## LETTERS FROM SGT GORDON FLENNIKEN, G/409 TO HIS WIFE

June 6, 1944 Tuesday evening Flen dear.

Today ain't so bad. The POR men left this morning – we spent the balance of the morning doing our usual routine – drill, bayonet, and a lecture on artificial respiration. Had a shakedown locker inspection by Capt Craddock – we think he was looking for live ammunition. The entire afternoon was spent sketching terrain features. My work may sound interesting, but it is so elementary I find it quite boring.

Tonight we scrubbed and re-arranged the hutment. I was moved to the 1<sup>st</sup> squad as squad leader which calls for Staff. A platoon from G. Co. was made up tonight – including practically all non-coms. We are going to Dallas June 15<sup>th</sup> (Thursday) put on a demonstration for the civilians. The 15<sup>th</sup> has been designated Infantry Day. This Platoon is supposed to be a crack outfit – I'm an acting Pvt in the team and have to demonstrate the bazooka. We work from 3 'til 8 and are free until 11:30 – sleep in tents in a park and come back Friday night (16 June)

We are taking a bayonet team, rough and tumble team, light and heavy machine gun and mortar sections – 75 and 105 artillery pieces, communications team and complete field kitchen. We will prepare supper and eat so the civilians can see how we do it. Boy, I'll bet we have T-bone steaks and ice cream.... [Letter from Sgt Gordon Jones Flenniken – Co. G, 409 Inf APO 470, Camp Howze, Texas]

(undated) postmarked 31 Oct '44 Precious Flen,

I have the tent all to myself, and I managed for a candle, so will write while I have the chance. No mail for the past three or four days - I should get a pile of it soon. McClurg and I went over to see the show tonight, and I had already seen it so came back. It was warm all day, no rain at all. We built a nice rock fireplace - put up a clothes line and washed all our dirty clothes in hot soapy water. You've heard of G.I. ingenuity...well we have it. When we got here there was nothing but a power line. Now we have tents all over the place in rows forming streets – mess tents – latrines screened and some roofed. Everyone scrambles for the packing crates and we have built stands for helmets making a portable bathroom. Incidentally, I need a mirror – preferably a round one you can hang up – if you haven't sent the other stuff. We spent three days carrying rocks in our helmets (we use them for everything) and built a large rock floor in and in front of the kitchen. The chow is 100% better. We still don't throw a damn thing away though. Had French toast (U.S. style) with syrup and apricots and corn beef hash and coffee this morning – meat loaf, green beans, pears, bread, butter and coffee for lunch – hamburger patties, hot dogs, peaches, bread and coffee for supper. Today was the first day I actually filled up. We had retreat tonight – the band played, and it was quite like being back in the states. I really feel good tonight. Shaved and had another helmet bath after supper. Oh yeah, got my hair cut today. You should see me, it's about a quarter of an inch long. Looks like hell, but I don't think I'll comb it again until I see you. It's much cleaner this way and no bother at all.

All the rest of the excess non-coms were busted yesterday – about seven of them I think; including a couple of old ones who slipped off to town and forgot to show up for reveille.

I think we will have showers in a few days and also move the kitchen into a wooden shack we have put up. Everything is better – not nearly so bad as it looked at first. Don't worry, Sweetheart, I am doing wonderfully well – never felt better in my life. I am learning rapidly how to live under these conditions – though I long constantly to be home with you.

(undated) postmarked 31 Oct 44 Darling Flen,

Yesterday morning we took a 4 hour hike in the nearby French countryside. Villages lie about every three or four miles apart – all the houses alike, built of stone with red tile roofs. Saw a few people – mostly old men, women and children. We climbed a cliff behind one village and had a beautiful view of a lake. The village was clustered about a huge rock that from a distance resembled an old medieval castle. There was a statue to the 1<sup>st</sup> War and a pretty little graveyard. We saw one old lady carrying a basket filled with loaves of bread and a bottle of wine.

Got back at noon for chow. The mess hall has been up two days, and the food is better, but meager. We have one slice of bread, some hash or stew, and a little jam and hot coffee. The coffee is wonderful. Last night we had an outdoor movie, but the sound didn't work, and it was too cold, so we left early.

This morning Sgt Whittington woke us up 2 hours too early, but he couldn't persuade anyone to get up. The tents are pretty warm at night – we sleep in our underclothes and socks, and huddle up together and cover with 4 blankets and our overcoats. Don't know what we'll do if it really gets cold. It has been raining steadily since breakfast – and we have been standing around a fire in our raincoats.

I broke the tent pole this morning, but made another one – and right now I am sitting inside my tent on my raincoat. All my equipment and blankets are piled at the back. If my feet were dry I would be more or less comfortable. I hope they don't call us out – it's still raining, and it's pretty cold. I'm wearing the muffler you gave me Christmas and it's really nice.

The sun was out most of yesterday afternoon and we all took our first bath. This was quite a trick – with half a helmet full of hot water. Living like this is miserable, but I'm more than thankful. It could be a hell of a lot worse, and probably will be. At least I have hot food, warm clothes and shelter. Everyone is doing his utmost to take care of himself. I don't even have a cold. Two years ago this would have put me in the hospital, but I'm glad for my training – I'm much tougher now.

October 28, 1944 Darling

Didn't have a chance to write vesterday as the Co. was on detail all day. I really enjoyed my part of it - managed to get in several chow lines, and also made off with several K rations and a qt. of motor oil in a wine bottle. Had an excellent supper last night after we got back. The wind blew like hell last night, but the tent was still over us this morning. McClurg and I slept through reveille, but made it to breakfast all right. This morning we had a short hike to warm up and then PT. After that an orientation lecture - the first news of the war I have heard in a couple of weeks. I built a lamp out of a couple of tin cans and a bottle for a chimney. The oil smokes a little, but it warms up the tent and gives enough light to go to bed and get up by. This morning we were issued a pack of cigarettes and a bar of candy. I think this afternoon we'll be able to get a few things like razor blades, shave cream, etc. We have the rest of the day off to wash clothes, fix our tents, sleep, etc. I think we are going on the same detail in town tonight. A few passes are being given out. Think I'll try to go to town Sunday – as yet I've only seen it from a truck. That's about all the news from here - I haven't received any mail all week. No rain in three days, but it gets pretty cold. We wear long underwear, fatigues, field jacket, overcoats and gloves most of the time. It's pretty windy today, but dry. I've got to write Mother and Dad and Norman, so guess I'll stop here. I miss you terribly - my every thought and prayer is for the day we begin our day. I'm keeping my chin up because I'm so very thankful for you keep yours up, and be sweet – all my love, baby – Flen

November 30, 1944 Darling Flen.

Hope you haven't been too worried. I haven't had a single chance to write as I have been constantly on the go. Been sleeping in barns and cellars – last night slept 4 in a lovely French feather bed. Got blown out of one house without a scratch. Since then we've abandoned the comforts of second story French houses for the safety of a cellar. Living almost like the 3 musketeers. We all steal food from everyone mainly off of tanks – they get better rations. I have my gas stove still and my sleeping bag. It is much warmer and have been more comfortable. I'm \_\_\_[whole cut out] the front and every day brings new thrills & experiences. So far I have been very lucky. I am ever so thankful just to be alive – yet I am warm, dry and well fed. Somehow I know God is beside me. I feel our prayers are heard. This can't last much longer.

December 1, 1944 Sweetheart.

Our squad is bivouacked around a table in a French home. We're sitting here taking a break for a moment – all of us feel fine, had a shave yesterday, and they brought beef sandwiches to us here last night. Had some very good wine and schnapps. We slept on the kitchen floor very comfortably. Just sent one man to try and get our last three weeks supply of mail. Maybe we'll have some Christmas pkgs and have an excellent dinner. As yet I haven't gotten mine. I found something you might like. A beautiful rosary with a silver locket cross that is supposed to have a piece of the Crucifix in it. I'll bring it to you, anyway.

Twenty-five days 'til Christmas. Golly, but I'd give a lot to spent it like the last one. I hope next Christmas we'll all be together – looks like maybe we will.

It's a beautiful day – the sun is shining outside and it's not cold at all. The old lady is cooking dinner – guess we'll break out the stove after while and heat our K ration and maybe boil some potatoes. I just sewed my cap to my sweater collar – makes a good hood and I won't lose it. We are making out fine – hope to get a change of clothes, haven't had these off for a month, however, I'm not suffering. I'm quite well – and quite homesick.

[NOTE – Enclosed in the same envelope was another letter written on the inside of a Christmas card – no date]

## My Darling Flen

The squad is gathered around a big box in somebody's cellar. We found all sorts of preserves – even cauliflower – which I prepared with a can of our cheese. We were all set up in an apartment house but Capt Hamm moved us back.

Last night we spent in a kitchen and bedroom, had about eight or ten Christmas packages – all the fruit cake and candy we could hold. The other squad had fried chicken and rabbit, while we had potatoes. We move from house to house, take what we want and move on. I took a wrist watch from a prisoner this afternoon – the entire squad got watches from the same source.

Life has been quite pleasant lately. Have lived in houses for over a week. We keep well supplied with handkerchiefs and socks – when they get dirty we throw them away and steal some more.

Today I witnessed my first mine explosion. The engineers blew a road block and moved into the wreckage. A pig jerked a trip wire after they moved in – I was about fifty yds away. Had to serve as a medic for a few minutes. War can be such a horrible experience. It's nothing to walk down a trail and stumble over a mangled body.

Forgive all of that – but that is my everyday life. It's all sort of a nightmare – where you are half awake and know that in a little while you will wake up. I really believe I shall, darling. Wake up and find all of this just an experience to scratch off as a bad dream....

They say war changes a person. God, but to see the things I've witnessed you would wonder at a person keeping his sanity. Life is so utterly worthless over here. ...

Last night we hung some tensile ice cycles in our blacked out – candle lighted kitchen. Eight of us sat there drying our socks – eating candy, nuts, etc til we were sick. That was our Christmas. We were happy in a way. we recalled former Christmases when we were home. We all agreed we had never appreciated our homes as we should if we ever again have the opportunity. It's the simple everyday things we crave. We pray constantly for that.

December 7, 1944 Precious Flen

Had pork roast for supper last nite and hot cakes for breakfast. Quite good for a change. Spent the last two nites in barns and hope to do so tonight. I got some new socks and had a chance to take a hot shower yesterday for the first time in over a month. Also received the pkg you sent from San Antonio. Thanks ever so much. The lobster paste and almonds were very good and the toothbrush was perfect. I hadn't brushed my teeth in two weeks.

I'm in the 7<sup>th</sup> Army – I can tell you now. we have been right in the middle of a big fight – in the Vosges mountains. I was in Selestat day before yesterday. I was near St Die also.

I found a beautiful Nazi dress saber, and have given it to the mess Sgt to keep for me. That will be the only souvenir I shall bring home. I want to forget all I've seen and been through. Also have a small bottle of some Parisian perfume. I don't know whether or not it's any good, but will bring it to you anyway.

December 23, 1944 My Sweetheart

Quite a bit has happened since I wrote last – experiences that I shall never forget – and never recall intentionally. I am the platoon runner now and practically live with Sgts Staneic and Parton. Right now we are back in a house, but have been outdoors up until now. Had a pretty tough time – went three days and nights with no sleep – guarded a pill box door and dodged grenades all one night. There were about 7 of them landed just outside the door. I would hear it click and just have time to step back inside.

I got a complete change of clothes today and am waiting to go next door for a shower in a few minutes. ..... Hell, honey – I can't write. I can't tell you the things I do or see, and wouldn't if I could.

Christmas Eve, 1944 My Darling,

Today has really been nice – had hot cakes for breakfast – steak and potatoes for lunch and hamburgers for supper. Besides all that I've attended Church Services once and persuaded the Chaplain to bring his organ to the house the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon is in, and we sang Christmas Carols for a few minutes before supper. The best of all, though, this morning your package came.

FOLLOWING IS A STORY FROM PAUL MARTIN ABOUT HIS FATHER, SGT WARREN J. MARTIN,  $D/411^{TH}$ 

Irish families have infighting! trust me on this! In my family it has always been my uncle Bill Martin, my father's younger brother. He is 87 and mean as hell! Well over the holiday my sister (bless her soul) went to visit him. My sister told him about our research into getting my father his decorations and awards. He broke down and cried. As it turns out he told my sister the story behind why my father, SGT Warren J. Martin, D/411/103d, may have been recommended the Bronze Star. It may be because of Fritz, my Dad's best friend.

SGT Reinhart A F Fritz, SN 37439037 was KIA March 20 1945. Most likely he was killed in a battle north of Bobenthal, Germany at Nieder Schlettenbach; this according to the time line on your web site. That's where the 411th attacked Nieder Schlettenbach on 3/20/1945 so we think we have the location and date where my father may have been recommended for the Bronze Star that was never awarded.

My Uncle's story is that SGT Martin, my father, and "Fritz" were assigned to a weapons company when they both came under heavy fire. They returned fire and later Fritz was wounded and his gun was knocked out and his loader wounded. My father ran through a field of fire with his weapon to get to "Fritz." My father then opened fire on the Germans from the higher position and silenced the German Position. He then picked up his wounded buddy, SGT Fritz, at war's end my father was 5 6" and 120 pounds, so this was no easy task, and carried SGT Fritz back to an aid station behind the fighting. My father was with him when he died. My Mother's story had always been that my father had told her he was with Fritz when he died, but she never elaborated on the circumstance surrounding it.

My sister said that my uncle told her my Father went through many battles in France and Germany that may have earned him a Bronze Star. My uncle also thinks my father was in a battle before the final push at the Kaufereng Camps and Lansburg concentration camp. The 411th liberated the Kaufering camps, but not my fathers company

My sister said when my uncle finished his story, he said his goodbye to her by saying that my father was never the same when he came back from the war. I thought, how could you be the SAME after what he went through in less than 7 months.

THE FOLLOWING STORY IS FROM T/5 JAMES "JIM" MURPHY – BATTERY C, 928<sup>TH</sup> FIELD ARTILLERY

The first news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that infamous Sunday, December 7, 1941 began to crackle on our Philco radio. I was 17 years old, at home with my parents in Macon, Georgia. We listened, trying to comprehend what was happening. We knew we were at war. As WWII became an instant reality, we in ROTC were learning much about military organization and rank, close order drill, parade ceremony, inspection, and other protocols. But we knew nothing about war. We would learn soon enough.

I and most college ROTC students all over the U.S. had enlisted in the reserves. The Army wanted to remove us from the draft and have us complete college and officer training. Then we would move to active duty. That program was short lived. In March 1943 we were called to immediate active duty for the Army needed ground troop replacements. Those of us from Georgia Tech reported to Fort McPherson in Atlanta. Our world had suddenly and dramatically changed. My first hurdle came at our induction physical examination. As we came to the eye exam I was dreadfully aware that I was blind in my left eye from birth, and would surely be disqualified, declared 4-F, and sent home. No way. I simply could not accept that. I was told to cover one eye with my hand and read the chart. So I covered my left eye with my left hand and easily read the chart to the bottom. Then I was told to cover the other eye. I quickly covered my left eye again, this time with my right hand, and again read the chart to the bottom; 20-20 both eyes. I had passed. Later on I had to use this strategy twice more, once when processed into the 103d Infantry Division and again to be cleared for overseas combat duty. It worked each time.

THE FOLLOWING LETTER WAS SENT HOME FROM 2LT HARRY SCHWEIKERT (THEN A STAFF SERGEANT WITH I/410<sup>TH</sup>/103D – HARRY LATER RECEIVED A BATTLEFIELD COMMISSION AND WAS THEN TRANSFERRED TO THE 3D INFANTRY DIVISION.)

## Please Do Not Reprint Without Family Permission

December 7th 1944

Dear Mom

You will probably think its your birthday receiving letters dated so close. But to seperate your receiving them as close together I am sending this free mail. Now all it has to do is twist my tail and beat yesterdays air-mail home.

Dont mind the first seven words of this letter. The heavy writing is due to a German pen Joe Mrosko was trying to convince me was better than my parker. As you see it doesn't compare. We took it from one of them many German prisoners my squad has taken. Just for pastime I'll mention the members of my squad. Squad Leader......Me of course......Joisey 1st Scout ......Bob Higbee.......Oklahoma 2nd Scout......John Kenneally.....New York B.A.R......Bob Quinn,.....Ohio Ass't B.A.R........Bob Wagner......Wisconsin

Ammo Bearer.....Joe Mrosko.....Ohio
Rifleman.....Ed Stachura.....Chicago
Rifleman.....Charles Dennard....Geogia
Rifleman.....Vernon Gabioud St.Louis

Asst Squad Leader.....Chas Orth /.......St.LOuis
There you have the boys. The reason that I put them
downis because we've srved up until now and are still intact. The only change is that Chas Orth has taken over another squad for now- they lost their squad leader thru sickness. I moved Bob Higbee up to ass't The other two squads have five and seven men respectively. The rest are casualities of one sirt or other, I'm just hoping that I can bring them all thru it intact. But Icant guarantee it because this squad has been called upon for the lions share of patrol and regular strong arm stuff.
These people may think may think that I am brave and foothardy
or whatever they want to call it but I am about the scaredest man in the company. The reason I chose to go ahead is this; somebody has to do it, in the first place and I've got about as little future to lose as anyone. The only thing I fear losing to death is my family -- I like them all so well and so proud of them. In the second place I toss a metal coin; heads I forge ahead aggressivlyreleiving my mind having some excitement-if I come thru of achievement, inflating my ego and respect of officers and men, if I dont come thru it would be a solution of all my earthly problems; tails I sit back, refuse the task, and in doing soboth releiving the minds of my men for their own safety, but surely not prompting any pride from them in my leadership. Then dying a thousand deaths waiting for developments up ahead, and me another cog in the wheel. I like to drive and be a somebody. That's my way. Its a silly way and the law of averages may ket ch up to me, but mom its the way i like it. I pray my heart out all the way thru the ordeal and after its over there is a moment of drunkedness exultance-acheivement. But we have not hit anything really rough. It is coming up and we might as well face it. Lets beleive in predestination; either my fate is to live thru this war anddie at homefrom old age or I am to die before reacing home. If this be so I may as well continue gambling as nothing could change it. Good way of lokking at it ? I started this letter with the express purpose of telling you about something I8m having sent home to-day Its an award. To tell you the truth its the purple heart. In my first

Week against the enemy. You see it went this way. My company went in during a pitch blank night to releive another company of troops. The hardships of that releif, I wont bother to recount But it was enough to make your son actually curse the world in general and everything in paricular that contributed to this war-yes and more than ence also and thats a vice I have not coll edted yet-along with smoking. So when I curse I need not ell you how mad I am. Anyway we had seven days andeight nighs of that hill under direct artillery and motar fire. That's the reason I sent home for a mass to be said for me. I never want to fear like that again. Its something you cannot fight against- just something to wait for- wait and see how close it can come to you. Well, I had to go out into on our last day of it. There was an attack thru our lines on the eight day and they place about eighth machine guns thru our platoon front-6 heavy thirties and two fifties-plus two of our B.A.R. (Brownings automatic Rifle) The macine guns used tracers and made it a cinch for the enemy motars and artillery to find. They lashed us with everythin they had. I cant tell you all the casualities nwe had, they werent much considering. I cannot see how it was so little. But we stayed flat in our holes for over seven hours until they let up Then two men had figured tt had ended and decided to go for water. One of them was Anderson from my hole the other was a man from the next hole. No sooner had they started out when it started again, I cursed myself for letting them go and wished they had enough sense to get back immediately. But we had not eaten or drank that whole day. I heard the canteens rattle and only Anderson came into the hole. He babled something about help But I did not need to be told. His face was covered with blood. I got out grabbed the first medic I saw and told him to follow Tknew the trail and it was a short way to where Frank was. But it was too late. We couldn't find a pulse in his body. In his hand he still held the chocolate"D" bar he was munching when he stepped out. A medic needs certain details when he comes upon a dead or wounded soldier but when that son-of-a-gun started collecting them under fire-when I could give him them from a more protective measures of a hole-why I got mad and told him to get the hellout of there and he'd get them. That placewas where they were shelling, thinking it was a pack trail, I got back to my hole and got flat on my stomach. The partner of the dead boy came over with Andy and I and the three of us dug our bodies as deeply into that hole as we could. Not deeply enough thoughbecause it was not long after a burst hit us. I got hit in the back so hard it had me gasping for air for a few seconds. Friends immediately yelled medic But the aid man occupied outside with someone who really needed him. I gained my breath and told them to never mind. Thad tape and bandage and the wound wasnot too bad. John Quinn stripped my back and managed to get the shrapnel out, then bandaged it He is a pe-medical boy and knows his stuff. Heas came thru quite a few time since then in handy first aid. I didnt go back because I was the only staff on line in my platoon. Anyway I did not consider it bad enough. I could not wear my pack but I could still walk and did. It hit me in the left side of my back about two inches from the KMIIKK backbone and in a very precarious and dangerous place- had it not spent itselfbefore it hit me or maybe I am too tough to penetrate(hah) I'm still carrying the son of a gun in my pockets Its about this size and about a quarter of an inch thick. I hope you never get an oak leaf cluster to it. But who knows. Reminds me of

what I said to Joe once. You see we were at another situation and I sent him up a little knoll on our right for flank protection. He started up the hill when some snipers bullets snapped over our heads, he rolled silently down to the bottombut fast. I crawled up to him and called him but he did not answer, so I thought he was hit. I nudged him againand called his name-asked him what was the matter, he said , someones taking pot shots at me'. I did not knot whether to laugh at his remarks or get mad but I did neither. I diplomatically told him those shots were elsewhere and for him to get up there. I got stuck later to clear that field. But a day or two later I told Joe the facts.. Sure there were snipers all around us. on three sides We picked up one Jerry hiding by sitting down among the fellows of another company. But that is what we are here for to get shot at. I tried to explain to Joe casually- I dont know whether or not it sunk in. This letter is the først I've let anybody into my confidence but it wont be often that I will It might be a little course to take mom but I'm hoping you can read the truth casually and realize it. You have not received a letter of this lenghth in a long while have you? Well this is my tenth letter in two days. Its my last letter and the fact is that it is the last night of our rest period. A rest period of KMK four days. Its been good to have. But war still sticks its nose in. WhileI was jotting a letter off to Vincent this afternoon some M.E'S straffed the edge of the town twice (M.E'smeans Messersmidts-109 they are planes). In case this letter gets to you before Christmas I wish you and the whole family a Merr Christmas and a Happy New Year. I have just received your and Mae Xmas cards to-day-thanks

So long for a while, and lots of love Son#1 Harry

P.S. Mom it seems that packages cannot be sent home C.O.D. from here and in order to send any home I would have ta carry anything that I intended sending home around with me. For that reason I forbear gathering anything. But I have been carrying my wrist watch around my neck on my dog chain for six weeks now, I pulled the stem out of it. The only place it can be fixed is in New York City. I cant get stamps to send anything. What I like is an assortment of stamps wrapped up in waxed paper against dampness about a dollars worth, 2-15. 5-6. 10-3,10-1 making it one dollar I hope. In this mannerI may be able tosend home my package and then any package you receive from mec you can immediately send me the cost of postage in stamps. In that way Isllalways be able to mail anything I wish. Okay? I will reimburse you at the first opprtunity. You'll have to trust me

Goom by now & good night love Harry
I say good night because this letter has been entirely written
by candle light. I dont think that there is any electricity
in all France. As these Germans-french say here-"Allis kaputallis Deuthhes kaput" all is broken-all is Gernab broken. Thats
what we get when we take a town and clear the houses. The ladies
chatter and show us what the artillery broke, "Allis kaputAllis kaput- Allis kaput".

THE FOLLOWING WAS A V-MAIL LETTER HOME FROM PVT STEVE KOPINSKI, WHO LATER WAS KIA IN FRANCE. PVT KOPINSKI TRANSFERRED INTO I/411<sup>TH</sup> OUT OF A HOSPITAL UNIT WHERE HE WAS RECUPERATING FROM A WOUND HE RECEIVED.

