud had passed the word to Johnny that I was gone, so my reappearance was like that of a returning ghost. But no time was lost on the drama of reunion. I quickly tried to assure Bud that it had not been his fault, that I had let go of his hand to shift the mortar. Johnny, who'd been carrying the base plate, threw it away and told Bud to do the same with the bipod, thanking me for relieving us all of part of our load by losing the barrel. All this in whispers, as we walked on and caught up again with the still-moving column.

Around 1:00 a.m. (the next day, already) we passed through a very shot-up village, with lots of stones and rubble in the streets. On the first break we'd taken after the river, I had pulled one of those kraut mittens I'd been saving from my pack to replace the glove I'd lost in the water. While doing that, word was passed down through the officers and noncoms that the whole battalion was sneaking through the enemy line to grab some hill near Combrimont by surprise. At one point we almost tiptoed, very slowly, between what we were later told was one of their heavy mortar positions about a hundred meters to the right and another one a similar distance to the left. True or not about the mortars, we made extraordinary efforts to move silently.

The time stretched interminably. There were frequent halts, some long, when the coldness pierced to the bone. The drizzling rain had returned, so my soaked clothes had no chance to dry. But fatigue and sleepiness almost deadened such discomforts. Several times during the shorter halts, I dozed off while still standing, only to be wakened by the sucking sound of boots breaking contact with the mud as I started to fall.

As dawn began to make Stromberg's back visible ahead of me, we were walking along a road lined with groves of fir trees. We passed a house off to the right, and I tried to talk myself into falling out, becoming a straggler. Finally we halted long enough in a fir grove to smoke a partly soggy cigarette. The battalion moved further into the woods and halted for a couple of hours. Many of us sat and slept leaning against trees, or stretched out on the ground, wet or not.

It must have been about an hour later when I woke up. A couple of guys brought eight or ten prisoners, taken by surprise, into the platoon's area. They were a miserable looking crew, as wet, cold, and tired, dirty and unshaved as we were. Some had shelter halves from the German Army version of the pup tent draped around them as ponchos. Someone gave cigarettes to a few of them, and as they stood around, waiting to be taken away, my eyes met those of one of these—a furtive-looking rat-faced type. He grinned, feebly but slyly, and for the first time I felt

a surge of real anger toward a specific member of this enemy army. He knew, and I knew, and each of us knew the other knew, that he was “home free.” He was out of it, on his way to a safe PW pen, while I (and the rest of us) in the company faced nothing but day after miserable day of more of the same as yesterday and today, stretching as far ahead as one could imagine. It was an appallingly depressing thought, and I could do no more than stare at him with what I hoped was infinite disgust—or if not infinite, at least enough to conceal my envy.

Finally we moved out; by then the afternoon had begun. We went up a long hill, at the top of which was a farmhouse and barn. We were halted there for an hour or so. The family was moving out, loading as much of their belongings as possible into an ox-cart. “Trop de guerre (too much war),” the old man muttered to no one and to everyone. We moved on before the family did, and after another tiring haul, halted, strung out along a narrow road with woods on one side and a farm field that had grown something the past summer. Then we heard machine gun fire well up ahead, which wasn’t too menacing at our distance.

But then a machine gun opened up much nearer by, perhaps three or four hundred meters off to the right-front. All hit the ground at once and waited for a follow-up burst. And waited some more. Finally, he let go a couple of quick bursts, and this time I could see dirt being kicked up in the field to our right. This meant that whatever the gunner thought he had seen, it wasn’t us. Word was passed along from the head of the column to lie still and quiet—they probably still didn’t know we were there.

More time passed. Then, from not far behind me in the line, I heard some small scraping kind of noises. Looked around, and someone from the mortar section was slowly crawling out into the field which we now knew to be in the field of fire of a kraut MG. Hypnotized, we watched him inch along on his belly, moving a foot or two, waiting, then another foot or two. Out about twenty meters, he began to dig in the wet dirt with his hands. Then he returned by the same route, still very slowly, but pushing two round objects, larger than big grapefruit, and still covered with too much dirt to guess what they were. When he made it back without being fired upon—or spotted by one of our officers—a whispered message was passed up and down the line in the mortar section: “Sugar beets!”

And soon, along came one of them, with sizeable chunks being cut off as it passed from one person to the next. I took my piece off and passed the dwindling prize up the line to Johnny Stromberg. It was raw and hard, not very sweet, and was far from free of dirt, but it was edible. It was, in fact, little more than a tiny reminder that we had not had more than a few fragmentary bites of food for over a day and a half, and not a single full meal, even of K-rations, for even longer. Perhaps the pain in my eye (which was less severe by then), the terror of crossing that plain under the 88s to get to Saulcy, the preoccupation with the manure-bed fiasco, the fall into the river and the wet coldness for so many hours since then, the burden of sleepiness, and the almost constant fear—all combined to make hunger seem a much weaker misery than it would otherwise have been. Whatever the reasons, I had evidently not thus far suffered as much from hunger as some of the others, and the nearly constant rule of silence since early the night before had not allowed the amount of griping that otherwise would have been heard about it. And even then, reminded of it, I was only aware of how much I would

enjoy some food, rather than feel that I was starving—much less starving to the degree that I would have crawled out into a machine gun-covered field to retrieve a couple of lousy sugar beets. But I did feel grateful to the guy who'd done that (I think it may have been Reuben Weaver) and for sharing his find.

We moved on. At one point, we saw some guys from M Company (Heavy Weapons) setting up their heavy .30 caliber water-cooled machine guns to cover us as we crossed a wide and exposed area. It was the first time we'd seen such; they probably didn't get many opportunities to come up to cover the kind of march we were on. We kept moving most of the afternoon, although halts of varying duration, some stretching to twenty or thirty minutes, were not infrequent.

On long hauls such as this, with nothing going on to provide distraction, I could often pass the time by "listening" in my head to music that I knew pretty well, from having played it or from having listened to recordings of particular pieces enough times, to know them fairly well. Sometimes it was classical, sometimes jazz or big-band swing. For some reason, some melody, often inane, had always seemed to be running in my head at all times that I was not consciously thinking about something else—and often when I was, in the background—except when actually listening to music. (This mental phenomenon has continued throughout my life. Sometimes it can be a nuisance, as when a relatively short phrase of some melody or even a chord sequence repeats itself incessantly. When I become aware that something like that is becoming very boring or tiresome, I consciously try to switch it to something else.)

But this mindless walking, doing nothing but following the person ahead at the proper distance, I had learned in training at Fort McClellan and Camp Howze in the States, was a good time to "send my mind away" by trying deliberately to run through something I thought I knew, and sometimes, if so inclined, to improvise or even invent whole passages. So I could take something like Leopold Stokowski's orchestral rendition of Liszt's Second Hungarian Rhapsody, a rather florid thing which I'd liked very much in high school, and pretty much go through the whole thing, trying to put the various sections of the orchestra together just as it was on the well-worn record. No one could hear my mistakes, so I could rerun any passage as long as I wanted. Or a Teddy Wilson piano solo such as "These Foolish Things" —parts of which I'd learned to copy (clumsily, to be sure) with the help of a much more musically talented cousin, John Glenn. If I couldn't remember all parts of it, I could hear Teddy improvise in his own style at such places. Sometimes I'd choose deliberately. Other times something might just emerge with no apparent choice on my part. It could take me away, until something from outside interrupted and brought me back to the real world. This habit helped me though this particularly miserable long march.

About dusk, we came to a wooded hill that looked steep. We climbed it, at an angle rather than straight up. Over the ridge, there was just enough light to see a valley with three or four houses along a road on the other side. Some light shone from a couple of them, meaning to me that there were fires there. In my still damp and freezing condition, that was an image not merely of civilization, but of paradise. But we passed them on our right, at some distance, then came lower down. Then we started up yet another hill, with difficulty—it had become dark.

A few shells came in up ahead, and we hit the ground. Then there was a brief spate of rifle fire, followed by silence. We continued to lie still—couldn't see anything. Captain Himic came walking back along the file, talking about having gotten his first kraut. The ugly idea that he might have shot a prisoner passed through my head. How else could he have seen well enough to know he'd hit anyone? But I suppressed it—why should I think he'd do such a thing? He might be a thug, but he probably would not brag about doing that.

Everyone began digging in—slit trenches for sleeping. Bud Smith and I dug a single one, wide enough for both of us to lie in, and got into it. But I began to have a chill, and couldn't stop shaking. So I got up and checked with Johnny Stromberg, then found Lieutenant Edward Bray, the executive officer (second-in-command of the company) and asked him if Johnny and I could go down into the valley and find the houses we'd passed not long ago. I wanted to slip into one of those houses, which I was sure contained only civilians, and dry my clothes by the fire. Johnny would come along as Bray's insurance that I wasn't going to drop out. I knew that this was a crazy idea that Bray no doubt wouldn't approve, but the chill and the shaking had made me feel desperate. Bray said instead that he thought the whole battalion would be going down, so I should just hang on a while longer. Bud and Johnny were glad to get this news when I got back to the squad, and we passed the word along to Hugh Brown and Bill Tscherne in the squad and others in the platoon.

Then I lay shivering in the hole yet another hour. But word finally was passed along to us to get ready to move out. It was pitch black as we formed up in single file. The path we followed was steep and the footing tricky; each man had to keep a hand on the pack or belt of the one ahead. At the foot of the hill, despite our silence, a couple of very big mortars (120s?) came in and held things up for a while—but only a couple. No follow-up. So someone had heard something, but they must still have no idea there were so many of us there in such a bunched-up line. Finally we began to move out into the valley, a platoon at a time. A flare went up from somewhere. Everyone froze, very tense now. In the wait afterward, the platoon ahead of us moved on without our knowing, and the Weapons Platoon lost contact altogether. We must have been lost for ten or fifteen minutes. We came to a dark house, but there was no answer to Kipgen's whispered inquiry. We moved on and soon came to another farmhouse—the right one. The rest of the company was there, waiting on the ground inside the court connecting the house with the barn. We sat down, and the wait extended to an hour or so. Finally we got the blessed word to move in. It was packed, still totally dark, but some of us made our way to the attached barn and climbed up into a hay loft.

There, at long last, I got out my sleeping bag, burrowed into the hay, and was soon wonderfully warm, drowsy, then sleeping. Before dropping off I was aware that only boards and a layer of shingles were between us and any shells that might come in, should the krauts discover that they had a whole company in this one house and barn. But I wasted no time worrying—I cared not a whit. I was warm and would die happy.

As it turned out, this tiny village had, until just an hour or so before, been some kind of a kraut command or communications post—those detailed to it had pulled out. But none of them knew that we had occupied it. During the night, (I heard the next day) a couple of kraut

messengers on motorcycles reported in. They were stupefied to discover us there, and our guards took them prisoner without a shot being fired. Later, I figured out that this village was (or was near) Combrimont. So we must have grabbed our hill. But the krauts had obliged us by pulling out before we got there.

Outside Barr, near Epfig: Wick and Uppy

[from longhand]

Raymond Wick and Bob Updyke were both from Chicago (or possibly Detroit). They were both lean, tough young men (our elders) in their early twenties, each an expert mortarman. They could set up in seconds, and they had an almost instinctive sense of distance, which is the mortarman's most essential skill. We had no difficulty in accepting Wick as leader of the mortar section, and I had, at first, considered myself lucky to be in Updyke's squad in Texas. But I was for some reason transferred to Stromberg's. These two knew their business and tried to teach the rest of us.

Moving out of Barr at twilight, K Company in the lead, we were held up by a kraut MG dug into the foot of a low hill ahead. Rather than going after it directly, or having us (mortars) try to get it, the CO evidently decided to wait and call in some artillery. We (the mortar section) lay down to rest along the side of the road. We waited. Waited some more. Nothing had been heard since the initial bursts of kraut MG that had stopped the column. We were not yet very tired and were therefore impatient.

Wick and Uppy decided to go up the road toward the company commander to find out what the fuck was going on. They got up and started to walk along that road.

The whine of incoming artillery galvanized everybody. The whines were too brief before the explosions; these were close ones. I found myself in the nearest kraut-dug hole with three or four others piled on top. We all struggled for the bottom of the hole.

The shells came in with earsplitting force—they didn't slack off as kraut shellings usually did. Worst shelling we ever had—and quickly I knew why. These were not kraut 88s—they were our 105s. The fucking artillery had pulled up and targeted the crossroad. When the CO called for artillery on the kraut MGs, these bastards dumped on us.

Wick and Uppy were hit immediately; they were upright, walking along the road. The shell that got them both hit behind them. Their backs were very messed up. Wick lived long enough to say that the cheese in his pack (early Christmas gift) was probably ruined. He then died. Uppy was already dead; probably never knew what hit him.

People were screaming for medics. (I tried to push a medic out of that hole—he didn't want to go. Harsh words.)

Eighteen others in the company were killed in that shelling. I wonder whether their relatives ever learned that they were killed by our artillery. More were wounded, maybe 20 or 30. One rifleman, who was killed later at Forbach, went off his rocker. He had been among those, including Wick and Uppy, who took the first few shells on the road, but he wasn't hit. He cried and became hysterical, and a couple of guys grabbed him and held him until he calmed down.

Eventually the word was passed down to move. It was dark, but we could see the bodies on or beside the road. I said a mechanical goodbye to Wick and Uppy, but had no idea which of the corpses were them. We had to step over some of them.

We walked all night; no more krauts shooting at us. About dawn we moved into some

village. After a little rest, we started to clean weapons. I was then carrying a .45 pistol—a lousy weapon in my opinion. It could blow off a head, if you were close to the target—say, two or three feet.

But, I dutifully cleaned it; disassemble, wipe, oil, reassemble. Tired and sleepy, I shoved in a magazine of bullets. Pulled back on the barrel cover, and BANG. A bullet went through the wall, six inches from Hugh Brown's head. He was slumped against the wall to sleep, but my near miss got his attention. He was pissed off, not that I had almost killed him, but that I had disturbed his rest.

Hugh will never know how much I agonized about this afterward. I almost killed him. I felt some kind of bond of obligation to him for his having been lucky enough to escape my wild shot.

With Wick and Uppy dead, and Johnny Stromberg hit at Climbach, I became an acting squad leader. My promotion to sergeant (squad leader) came through in late December, when we were at Morsbach. I figured that I had maybe two or three months, and that with luck I could get a million-dollar wound: a non-fatal but disabling shot—maybe in the leg.

Siegfried Line: Night of the Trench

December 15, the day after Climbach, the 411th crossed the boundary and entered Germany about six kilometers west of Wissembourg. We didn't know that until later—nor did we know that I Company, just ahead of us (K Company) was the first company of the first regiment of the first division of the whole Seventh Army to penetrate Germany. They even wrote down the time of day: 1305 (1:05 p.m.). L Company on the right crossed a few minutes later. That made K Company the second or third company in. (The 45th and the 79th divisions crossed between 45 minutes and an hour later at different points a few miles to the east. All this was in a news release that made the *Opelika Daily News*.) The boundary runs east-west there, from the Rhine eastward to about Saarbrücken, where it begins to swing northward.

The boundary was not marked—just a little stream five or six feet wide in a steep valley in mountainous wooded terrain. There are a couple of pictures on pages 50 and 52 of the division history, *Report after Action*. We moved on a few kilometers, uphill and down. Hard going, but no action. Then we held up a few days on a hillside in the woods.

Another matter we did not know about until days later was that early on the 16th, the Germans had begun a very large strategic counterattack, about 200 kilometers (125 miles) to the northwest, in the Ardennes Forest. This was to become the Battle of the Bulge, so called because of the large westward “bulge” in the line on the map between German and Allied forces as the Germans advanced. It was the last major German counteroffensive of the war. Our wait in the woods was no doubt ordered by the brass in our sector until even higher brass figured out what to do about that growing bulge.

Finally we got the word to push on northward. We did not get very far.

One of the two other rifle companies in the battalion was ahead of us again, and as they went up a very steep small mountainside, they were held up most of the day. We heard a lot of machine gun and rifle fire, an unusual number of grenades, plus two or three heavy explosions. In mid-afternoon, they began to withdraw, filing past us. They looked beat-up, with a sizeable number of walking wounded, and vastly relieved. Some of them offered comments as they dragged by, to the effect that they had been like fish in a barrel for the krauts, who were rolling concussion grenades down the hill onto them. As we were kept in place, we guessed what turned out to be the truth: K Company would now be given a run at whatever had stopped the other company.

For those who wondered (and I was one of those) why the other company had to be completely withdrawn before we could go up, the reason soon became clear. We entered single file a long zigzag kraut communication trench that must have gone all the way to the top. It averaged about six feet deep, and about three or four feet wide at the top. The path along the bottom of the trench was churned to mud several inches deep most of the way. Slow-going donkey work to go just a few hundred meters. Two rifle platoons preceded the Weapons Platoon into the trench; the third followed us.

We took one break close to a good-sized, abandoned concrete bunker, dug deep into the

hillside. Walls and top several feet thick, a big gun barrel (it looked much bigger than the 88s we had learned to dread) poking out, slanted downhill, and a horizontal slot for observation (and small-arms fire?) across the front. Some of us left the trench to inspect it more closely. A steel door in a dugout area at its rear was hanging open. Afraid of booby traps, we didn't try to go in and have a look around. But we knew we were now in the famous Siegfried Line. That meant a zone several miles deep, with such pillboxes located, with fields of fire prepared, to cover every foot of the line several times over, along the entire German border. And it was starting out by grinding up one of our companies per pillbox. We resumed our movement up the trench as it zigzagged past the abandoned one.

The shooting started when the first few riflemen went around the zig or zag that put them in the field of fire of the next concrete bunker. Machine gun. At least one rifleman was hit seriously, through the neck, we learned later. At first shot, everyone was on the bottom of the trench—very crowded. Room only to squat or hunch down.

Time passed. It was getting dark and cold, particularly down in the trench. Although the MG fire continued at irregular intervals, along with some rifles and an occasional grenade, some of us began getting carefully up. I stepped on a large rock, getting just my eyes above the top of the trench to try to see around. Nothing to see in the fading light—trees, rocks, no sign of the bunker.

From ahead in the trench came sounds of people getting up, beginning to move along. The man just behind me was still hunched over. When he didn't seem to be getting ready to move, I touched his shoulder, thinking he had dozed off. But he didn't move. I pushed a bit harder and realized with a momentary shock that he was dead. One of my squad? No, he was stiff. Rigor mortis meant that he'd been there some time—probably from the company that had been here before us, long ago this morning. I must have scrambled over him when we hit the mud as the shooting started. Then I saw that he was hunched over a rifle, and I immediately wrenched it from under him—fortunately his hands were not gripping it. Quickly checked the muzzle; it was clear of mud, and so was most of the mechanism where the eight-round clip of ammo is stuffed in. I got a couple of full clips from his belt, stuck them in my jacket pocket.

As a mortar gunner, I had been armed only with a .45 pistol. That was a clumsy piece, and I had not been a very good shot with it on the range in training. Hadn't had any occasion to use it yet. But since Johnny Stromberg had been hit a few days ago at Climbach, I'd been acting squad leader. Mortar squad leaders carried carbines, but one of those hadn't caught up with me yet. I had scored much better with the M1 in stateside training, and at the moment it seemed a lot more comfortable and practical. As it turned out, I would carry this M1 until the end of the war.

We did not move far up the trench at all. Soon came to another halt and waited. There was another spate of firing up where the head of the file must have been. Now it was dark, and an occasional flare went up, throwing an eerie light.

Someone came walking along the trench, on the surface outside. It was Kipgen, talking in a low, hissing voice as he came. "Get your heads up out of that trench. How're you gonna see 'em when they come down after you? They'd be here now if they knew you all had your heads

stuck in 'at goddamn mud. They'll be coming down here any time now. Heads up—eyes and ears open!" He paused regularly to make sure everyone did as he was told. He stopped by the two MG squads and told them to follow him. He jumped the trench and led them off to the right, stopping one to set up and dig in, then taking the other squad farther off in the same direction to position them the same way.

After a time, during which he apparently had gone up toward the head of the column to confer with Bray, K Company CO, Kip came back. "We'll be here for the night. Everybody move out of the trench. Find cover in places you can see up the hill from, and dig in. Two-man holes, one man awake at all times. And keep it quiet, digging. No talking either. They'll prob'ly be down to try and get us sometime before dawn."

As we were coming out of the trench, a few more grenades went off in a ragged cluster of explosions forty or fifty meters up ahead. By the time the second one exploded, everyone was back in the trench, except Kip. He hit the ground where he was. But as soon as it was quiet for about thirty seconds, he was up again, irritatedly telling everyone to get out and get on with it. Bud Smith, who was now gunner, and I moved off about twenty meters and began to look for a place. The new assistant gunner, who'd been an ammo bearer, and the one remaining ammo bearer in the squad, paired up to dig.

While that was going on, I made out the tall thin figure of Kip standing near a tree. I moved closer to ask whether he knew anything about plans for the next morning, but found when I got close enough that he was already in quiet conversation with Bray. Bray was telling him where he had deployed the First and Second platoons (out on the right flank, facing uphill), where he proposed to put the Third (reserve) Platoon (downhill behind Weapons), and said he thought it would be a good idea to put one machine gun in close with each of the first two rifle platoons. Then he asked, "What d'you think of that, Kip?"

"I think that's as good as we can do here," said Technical Sergeant Kipgen, platoon sergeant of the Weapons Platoon, to First Lieutenant Bray, company commander. "I've already put the MG squads out there, and they've prob'ly already worked out positions with the two rifle platoons. And I've stretched out the mortar squads to cover the left flank, where they'll need the Third Platoon's help if anything opens up from that direction. Nobody's left in the trench, so we can start hauling out the guys who've been hit as soon as that's organized."

I butted in to report the body in the trench near where we stood. "Yeah," said Bray, "there's more of them they left in the mud up there when they hauled ass this morning. I'll send a runner back to battalion to send up a bunch of them up as litter bearers. But we've still got a few of our own wounded to get out. And our dead."

Ken Shafer showed up as I was moving away. He had been a mortar squad leader and was now mortar section leader, replacing Ray Wick who'd been killed between Barr and Epfig around the end of November. He told me he'd pair up with one of the other squad leaders for the night and would be along later. He stayed for some words with Kip and Bray.

Over where my squad was beginning to dig in, I tried with Bud Smith to find a place for us to dig, peering uphill in the darkness to see whether there was any open space around me and whether there was any kind of cover behind which we might start digging. But it was

nearly pitch-black. Finally I felt around on the ground and found a small spot away from trees and, I hoped, relatively free of stone. Bud said he'd found a place, but it wasn't big enough for both of us. We quickly decided to dig separately, as they were close enough together that we could still share the watch. When I started to dig, I hit large stones almost everywhere. After about an hour I had gone down only about six inches and had found very large ones that I could not dislodge. I'd piled the dirt and stones on the uphill side. Finally decided I'd have to take my chances if I wanted to get any sleep at all, so dragged a couple of pitifully inadequate little logs to the top of the pile.

I made one last round to check on Bud and the other pair in the squad trying to dig a two-man hole. Neither they nor Bud had had better luck. We all knew what the choice was: dig all night and maybe have adequate holes by morning, when we'd be moving on, or get some rest so we'd be able to move on in the morning. But if the krauts came down the hill or if they dumped in some artillery or mortars during the night or early morning (surely they'd heard the digging—there's no way to dig silently in rocky ground), we'd have a real problem. By then we all wanted rest about as badly as we wanted to live, and I didn't have the heart to try to make them start digging again. We all wanted to take the chance and get some rest. And I ratified the consensus—did not argue strongly against it, did not, finally, order them to dig whether they wanted to or not.

So I found my own shallow "hole," after drawing straws with Bud for who would get first watch of two hours. Bud lost, so I huddled down, feeling that I'd be asleep the moment I closed my eyes.

But I could not relax and close down my thoughts. Worry about the easy, rotten choice I'd allowed began gnawing, not only at my mind, but at my guts. If the worst happened, and a squad member was killed because of lack of adequate cover, it would be my fault. If I were killed too, that would be only fair, and at least I wouldn't have to worry about it afterward. But suppose one or more (how about all?) of them getting it in a sudden rain of mortar shells in the night, and I were the "lucky" one and got through it alive. How could I live with that? I didn't think I could. How could I have been so dumb as to rationalize allowing us to stop digging?—so miserably weak-willed was more like it. It was not idle worry. More than one in the company had already been killed by unexpected artillery or mortars at night, after having decided they were too tired to dig a slit trench to sleep in. And those were in situations when it seemed quite unlikely. The last such loss was only a couple of weeks ago. Here we were right under the krauts' noses—and they knew we were here. When would they start? What the hell kind of a squad leader was I?

Maybe we'd luck out tonight. Maybe, somehow, the krauts would decide to sweat us out—wait for daylight, and grind us up bit by bit as we tried to get to, or behind that pillbox. But what the hell, they could do that anyway. Why not give us some mortars in the night, just to ruin our sleep, if nothing else? They would never pass up such an opportunity. Maybe I'd better wake up the others to dig some more . . . but I'm too beat-out to dig any more myself. Why can't I just rest and take what comes? Why can't I do anything? Why did I ever agree to be squad leader, anyway? They'd be better off with the newest replacement ammo bearer.

A couple of times I started to get up, having decided to wake up the sleepers and make them start digging. But I couldn't face the consequences of that—the resentment, maybe even refusal. I'd been squad leader less than a week. If they refused, I'd have to take it to Shafe, or Kip—and then, having failed as squad leader, resign the job and ask for a transfer out of the platoon. Could I do that? I doubted it. So I didn't wake them up. More twisting and turning in the cramped, rocky little depression I called a hole.

This agonizing indecision was interrupted occasionally by the sounds of litter-bearers going up and down—especially down—the nearby trench, carrying out first the wounded, then the dead. One of the wounded was Barton, the rifleman who'd caught one through his throat. I remember the gurgling sound he made as they carried him down. (Or had he been carried out earlier, just after we got out of the trench? Probably—they couldn't have waited with a wound that bad. I just don't remember when, but I remember the gurgle.) Anyway, there were others, some hit less seriously. Plus the dead—I didn't count.

But, and at this I was awed, we found out next day that “old” Ken Shafer, 34, had joined the litter bearers, making two or three trips up and down the trench that night. The rest of us in our late teens—I was almost 20—or early to mid-twenties, had been too worn out to dig properly, even in that most ominously dangerous situation. And that “old man” had voluntarily taken on the mule's labor of hauling out the dead, because it had to be done, and there were not enough others to do it. But that was Shafe: solid, dependable, always willing and able to go the extra mile—a real noncom. When I learned the next day what he'd done, I felt all the worse about the misery of my dilemma the night before.

Then, when I thought only about an hour had passed, Bud crawled over to shake me awake. He was surprised to find me awake, but I said only, “Bud, we're not dug in right . . . we've got to—”

“I don't give a shit,” he interrupted. “I just want to get some sleep—don't know how I kept my eyes open these two hours.” Then he was gone, back to his “hole,” no deeper than mine.

So now I faced two more hours in which I could not sleep, even if I had felt like it. The question not being resolved, I had no trouble on that score—the problem became keeping my attention focused on sounds that might indicate anything moving down from uphill. By then I knew that I was going to do nothing. What would happen would happen, and if it turned out badly for us, I'd have to live with it—if I lived through it. The first question was, when would it happen?

The tension within rose and fell. The sound of a rock moving or a twig snapping, real or imagined, brought a mental image of “them” stealing down on us—how many of them? Listen for a follow-up clue. Silence. A low cough . . . one of them or one of us? Silence. Why are they waiting? How dumb can I get? Why should they risk casualties by attacking at night? They'll work us over with mortars first. It will be mortars. We're too close for them to risk artillery. But, no, they're safe in their bunker. I must be getting confused. Anyway, even their artillery wouldn't be much of a worry if we were only properly dug in. Nobody to blame for that but me. It'll be better if the first shells in get me, if they get anyone.

So it went, minute after excruciating minute. At some times, my mind wandered. I

thought of home, of Mother and Dad—how they'd take it when they got the news. They wouldn't feel quite as bad if they did not know the whole story of how it happened—that I'd brought it on myself. Surely no one would tell them that . . . they'll just get the usual formal telegram. Even so, I wish I could spare them from having to get one of those. It'll be hard, so very hard for Mother. Dad, too, but he'll bury the hurt, trying to help her through it. But they do still have Walter. He'll be 18 in March. Maybe this whole miserable war will be over before he has time to get involved. How about Japan—how is that part of the war going, anyway? The damn Japs will try to hold out to the last man. Maybe a whole year more—maybe two. At least they'll know to keep him out of the fucking infantry, and maybe he'll be persuadable, knowing he's the only one of us left. God!

God? I should pray. "God, please help us out of this mess. God, please help us . . ." But my true feeling was, why should He? Why should He hand out big favors to people who only called on Him when they were in real trouble? I'd already noticed, too, that plenty of "good" guys were getting killed—many who did not wait for trouble before they called on Him, who seemed genuinely to be "good Christians"—and devout Jews. He sure did not seem to be taking advantage of this war to protect the good (or the innocent) while letting the bad get what was coming to them. It may be true that all of us are sinners—but some I knew sure took a deeper, deliberate dive into sin than others. But there was no clear sign of the wicked getting their due so far. Casualties are just that—all too "casual," even random. In short, I just did not have the kind of faith that could give me confidence in this kind of situation. But why? Combat was supposed to be the great convincer. Why was it not having that effect on me?

Did I say random? Only when we're caught out in the open, when we're not careful, when we don't dig in—like right now. Damn! So when will it start? Why don't they let us have it?

The minutes dragged by. I began to look at the luminous hands on my watch more often, aching all over with fatigue. Maybe I could sleep when my two hours were over. I began to hope the shelling wouldn't start until I had the pleasure of drifting off to sleep just one more time. No, can't even think about sleep now. It might ease in on me and drag me down before I'm aware enough to resist it. Can I hold out? Come on, krauts—let's have the shells.

Finally, it ended. The minute hand slowly got around that last hour. The last few minutes I mentally counted the seconds. Then gave myself a full extra minute before beginning to crawl over to wake Bud with the bad news that it was his turn again. "Congratulations," I said.

"Thanks," he replied groggily, "and a big happy bucket of shit to you." Good ol' Bud Smith.

Miracle. I did get to sleep this time—almost too quickly to enjoy the slide to oblivion. But in about three minutes (or so it seemed—actually it was almost two hours), Bud was shaking me awake. It was still black night. "We're pulling out," he whispered.

Like zombies, we stumbled back into the trench. After the inevitable wait, we finally began the long trip back down, turning left, turning right, at each corner of the zigzag trail. Silence, except for the sound of boots in the mud, a muffled curse as someone missed a step or hit a stone, an occasional clank of metal on metal. Feeling began to come back into numbed

limbs and joints as we moved, but my physical sensations were overcome by the almost joyous relief of getting away from those half-assed holes that gave me so much grief. I just resolved not to forget it, and hoped—swore to myself—never to make such a blunder again.

Then, however, I began to feel needles in the soles of my feet. A little in the beginning, but gradually more, until it felt as if I were walking on a path of upraised needles, needles that sank in a half-inch or more with each step. I slowed, tried to stop. I'd never felt anything like this before. Wanted only to get my feet off those needles. But I couldn't. This narrow trench was the one place in this whole shitty war where you could not fall out. Too narrow at the bottom for passing—go down, and two and a half platoons would be held up, or walk over your back. Crawl up and out, and you'd soon be left. Word had been passed along that we were pulling out to let the heavy artillery (155s) try to blast the bunkers. It was not the place to get left.

So I hobbled on, biting my lip to keep from crying out. It was the worst physical pain I'd experienced in the Army: trench foot or frostbite of the feet. Actually, the frostbite must have occurred in the night; water must have gotten into my boots in the trench and frozen once I was off my feet for a time. Fatigue would have hidden any discomfort. The pain I felt when walking was probably from the beginning of circulation again as the feet warmed from walking. It must not have been a serious case. I knew nothing of this process at the time, but learned when we got to the bottom that several others in the company had the same problem. Once out of the trench, Bud and others helped me to walk. We didn't go far before a halt was called in a wooded area.

Lo and behold, there were a couple of jeeps pulling trailers. The mess sergeant, Spam Reynolds, and his cooks had gotten a hot breakfast up that far, the first in many days. I remember it not so much for what it was as for having to go through the chow line on my hands and knees. Then, while eating, a company medic (Meche, I think it was) came by, looked at my feet, and told me what had probably happened. But what could be done for the pain? "Nothing," he said, "unless you got trench foot real bad. Then all the tissue dies, gangrene sets in, and we ought to be able to get you evacuated in time for amputation. Looks like yours is not a bad case. But look at it this way: either it's a light case, and the feet eventually stop hurting, or it's a bad case, and you leave your feet here and go home. Right now, it's outta your hands. Wanna aspirin?" Magic "Dr." Meche, the Medicine Man.

It took me a moment to think, but I was able to come up with a rejoinder. "No, I guess not. But can't you put on a wooden mask, light a fire, and give me a nice little chant?"

To which he didn't have to wait to respond, "Nah, that's for the really serious cases. You gotta get both feet blowed off for that. Right now, if you got dry socks, put 'em on."

Meanwhile, we were hearing our 155s coming in on the bunkers. Heavy explosions back up on the hill. But we knew that that was a futile exercise. They'd come out usable again. To do any real damage, each one would have to be stuffed full of TNT and detonated from a good distance away. And, since our company officers knew that—surely they knew that—they'd have passed the word to battalion and regiment. So, for whatever reason, further use of infantry on these particular bunkers must have been called off. We didn't wonder why—were simply glad to have some reason to think that.

After the meal and a rest, the word came to get ready to move out. Dry socks felt a little better, but I still couldn't walk. The jeep drivers let those of us with trench foot sit on the hoods or on the trailers for a few kilometers. The two jeeps were moving no faster than the column of troops. Then some lieutenant saw this and ordered us off. We tried to explain about our feet, but no deal. If we hadn't been evacuated, we had to walk. Friends in the platoon helped me along the rest of the way, which fortunately was not too far. For some time I tried to remember the lieutenant's name, so if we both survived I could look him up after the war and express my appreciation more adequately. But my memory was not good enough—probably overloaded with other things.

At the end of this march, trucks awaited. We loaded on and were taken back to some town in France—possibly Woerth. I remember that I was aware that it was a place we had gone through on foot about ten days or so earlier. Only this time it was almost dark when we got there, and when we unloaded we filed into what seemed to be a school auditorium without chairs or benches. We were told we'd spend at least part of the night there.

Officers and platoon sergeants were called off to a meeting with battalion officers. When they returned, Kipgen broke the news about the big German counteroffensive up in eastern Belgium. It was bad; nobody knew yet how bad, but the American line had been broken and had taken very heavy losses. So we'd be shifting around in that direction, probably to relieve some division, closer to the main action, which was being pulled out to try to block the German advance. We'd probably be moving out sometime that night, as soon as the rear echelon could get enough trucks together to start hauling the division.

Hugh Brown, Gabby, Bud Smith, and I sat around briefly after that, trying to relieve the anxiety of this big new uncertainty by speculating on what it meant. We soon found that no one had information or ideas to warrant wasting time on, so broke up to unroll our light sleeping bags for whatever sleep we might be able to get. No matter how bad what was ahead might be, tonight, indoors, was so much better than the night before at that miserable trench that I (and I'm sure the others, too) slept as if we were in the lap of luxury. Wonder how you go about getting a nice rear echelon job where you sleep like this every night . . .

Shafe

[This letter was written to Allen Shafer in response to his queries about his father. —FD]

January 22, 1990

Dear Allen,

I'm not sure just how belated this is, for I didn't write down the date of your telephone call. But I am nevertheless sorry that it has taken me this long to write.

At first I was under what seems to have been a misimpression, and thought that I'd get a note from you explaining specifically what information you'd like to have—I thought it was in connection with certifying something to the Dept. of the Army about your father's service. But as the days passed I became persuaded that I was mistaken, and that you simply wanted to hear, from some of those who knew him, something about him and his military experience—particularly that which occurred overseas in the Second World War. If I'm still confused about this, please let me know and I'll be happy to do whatever it is that you'd like. Also, I've asked the Battery Press here, which reprinted the 103d Division history, *Report after Action*, to send you a brochure on the book. It's a tad more expensive (\$29.50) than I remember quoting to you, so I thought perhaps you should have an opportunity to change your mind. But it's far and away the best source for getting an initial idea of the context of your dad's experience.

Meanwhile, I'll begin here with some background and general comments. If anything here suggests further questions, be sure to write, and I'll follow up.

It was in March 1944, at Camp Howze, Texas, that I first met your dad when, along with almost all of the privates and privates first class who went overseas with the 103d Division, I was transferred into that division. He, and all the other noncommissioned officers (and officers), made up the "cadre" whose job it was to train us (and themselves) prior to going overseas. In our platoon most of the noncoms were in their middle to late twenties (your father was an astonishing 33—I'd almost forgotten), while most of us were in our late teens to very early twenties. (Although I had had infantry basic training, I'd spent two quarters in an Army college program, the ASTP. Most of the others who came into the division at that time were new to the infantry.) Almost all the previous privates and privates first class in the division had just been shipped overseas as replacements. It soon became known that next time, the whole division would ship out as a unit, so the noncoms and officers with whom we were training would be those who would lead us in combat.

"Shafe," as we soon learned to call him, was one of three 60mm mortar squad leaders (sergeants) in the Weapons Platoon of Company K, 411th Infantry Regiment. The three mortar squads constituted a "section" which was led by Staff Sergeant Raymond F. Wick (killed in France). The other section of the platoon consisted of two "light" machine gun squads (.30 caliber air-cooled). Their section leader was Staff Sergeant Tom D. Goddard (wounded in

France). Both sections were led by Technical Sergeant Stephen N. Kipgen (later made lieutenant—and also wounded in France). Each of the five squads, mortar and machine gun, were made up of five men: the squad leader, a gunner, assistant gunner, and two ammunition bearers. (The relevance of the casualties I mentioned will be clearer later.)

I give all this detail so that you can have an idea of the type and structure of our outfit. It was one of the four platoons of a rifle company, the other three being rifle platoons, each with three twelve-man rifle squads. K Company was one of three rifle companies in the 3d Battalion of the 411th; each of the three such battalions also contained a “heavy weapons” company of 81mm mortars and “heavy” (water-cooled) .30 caliber machine guns—not to be confused with the weapons platoons of the rifle companies. The other two regiments of the 103d Division were the 409th and the 410th.

I did not know Shafe very well at first, as I was in another mortar squad, led by Sergeant John Stromberg (wounded in France). (The other mortar squad in the platoon was led by Robert W. Updyke, killed in France). But your father stood out during that period as being both rugged and “serious”—if that is the way to characterize one who was relatively quiet, did not drink nor (I think) smoke, nor did he go to Dallas or Fort Worth with most of the rest of us to raise hell on weekend passes. While he could be very firm, his language was not that of the typical sergeant. Perhaps he uttered an occasional “damn” or “hell” for effect (and I’m not even sure of that)—but, compared to the rest of us, and particularly his fellow sergeants, his speech was notable for the absence of the purple profanities and acrobatic obscenities that were considered by most to be essential for clarity and emphasis. I don’t think I have any memory of his ever raising his voice louder than was necessary to be heard, nor of his being angry—much less losing his temper. But his strength, endurance, cool-headed dependability, practical good sense and knowledge of whatever had to be known to do his job well, earned him the respect of all who knew him. My permanent image of him includes a smiling face. Friendly, helpful, strong. And decent.

Thus when Wick and Updyke were hit in early December between Barr and Epfig in Alsace, it was quite natural that Shafe would become the new section leader, with a promotion to staff sergeant. And in February ‘45, when Kipgen was promoted to lieutenant (his condition for accepting that was that, after the brief training such elevation required, he be returned as our platoon leader—a stipulation unanimously endorsed by the platoon), it was accepted that Shafe was the one to become platoon sergeant. (It was then that I, who had become a squad leader when Johnny Stromberg got hit in mid-December, replaced Shafe as mortar section leader.)

I came to know your father somewhat better once I was squad leader in the three-squad section that he led, and later as section leader in the platoon of which he was the top noncom. And I must say that he set an example that few could match. On long marches, with little sleep for several days, I saw him as squad leader helping one or another of his men by carrying part of their load for them. (Overseas, not in Texas training.) Not many noncoms, even if they would

have, could have done that. When Stromberg was hit in the face by shrapnel in a mortar shelling that targeted the section perfectly—we survived because we had had time to dig in—Shafe was out of his hole and had pulled Stromberg out of his and carried him off in search of the medic before any of the rest of us even knew he'd been hit. (This was at what the division history refers to as the “Battle of Climbach” on pages 49-50.)

A few days after that, we crossed into Germany (for a short time) and encountered the massive pillboxes of the Siegfried Line for the first time. This was four or five kilometers west of Wissembourg. (This situation is described in pages 51-55 of the division history, so I won't spell it all out here. The text in italics in those pages so accurately matches my memory of that episode—even to the detail of the rifleman hit in the neck, whose name, according to my notes, was Barton, that the author, if he were not there, had to have interviewed some of the guys in K Company.) Suffice to say that K Company was partly in, partly outside of a long zigzag communication trench between two big concrete bunkers, going up a fairly steep and partly wooded hill. It was night, we were zombie-tired, the company had taken a number of casualties in the trench, and we were effectively stopped and pinned down. I had left the trench and tried to dig a hole, but fatigue and very rocky ground kept my hole less than a foot deep. So I piled some of the larger stones around it, particularly on the uphill side that was exposed to occasional rifle and MG fire. But no tracers had come very near my spot, so I may have been shielded by tree trunks that I couldn't see in the darkness. The word was passed that no one was to lay his piece down, much less sleep. Here I will excerpt a passage that I wrote a number of years ago—writing based on notes made shortly after the war when all of this was much clearer in my memory (although rereading it brings it back in full vivid detail):

Sleepless night. Waiting, watching. Nothing.

Except Shafe. He and one other fellow (who? a medic?) went up and down that trench to haul out the wounded, then the dead. The boy who got hit in the neck (Barton?) was still alive and gurgling a bit when they carried him by. Don't know what became of him. But Shafe lives in my memory as one of those rare men who go the extra mile—one who comes through when all those around him are too deadbeat-tired or too scared to move.

(Ken Shafer was the “old man” in our platoon—pushing 34, as I recall. Some thought of him as too old for this line of work. Actually he was as strong as an ox and had more stamina than most of us 19- or 20-year-old punks.)

On another occasion (one that I can't place in time), after we had been caught pretty much out in the open by a short shelling by 88s, Shafe was crawling around to check on all of his people. He hunched his rifle up to show me the leather sling, which had a tear in it from a piece of shrapnel that had almost severed it. He was grinning, saying, “Where is that rear-echelon supply sergeant when I really need him? I think I'll tell Bray [our company commander] I'm going back to Marseille to look for the supply sergeant.” Although I've used quotation marks, my memory is not quite sharp enough to guarantee the accuracy that they suggest. But my memory is quite clear on both his expression and the substance of what he said.

It was his style of offering reassurance. "See, it's not so bad. Even when they come this close, they miss more than they hit." A memorable man.

One final incident: After the war, many of us had been transferred to the 45th Division, which was being shipped back to the States. (The 103d had been broken up; some—mostly replacements who hadn't been in it very long—had been transferred to a division that was to stay on in Germany as occupation troops; others had been sent to some other division for earlier shipment to the States.) In July and August, the 45th was in a huge redeployment center outside of Rheims, France. Since Rheims is only about fifty-odd miles from Paris, which a lot of people wanted to see (and since the division was supposed to be there only a week or so before moving to a seaport and then the States), passes were allocated to each unit for the weekend. It came out as two per platoon, and I did not draw one of the two lucky straws. Being that close to Paris, I decided that I was not going to miss the only chance I might have to see the city. So I spoke privately with your father. Told him that I would not ask him to tell any lies to cover for me, but that I was going to Paris for the weekend, and that if no officer asked for me or about me, I would be grateful if he would refrain from volunteering that information. He only smiled, and I took off for Paris. Which was only one more time that I was grateful that he was the platoon sergeant. (As it turned out, we were there for five or six weekends, and I went to Paris on each one—and on one of them I even lucked out and drew a lucky straw so that I could go with a legal pass.) And each time, Shafe and I had the same understanding. If he ever actually had to cover for me, he must have decided not to tell me about it. But I knew he would have done so.

This, incidentally, had unforeseen consequences for me. It was on those weekend visits that I formed the idea of returning to Paris to study, should I ever have the opportunity. The chance came in 1950, when I went there for a year. And that experience led to many other interesting turns in my subsequent life. So it is no distortion to say that his friendship had beneficial influences that reached long beyond our time together in the Weapons Platoon of Company K of the 411th.

These particular incidents, and the more general characterizations I've used, give the flavor of my memories of your father. But they do not conceal the fact that I cannot claim to have been a close friend. The reasons for that, no doubt, stem from the differences in age, in status (he was "cadre" and a noncom, and I was a private and private first class for ten of the eighteen months I knew him), and possibly also because he seemed to me to be, in a completely inoffensive way, more of a "loner" than most. But because of his qualities, I remember him much more clearly than some of the others, regardless of similarities to or differences from myself. And I did know him well enough to know that the ways in which I've spoken of him were true of him.

In our telephone conversation, you mentioned that your father never talked much about his experience in the war. That seems to be a fairly common situation, and I've wondered about it. When I came home, I had the simple-minded notion that, if someone could merely write accurately and honestly about what had happened, so that people could know, there would be no more wars. So I read novels and short stories by people who had "been there," and I went to movies that were reviewed favorably as to their realism about the war, looking for the one that

was going to do the job. But, as one author recently put it, “For the past fifty years the Allied war has been sanitized and romanticized almost beyond recognition by the sentimental, the loony patriotic, the ignorant, and the bloodthirsty.” One result has been that the few accounts, historical or fictional, that come anywhere close to the truth are almost totally overwhelmed by the multitude of the sanitized and romanticized—to the point that even many of that dwindling minority who once knew the truth have been at least partly brainwashed. Disappointingly, some of that kind of transformation even crept into the 103d Division’s history, *Report after Action*, that I referred to above (and which I still recommend).

There are, of course, a lot of reasons for this, and I won’t digress into that here. But, if you are interested in such matters, I’ll recommend a second book: Paul Fussell’s *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford, 1989), especially the last chapter, “The Real War Will Never Get in the Books.” But that chapter won’t have its full impact without reading at least most of the rest of it beforehand. And, although the book is not a narrative or a personal account, Fussell happens to have been an infantryman (wounded) in the 410th of the 103d Division.

I was very pleased to hear from you, Allen, for I had a lot of affection as well as respect for your father. But it made me aware that I had somehow been carrying the unconscious assumption that I would someday be seeing him again, and it is now painful to realize that that is not to be. If you should ever happen to be in this part of the country, I do hope that you’ll get in touch. I’d be delighted to meet you. And by all means write (or call again) if you think of any.

Sincerely,

John T. Dorsey, Jr.

P.S. Did Johnny Stromberg give you the name and telephone number of Stephen N. Kipgen, our platoon sergeant and later lieutenant? He called me (first time in many years) and said you’d called him. Told me he had a California number for Kip—a few years old. He and Kip knew your father before either I or Hugh Brown or Seymour Gabiner, whose names I gave you, did.

Christmas 1944, Morsbach, Lorraine

[from longhand]

I had been promoted to sergeant, because Wick and Uppy were killed after Barr, and we had been knocked on our ass trying to go up the trench after Climbach, where Johnny Stromberg was hit. Nobody left to promote but me.

The kraut offensive in the Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge) caused the Seventh Army to pull back, spread thin to the left. We were moved in trucks to Morsbach, southeast of Saarbrücken, where we were to hold the line while most of the action went on to the north and northwest. Sweet, peaceful relief. Houses to sleep in, guard duty on the line around the clock, but no action.

Mail and Christmas packages were brought up and distributed. I remember four things: a letter from Pinky, some fruitcake from Mother, and, for Christ's sake, a pair of bedroom slippers and a big book of cartoons about the jolly misfortunes of the boys in stateside Army training camps. The slippers I gave to the old "Papa" in the house (Calmes), the book I threw in the stove. The fruitcake was shared out, and I kept the letter (life at Judson College) to read many times.

Bernard Pock

[This letter was written to Mrs. Tice in response to her queries about her father. —FD]

January 3, 1986

Dear Mrs. Tice,

It was a moving experience to talk with you by telephone yesterday — a stranger's voice, yet one directly related to an event of almost exactly 41 years ago in a very small place in distant northeastern France. Your question about the death of your father, the date, etc., brought a rush of memories, some still quite clear, others hazy and, like shifting vapor, resisting conscious effort to bring them into focus.

I must first say in all honesty that, despite hours of effort, I can remember no image, no event, that would allow me to say, "Yes, that was Bernard Pock; now I remember . . ." Yet I was aware at that time of a person with that name. The evidence is first of all in the small sheets of pocket-sized notebook paper on which I printed in pencil about 86 names. Evidently I did this just after the war, maybe in an effort first to list people killed or wounded in our company whom I could recall from memory. Yet the list includes some (e.g., four cooks) whom I know were never hit. And the list is far from complete, for many replacements came in who were killed or wounded whom I hardly even saw before they were gone. Nevertheless, the name "Pock" is the 56th name on that list. (A rifle company, full-strength, included about 150 men in those days.)

More important, however, is what I discovered later when I got out my copy of the 103d division's history. This book, incidentally, is one you should try to find a copy of for yourself. It will give you a fairly clear idea of the kinds of places and experiences your father had or knew something about from the time he joined the division until his death. The authors were Ralph Mueller and Jerry Turk, with Bill Barker, artist. The title is *Report after Action: The Story of the 103d Infantry Division*. It was published by the division in Innsbruck, Austria, in 1945, and copies were, I think, delivered to us there before the division was broken up to be shipped either back to the States or to Germany for occupation duty. Or maybe they took orders there and mailed copies later. Just possibly the association's secretary could help you find one or could get one Xeroxed for you. It is 170 pages long.

In reading it just after publication, I made a lot of notes in margins to elaborate on, correct, or fill in details of events that were described. Here is one paragraph from page 61:

On January 10 the Division assumed the offensive for the first time in the Sarreguemines area when the 411th Infantry attacked toward a limited objective on the commanding terrain in the vicinity of Morsbach, Oeting, and Behren. Bitter resistance was encountered on Hill 387, northwest of Oeting, from which the enemy launched a counterattack against the third battalion. The second battalion was subjected to a heavy shelling in the Behren sector and was pinned down a few hundred yards short of the objective. Enemy strength was greater

than anticipated and rendered advance positions untenable. A minor withdrawal was necessary to a line slightly in advance of the line of departure, where positions were consolidated under heavy pressure. Fighting subsided during the night and hostilities in the Sarreguemines area again dissolved into a static situation.

In the margin beside that paragraph, where I wrote it in pencil many years ago, at a time when all of this was fresh enough in memory to allow me to fill in such details, is this note: "K or W [Killed or wounded]: Corey, Pock, Scagliani, Zundel, Fulton, 17 others."

So, to my mind, this answers the question of the time, the place, and the general circumstances of your father's death. I did not witness it (although I did a few of the others). I did happen to know one of the five named fairly well and was acquainted with two others. Usually after such actions, those surviving were anxious to know about friends and how badly the company had been hurt, and when the total was known to the company commander or the first sergeant they would pass the word along. The word that day was evidently "22," of whom I knew (or was familiar with the names of) those five. (Company K, of course, was a part of the 3d Battalion, along with I, L, and M companies.)

But why that time, where was that place, and how are those circumstances to be understood? I can only offer a summary of the relevant history and supplement that with the understanding that was, as I recall, shared by a number of us in the enlisted ranks at that time and place.

First, as I mentioned in our telephone conversation, the 103d Division was not directly involved in the Battle of the Bulge. I imagine the newspaper coverage of the time made it appear that that was the only place U.S. troops were being killed and wounded, but that's the way of newspapers and other mass media. The 103d, of which the 411th Infantry was one of the three regiments (the other two being the 409th and the 410th) became one of the divisions of the Seventh Army. That army had invaded France from the south before the 103d got there, so we were moved by trucks and jeeps up to the Vosges Mountains in northeastern France. The division went "on the line," taking over a portion of the front from another division, on what used to be called "Armistice Day" — November 11th. On November 16th, we began our first attack near the city of Saint-Dié. From then until late December, five weeks that seemed then and even now to have been many times that long, we made our way, first, on foot through the mountains and the plain, almost to the Rhine River near Sélestat. Many were killed or wounded along the way. We were then moved north a ways on trucks and unloaded to continue in that direction on foot to the Wissembourg area. Again, we were having to fight for almost every little town and village along the way.

Then, between Climbach and Bobenthal, the 3d Battalion (companies I and L first, then K and later M) became the first battalion of the 6th Army Group (of which the Seventh Army was one of the armies) to enter Germany. But not for long. We ran into the fortified Siegfried Line and were stopped—again, lots of killed and wounded. About that time (December 16th), the Germans began their large counterattack, which the newspapers soon labeled the "Battle of the Bulge," a good distance (some 125-150 miles) to the northwest of where we were. So the

103d was pulled out of the Siegfried Line in the Wissembourg area and moved westward to the western portion of the Sarreguemines sector (just south of the German city of Saarbrücken) to help hold down the southern hinge of the Bulge.

There, on December 24th, we relieved an armored division which was moving up for direct use in reducing the Bulge. K Company was in a little village on the front, Morsbach, just a mile and a quarter from German-held Forsbach. We were very tired and the whole division was pretty well shot up by then. Although replacements had been fed in fairly frequently, we were seldom if ever at full strength. But we had a couple of restful weeks, with only patrols going out at night to feel out the exact location and strength of the German positions. These showed that the Germans were well dug in and had lots of ammunition.

Finally, however, K Company got the word that we were to leave our low-casualty, white-Christmas Morsbach to go with the rest of the 3d (and 2d) battalions to take a big hill (Hill 387) that sort of jutted out to make a dent in the line drawn on the map showing where the front was in our sector. (I've sketched a map more or less to scale so you can see what I, and the paragraph I quoted earlier from the book, are talking about.) Not that the Germans were about to come off that hill and give us trouble—their commanders from Holland down to near Switzerland were probably thinking more about their losses in the fast-fading "Bulge." And our whole Seventh Army was within ten days of a general pullback in the east because, I suppose, of our side's losses in the same Bulge. No doubt, some grand strategic plan required that the line on the map be straight rather than dented there. But we also knew from night patrolling that the Germans basically would like to keep that line as it was. So early on January 10th (according to the paragraph quoted earlier from the book) and not on the 11th, we set out over a high wooded ridge—tall trees—and down the steep slope to the valley between the ridge and Hill 387.

Two of the rifle platoons (up to about 36 men in each when full-strength, but I think the company as a whole was still shorthanded due to the need to divert shipments of replacements to the divisions cut to pieces in the Bulge), in one of which was probably your father, left the cover of the trees and moved out into the valley. There was barbed wire that had to be cut through out there, but as the platoons in skirmish formation approached it, the Germans opened up with a lot of machine gun, rifle, and mortar fire. In the woods, we were getting a good bit of the mortar shells, while the machine guns and rifles worked over the platoons in the exposed positions. They were mostly pinned down and unable to move very much. I think I remember that the third rifle platoon was also committed in an effort to relieve the situation. Most of those being killed and wounded were out there, and there was not much that could be done about it. It went on all day.

My best recollection is that the only artillery we heard was German, coming in over to the right where the book says 2d Battalion was getting it. I may be mistaken, but right now I do not remember hearing much if any of our artillery coming from the rear to try to stop the machine guns, and we could not use our mortars from the woods because the tree-top cover was too dense to get our shells out through it. German mortar shells were coming in and exploding in the same tree-tops, and fragments from one of these got Zundel (our relatively

new company commander) in the arm, but he was able to stay, propped sitting against a tree. Where the 411th's reserve battalion for that attack, the 1st, was that day, I don't remember—or didn't hear.

One of those wounded badly out in the valley happened to be a young fellow whom I did know, a minister's son from Iowa I believe it was. We had had a long conversation in Morsbach the day before. Another, Scagliani on the list I wrote in the margin, was a medic who tried to go out and get him or at least give him some morphine so he wouldn't scream so much. Medics wore white cloth vests with a large red cross on the front and the back, and also large white circles on their helmets with a red cross painted in each circle. Most times both sides did not shoot at each other's medics, but this time they killed Scagliani before he got to my buddy, who screamed almost all night until he died. It was very cold and it snowed again that night. (All this is what those distant, impersonal words mean which said, "Enemy strength was greater than anticipated and rendered advance positions untenable.") Things did quiet down late at night, and it was possible for those who had spent the day in the field to crawl back dragging the wounded and the bodies of the dead. So by early morning, before daylight, the battalion and regimental commanders had decided that the whole thing was maybe not such a good idea after all, and we were allowed to get the hell out of there, leaving that dented line on the map pretty much as it had been.

Well, that is what I remember of January 10, 1945. If it was ugly and nasty, without any heroics, and in the end not very meaningful except for the dead and the wounded and their families when they got the news, well, that is what so many other days were like for the young men who were compelled or who for mistaken reasons went willingly (including myself here, and maybe your unlucky father) to do the official dying. Not that many others including children and women were or are exempt, in view of the bombing and burning of cities. It is just a sordid and degenerate business that no amount of fine words, flag waving, and marching band music can completely cover up or redeem. Yet, we continue to tolerate maniacs and savages in highest offices of governmental authority—we even elect them and reelect them—who spend their time planning for the next one, instead of devoting their every waking hour and last pulse of energy to trying every possible way to stop the wars going on now and prevent others. Eisenhower was perhaps the last president we had who came close to sanity on this point, and I'm inclined to think that his knowledge of the hundreds of thousands who died or were mangled in body or mind as a result of his deliberate commands weighed heavily in his mind.

I am truly sorry that I have not been able to tell you anything about your father as a person. I wish I had known him, but in rifle companies it was not usual that one got to know many people outside one's own platoon, unless they had spent much longer in training together than was true of those of us who came into Company K as privates in the spring of 1944. But I did want to let you know that this must have been the action in which he was killed and to tell you as honestly and as fully as I can remember what kind of an action it was.

If there is any further information that you think I might be able to provide, I do hope that you will call again or write. And I hope that having at least this little bit of sketchy, although I think reliable, information about your father's last day will ease at least that part of your sadness and frustration that was due to not knowing any of the circumstances.

Sincerely,

John T. Dorsey, Jr.

P.S. If you should get in touch with anyone else who was there (Francis W. "Red" Shedd or Seymour Gabiner, for example), please feel free to make copies of this to jog their memories, if needed. I'd be glad to know their recollections or their reactions to mine.

P.P.S. Those two, as was I, were in the fourth, or Weapons Platoon. We all went over as pfc's and ended as noncoms because of casualties. I came out as staff sergeant, section leader of the 60mm mortars. So most of those I knew best were either mortarmen or machine gunners.

Sessenheim, January 19, 1945

After the fiasco of the 3d Battalion's attack on Hill 387 near Morsbach in Lorraine, the entire division was moved back eastward to Alsace again. But the situation there was different from what it had been when we left in December. The Battle of the Bulge may have exhausted Germany's last offensive capacity. But it had also seriously blunted the Western Allies' drive to take the entire west bank of the Rhine as the next-to-last step in defeating Germany, while the Soviet armies battered inexorably into eastern Germany.

We had been hauled some distance in trucks on January 18, 1945. Around dark, we unloaded in some fairly thick woods, a few kilometers east of Hagenau. (Hagenau, in turn, is about 25 kilometers north of Strasbourg.) It was quiet; we couldn't even hear any artillery in the distance, so we assumed that we must be some distance from the line. Word came down that we'd be in this area all night. We were to spread out a bit and dig slit trenches to sleep in. But we were to maintain a blackout—no smoking even, except in the holes. Sounded as if we were fairly close, after all.

Next morning we got the word on the situation. The 1st and 3d battalions of our regiment, the 411th, along with a battalion from the 410th Regiment, were now the main part of a combat team, the other part of which would be tanks—eight of them, of the 781st Tank Battalion. We, the 3d Battalion of the 411th Infantry, were to replace some other outfit ahead of us to the east in the edge of the forest. Then, working with the tanks, we would attack a village named Sessenheim, across a broad plain. Sessenheim is on a small river, the Moder, making its way to the Rhine, which is only a couple of kilometers more to the east.

The Germans had begun applying pressure in the area north of Strasbourg, and we were now in that area. By taking Sessenheim, we were told, we would thwart their attack, throw them off balance. There was not much intelligence on what was in Sessenheim or what kind of an outfit or outfits we would go up against. (Later we learned they included some Waffen SS units, which would not have been regarded as good news.) We wondered why the brass thought we'd need tanks. But the tanks made us apprehensive. As someone usually managed to pronounce about that, always in gloomy tones, "The bastards draw artillery." Artillery was the dread of the infantryman.

Before dawn the next day, the 19th, we moved out along a road through the mostly pine forest. Soon the outfit we were replacing began moving past us toward the rear in a column of twos, as we moved forward in the same formation. They were bedraggled: unshaven, muddy, weary-looking, and mostly quiet. As they filed out and we filed in, a few of them offered their own succinct briefings such as "Tough shit, boys," or "You poor bastards are in for it."

There had been a thaw and much of the snow had melted, followed by a hard freeze. Many of our guys had had their helmets painted white back in Morsbach. I had declined what I figured was too permanent a form of camouflage and had instead gotten hold of a white piece of cloth to stretch over mine. This I had by now taken off and stuffed into a pocket. These woods had been shelled a lot, and tree trunks, standing, leaning, or down, looked black. Some

of the troops we were replacing grinned at those with white helmets and said, "Target heads" or "Bull's eye!"

I must not have been alone in thinking all was not right in this situation. Couldn't put my finger on it—it just had a bad feel. One man in our platoon—I don't remember who—began to lag. When Kipgen told him to catch up, he said, "I can't. I'm not going this time." Kip said, almost snarling, "You'll go if I have to kick your ass every foot of the way." The guy, obviously terrified, said, "I've had enough. I'm scared. I'm not going." Another voice joined the dialogue: "You think we ain't scared, you son of a bitch? How do you get to be one so scared you don't have to go?" Kip gave him a shove and another word or two, and the guy, sniffling by now, moved ahead and took his place again in the column.

As we got closer to the edge of the woods, we could hear the rumble and grinding of the tanks that were joining us. They were not in our part of the column, so we couldn't see them. But as the noise they made grew louder, sure enough we began to pick up the whine of incoming 88s. We hit the ground, but could hear enough of the tonal change of the whine to know they were not going to hit close. About a dozen cracking explosions, a few hundred meters behind. The tank engines ground on. Jeez, why couldn't they put better mufflers on those things?

No more 88s. After a few minutes, we moved on. But now we knew that they knew that we were here, with tanks. Dawn had passed, and we had a cold, grey, overcast early morning. We could make out the edge of the woods, and the wide flat plain that it bordered. K Company moved down to the right, moving back a bit from the plain so we'd be less visible.

Companies I and L were, with the tanks, to cross the plain from our left and hit Sessenheim, of which we got glimpses of a church steeple and some roofs, off to our right front. We (K Company) were to hold up in the edge of the woods as reserve, either to follow I and L in or to hit Sessenheim from the right flank if necessary. Word came down that we wouldn't be in position long enough to dig in, so each of us looked around for any naturally available cover.

But when mortars began to come in, many bursting in the trees above us, few, including me, had decent shelter. We were well spread out, but after each batch of shell bursts the call for "Medic! Medic!" could be heard. I wondered how many casualties K Company was taking. Should have been more worried about I and L, heading out onto the plain with the tanks.

I was at the edge of the woods and had a clear view of that scene. The tanks, each followed by a couple of squads from I or L companies, were stretched out in a ragged line. It looked as if the lead tank was getting close to the first buildings of Sessenheim, amidst a lot of rifle and machine gun fire, punctuated by an occasional deeper blast from the big guns on the tanks.

Suddenly we heard something new and terrifying. It sounded like thousand mile-per-hour freight trains, screaming and roaring across that plain, roughly toward us—a rapid series of horrendous roars and explosions. For a moment I wondered whether this could be some new "secret weapon." When I realized they were not hitting in our immediate area, I managed to lift my head high enough to see what it was. A few others were doing the same, and someone figured it out and hollered, "It's pointblank 88s! Look at the tanks!"

The lead tank had reached the edge of the village, where it had been hit and stopped. The

troops with it had made it into the village and taken cover. The tanks still out in the open were being hit, one after the other, by those 88s firing pointblank. From four or five of the tanks, the top had flown open and their crews had piled out and begun a mad dash back across the plain where they'd come from. The tops didn't open on the others; they were smoking, having apparently been stopped by shells that had pierced their armor and probably killed their crews. It was misses by some of those 88s that came in our general direction, making such fearful noise.

The option of taking off for the rear was not open to the riflemen who had gone out with the tanks at the head of the column. Those closest to the village had rushed it, seeking cover. Many others were scattered on the ground in the wakes of the tanks, killed or wounded—or playing dead. Only those following the last few tanks were able to make a reasonably orderly withdrawal—although “orderly” has to be understood here in an elastic sense. It looked like a total wipeout of the tanks and a very high proportion of losses in the two rifle companies. (The regimental history, *From Bruyeres to Brenner*, page 9, gave I Company's roster afterward as 28 and L's as 50. Assuming 150 in each company going in, I Company's losses were over 80 percent, and L's were over 67 percent. An unstated but probably significant number of these were captured, inside Sessenheim. K Company's losses were not listed. They were less dramatic, for we remained in reserve all day and took only a routine number of casualties, mainly from mortars.)

Another footnote to the wipeout of the tank unit deserves inclusion. Years later, in 1965 or '66, I was on the faculty of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. I fell into conversation with Dave Kayser, the director of the Joint University Library. I don't recall how the discussion moved to such a subject, but it turned out that he had been a captain, in charge of those eight tanks of the 781st Tank Battalion. He had been among the lucky ones who popped out of the top of their tank and set records for the dash back to the woods. But he remembered the name “Sessenheim” from an even more harrowing perspective than I did.

By then it was late morning, and the order came down for K Company to shift to our right, staying in the edge of the forest. Our movement of a few hundred yards must have been visible to their mortar fire controllers, for mortars soon began to rain in on us. They seemed to have generous supplies of ammunition and were well zeroed in on our position. We began to take casualties.

Time passed and the mortars let up. The medics had a lot to do, moving from one to another of those hit. Most were only wounded, and few were killed. The tree bursts blew a lot of metal among us, but most of the mortar shells were evidently small (50-60mm or less), and only those that hit very close could be lethal.

When most of the incoming stuff is exploding in the trees, and there are no holes in the ground in which to take cover, the best position is hunched in a squatting fetal position, head up, in the smallest knot possible close against the trunk of a solid tree, rather than stretched out flat on the ground. Muscles get tired holding that position, but the fear inspired by the overhead explosions keeps one tense. During this lull I leaned my back against the tree and spread my legs to relax. There was time to call around to see if others in the squad were OK. All OK.

But mortars come in without the whistle or whine which is the telltale warning of spinning artillery rounds. One gets only a brief WHOOSH before the explosion. So when the next batch came in, there I sat with no time to move. The tree bursts were almost directly overhead this time, and at the same time I heard a loud but non-explosive THUNK right in front of me. Midway between my spread thighs, a round hole had appeared in the damp ground. It was about two to two and a half inches in diameter. Looking directly down the hole, one could see a portion of the fin mechanism on the tail of the kraut mortar round. Had it not been a dud, my army career would no doubt have come to an abrupt end right there.

I was petrified, just staring, hypnotized, at that hole in the ground. One of the guys close by happened to be Patsy Mastramico. Patsy had been one of the earliest replacements in the platoon, back in November. His family had immigrated to the States when he was a kid, but he still spoke with a marked Italian accent when excited. He was looking at me and at that hole, bug-eyed. "Jee Skarice, John!" he groaned. "Counta you balls!"

The mortars had slacked off again, and our movement continued to the right, along the edge of the woods. I scrambled up with the others and ran a bit farther along, keeping an eye out for possible cover every yard of the way. A sizable tree had been blown over, putting its roots in the air and leaving a hole five or six feet across and a couple of feet deep in the center. I dove for it just as more mortars began to come in. Bud Brown also landed in the shallow hole. Most of the bursts were in tree branches, alarmingly close overhead. At the height of all the noise, a sharp stinging pain caught me behind the right shoulder. "Bud, I'm hit," I said, and he stuck up his head and yelled, "Medic! Medic!" I pulled off my right glove and worked my fingers. They all moved. I moved my elbow and upper arm. Both in working order. A delighted thrill began to suffuse me—I'd be out of it! Maybe not a million-dollar wound. But weeks in a hospital, I was sure. Weeks!

"Where is it?" Bud wanted to know. I told him, and in a second he pulled the right strap of my pack off my shoulder, I unhooked my ammo belt, and he clawed up my jacket, shirt, and undershirt.

About that time, Meche the medic scrambled over. They bared my back up to my neck. The medic spoke first. "Tough shit, John. It just pinked you at the edge of the shoulder blade. Barely a drop of blood. Hold still; I'll bandage it."

"To hell with it," I said, my vision of the hospital fading rapidly. "Lemme get all this crap back on."

There were two little pieces of jagged shrapnel, one about half the size of the tip of my thumb, the other smaller. The larger had gone through the outside of my pack and into a waxed cardboard K-ration box, where it penetrated and lodged inside the cat-food-sized can of yellow cheese, denting outward the opposite side of the can. Had it not been stopped, it would have done considerable damage to my lung. The smaller one had also gone through the K-ration box, but missed the can. It had gone through the canvas of my backpack, barely cut my shirt and undershirt, and, its force spent, had stopped there, producing the sting and very slight cut in the skin. The worst damage was to my spare pair of dry socks. Folded over and tucked just inside the pack, on top of the K-ration, each had ragged holes torn through them. (I put the two

little chunks of kraut mortar shell in a pocket to keep as souvenirs. But eventually they were misplaced and lost.)

When I got my shirt, jacket, and pack back on, Bud slapped me heartily on the arm. "It's great, John! You're OK!"

"Yeah," I muttered. "Great."

After a number of short moves along to the right, followed by periods of waiting, and keeping far enough from the border of the woods along the plain that (we hoped) we were not visible to observers in Sessenheim, the word came down to dig in. Two-man holes. But first, we should try to find a clearing where we could set up at least two of our three mortars, aimed so that we could fire defensively into a zone a couple of hundred meters wide in the plain parallel to the edge of the woods. The company's two machine guns were positioned at the edge of the woods, one at the farthest right flank of the First Platoon, one at the corresponding place on the left. It was a standard defense, in which we would have the advantage of planned fields of fire, should they decide to cross the plain and come after us. What we did not know was that K Company was the only reasonably intact rifle company left in the battalion—only fragments of I and L were left.

But also it was getting late, and daylight was fading fast. We didn't have time to search until we could find an adequate clearing for mortars, much less to get them laid for possible firing at night, should the krauts decide to come out and see how badly we'd been hurt during the day. (At that time, of course, our officers had not passed that very discouraging intelligence along to us.) We could only find places for our holes, and start digging. Fortunately the ground was damp and relatively easy to move; nor did we run into too many large roots. We were able to dig out pretty good two-man holes in relatively short order. As usual in this sort of situation, the rule was one man awake at all times in each hole. This meant two hours of sleep, sitting in the bottom of the hole, followed by two hours standing, head above ground level, peering into the dark and trying to interpret every crack of a twig or cough from some other hole. With luck, a total of four to five hours of sleep for each. Never enough.

The grey morning arrived, and nothing much seemed to be going on. The word was that we'd probably move to another position during the day, but that we'd probably spend another night in these woods, still close to Sessenheim. During the morning, we began to learn the extent of the battalion's losses the day before. Companies I and L were, for all intents and purposes, gone. What was left of them was put together in a couple of platoon-sized units to function as reserves for K Company. The latter was deployed along the edge of the woods, to cover that plain still separating us from Sessenheim. We found positions from which our three mortars could fire up between treetops and onto that plain and set the mortars up. The problem was that we did not have a large supply of ammunition. We'd not be able support the defense for a very long time against a sustained German attack. Thus, as the hours passed, the level of anxiety and tension remained fairly high. There was not much to do, and time dragged slowly.

When darkness finally came, and we made preparations to spend another night there, many

of us were as tired from the nervous tension as if we had been working physically all day. The sleep deficit from the preceding night and the stress of the day before had contributed their quotas to the cumulating fatigue. I looked forward to some sleep.

We got less than two hours sleep. Word came down to the platoon to get ready to move again. Coming at the time it did, this was not received with great glee. But the order was soon supplemented by information that this was not just another tactical shift of position. Other U.S. forces on each flank had begun a general withdrawal; as we pulled back, bridges we crossed would be blown up by the engineers. We (the Allied forces in this sector) were going to cede a sizeable chunk of territory to the Germans. "We are going," said one noncom, "to haul ass. An' anybody lags or drops out will just have to wait for the krauts to pick him up an' tend to his achin' back and bleedin' feet."

So, under orders to keep it as quiet as possible, and not to talk at all, 3d Battalion began a retreat that would last all night. Following the shootout at Sessenheim, the battalion was down close to half of its normal strength—which, of course, due to the attrition of "normal" casualties, was never as large as full strength of over 700. There was probably a unanimous sense of relief that we were pulling out of a situation that was obviously very dangerous.

We started out at a fairly normal clip. We were on a road before long, and the terrain in the Rhine plain was relatively flat. When we crossed bridges over small streams, a team of engineers was usually standing by. After we'd passed, and allowing enough time for the rest of the column to get across, we'd hear the explosions as the bridges went up. We hoped those guys were also laying a lot of mines. It was obvious that none of the bridges was large enough to cause the krauts much of a delay, if they wised up to our sudden departure and organized a reconnaissance in strength to harass our rear.

However, the pace slowed after an hour or so. The buildup of fatigue and sleeplessness must have affected even the officers, who did not carry the load of weapons and ammunition that the rest of us did, for they were not hassling us to move faster. Instead they seemed much more solicitous than ever in encouraging people to keep going if they showed signs of beginning to straggle.

It became another one of those all-night marches, with occasional ten-minute breaks to rest. It got colder, and we came into snow-covered ground. The road was not icy, however, and footing was steady enough that one could doze while walking—a trick that many of us had learned back in November and December on those not too frequent occasions when we had smooth and relatively level surfaces to cover at night.

Finally, about dawn, we came into a village large enough to billet the 350 or so left in the battalion. Most of the mortar section was able to get into one small house, for with our sleeping bags we did not need beds. An elderly Alsatian lady dithered about, smilingly making sure everyone had a good space to stretch out. We were soon all asleep.

Late that afternoon, when some of us began to wake up and move about, we could not help noticing photographs of a couple of her sons in Wehrmacht uniforms. The lady even proudly identified them. I couldn't decide whether she did not know that we were Americans or whether to her it no longer made any difference. Perhaps she was willing to welcome and try to

make comfortable any mothers' sons who were far from home and engaged in this unlucky business.

Danny

[from longhand]

Danny Mathis is a type to be remembered. He was in the machine gun section of the Weapons Platoon—an ammo bearer when we went across.

Danny enjoyed being called “15-0-49.” This was his number in the Illinois State Prison at Joliet, where he spent a year or so before induction into the Army. Statutory rape conviction. He claimed (a) that he didn’t know she was under sixteen, and (b) that the Illinois state highway patrolman who caught them in flagrante delicto, parked beside the highway, asked for ten dollars to forget the matter. Danny did not have the ten, so he was charged, tried, and convicted.

The girl was remorseful after the trial; she had been screwing all of Danny’s friends (according to Danny) and had not realized what a problem she was creating for him when she blurted her age to the state trooper when he asked.

Danny was a handsome young man, a bit thin, with black hair and blue eyes. Always had a rather casual attitude toward the Army, the war, and his job in the machine gun squad. Once in Texas he was in the battalion guard house for being AWOL in Dallas and saying something offensive to the MPs who picked him up. I happened to catch guard duty at the time. I tried to slip him a bottle of beer and a Hershey bar. He refused to take them, playing out some noble scenario, but creating a problem for me because I had to dispose of the contraband. Fortunately, Camp Howze was then relatively new, and there was a raw red-earth ditch into which I could dump it and kick dirt over it.

Danny, Red Shedd, Glenn Wainwright, Dave Totoro and I enjoyed several weekend passes together in Dallas and Fort Worth. There was a mutual affinity, hard to understand. Danny and Dave, rotten to the core, but in different ways, which I hope to get to below. Glenn, Red, and I made some pretence at intellectuality, but we probably all shared the character of thugs—which our infantry training only reinforced.

Overseas, Danny made a fine machine gunner. From ammo bearer, he moved up quickly to gunner as people got hit. The casual attitude and the reflexes that are soon learned in the infantry if one is lucky enough to survive the first few engagements and bombardments served him well.

Two incidents remain in my memory. One occurred while we were in Lorraine, in Morsbach. There was a young replacement in Danny’s machine gun squad: Eddy Scemimi. This boy was your typical Italiano from Buffalo. Clever, even bright. Dark, handsome, and short. But for reasons unknown to me, some of the guys in the MG section began to ride him. In the morning, one of them would tell him, “Eddy. I had a dream about you last night. You got it. Tough shit, Eddy.”

This got to him. About the same time, Danny and another of the machine gunners (I cannot remember his name—this one was a rat) decided that life would be safer and more comfortable

in one of the larger towns we had overrun in France. They took off—and Eddy went along on a dare.

All three were eventually caught and returned to the company. We were off line for a few days and word came down through Bray (then CO—Himic had been hit) that the colonel had decided to make an example of Scemimi, not of Danny or this other rat who had encouraged Eddy to take off. Danny would be returned to the company, the other rat would go to the stockade for life, and Eddy would be shot.

I cannot remember the name of the town where this was told to me. But I remember the brick street and the stone buildings very clearly. One was a barn-type building. I told the officer who said this to me (I was then a sergeant), “You can’t do this. Scemimi is a kid. If someone is to be shot, let it be Mathis.” (Sorry, Danny; you were more responsible than Eddy.) The officer said, “We are going to make an example here.” Again I said, “No. He is a kid.”

They did not shoot Eddy. But they put him away, and my letter to him was never answered.

But back to Danny. Bray was then CO and, being very angry at Danny (he was constitutionally unable to understand machine gunners), decreed that Danny should walk point whenever possible from then on.

Nieffern, Alsace, Night of February 13, 1945

An episode on February 13, 1945 resulted in the award of a medal. Because the citation describing the episode did not get all the facts straight, and because the whole thing left me with very mixed feelings, I will give the full citation here, and follow it up with my quite clear memory of what happened. My first notes on that were put down quite shortly after the end of the war.

[COPY]

HEADQUARTERS 103d INFANTRY DIVISION
Office of the Commanding General

APO 470, U.S. Army
31 May 1945
GENERAL ORDERS)
NUMBER - 156).....

I—AWARD OF SILVER STAR. Under the provisions of Army Regulations 600-45, 22 September 1943, as amended, the Silver Star is awarded to following named individuals:

.....

Staff Sergeant John T. Dorsey, Jr., 34809191(then Sergeant), Infantry, Company "K," 411th Infantry Regiment. For gallantry in action. On the night of 13 February 1945 Sergeant Dorsey in the process of leading a raiding party on Niffern, France, was subjected to intense machine gun fire which pinned down his group. Crawling forward he observed the fire coming from the window of a building a short distance away. Turning the assault group over to his second-in-command, he crawled forward in the face of intense fire to a position directly below the window. Throwing a grenade into the building, he completely destroyed the gun and crew. On his return trip Sergeant Dorsey was fired upon by a hidden sniper. Observing the flash from the sniper's gun he hunted him down and killed him with one well-placed shot. Sergeant Dorsey's outstanding valor is in accordance with the highest traditions of the military service. Residence: Opelika, Alabama.

[END OF COPY]

From mid-January to the middle of March, 1945, the line in our sector of the front was relatively stabilized. Both sides were recovering from the losses of the Battle of the Bulge—the von Rundstedt offensive in the Ardennes in Belgium—and preparing for the next Allied offensive, which was bound to be a big one. Until then, each side was dug in, holding strings of villages and/or hills as strong points. The two sides were quite close together at some places, at others separated by as much as one or two kilometers.

There was fairly frequent night patrolling by both sides—more by us than by them. And

occasionally we conducted night raids on German-held villages or other strong points, to try to capture prisoners for interrogation—also, presumably, to keep them off balance, and to keep us on our toes. Portions of one or another rifle company were chosen to make each raid. The village of Nieffern was selected, probably by the battalion CO, for one of these. It was quite a small hamlet, a few kilometers down the line from where we were. K Company had been rotated into battalion reserve for a few days, with I Company and L Company on the line; so we got the job this time.

About 35 or 40 men were chosen from the three rifle platoons. But Steve Kipgen, our former platoon sergeant, now promoted to second lieutenant and assigned to the Weapons Platoon as our leader, had just returned from a few weeks of officer training. He was to lead one of the three groups that would make up this raiding party, and he asked us whether any from Weapons Platoon would go along too. No one said anything for some seconds—then somewhat to my surprise, I heard myself say I'd go. Immediately I wished I could take it back—I had impulsively broken the basic coping rule in the Army: Never volunteer for anything.

But I knew why I'd done it. Back in November, on the first big attack after our initiation at the Taintrux, Kip had literally saved my life when I fell into the Meurthe River and the flooding stream was tugging me away from an insecure hold on a piling under the footbridge. If he wanted someone from the platoon to go on this raid, I was not going to let him go off leading a bunch of riflemen he didn't even know. There were numbers of relatively new replacements in all the platoons, and he needed some people he knew and who at least had some experience in this business. It was a dumb move on my part, and if I'd taken time to think I probably wouldn't have done it. But, along with all who'd been in the platoon long enough to know Kip, I had a great respect and admiration for him. In many ways we were all indebted to him, but possibly I particularly felt it, because he'd managed to pull me out of that crazy rushing little river.

So there were a couple of days in which we got ready. From maps and the reports of daylight observation and previous night patrols, Nieffern had been pretty well cased. We studied not only the maps, but a small-scale wood and clay mockup of the village. We learned all of its few meandering streets and alleys and the buildings whose location and orientation we most needed to know. Most of us didn't know each other very well, and that was hardly a favorable element in this kind of a job. We tried to get at least better acquainted.

The three squad-size groups of 12 or so men each had to know the terrain as perfectly as possible, for it would be a very dark night. We were shown the exact locations of minefields, machine gun emplacements known to be manned at night, and other probable night guard posts. These had been located by earlier night patrols. One group, led by Kipgen, was to move out along the road leading directly into Nieffern. A portion of the road near the village was mined and shown clearly on the mockup; this could easily be bypassed. Two German MGs were in buildings at the edge of the village where the road led in. A second group was to approach the village's corner, to our right. There were mines in the field along the edge of the village facing us and some barbed wire, but this group was to swing far enough to the right to avoid them. While it would be logical to expect a MG position in the corner house which would

be the point of initial reference for the second group, night patrols had not reported one there. The third group was to go through a known gap in the line well to the left of the village, circle around to the rear of it, and slip in that way.

The operation was to be synchronized so that all three groups would arrive at the designated points and try to penetrate the village perimeter at the same time. In the confusion created by simultaneous attacks by the first two groups, the third coming from their rear should be able to grab a prisoner or two to bring back for interrogation. Of course, the first two groups also should not pass up any opportunities to take prisoners, but their main job was to shoot the place up a bit, create a bit of terror and confusion.

My first unpleasant surprise as I prepared for the raid was to be assigned, not to Kipgen's group, but to the second group, as its second-in-command; I was a sergeant then. The first and third groups were to be led by officers, Kip for the first group, and a new and inexperienced second lieutenant for the third. The second group would be led by a rifle squad leader, Staff Sergeant Dill. I was acquainted with Dill from Texas training days; he had come over with the rest of us. Like a good proportion of the noncoms in the company by now, including myself, he had been promoted to replace a squad leader who'd been hit or otherwise removed. He was supposed to be a good squad leader. However, a couple of weeks earlier when we were near Rothbach, I had come upon him in the woods, sitting on a log, reading a letter. He was obviously distressed. I stopped and asked if I could do anything. He said the letter was from home—his brother had been killed in the Pacific. I tried awkwardly to express sympathy, and he began to talk in a jerky, near-sobbing way. His hands were shaking, and about all that I understood was that if he got it, his parents would have no one left—there had been only the two sons. He seemed to be close to the edge. When he was quiet, all I could think of to say was a clumsy "I'm so sorry, Dill. You'll have to take good care of yourself..." or something equally unhelpful. In a few minutes I moved on, feeling very inadequate.

So when I found out that I'd be second to Dill in this group, I was not reassured. In the preparation sessions, he was quiet but seemed tense. At times he would be staring off into space when the layout of the village was being gone over for the seventeenth time. I wondered if there were any way I could get out of this situation. Too late.

The 13th arrived all too quickly. That night, the raiding party got into a couple of trucks which took us the two or three kilometers to the village of Zutzendorf, our jumping-off point. Nieffern was only about one and a half kilometers to the northeast. A heavily overcast sky made it pitch black, as anticipated. We had blackened our faces and hands with burnt cork. Most of each group were armed with rifles, but I had chosen to lay mine aside and borrow a .30 carbine because it was shorter and lighter than an M1. Any shooting that occurred would have to be at fairly short range, and the carbine would be more handy and maneuverable and, close up, just as effective.

The third group, which was to hit Nieffern from behind, left first. After a calculated time, Dill led my group, the second, down the road toward the place where we would leave it to swing to the right for our targeted point. Kip then led the first group down the same road, to

stay on it until they reached the village, except for the stretch where they would leave it to avoid the minefield.

My group left the road at the designated place and moved out into a downward sloping meadow. No talking, careful walking. It was cold, but not too much—no overcoats. Five or six of our group were carrying a huge and heavy plank, perhaps fourteen or fifteen feet long. It was to be our bridge over a small but swift stream several hundred meters this side of the village. I wondered where the rear echelon had found such a right-size board. When we got to the stream, only one man had to get wet carrying the end to the other side. It was silently laid in place, and it bounced a bit each time a man walked on it. We crossed, one at a time.

With all across, Dill whispered to me to take a position in the middle of the file. As second-in-command, I had been bringing up the rear. I had no idea why he was doing this, but the circumstances were hardly right for questions or discussion—I did what he wanted, whispering to the man now last in the line to make sure no one strayed or straggled. We moved on, slightly upgrade now. The darkness was such that five or six feet was the maximum distance between each of us.

Then the clouds thinned briefly, and I could barely make out the straight silhouettes of portions of rooflines ahead. Silently we hit the ground—if we could see anything, they might be able to see us also. Nobody moved for a while. Nothing happened. Again the darkness covered everything, and Dill up ahead got up and moved on—slower this time, each step careful not to break the silence.

The first sign that something was wrong was the sound of irregular explosions, several hundred meters to the left and slightly to our rear. Not mortars, not artillery. Dull, flat booms. Had to be mines. Kraut MG fire with it. Kipgen's group must have walked into a minefield that was not supposed to be there. (This turned out to be what had happened, we learned later. Three of Kipgen's group were killed outright. Several others were wounded, Kip among them. He was carried out with somebody's brains and blood splattered over the back of his helmet and jacket. He survived and returned to the platoon a month or so later, but he had a little trouble with his hearing thereafter. What was left of his group withdrew, under the fire of one or maybe two kraut MGs.) But all the noise had ruined our hope of surprise. The krauts would be on edge now.

Our group moved on, slowly, straining to hear or see anything. We would have to be getting close to the corner house we were aiming for. Then I could barely make out the looming bulk that must be it. Dill was about ten meters away from it, angling to the right to round its corner, with the five or six others ahead of me strung out in a ragged line with about two meters between each. I got to see all of this, briefly, because at that moment the machine gun (that was not supposed to be there) in a ground-floor window opened up, and its muzzle flashes seemed to throw light on everything. That is, of course, an exaggeration, but the surprise of reddish-yellow light so close at hand had that effect. I could even see sparks dripping down and away from the fire spurting from the muzzle. And from the curious growling sound from the throat of the man ahead of me as he went down, I knew he was hit. He was a redheaded fellow, a replacement whose name I wasn't even sure of. On the ground he made not a sound. We had all

hit the ground at the first shot. The roar of the gun so close was deafening—a series of short bursts, sweeping the air over us. I was lying spread-eagled on my stomach, head toward the window about twenty meters ahead, trying to will the ground to open up and swallow me. Then there were seconds—five? ten? thirty?—of silence. No one moved in the slightest way.

Then a POP high overhead, and red hellish light bathed everything as a flare floated down. The MG began to fire again.

At that moment I knew, with greater certainty than ever before, that I was about to die, that it was only seconds away. I put my face down, aiming the top of my helmet toward that window, so that when he saw me and fired I would get it through the top of my head and go instantly, with no lingering pain.

But the light faded into darkness, and the shooting stopped, and I was still there. I lifted my head, and again the POP from the sky and that ugly light. This time I managed to scan the whole scene before the MG spoke again. I saw only three or four shapes on the ground ahead—so Dill and maybe one more must have made it around the corner. All were still—no way to tell whether any were alive. Behind me were the rest of the group, likewise scattered and still. There was a small bare tree a few feet to my right rear. As the gun raked the area, I heard one round thunk into its trunk. Why didn't the gunner lower his muzzle and hose down the area on which we lay? It was only a matter of seconds until he did, and we'd all be gone.

Idiotically I wondered why my whole life was not flashing through my mind, as it's supposed to do when you know that the end is at hand. Perhaps instead it is a moment of liberation: it no longer matters what you do. I was aware that I was moving, crawling on my belly, ever so slowly, during the period of flarelight while the gun was firing. When it stopped, so did I. Then another flare, more machine gun fire, and I was making headway again toward the window. The noise of the gun concealed any noise I might accidentally make. Without consciously deciding to do so, I was doing the obvious thing—moving up under the window where I could toss in a grenade with no chance of missing. It didn't dawn on me that they might be as terrified as I was, so did not rise up high enough behind the gun when a flare lighted everything to see that we were all sprawled out right in front of them, dead or playing dead, waiting for them to finish us off. But why didn't someone already closer to the window put a grenade through it? Jesus! Maybe everybody else was dead! Could the krauts hear me if I moved only when they were firing? If they should hear me coming, they could either lower the muzzle and spray us, or toss out a few potato mashers and do to us what I hoped to do to them. Surely they could hear my heavy, ragged breathing in the still periods between flares. I tried to slow it down, lower the volume.

It was taking so long . . . but then my hand felt the cold stone of the house foundation.... Was I already there? It had all happened so fast. But yes, the flare again, and the gun was firing four or five feet directly above my head. Quickly, before it stopped, I had a grenade off my belt and pulled the pin, holding the grenade in my right hand with the handle firmly pressed to its side to keep the fuse from firing. Then light faded again and the firing stopped. Suddenly I realized I didn't have to wait again. In the stillness, as I decided how I was going to do it, I heard agitated whispering from the open window. What were they saying? Maybe one had

heard something as I moved to get the grenade. Can't wait any longer. I let the handle loose, holding on to the grenade, heard the trigger pop the fuse cap, counted one . . . and two . . . I hope this fucking thing was made right so I'll have the full five seconds . . . and three . . . my arm was swinging . . . and four . . . it hit the floor . . . and BOOM! It exploded before either of them could have a chance to grab it and toss it back . . . and almost with the boom, a clank of metal against metal and a sharp, short moan. Then silence, and I knew with great relief that this machine gun wouldn't fire at us anymore. Almost without thinking, I had another grenade in my hand, pulled the pin, and tossed it in without waiting. Counted five seconds . . . another sweet explosion. Just for good measure.

All of this I remember in unvarying, excruciating detail. Probably will never forget any of it. Yet, with the surge of relief at having survived, of that particular danger ended, I must have blanked out briefly—or my mind was racing too fast to register all that was happening. There were two windows on that wall, far enough apart for them to open from separate rooms. And others there reported afterward that a rifle fired from the other window, and that I, standing now, moved away from the wall enough to get an angled view into it, swung my carbine around, and snapped off one, maybe two shots. A rifle clattered to the ground, and a body slumped partly over the window sill, an arm hanging down, until he slid to the floor inside. (Withal, that clatter and the crazy image of that disappearing arm seem to have registered, in an abstracted way, in my mind.) The flares were continuing, close together now, so visibility was good—I was aware of that, too—but stopped soon after, when machine gun fire no longer accompanied the light. One of the guys in our group ran up with a .45 grease gun (as we called those mass-produced, little handheld assault machine guns) and fired bursts into each window. He told of this later, at debriefing. I didn't remember that either. But the others saw that also.

During that time, I was frantically wondering where the hell Dill was. My memory picks up more clearly where Dill galloped around from the right corner of the house, babbling. He didn't have his rifle. He said, loudly, "We gotta get the hell out of here." I hissed, "Don't make noise. Are you OK, Dill?" He repeated himself, still in a louder than normal speaking voice. But he went on and didn't make sense. His voice quavered. It was clear that he had cracked up. We were at the left corner of the house, where there was a low wall. Taking his arm I pulled him down to sit on the wall and tried to calm him. But he continued to babble, making far too much noise. I slapped him hard, twice, across the face, grabbed both his shoulders and shook as hard as I could. "Shut up, Dill! Shut up, goddamnit! You wanna get us all killed?" He dropped his head in his hands, shoulders shaking. But he quieted down.

A small group had collected. I told two of them to stay with Dill and keep him quiet, even if they had to knock him in the head. I sent two others to a front corner of the building to keep watch on the short street that led shortly to the central street of the village. Somebody told me that the man who'd gone down ahead of me when it started was dead—got it in the head. I needed to decide what we should do next. We hadn't heard anything from the third group yet. They should have reached the village from its rear about the time the MG had opened up on us. But we'd heard nothing from that direction, and the silence now was ominous. Was the whole

operation fucked up? The five or six of us still standing there huddled for a moment, and I told them we'd hang on to this building as a base, and sent two of them to sneak along the street, listening at each building to try to learn whether any krauts were inside. Warned them to be careful of shooting at any moving figures unless they were sure they were not our unaccounted-for third group, and reminded them we were there to get prisoners. I sent the guy with the .45 grease gun and another with a rifle.

They had not been gone but a couple of minutes when we heard low talking around in front of the building. It turned out to be the long-lost third group, with the lieutenant in charge. He said they had swung too far around to the rear of the village and had missed it when they moved up to the line where it should have been. Then they heard all the shooting, and were able to find the village from that. But they had just come into the village from the right and had had no contact with anyone but us. I told him what I thought had happened to the first group — all was quiet in that direction so they must not have gotten in. We'd lost two: one dead, the other off his rocker and tying up two more to keep him quiet. But all the krauts had to be wide awake and waiting. Did he have any good ideas for flushing any of them out so we could catch a couple? He said no, this was now a new situation, what did I think? I suggested we wait for the recon I'd sent out to get back, then we might know enough to decide.

About that time, we heard a muffled explosion from the direction of the center of the village, then a few bursts from the .45 grease gun. The lieutenant deployed his group to be ready for anything that came our way from there, and I did the same with the remainder of mine. Shortly, the two I'd sent out came along from that direction. They had found a house full of krauts. One had opened the door, seen or heard something and called out, whereupon the rifleman had thrown a grenade past him and through the open door, while the one with the grease gun let them have a few rounds.

"OK," said the lieutenant, "no chance of bagging any now. We're pulling out. You lead out with your group. We'll follow." So I told four in my group who hadn't yet had anything to do to get the body of the man we'd lost and work it out so they could help each other carry him back. The two with Dill said he was OK and still ready to go, so I asked them to stick with him and make sure he got back all right. And off we went, still keeping quiet, but moving a good bit faster this time.

We retraced our steps uneventfully. The first real relief was to recross the stream on that big plank. When we reached Zutzendorf, a couple of officers, one a major, from battalion were there. Each man who'd been along was interviewed as to what he'd seen and heard, and what had happened. That's when I learned what had happened to Kip and his group. I told the major with some anger that the intelligence was dead wrong on a couple of very critical points: for us the location of the MG that cost us one life, and worse, the minefield that Kip's group walked into. These blunders had fucked up the whole operation. "Sorry, Sergeant. Nothing's perfect in this business."

Several of our group expressed thanks to me for taking care of the kraut MG, and the rifleman in the window (which, as previously mentioned, came as news to me) and a couple for calming Dill down. I felt very bad about that at the time, and often wondered later what became

of him. In this business, everyone has a breaking point, if he lasts long enough. I'm sure of that. I was very lucky—the war ended in early May, leaving me both still alive and still on the sane side of my own such point. The medics took charge of Dill that night, and we didn't see him again. As we rode in the truck to rejoin the company, all I felt was a mixture of anger, disgust, frustration, and overwhelming fatigue. Four dead, more wounded, including Kip, one around the bend, and nothing accomplished. All I wanted was to sleep.

A couple of months later, K Company's first sergeant, Scruggs, mentioned to me that I'd been put in for a medal. I asked what for, and he said, "Just wait. You'll find out if it goes through." I had forgotten about it until about a month after the war ended in Europe, when I was notified while we were in Pettneu, Austria. The citation included mistakes (e.g., referring to me as "leader" of the group, when I was second-in-command of a group whose leader was incapacitated) as a comparison with this account will show. They couldn't even spell the name "Nieffern" right, and the whole tone of it was wrong—the Army never gets anything completely right. Reading it brought back the angry frustration and dejection I'd felt at the time. Only now it seemed they were trying to buy my complicity in the whole fuckup—and in the whole miserable Army way of doing things and the whole rotten war. (But by now I was fully complicitous, wasn't I?) Nor did it seem to me that I had done anything at all extraordinary, considering the way things go in combat. When I got back to the company after the award ceremony I pinned the medal to the seat of my pants and wore it there for several days, until Kip told me I should take it off. And yet . . . I didn't throw it away. Nor did I send it back with an appropriate message. If nothing else, it would remind me of where I'd been and what I'd felt that night—if I should ever need reminding. So its meaning was very mixed and dubious to me.

This ambivalence about the medal has never changed or faded. I also came to realize that it symbolizes to me what is essentially wrong with the military as a means of dealing with human problems. In a nutshell, it not only exists as an instrument of institutionalized violence, even to the taking of life, but it seeks to legitimate that grisly function by glorifying it. So I've tried here to write it down exactly as it happened. But even without notes, it seems to be etched in my memory, as are many other events during the war, as unchanged as a movie film—even years later. All I have to do is close my eyes, think "Nieffern," and the reel starts rolling.

The Beginning of the End, March 15, 1945

[from longhand]

We had had several days of rest in Ingwiller. Replacements had brought K Company (and all other units) up to full strength. Plenty of ammo and other supplies were piling up in the village. It was a waiting period in which we all knew something big was building up. Tension was in the air.

Finally, in late afternoon of March 14, word came down to noncoms in the platoon assembled by the new platoon leader who had replaced Kip. The whole Seventh Army would jump off at dawn the next day. K Company would be on line: our first objective would be a heavily defended village (Muhlhausen?). It would be a full-scale attack, preceded by artillery shelling. We would be accompanied by tanks, and would go in after sunrise under smoke. The push was to go on up and down the line until we reached Germany, and would continue until the Germans surrendered. Finally, all the setbacks of the winter would be reversed; we were heading for the end of the war. Rah-rah.

By now, we were completely aware that the fucking krauts could not or would not recognize the inevitable. They would continue the kind of strategic withdrawal we had experienced through the Vosges Mountains. With the advantage of well-prepared defensive positions, they could withdraw by stages as necessary, holding with main force units as long as possible, then leaving mines, artillery, machine gunners, and snipers to slow us while the main force withdrew. And we would walk into places where their artillery would know exposed areas and ranges down to the yard. If we had had time to build up strength, so had they. All of this, the lieutenant did not spell out. But we knew it. His pep talk was so much shit for the birds. Maybe he believed it; he was new.

Still, when we (the noncoms) passed the word to the sections and squads, we tended to accentuate the positive too. We had a few fresh replacements who had to be reassured by belief that it would be a pushover. Glenn Wainwright, who was by now a machine gun squad leader, Hugh Brown, and I exchanged a few ironic cracks about what the kraut officers were peddling to their boys about this. We assumed that they knew we were coming at them—and that they probably even knew the date.

We spent some time that evening cleaning weapons again for the umpteenth time and checking over all gear. I had a last conversation with “Maman” Reinhardt. She knew we were going. She put her hands on my shoulders and said a few words in Alsatian-German. I asked what she had said, and she responded, “Que le Bon Dieu te protège” (May God protect you). I was embarrassed, said nothing. She gave me a slip of paper with her daughter’s name on it. “If you hear anything about her in Germany, get word to me any way you can. I will be so grateful.” I assured her that I would, although we both knew that the chances for such a thing were infinitesimally small.

I went to my place on the floor to sleep, taking off only my boots. I had not told “Maman” one reason for my embarrassment. It was that in drawing straws for the next combat leave, I

had won in our platoon. It would mean a week of R and R in Reims—but it began on March 16. I had half-seriously proposed to First Sergeant Scruggs that I stay behind with the cooks on the 15th to be sure I got the R and R. He smilingly informed me that that would be unfair to the other guys in the Weapons Platoon. If I got it on the 15th, they would be able to draw straws again. I went to sleep with the usual fears of what the next day would bring, alternating with fervent anticipation of a whole week far behind the lines in Reims.

It was still pitch black the next morning when we were shaken awake by the company runner. We lined up and had hot chow for what was assumed would be the last time for a while. Then we formed up in the street and moved out. We had five or six kilometers to cover before the show started.

As we moved along the road, our artillery started up. The firing from the rear was soon followed by the thunder of explosions ahead where the shells were going in. And a steady thunder it was, almost without breaks. How sweet the sound. The krauts would know for sure that we would be coming, but a barrage that heavy would surely mean fewer of them would still be there. It lasted and lasted as daylight came. We had left the road and were holding in a field, with the platoons getting into position. We were on moderately high ground, and as the light grew I could see the other rifle companies stretched out far to the left and right. To the sound of artillery there was added the rumble of tanks moving into positions among the leading lines of rifle platoons. My God, it was big! For once everything seemed to be going on time—the whole line began to move ahead at once. Ahead not much could be seen, but the exploding shells kept a reddish light going.

As we moved forward, the artillery switched to smoke shells, and ahead it was as if a cloud had descended to the ground, and we were walking toward and finally into it. Then the artillery stopped, and the only sound was the rumble and clank of tanks. Visibility was almost zero. We silently closed up so that each man could see the back of the man just a few feet ahead. Tense now, waiting for the first kraut small-arms fire. Would they let us walk right up to them? Under the circumstances, a minute stretches into an hour. Step by step, seeing only the back of the guy ahead (what was it like for the point man?), waiting, waiting for the inevitable when the krauts start shooting. We were probably far too close for them to start off with artillery. Eerie.

Finally, the rapid bursts of a kraut MG. Almost a relief, ending the suspense. At the first break in the smoky silence, we were flat on the ground. Then the man ahead begins to crawl, following the one ahead of him. More MG bursts, each one flattening us momentarily. Still can't see anything. But the MG is off to the right, maybe fifty or sixty yards. (Somebody else will have to get that one.)

Then rifle fire ahead, theirs and ours. Starting as scattered shots, it accelerates to a ragged, irregular staccato. They may see us, we can't see them yet. We crawl, we flatten, we jump up and run a few yards before hitting the ground again. The sound of hand grenades – we're getting close. In lulls, the cry of "Medic! Medic!" Who's been hit? The smokescreen begins to clear.

Ahead is a stone bridge over a stream, and houses on the other side. Some have gotten across; now it is our turn. Rush across firing toward windows. Confusion. Check to see if

mortar squads made it. Yes. We are along a street, taking cover in doorways and alleys; shooting continues in street ahead. No more smoke.

The door behind me is half-open. I swing around, kick it open, duck. Door swings open; Gabby appears, we have it covered. Silence. I go in; nobody there. But there are a table and chairs. On the table, a candle burns. Cups half full of tepid coffee and a couple of opened tins of some kind of kraut rations. A couple of kraut caps and a boot on the floor. Could we have taken them by surprise after all? Had they thought our artillery was just another routine shelling? What about our smoke? Didn't that tell them anything? Gabby and I speculated. Weird. Anyway, these particular krauts had departed.

Back into the street. Quick check—all the mortar section was OK. (I was conscious of not liking this feeling of responsibility for them. If any were hit, was it my fault? Everybody in this business has to take care of his own ass. But we had a few replacements for whom this was the first action. Check to make sure they're OK. Just a word or two to each, intended to be encouragement.)

The shooting up ahead continued. Sounded like this one would be house-to-house. (It was, for about four hours.) We moved up the street against occasional rifle fire. Their MGs had been knocked out or had withdrawn. At least a couple of them could still be heard, as well as some bursts from our slower-shooting light .30s.

The street ahead angled away, and I could see. In the street, three dead krauts in blood puddles, lying in grotesque poses, their rifles scattered nearby. Across the street in a courtyard were two dead GIs. One was the big BAR man from Second Platoon. Must have been close to seven feet tall—but husky. He was big and strong, so he got the BAR. Now he was hunched over, face in the dirt and ass in the air, his BAR on the ground a couple of yards ahead. He must have been hit running and just went down on his face, without toppling to right or left. No blood showing. The other GI, a rifleman, lay stretched on his face with plenty of blood puddled around him. Occasional kraut rifle shots kicked up dirt in the street.

In this situation, there was no way for the 60mm mortars to be used. We just had to sit tight and keep covered while the rifle platoons cleared the village. Four long hours of more.

Vignette #1 from this operation: While I was crouched in an alley off the street covered by kraut rifles, Sergeant Scruggs, our first sergeant, toddled up the street with his helmet at a rakish angle. He was staggering drunk, having gotten hold (as we learned later) of some "medic alky"—the company medics had access to pure grain alcohol for sterilization of wounds. Scruggs, we knew, had made Meinke the Medic a good friend. His carbine was slung sloppily from his shoulder, and he was whistling. German rifle shots kicked up dust ahead of him and on both sides, but he wasn't hit (lousy kraut riflemen). Finally he stumbled into a doorway and somebody kept him from getting up.

Vignette #2: A new lieutenant jumps into a house, gung ho, and gets his foot shot off. He

didn't remember to throw a grenade first.

Vignette#3: The company radio bearer, who jumped into the stream instead of crossing the bridge was shot between the eyes. The CO was out of touch with battalion HQ for some time as a result – while he stood waist-deep in the stream.

Vignette #4: In the afternoon, when things had quieted down, one of the mortar ammo bearers took a photo of Hugh Brown and me sitting on a rock wall in between two houses. He had liberated the camera from a nearby house. But the film was subsequently lost.

One Long Day and Night

[from longhand]

In late March or early April '45, we were near Rhein Pfalz, after the Siegfried Line, on the way to Speyer on the Rhine. The battalion had been walking all day, mostly on roads. It was moderately mountainous, but easy going. There were one or two harassing short shellings, nobody hurt. As somebody remarked, they just want to let us know that they know we're coming—and they know just how far along we are.

Late afternoon. We headed up a wooded valley toward a small village. The road was on the right, following the foot of the ridge. A strip of farm land lay on the left, with a small stream. The other ridge rose to the left.

About three-quarters of a mile from the village, kraut machine gun and rifle fire from up ahead and from the left ridge stopped us. We took cover in ditches along the road, some behind trees or bushes if they couldn't find space in a ditch. Our first and second rifle platoons began to return the fire, but somewhat sporadically—nobody could see exactly where the kraut fire was coming from. But when our riflemen moved to get better positions, they drew a lot of kraut fire. Inevitably a few got hit, signaled by that miserable shout "Medic . . . Medic!" We seemed to be stuck.

Some of us simultaneously spotted tracers from a kraut MG. It seemed to be the only MG firing on us, and the tracers were coming from a spot just below the skyline up at the head of the valley.

There was a small chapel just ahead of us on the right. It looked as if it might offer good cover from the MG, and possibly some cover from the rifle fire coming from the left. I called to two mortar squads to follow and we made a dash to the side of the building where there was a clearing. There was enough scrub and bush cover to conceal it from the ridge where the krauts were shooting from. I told Hugh and Gabby to pick good spots to lay the mortars for fire over the chapel at the MG and to get ready to set up. Then I started to move forward to find Bray (CO). He had already worked back and was there before I had gone thirty yards.

"You see him?" he asked.

"Yep."

"Can you set up here?"

"We're ready to do that. OK!" I called to Hugh and Gabby. In a few seconds, both mortars were laid and stakes were out in the clearing.

"What do you think—600?" I asked Bray.

"Try five," he said, and I passed the word.

"No. 1 gun, one round," I called. After a few seconds, it hit, but I couldn't see where. But it must have been short, for the sound of the explosion bounced back toward us, instead of being swallowed as it would have been if it had gone over the ridge.

"Down two. One round." Too far—the ridge swallowed that one. Impossible to tell whether they were too far left or right. The MG had quieted down, knowing we were after him. I was no

longer sure exactly where the tracers had come from. Take your eyes away for a second, look back, and it is just a stretch of green trees. We would just have to let the shells do the looking.

“Up one. One round.” At last, a shell burst I could see in the treetops. Not sure it was where the tracers had come from, but it looked like the right distance from the top of the ridge.

Bray said, “Keep sprinkling that area; maybe he’ll keep quiet. I’ll move the rifle platoons along the road fast, firing toward the left ridge. Maybe we can make them keep their heads down long enough to get close to the village. When the Third Platoon has gone by you, shut down the mortars and come along the road on the double. Tell everybody to shoot as they run—never mind if they have no targets. Just keep shooting to the left.” He left.

“Hugh, one turn left, a round, one right, one round, another right, one round. Then walk it back to the left, same way. Keep doing it, back and forth, not too fast, and not regular. Gabby can pack his gun and get ready to move. We’ll all go after Third Platoon has gone by.”

I kept my eyes on the ridge, watching shell bursts, and hearing our rifle fire pick up as the First and Second platoons moved up the road on the double. I was looking so intently for any sign of more MG tracers that Gabby had to holler at me that the Third Platoon had gone by. Hugh’s squad ceased fire and broke the mortar down. Told Gabby’s ammo bearers to divvy up their load with Hugh’s now lighter bearers, and everybody to get ready to run and keep up fire to the left ridge. “Just make enough noise to make them want to keep their heads down.” And I took off, fast, trying to catch sight of the tail of the Third Platoon.

There was a long stretch of road completely exposed to the kraut rifles, and we ran crouched over and shooting madly to the left. I became suddenly aware that dusk had fallen—now I could see the muzzle flashes from the kraut rifles. Holy Christ, if we can see theirs, they can see ours. I stopped shooting and hollered over my shoulder to the section to cease fire and just run. Too much racket; they couldn’t hear me—but most of them stopped shooting anyway, having reached the same conclusion that I had.

Passed a GI crumpled in the road in his own blood, briefly wondered who, kept running. (Later I learned it was a replacement I didn’t know.)

Later. The company had made it to the village. It was almost dark. The road turned left in the center of the village, then right again and started to zigzag up the ridge on the left. The kraut riflemen were still up there, peppering the road irregularly. Everyone had to make it across the street where it turned left—a completely exposed stretch of about thirty yards. The rifle platoons had made it across and had started up the zigzag road on the other side. We, the whole mortar section, were in a barn-like building waiting our turn. When the last of the section had run in, I told them to run one by one with plenty of space between each one, across the exposed area. Run zigzag, I said. (We had a few new replacements—this was for them.)

Gabby or Hugh (I forget which) took off and danced across. Made it without a shot being fired. Next was Tscherne. As he started, Bill Henders did too—plus a replacement ammo bearer. In a tight little knot, they moved out. “Goddamn!” I screamed. Sure enough, two loud splats and whining ricochets hit the ground right at their feet, raising dust—I was enraged, shouted at the rest of the section, “Do not do it that way!”—and danced across to the cover of the building on the other side. The three of them stood there and one chuckled something like

“missed us.” I wanted to strangle them and started shouting. “You dumb sons of bitches! You’re so goddamn dumb you ought to be shot! You not only risk your own ass, you risk the ass of each of the others. Henders, Tscherne, you know better, and you show this dumb fuck of a replacement how to get killed before he has a chance to learn how to take care of himself.” Really blew my stack. They said nothing, and I told them to get moving. Stayed there while each of the rest of the section got across, one by one for damn sure.

A half hour or so later we were moving along up the road that would take us where those kraut riflemen were. It was now dark; all moved up to close single file. Word was passed back to keep it very quiet. Fatigue had begun to set in, but we were moving slowly, keeping close to the vertical rise along the left of the road.

It was almost a relief when the kraut MG spoke up ahead of the column. All hit the dirt in the drainage ditch to the left. I wondered if it were the same MG we tried to get earlier, now pulled back to cover a bend in the road. Didn’t matter. He was there, and we were getting a break.

All quiet for a while. No word came back as to what was up. Then another burst from the MG, followed by some of our rifle fire. Quiet again. We settled in the ditch to rest. I began to doze.

Footsteps and a voice from the rear jerked me awake. “What the hell is the holdup now?” said the voice, quite loud.

“Shut up and take cover, you dumb bastard!” I hissed.

The footsteps stopped, and the voice said, “Who said that?”

I answered, “Will you shut up for Christ’s sake? This fucking ridge is crawling with krauts and an MG has stopped the head of the column.”

“This is Major _____. Who is telling me to shut up?” I closed my big mouth. Mercifully, the MG fired a couple of long bursts. I heard a couple of people scramble into the ditch behind me. Then silence.

After ten or fifteen minutes, the major and the officer with him got up and moved along the road toward the head of the column, walking softly and saying nothing now. We waited, trying to relax and rest without dozing. Time dragged; nothing happened. It may have been half an hour before the sound of people getting up and starting to shuffle on came back down the column to us. We got up, shuffled on. The krauts must have pulled out—maybe a squad had gone out to reconnoiter and drew no fire. Absence of shooting told us the krauts were still ahead, even though retreating. I figured they were probably as tired as we were. And they had to be scared; they had seen we were a full battalion, and they were probably no more than a couple of rearguard platoons whose job was to slow us down, pull back, and slow us again. If we didn’t get beyond the hills and ridges, that kind of crap could go on all night—unless they found a nice place to take cover and bushwhack us after we had walked into a setup.

But not long after, we emerged on what seemed to be a plateau. The road straightened out and the column could stretch out with more space between each man. There was no moon, but starlight was enough to see the back of the person ten yards or so ahead. We settled in to a monotonous, steady, mile-eating pace. But so tired. Thank God for a smooth road. It is possible

for the mind to doze, even dream, when the body is still moving, if one is tired and sleepy enough and doesn't have to look where each step is going. Most of us were in that state; at least I was.

Sometime later—one hour? two?—we were jerked awake by a monstrous explosion off to the right front—a reverberating boom that came out of a huge red ball of fire that seemed some distance away. After a minute or so we picked ourselves up, and saw another red ball, followed by another boom. Counting seconds between appearance of the flash and the sound of the explosion I guessed that it was about a mile away. But what in hell was it? Those explosions were awesome, nothing like anything I had ever heard. We began to move along again, sleepiness scared out of us.

Fear of the unknown is harder to deal with than that associated with known and familiar dangers such as rifle, MG, mortar, or artillery fire. These killed, mangled, or missed in fairly habitual ways. Something new such as this always brought the idea of some strange secret weapon the krauts were just bringing on line. I had the same reaction the first time they fired 88 artillery pointblank at us back at Sessenheim in January. And in January we saw our first kraut jet fighter plane go over, high up. Our ack-ack was totally ineffective—the shells exploded what looked like hundreds of yards behind it. The jet moved faster than anything I had ever seen; it was a true “secret weapon.” But it was the only such plane I ever saw.

Word was finally passed back that maps showed a railway siding over where the explosions were coming from. The krauts were probably blowing up boxcars loaded with ammo. This was reassuring; but it was more reassuring that we were not headed toward them, but were passing a safe distance to the left. There were a half-dozen more of the blasts at irregular intervals. By the time the last two or three blew, I wanted to hear more: Each one was destroying thousands of rounds that would never be fired at us. Also, the explanation supported the notion that some of the map-carrying officers had at least a rough idea of where the hell we were.

The blasts had juiced me with a little adrenaline. But that wore off and left me more tired than before. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Don't count, empty the mind, sway with the slow rhythm, and try to doze without stumbling and going down. It can be done, and if such semi-sleep is not very restful for feet, legs, and back, at least the mind is no longer conscious of where I am, what I am doing, and what may happen the next time.

As it turned out, next time was nice. Danny Mathis, who had lost his PFC stripe and been returned to the company after the Morsbach business, had been reassigned to a rifle platoon. He had the distinction of being No. 1 on the CO's shit list. That worthy—Bray at that time, I think—had instructed the rifle platoon leader and Danny's squad leader that any time Danny's platoon were point, and Danny's squad were the platoon point, that Danny himself would be point for the squad. No rotating. Danny each time.

Actually, walking point in this kind of situation is not necessarily the most dangerous position in the company. If we walk into an ambush, they will wait until a lot of guys have gone past their outer position before they open up on us. If we walk into a place already zeroed in by their artillery, again they will wait until a platoon or two have moved into the target area. But, if they have mined the road, or if we walk into a line that they intend to hold with dug-in MGs

and rifles, then walking point becomes the least desirable position in the company. It is not a job conducive to the kind of semi-sleepwalking that I and others were enjoying a few hundred feet back.

Almost without being aware of having gotten a signal from the man ahead, I was off the road and on the ground. The sound of muffled clanks and thuds of others hitting the ground down the line behind receded and all was quiet.

After ten or fifteen minutes, there was no sound from the head of the column. This was not the usual break for ten minutes per hour. What the hell was going on up there? Never mind; to hell with it, rest. Sleep.

Then whispered word was passed back, "Stay awake. Krauts ahead." Shit. They can't expect us to do anything about the krauts now . . . too tired . . . too sleepy . . .

More time passed. Struggling against sweet sleep. A soft bed, clean sheets, no reveille. The war is over, we've won, they've lost, so let's all cut out the crap and go home. Nobody needs any more of it.

Sleep shattered by the sound of hobnail boots coming down the hard-surface road. Then a loud voice, "On your feet! Prisoners coming!" To our astonishment, a double line of krauts, hands on heads or backs of necks, walked between our two columns along each edge of the road. They had no helmets, rifles, grenades, or ammo belts. The moon had come out, and it was possible to see their faces as they passed—dozens and dozens of them. Tired faces and bodies. They slouched and shuffled along about as dispiritedly as we had.

Finally they were halted. Estimating from the number who had passed us and the number stretched out to the head of our column, there must have been about 150 of them. They stood there, most looking at the ground, as we stared at them, holding our rifles, carbines, or pistols half-ready.

A couple of our officers came along the road, talking in normal tones. They passed the word that we would be moving again—back in the direction we had come. Hugh, Smitty, Gabby, and I speculated that the dumb fucking officers had gotten us lost. We weren't supposed to be here at all.

But I had an idea. I told them that the war was not over yet for these krauts. Since we'd be moving back with them, we would just let them carry the deadweight—the mortar tubes and bases and the ammo. I picked out a kraut who had noncom insignia on his sleeve and brought over one of the mortar crews. Told them to hand their heavy stuff to the krauts. The krauts got the idea, but the noncom said, "Nein, nein" and something which I missed. But his expression and gestures communicated. They were too tired to carry such weight. At which I called on my limited German and said, "Sie müssen" (You must) and slung my rifle off my shoulder. Didn't even have to point it at him; he got the idea. He and the krauts behind him accepted the mortars and the ammo holding canvasses. When we moved out, the krauts carried the weight.

We learned later what had happened. The head of the column, Danny as point, had approached a wooded area. He was about twenty yards ahead of the next man when he stopped at the first sizeable tree and signaled back for the column to hit the ground. He had heard the "Halt!" from up ahead. Two krauts with burp guns stepped out from behind trees

and motioned for him to drop his rifle, which he did. They motioned for him to hold his hands up and follow one, with the other behind him. After only twenty or thirty yards, they halted, and in the dim light Danny saw that he was surrounded by a group carrying burp guns and rifles. One spoke to him, but Danny asked, "Wo ist der Kommandant?" . . .

[Danny explained that there was a battalion right behind him and offered the German commanding officer the opportunity to surrender. Apparently, he quickly accepted. —FD]

Landsberg

In late April, the regiment was moving fairly rapidly down through Bavaria, toward the eastern tip of Austria and its Brenner Pass to Italy. We were loaded onto tanks for the most part, which were subject to the same cycle that governs so much of the military: hurry up and wait. This seemed less of a nuisance when riding. The 411th Regiment, however, and the tanks carrying us were sent on an eastern tangent toward what turned out to be the town of Landsberg. Before arriving there, we halted near a sizeable compound surrounded by reinforced barbed wire fences. As we drew near to a gate, hanging half-open, we could see that this must be one of the Nazis' concentration camps for Jews, gypsies, Eastern Europeans, etc.

[This is where the writing stopped. John told about this day several times, but was not able to commit it to paper. He was barely able to talk about it, even at the end of his life. All the suffering he and other combat soldiers experienced must have just melted away for him, in the face of this horror.]

John went to school after the war planning to study chemical engineering. But he could not shake the war off and found himself most engaged by his political science courses. He always had a touching faith in logic and reason and may have initially thought it possible to find answers to his questions about how the whole thing started and how humans might avoid such future conflagrations. I suspect that his transition from irreverent cynicism through depression to eventual serenity was germinated this day at Landsberg. There was a larger-than-life Greek tragic aspect to the way that he spent his life wrestling with his demons. Family were often only distant bystanders. He barely spoke of the war for 45 years and ultimately could not write about Landsberg. Following is more or less what he told me. —FD]

As the regiment approached the town of Landsberg, they began to see skeletal figures moving along the road, away from the camp. Some were so weak they were barely able to walk. There was a burning smell in the air, sort of like pork and wood, John said, but unfamiliar. John and some others were given the task of approaching the people, to ask them to return to the camp where doctors and food were being assembled to help them. Every person refused to go back. They said or gestured that it was preferable to die in the road than to return.

John decided he wanted to see just what it

In Landsberg, we opened up a smaller concentration camp, but I was not assigned to that detail and didn't see it. However, I did meet one of the inmates who had wandered out into town clutching an army canteen cup with some canned corn in it. He was a Polish Jew, wearing the standard striped pajamas, somewhat crazed by his experience. We both talked broken German and he told me how the German SS troops had come into his town, bashed babies against the wall, and shipped the adults to concentration camps.

—Hugh Brown

was that they were fleeing with such conviction. He and a friend went to the camp. As they entered the camp, they saw starved bodies on the ground. There were no more walking people; but when they went into one of the barrack-like buildings, they saw a few figures lying in beds, too weak to walk. John and his friend approached a woman with red hair. It was impossible to tell how old she was. He sat down near her and took her hand. He told her haltingly how sorry he was, though they did not share a language. She looked at him, too weak to speak, and barely squeezed his hand. John sat for a while. He told the woman he would come back the next day. He could no longer speak and told his friend he had to leave. They left, returning the next day with some food. (They had been told earlier not to offer food initially, as the people were too weak to eat regular food and needed special food until their systems were able to digest better.) The woman was gone, however, as were the few remaining others. John always wondered but never learned what had become of her.

John said that the rumor was that the SS guard at the camp, upon learning that the Allies were very close, rounded up all within the camp who were able to walk and began to march them out. They did not get far before realizing they would soon be caught. They marched the people back to the camp, into the officers' quarters with camp records, locked the doors and set the whole thing on fire. John said this was not confirmed, but there was a burned site and the smell.

The American commanding officer rounded up local German civilians, including the town dignitaries (who all denied having any knowledge of what had been happening in the camp), and made them dig graves, move corpses, and bury the dead. There are photos of this in the division history *Report after Action*.

Afterword

[written in 1975]

It is a law of nature, Ellen Glasgow wrote somewhere, that we are drawn back, inevitably, to the place where we have suffered most. Glasgow is right. But it must be added that what draws one back to such a place and to the events which transpired there may come to be nothing less than a morbid obsession. Until it is exorcised, it can cripple—both emotionally and intellectually. At least, this has been my experience. I write as an exercise in exorcism.

May I never again have the nightmare, repeated over the years, of being told by some faceless military officer that “because of my experience,” I must lead a group of replacements into what he and I both know is a hopeless combat situation. I tell him that I am growing old and am no longer strong; I can’t even keep up with these new kids who don’t know their asses from first base, and I am afraid. The officer says, “Never mind. They’ll do what you say. Move out.” We move out. Snow begins to fall. I have an M1 rifle and a helmet, but my clothes are civilian. Mortar shells start to come in. The first scream of “Medic! Medic!” wakes me up. It is only a dream.

The place, for me, is the Vosges Mountains in northeastern France (old Alsace), a portion of Lorraine, part of the southern Rhein-Pfalz in Germany, a strip of Bavaria, and the Austrian Tyrol. The time, the winter and spring of 1944–45: November 11–May 8. Only about six months.

Only about six months. But it was both shattering and formative. I am still trying to understand. Whoever or whatever I am today, in my mid-fifties, is, I think, as much the result of that period as it is of my childhood and adolescence. Those six months, in which I passed my 20th birthday, shaped a lot of attitudes and values, patterned a lot of ways of dealing with emotions, which remain with me today.

“Highty Tightly”

Below is a song that I first heard while in the sixteen-week Infantry Basic Training cycle at Fort McClellan, Alabama (near Anniston), June-September, 1943. The first time I heard it, a single GI was singing it in a low and labored voice during the early part of a long march to amuse himself and those few close enough to hear. Later, on several occasions, I also heard it while relaxing in the company day room (a section of barracks equipped with a ping-pong table, tables to play cards, a soft drink dispenser, chairs, etc.). Sometimes the stanzas varied; some perhaps were improvised on the spot. The chorus was always joined in by whoever resonated to the sentiment of it and felt inclined to sing. The appearance of an officer or a hostile noncom was enough to create mock-embarrassed silence.

The tempo is slower than a march and the melody is “tired” — anything but sprightly or inspiring. It was obviously intended to be an infantry response to those patriotic, terribly overworked, branch-of-service-glorifying compositions such as the “Marines’ Hymn” (“From the Halls of Montezuma . . .”), the Navy’s “Anchors Away,” the Army Air Corps’ “Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder,” and the field artillery’s “The Caissons Go Rolling Along.” Radio, movies, even concerts, blared these ad nauseam during the war years.

I don’t know whether this particular effort to give the infantry its own “hymn” was localized at Fort McClellan, whether it was known at other infantry training centers, whether its roots were in the pre-war regular Army, or what. I don’t remember hearing it while I was in the 103d Infantry Division. I record it simply as a clear expression of a widely-felt attitude of the lowest-ranking infantry troops—an artifact of the Second World War.

Chorus (sung at the beginning, then between each stanza):

Highty tightly, Christ almighty! Who the fuck are we? Zim-zam,
goddamn, the fucking infantry.

Stanza 1 We’re up, we’re down, we roll around, in shit and piss and mud;
When blowed on our ass, we’ll land, we ask, in somebody else’s blood.

Stanza 2 You lose an arm, you lose a leg, the sergeant says, “Let’s go!”
You’ll get his bayonet up your ass, if he thinks you get up too slow.

Stanza 3 The captain says, “Where the fuck are we now? Who’s got the goddamn map?”
Lieutenant says, “Oh, is that what it was? I used it to take a crap.”

Stanza 4 The colonel’s the man, with a lunatic plan, to take some fucking hill.
Sends each battalion the wrong fucking way; dogface pays the bill.

Stanza 5 The Army’s fucked up beyond all repair, nobody knows what to do;
Maniacs plan, and morons command — and who gets fucked? Guess who.

And so on. There were other stanzas. These are all I recall now.

Two Takes on Survival

[from longhand]

1.

The question of survival in infantry combat seems to me to depend upon three factors. First and probably most important (50 percent) is whether one is engaged in an attack or a defense. To attack is to be exposed to fire that is hidden or inaccessible (mortars, artillery) or that is so hard to respond to accurately (machine guns, rifles—they are dug in and camouflaged) that there is little chance of neutralizing or eliminating them directly. Many of the attackers are hit; few of the defenders. Sometimes these can be silenced by lucky shots or just overrunning them. More often, they withdraw because of a tactical decision by their company or battalion CO that they can pull back, relatively unweakened, and dig in for another defense in which probabilities will operate in their favor again.

The second factor is pure chance or luck. It operates regardless of whether one is part of an attack or a defense. Sometimes you happen to be running, lying, or standing close to where artillery or mortar shells come in. If they explode and you are nearby, you are hit. But luck! The mortar shell that landed between my legs at Sessenheim; the mortar fragments which tore up the dry socks in my backpack and lodged in my K-ration cheese at Sessenheim, one of which pinked my right shoulder blade and led me momentarily to think that I had gotten my million-dollar wound; dancing laterally and upward over a railroad embankment at dusk with MG tracers hitting at our heels—the dumb kraut machine gunner had evidently not been taught to lead his moving targets by a few yards.

Casual, unpredictable luck. Is this why they call those who are hit “casualties”? Let us ascribe 30 percent of survival chances to this factor.

This leaves 20 percent. Here I would say about 20 percent of survival probability can be attributed to certain learned skill and reflexes. If, by luck, one survives the first few engagements, he has a chance to develop these skills and reflexes.

2.

Survival in infantry combat in World War II depended on three skills, none of which could possibly be taught or learned in pre-combat training. Only experience could teach these, and survival for the length of time required to learn from experience was a pure matter of chance. Those who were killed or wounded fairly early had no chance to learn. Those lucky enough to survive the early episodes learned—but even for them, nothing prevented their being at the wrong place when a bullet or an artillery or grenade fragment came their way.

The first is a conditioned reflex that enables one to take cover (fall flat, roll over, dive in a

hole) before an incoming shell or pattern of bullets hits. This is quite unconscious. One finds himself on the ground almost before he hears the explosion of the shell or the report of bullets. Once acquired, the reflexive response lasts for some time. I can remember such reactions on occasions one, one and a half, and two and a half years after May of 1945 (*and once 25 years later—FD*).

The second is an almost unwilling, partly reflexive knowing when to get up, to move, and/or to shoot. As in the first reflex above, one realizes only after the fact that one has done this. But since it does entail increased awareness of exposure to danger, an element of will is required to overcome fear—or the desire to play dead. (The latter, however, is balanced against knowledge that you may attract a medic who would find you unharmed, while others actually wounded and not yet dead need the medic most.)

Strangely, one of the hardest things to teach replacements is to stick their heads up and pull the trigger. They do not seem to understand that by shooting a lot they can encourage the krauts to keep their heads down and thus refrain from shooting at them.

The third skill is the hardest to define and is the least reliable. One can be mistaken. It is a sort of sixth sense about the degree of danger in a situation. It “smells” right –or it doesn’t. This one is essential to surviving as a leader. (Examples: scouting the village on the way to Barr, flushing out the kraut in Barr.) If you misjudge on this one, some of your squad or team may be hit, not to mention yourself. When is it OK to barge through a dark entrance and when is it better to wait and maybe toss in a grenade? The choice often has to be quick and sure; the kraut may have the same reflexes.

On Tough Generals, Admirals, and Other Officers

[from longhand]

Any general or admiral given an army or fleet command relishes the “tough guy” image: the unbeaten barroom brawler who takes on all challengers, risen by the grace of military seniority and old-boy favoritism to the rank entitling him to waste young men’s health and lives in risky actions which, if they result in “victory,” only embellish the “tough guy” image. It is an infantile fantasy, nourished by a sycophantic press and staff officer flunkies; but for mobilizing a radically sentimentalized “home front” and for keeping more cynical rear echelon troops on their toes, it works. Examples: Ernest King, Bernard Montgomery, George Patton, Erwin Rommel.

Rickety old farts who gambled with young men’s lives and were lucky, they loved the tough guy image. King “shaved with a blowtorch” and started Guadalcanal before troops were ready. Patton wore a pair of pearl-handled six-shooters and liked to push enlisted men around, especially in hospitals. Montgomery liked to pose in a tank turret wearing a jaunty beret. Having beaten Rommel with overwhelming supplies of U.S. tanks, he wouldn’t risk his reputation without assurances of success thereafter. Rommel earned his initial reputation by ordering unexpected attacks when his Panzer divisions were supposed to have been battered and low on fuel.

Do not trust “tough” generals and admirals. Their “courage” and “bravery” rest on their ability to send large numbers of young soldiers and sailors to near certain death—and flacks to praise their daring leadership.

Afterword | *Frances Dorsey*

Some of these essays were written and polished by John and stand as he left them. Others (noted in the titles) were in draft version or in longhand amongst his papers. I am not sure how he would feel to know that the roughest ones were to be read, but I have only added pronouns or the odd (very obvious) word, since they seemed to have emerged fully realized. In all cases, errors in punctuation, syntax, or typography are mine, as John was scrupulous.

I undertook this project for numerous reasons. John began to speak about the war when we passed Anniston, Alabama during a trip. He observed that he had gone to boot camp there. I asked him to tell me about it. Over the next weeks, we would get into the car and he would begin to talk. He said he could remember every day. I asked him if he would write down what he had told me, in hopes that my brother and I would be able to understand a little of what he had experienced. He confessed that he had sporadically written about it over the years and was thinking about seriously committing to the job. Over the next year or so, he showed a few chapters to friends and family. It was compelling. Though he always claimed to be doing it for himself, he gave various texts to many people for comment. I believe he was writing to a larger audience than his immediate circle.

After he became ill, he persevered for some time in getting the account finished. As he became weaker, he was less anxious to rid himself of the devils of memory. We urged him to talk to a tape recorder, but he declined—probably speaking did not have the same purgative value as writing. In the end, he could not get beyond Landsberg. Nonetheless, it seemed pretty clear that he had laid the ghost to rest and moved beyond an interest in the project by the time he died.

However, there needed to be closure for me before I could resume my life. Most of you reading the stories knew about them ahead of time and were looking forward to reading them for a year or more before he died. Me too. I was trapped in the words and also trapped in the snapshots of John and his friends at the end of the war. So many of the sorrows and regrets of my own life (and those of my mother and brother) seemed to be caught up in this time period. It defined the patterns we all assumed as coping mechanisms, and lives with us still.

Sifting through his stuff after his death, I still could not escape from the account. Since I had already begun to work with photographic war imagery in my artwork, it was a small step to move from the general to the specific. At the risk of being intrusive, I decided to respond visually to his words and the photos in order to clarify my own thoughts. Filial duty? Morbid curiosity? Love? It doesn't matter.

Postscript—June 2011 | *Frances Dorsey*

My father's writing is being reprinted at this time due to the energy and persistence of two people. Bob French, son of late 103d veteran Edward L. French, found the text and contacted me. His generosity, kindness and conviction that the writing deserved a broader audience encouraged me to join the project. The enthusiasm and support of Chan Rogers, president of the 103d Infantry Division Association, along with his vision for an expanded presentation, has allowed the stories to move into a larger field. Zack Sigler's careful, time-consuming digitization of the K Company morning reports serves to enrich and ground the account. It has been a privilege to collaborate with these partners.

After all these years, I still find my dad's account moving and compelling, and I still wish that there had been more of it. Nonetheless, as an account of a young man coming to adulthood in a period of crisis and upheaval, it still seems complete, universal, and relevant today. As a record of a combat experience, carefully documented by a thoughtful and sensitive participant, it offers us a timely reminder that war is a barbarous "failure of diplomacy," to quote John, and that such violence maims all—participants, bystanders, descendants, through the generations. John spent his life working for peace; our gratitude to him and his generation might be most clearly articulated by doing the same.

103d Infantry Division Rifle Company Battle Casualty Statistics

This table presents the battle casualty statistics of the 103d Infantry Division's 27 rifle companies—the “spear points” of the division. Rifle company authorized strength was 187 enlisted men and six officers. Most of an infantry division's battle casualties were in the rifle companies. Exposed to rain, snow, and bitter cold for extended periods, they also suffered the highest rates of non-battle casualties. The rosters of many of the 103d's rifle companies largely turned over in six months of combat.

The doctrine for the deployment of the line elements of platoons, companies, battalions, and regiments of the triangular divisions of the World War II era called for two units forward (on line) and one in reserve for each echelon in the deployed division at company level and above. In theory, and typically rigorously followed, the rotation of the units intended to ensure equal time on line for all units at each echelon level and unit commanders at each level made every effort to ensure an even share of intense combat commitments. Since combat was totally random and unpredictable as to degree of intensity, however, it is obvious that scheduling the deployment of units so as to equalize the negative effects was not possible and the relative casualty impacts was random, as the matrix indicates. That randomness worked against John Dorsey's Company K, 411th (shaded row), which suffered the fifth highest number of battle casualties among the 103d's 27 rifle companies.

—Cranston R. (“Chan”) Rogers

		Total	KIA	POW	WIA
409th	A	149	24	2	123
	B	257	24	109	124
	C	208	28	48	132
	E	149	23	25	101
	F	95	15	1	79
	G	185	42	8	135
	I	76	8	1	67
	K	135	11	2	122
	L	54	12	0	42
	Total	1308	187	196	925
	Avg	145	21	22	103
410th	A	137	26	11	100
	B	128	38	11	79
	C	108	24	12	72
	E	87	16	27	44
	F	107	18	0	89
	G	116	29	17	70
	I	58	12	2	44
	K	45	11	1	33
	L	89	18	2	69
	Total	875	192	83	600
	Avg	97	21	9	67
411th	A	138	33	1	104
	B	147	26	6	115
	C	163	33	2	128
	E	163	21	10	132
	F	166	28	12	126
	G	275	36	10	229
	I	170	36	14	120
	K	183	36	2	145
	L	169	22	38	109
	Total	1574	271	95	1208
	Avg	175	30	11	134
All Rifle Co	Total	3757	650	374	2733
	Avg	139	24	14	101

Note: KIA includes DOW (Died of Wounds), FOD (Finding of Death—used where someone was missing and presumed killed in action), DNB (Died Non-Battle). All MIAs were accounted for.

Locations and Activities of K Company, 411th Infantry, March 1944 – July 1945

Filed each morning by each company to higher headquarters, the company Morning Report provided a daily record of unit location, activity, and changes in personnel. Location misspellings have been corrected.

Date	Location	Record of Events
10/20/1944		Arrived Marseille, France by boat, approximately 1400. After debarking, proceeded by foot march to Staging Area #2, arrived by groups from 2100 to 2400.
10/31/1944	Staging Area #2, Marseilles	
11/6/1944		Co left Staging Area #2, Marseille, FR, 1000, by rail per march order.
11/9/1944		Co arrived vicinity of Epinal, FR, 0900.
11/10/1944		Co in bivouac area in vicinity of Epinal, FR.
11/12/1944		11-Nov - Co moved by motor march to vicinity of Brouvelieures, FR. Arrived approximately 1330. Distance approximately 25 miles.
11/15/1944	La Bolle	
11/16/1944		Pinned down by enemy fire - 32 casualties.
11/17/1944	Foucharupt	Pinned down by enemy fire. Move forward behind Co L on the attack. Advanced along front.
11/18/1944	Foucharupt	Holding high ground surrounding Foucharupt, FR.
11/19/1944	La Bolle	Co withdrew from Foucharupt, FR to vicinity of La Bolle, FR.
11/20/1944	Foucharupt	Co in Bn [Battalion] reserve.
11/21/1944	Foucharupt	Co in Bn mobile reserve
11/22/1944	Saulcy	Reserve Bn in attack from Foucharupt, FR to Saulcy, France.
11/23/1944	St. Die	Co penetrating with Bn through enemy lines. Continuing attack.
11/24/1944	Bertrimoutier	Co moved to Bertrimoutier, France from hill 609, Bn reserve.
11/25/1944	Lubine	Co went into attack east from Lubine, 1315.
11/26/1944	Maisonsguette	Co moved from vicinity of Lubine to vicinity of Maisonsguette, FR.
11/27/1944	Barr	Co in the attack.
11/28/1944		Co attacked & helped seize Barr, France
11/29/1944		Co in vicinity of Barr, France.
11/30/1944	Epfig	Co continued advance from Barr, FR. Captured Eichheffen & continued advance to Epfig.
12/1/1944	Epfig	Co in Epfig, FR
12/2/1944	Ebersheim	Co in vicinity of Ebersheim, FR.
12/3/1944	Ebersheim	Defending Ebersheim, France
12/4/1944	Epfig	Co withdrew from Ebersheim to Epfig by motor.
12/5/1944	Gimbrett	Co billeted in Gimbrett, France.
12/6/1944	Gimbrett	Co in rest area.
12/7/1944	Gimbrett	Billeted in Gimbrett, France. Cleaning & care of weapons.
12/8/1944	Gimbrett	Co in Gimbrett, FR. Ready to move out.
12/9/1944	Kindwiller	Co held in Regimental reserve.
12/10/1944	Uttenhoffen	Co moved forward from Kindwiller to Uttenhoffen.
12/11/1944	Griesbech	Co moved to Griesbech, FR from Uttenhoffen. Crossed IP [Initial Point], 0830.
12/12/1944	Woerth	Co held in reserve.

12/13/1944	Lampertsloch	Co moved to Lampertsloch, France
12/14/1944	Pfaffenbron	Co in attack. Little resistance.
12/15/1944	Climbach	Co moved to Climbach, FR.
12/16/1944		Co in attack north of Climbach, FR.
12/17/1944	Bobenthal	Co attacking.
12/18/1944		Co in attack in vicinity of Bobenthal, Germany.
12/19/1944		Bn in attack on sector of Siegfried Line.
12/20/1944	Bobenthal	Co move to assault & capture strong enemy positions on Hill 476.
12/21/1944	Bobenthal	Co withdrew from Hill 476.
12/22/1944	Erstroff	Co moved by motor from Climbach to Erstroff, FR.
12/23/1944		Co reorganizing.
12/24/1944	Siengbouse	Co going in defensive position relieving units of 6th Armored Div.
12/25/1944	Rosbruck	Co in defensive position.
12/29/1944	Rosbruck	Co in defensive position.
12/30/1944	Rosbruck	Co in defensive position.
12/31/1944	Rosbruck	Co in defensive position. No enemy action.
1/5/1945		Co still in defensive position in the vicinity of Rosbruck, France.
1/6/1945		With 2 platoons & attached weapons, raided factory in vicinity of Forbach, FR. 2-casualties.
1/7/1945		Co in defensive position.
1/11/1945	Morsbach	Co in attack on enemy positions in vicinity of Morsbach, FR.
1/12/1945	Morsbach	Co in attack on high ground 900 yards south of Forbach. Withdrew to Morsbach.
1/13/1945		Co initiating patrol activity in the vicinity of Morsbach.
1/14/1945	St Nikolaus	Moved to new location at St Nikolaus.
1/15/1945		Co in defensive position in vicinity of St Nikolaus.
1/17/1945		Co in defensive position. Co scheduled to move.
1/18/1945	Gundershoffen	Co in offensive position
1/19/1945	Schirrhoffen	Co moved from Gundershoffen to Schirrhoffen by motor, 25 miles.
1/21/1945	Weitbruch	Co withdrew at 2300, 20-Jan, for reserve.
1/22/1945	Kirrwiller	Co in reserve.
1/23/1945	Obersoultzbach	Co moved from Kirrwiller to Obersoultzbach. Co in reserve.
1/24/1945		Co in defensive position.
1/26/1945	Menchoffen,	
1/27/1945		Co in reserve.
1/28/1945	Obersoultzbach	Co moved from Menchoffen to Obersoultzbach.
1/29/1945		Co going in offensive position. No engagement.
1/30/1945		Co in reserve.
1/31/1945		Co in reserve.
2/1/1945	Obersoultzbach	
2/2/1945		Co in reserve. Care & cleaning of equipment.
2/3/1945		Co in reserve. Co inspected by commanding general.
2/7/1945		Co in reserve. Preparing to relieve 410th Infantry.
2/8/1945	Menchoffen	Co moved to Menchoffen.
2/9/1945		Co in reserve.

2/15/1945	Ingwiller	Co in defensive position & Bn reserve.
2/23/1945	Rothbach	
2/28/1945	Rothbach	Co in defensive position.
3/1/1945	Rothbach	Co in defensive position.
3/10/1945	Ingwiller	Co in reserve.
3/15/1945	Muhlhausen	Co moved at 0600 to attack.
3/16/1945	Muhlhausen	Co in attack.
3/17/1945	Gumbrechtshoffen	Co in attack.
3/18/1945	Langensoultzbach	Co continuing attack.
3/19/1945	Bobenthal	Co continuing attack. Crossed German border.
3/20/1945	Bobenthal	Co attacking Siegfried Line.
3/21/1945	Bobenthal	Co advancing through Siegfried line. Fighting on high ground.
3/22/1945	Reisdorf	Co attacking high ground vicinity of Reisdorf.
3/23/1945	Gocklingen	Co attached to 410th Infantry Regiment. Continuing attack.
3/24/1945	Gocklingen	Co assembling for reorganization.
3/25/1945	Gocklingen	Co in reserve.
3/26/1945	Morlheim	Co in reserve.
3/27/1945	Morlheim	Co in reserve.
3/29/1945	Speyer	Co in defense of the Rhine River.
3/30/1945	Waldsee	Co in defense of the Rhine River.
4/1/1945	Waldsee	Co in reserve.
4/2/1945	Freinsheim	Co moved by motor to Freinsheim.
4/3/1945		Co occupying Freinsheim, Germany.
4/4/1945		Co occupying Freinsheim, Germany. Security patrol activity.
4/6/1945		Co furnishing security for town & vicinity.
4/7/1945		Co preparing to move across Rhine River
4/8/1945	Rimbach	Co moved by motor to Rimbach from Freinsheim. Occupying town.
4/9/1945	Darmstadt	Moved by motor from Rimbach. Furnishing patrols & security.
4/10/1945		Co occupying one sector of Darmstadt. Patrolling town.
4/13/1945	Darmstadt	
4/14/1945		Co performing duties of occupation.
4/18/1945	Darmstadt	Co continuing to post security & continuing patrols.
4/20/1945	Bartenbach	Co moved from Darmstadt to Bartenbach, Germany.
4/21/1945	Schorndorf	Co moved by motor to Schorndorf in attack.
4/22/1945	Lindorf	Co in attack. Little resistance.
4/23/1945	Reutlingen	Co joined 1st French Army into attack.
4/24/1945	Dottingen	Co continuing attack.
4/25/1945	Musingen	
4/26/1945	Stuppelau	Co in mobile reserve.
4/27/1945	Landsberg	
4/28/1945	Landsberg	Co in reserve.
4/29/1945	Landsberg	Co alerted for movement.
4/30/1945	Garmisch Partenkirchen	Co in motor movement to Brenner Pass.
5/2/1945	Borchant	Co in reserve, awaiting orders for forward movement.

5/3/1945	Mittenwald	Co on alert reserve status.
5/4/1945	Steinach	Co in mobile task force.
5/5/1945	Steinach	Co preparing for occupation of this sector
5/6/1945	Steinach	Co in occupation.
5/7/1945	St Peter	
5/9/1945	Steinach	
5/22/1945		ASR Scores* - Annex 2 & 3 attached.
6/5/1945	Pettneu	Co moved to Pettneu, Austria. Co in occupation.
7/1/1945	Pettneu	
7/8/1945	Zaientshofen	Co moved by motor from Pettneu, Austria to Zaientshofen, Germany.
7/13/1945	Krumbach	

* The War Department devised the adjusted service rating (ASR) or points system to determine who was eligible to be discharged from the army after the war in Europe ended. A soldier's ASR score was based on their length of service, time served overseas, each combat decoration, and each child under 18 (up to three children).

Contributors

Book compilation and interior artwork || Frances Dorsey is an artist based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada and teaches at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD). Exploring some of the human costs of war and armed conflict, her work has been shown both in Canada and internationally. Initially working with many types of fabric and dyes, she now works only with natural dyes and used table and other domestic cloth, as a way of expressing some tactile, sensory and intimate aspects of memory, grieving and redemption. In her words, "Cloth is humble yet powerful, and able to communicate through a long history with people, politics and comfort." Frances Dorsey's work can be found in public and private collections. She holds an MFA in Fibers from the University of Michigan.

Project leader || Robert French is a son of Edward L. French (1923-1986), who served as staff sergeant and squad leader in the antitank platoon posted under Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 411th Infantry, 103d Infantry Division. Initially to learn more about his father's military service, Robert French became active in the 103d Infantry Division Association, including its oral history project. He earned a PhD in social anthropology from Harvard University and works as a program planner, administrator, and advocate for services and supports that help improve the lives of vulnerable children, youth, and families. His vision, enthusiasm, and support for this publication are responsible for its life here in this form.

Map development || Cranston R. ("Chan") Rogers served in Company G, 409th Infantry Regiment, 103d Infantry Division before his January 1945 transfer to a line company of the 157th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division. Deployed overseas as a private first class, he rose to the rank of platoon sergeant and was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. Receiving his master's degree in civil engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Chan Rogers won recognition both for his design of numerous, often challenging transportation projects and for his management of U.S. Army Engineer Reserve units. His leadership of the 103d Infantry Division Association has brought new energy and focus on documenting the 103d's contributions in liberating Nazi-occupied Europe.

K Company morning report digitization || Zack Sigler of Wichita, Kansas was named after an uncle who was a technical sergeant in D Company, 409th Infantry Regiment, 103d Infantry Division and was killed in action on December 2, 1944 in taking Sélestat in Alsace. Young Zack's lifelong quest to learn more about and preserve the memory of his uncle gradually widened to encompass keeping memory of the heavy weapons company in which his uncle served, the 409th Infantry, and finally the 103d. From microfilm reels, obtained from the National Archives and Records Administration, he engaged in a multi-year project to digitize all unit morning reports for the period March 1944 to July 1945—including advanced training at Camp Howze, Texas through combat deployment in Europe. Moreover, his extensive collection of 103d documents and memorabilia has been a magnet of interest and catalyst for discovery at association reunions.

Photos and identifying information || Hugh Brown, along with John Dorsey, served in the 60mm mortar section of the weapons platoon of K Company, 411th Infantry. He was discharged as a staff sergeant. Earning his BA at Oberlin College and his master's degree from Columbia University, he worked in management at General Motors until retirement. He enjoyed two informal mini-reunions with John Dorsey, three others from their weapons platoon, and their wives.



A decorated combat veteran of World War II, **John T. Dorsey Jr.** (1924-1993) saw action in France, Germany, and Austria with the 103d Infantry Division. Going overseas with the rank of private first class, he earned a Silver Star for heroism and was promoted to staff sergeant and mortar section leader. A native of Opelika, Alabama, he received his undergraduate, master's, and doctorate degrees from the University of Alabama. He was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Paris's Institute of Political Science. He taught political science at Michigan State University, the University of Sao Paulo (Brazil), and Vanderbilt University and was well known for his scholarly publications in the field of public administration.

This book is a record of Dorsey's personal experiences in combat with the mortar section of a World War II rifle company.

