

# My World War II

## Frank Rogers

Company G  
409th Infantry  
103d Division

### Introduction

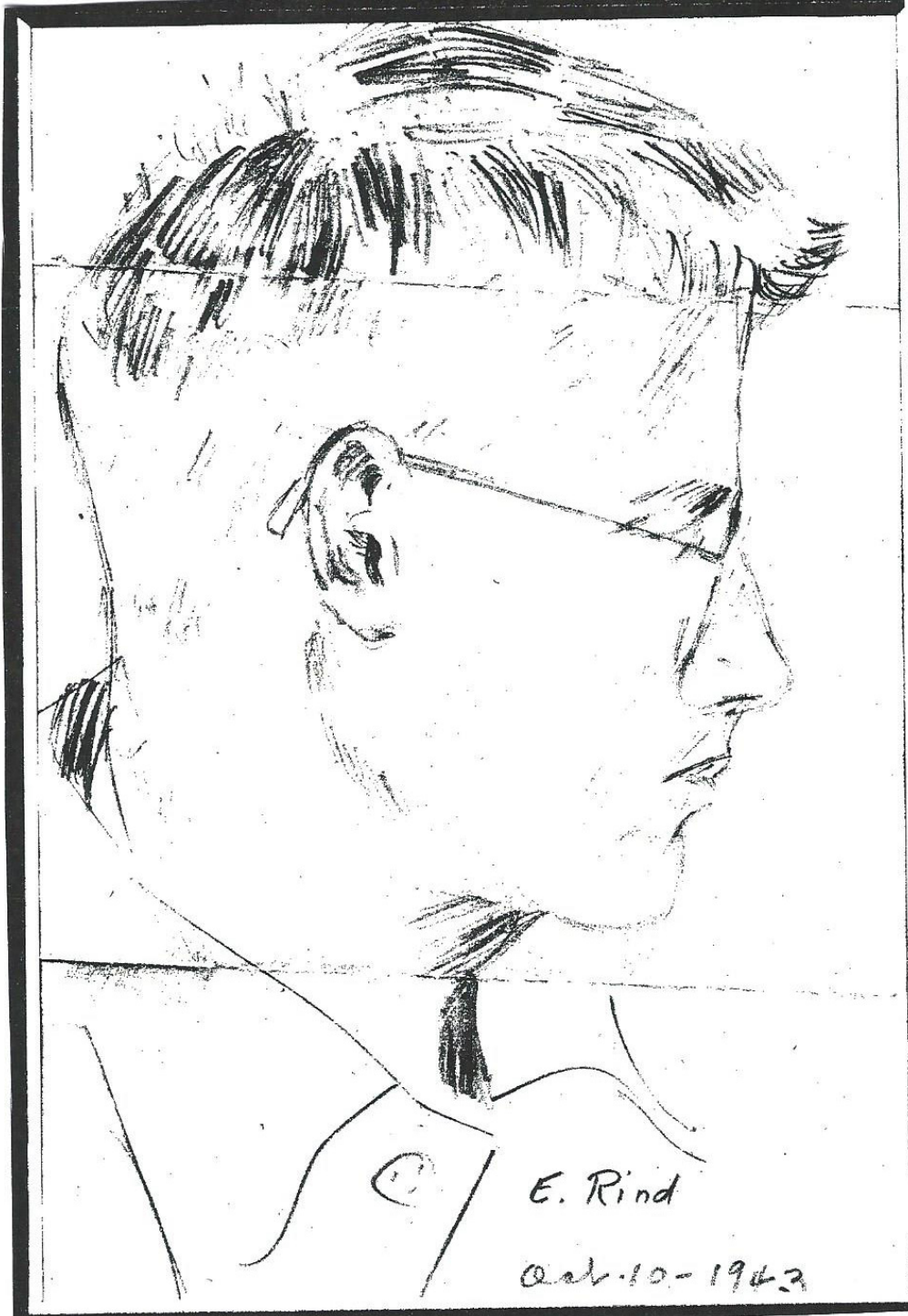
The first time I wrote about my World War II experiences was in 1996, over 50 years after the fact. At age 71, I still had many vivid, detailed memories of what I had gone through. On the other hand, I had only small, fragmented impressions from some events and periods—like flotsam washed up on a beach. To try to sort out my memories and put them into chronological order, I referred to dates, place names, activities, and events I had copied from our company morning reports after the war in Europe ended. I found out much later – thanks to Bob Leslie, a machine gunner in our company and one of the few of us still living into the 21st century – the information in the morning reports does not agree exactly with the official records. I also went back to our regimental history\* for a refresher on the chronology of events, though my purpose in writing this account was not to spell out tactics or strategies except to provide context to what I did and saw. Rather, this is my memory of my personal experiences as a soldier in World War II.

In keeping with the times, I preserved by story in computerized, or digitized, format in 2004 – making only minimal revisions in the process. In 2014, I added a few details and reflections to round out my account.

A word of explanation: A legacy of my father and my grandfather having worked in railroading is that I have been a lifelong rail fan – hence my frequent references in this account to what railroads I traveled on in the States and trains I saw in Europe.

---

\* William East and William F. Gleason. *The 409th Infantry in World War II*. Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947.



In late summer and early fall of 1943, I was in basic training at North Camp Hood, Texas. One of my "roommates" was Emanuel "Manny" Rind from New York City's Coney Island. A talented artist, he sketched me while we were both sitting on our upper bunks. I had been unaware of what he was doing until he handed me this pencil sketch.

# PART I

## My Life Before

I turned 18 on January 3, 1943, when I was halfway through my freshman year at the University of Wisconsin. As required by law, I registered at the Selective Service Office (Draft Board), and within a short time I received notice to report for a preliminary physical exam (administered at the UW Student Clinic). Within a few weeks I received my draft card showing my status as "1A," meaning available for military service with no restrictions.

My family was practically in mourning. Then I found out that a deferment might be possible to get me through the end of the school year. My dad had been a locomotive fireman during World War I and so wasn't drafted when he reached 18 in 1917. Dad and I went to the Board office, where he found he knew the clerk, who told us that such deferments were common in Dane County, and easy to get. I applied, and the deferment was granted.

My father had read that young men like me could take a test that might qualify them for various special programs like the V-12 in the Navy and the Army's ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program). He urged me to do so and I did. Sometime during that freshman year – I think it was in the fall of 1942 – I took the exam, given in Bascom Hall, which determined qualification for such programs as the Navy V-12 or ASTP. I did well on it and was notified that I was qualified for entry into any of these programs, whether by volunteering or by presenting my notice of qualification at any recruiting office or the reception center if and when I was drafted. My mistake would be to choose the Army instead of the Navy. The rest is history . . .

There was no doubt in my mind that the Allies would win, but at what costs, and who would survive, were ever-present uncertainties. This was especially true for my family – parents, grandparents, etc. – all of whom still harbored dark memories of World War I. On the other hand, I had no such memories, and the possibility of fighting for my country seemed comfortably remote. Nothing that exciting had ever happened to me, and in some ways I was looking forward to the experience. Further, I was not doing all that well at school, and I would just as soon have dropped out and gone into service. My family, however, strongly felt differently.

Life went on. I studied, attended classes, listened to and read accounts of the war on both fronts, and wondered what my fate would be. I played with my model railroad, spent time with my friends, occasionally rode my bike, photographed and watched trains, and the school year came to an end – all the while feeling the presence of the draft board "breathing down my neck," a phrase common at the time, never knowing

whether I would actually finish the semester before I was called up. But June came, and I had managed to receive passing or better grades. It seemed inevitable that my life as a college student would now be suspended until World War II came to an end.

With all of us expecting to be drafted that summer, my three best friends – Bob Rhodes, Harlan Hanson and Herb Marcus – and I got together a few more times. As a farewell event, we spent a day hiking up and down the bluffs of Devils Lake State Park, about 40 miles north of Madison. Another day we took the train to Chicago to visit the Field Museum and nearby planetarium. From an overpass, we viewed the networks of converging rails, known as the “throats.” Pausing now and again to watch the spectacle of moving trains, we were greeted by a Chicago police officer, who quizzed us about our identities and intentions. There was a war going on, and our lingering to observe the trains could be misinterpreted as spying for the enemy. We explained why we were there, showed our draft cards, and, at the officer’s suggestion, walked on over the bridge without any further lingering.

When school ended, so did my deferment. The 1A card arrived. During this time I was helping John, a steamfitter employed by Grandpa Toussaint, to install a hot water heating system in our house. John was a veteran of World War I, and he empathized with me as I received my “Greeting” from the government to report to the front of the Washington Building (in which the Draft Board was located), off the Capitol Square, at about 6 a.m., on June 25, for transportation to Milwaukee (by chartered bus), there to be given a more thorough physical exam. Immediately following, assuming the physical turned up no restrictions, I was to be inducted into a branch of the armed services.

Bob Rhodes and I went on the same day. The physical turned up no restrictions and I was given my choice of Army, Navy, or Marines. With the Army as my choice, I along with the rest of those who made the same choice, were sworn into the Army of the United States. It was June 25, 1943, and I was an Army private . . .

I was given orders, which allowed me two weeks at home “to clear up my personal affairs,” after which, on July 9, I was to present myself at the Milwaukee Road Depot at about 5:30 in the evening, for transportation by train to Camp Grant, Illinois. The camp had been in existence since before World War I, and served as a reception center for processing new members of the Army as well as a basic training center for those who became members of the Army Medical Corps. (For example, the butcher from our neighborhood grocery store was in the same group as me, but he stayed in Camp Grant, and became a meat inspector for the Army.)

Those two weeks were, of course, filled with good-byes, activity, and all kinds of emotions. Mother was worried about me, wondering what would become of me. Dad was too; he felt I was not quite ready to take care of myself – face the world alone (and he was right). Advising my father on how to prepare me, a neighbor who was a member of the Army Air Corps, stationed at nearby Truax Field, but living off-post, advised my father on how to prepare me – what to take, how to pack, etc. In my

opinion, it was basically unnecessary, but since Dad had never been through anything like it, he drank it all in and then went over it with me in detail. I know he meant well.

My grandparents were devastated, especially Grandma Rogers. She was a widow now, and she probably felt that my departure was just another step in the bundle of disasters that were befalling her. She was convinced that I would not come back.

But the day and time came, and Dad took me to the station, and I left. The trip down, in a special coach provided for the draftees, was one filled with excited young men who at this point were treating the whole thing as one of life's adventures. Rhodes was there, as well as Bob Evans, a distant collateral cousin on Grandma Toussaint's side of the family. We enjoyed the trip.

## Induction

**A**t Grant, we were met by Army personnel who oriented us, divided us into groups and got us bedded down for the night. I don't remember whether we were given a meal, but I doubt it. I'm not even sure whether we were allowed to go to a PX.

The next morning we awakened early, and after the usual morning ablutions, breakfast, etc., we went about the process of changing from civilian to soldier. We got "GI haircuts" – I didn't get one because my hair was already as short as the Army required; too bad since they were the only free haircuts the Army gave. We were issued our uniforms, towels, razors, barracks bags, etc., including shoes that just had to fit; if they didn't, you went back to the shoe issuing area and got a different size, and repeated this until you were satisfied that you had the size that would let you walk around the world comfortably, if so ordered.

We were also given the Army General Classification Test (AGCT). This was a critical part of the induction process, because your AGCT score determine your qualification for various Army occupations. As I recall, my score was around 130; 100 was the 50th percentile, and 162 was the highest possible score. While the entrance requirement for Officers Candidate School (OCS) was 110, ASTP required 115.

I believe we were also interviewed, for purposes of determining what part of the Army we would enter, but I don't remember anything about it. At some point in the process, I surrendered the card that certified that I was eligible for ASTP.

With the induction process completed, the next step was to wait until the Army was ready to send us to a camp to begin training for our roles as soldiers. This wait was about two weeks long for me, and during that time I was given a weekend pass to go home – a great experience, *in uniform* – and I was given the privilege of standing guard for 24 hours.

The guard duty was interesting – not to mention somewhat amusing, as I look back on it. We had obviously not been given any instructions in the fine art of handling firearms, so we didn't get any. Instead we walked our posts with Billy clubs such as police carry, including military police. Also, we had barely been issued our Soldiers Handbook, so we couldn't be held responsible for knowing any of the 10 General Orders. Instead, we were told what the first General Order was – “To take charge of this post and all government property in view” – and we were told that we might have to recite this to the officer of the day if he came around while we were walking our post.

It was an experience to walk the post before bedtime, because my sector of responsibility took me pretty much through the area where my fellow-inductees were “living,” including my own barracks. Several of them were impressed, including my then uncle, Walter Miller, who had been inducted at the same time that I was.

On a couple of occasions we were assembled and given instruction in the rudiments of close order drill. This was easy for several of us, because during our freshman year at the UW we were required to take ROTC, and close order drill was part of the course.

Finally, my time came. I think it was on a Monday morning, the 19th of July, following my weekend at home, when a small group of us – about 28, I think – were assembled and advised that we were “shipping out.” We were told to pack and to be ready to move when called upon.

We left Camp Grant in a special coach – wicker seats, the obvious giveaway that it was a car normally used in commuter service – on the *Burlington* (Chicago Burlington & Quincy RR). When we arrived in Chicago we traveled via some conveyance, probably a bus, to the Dearborn Station, having arrived in Chicago at the Union Depot, and to a train on the Wabash Railroad. The train was either the *Banner Blue* or some similar run, from Chicago to St. Louis. At St. Louis, our “convoy commander” – a corporal who had made similar trips many times before, with small groups of new recruits from Grant to their basic training centers – escorted us to a special Army-run dining room on a mezzanine of the St. Louis Union Terminal where we had a rather elegant meal, served by black waiters dressed in white coats with the traditional white towel draped over one crooked arm. He then walked us to the St. Louis Convention Center. There he set us free, after being told when to be present at the designated spot in the center, for the next step – a return to the Union Terminal.

Among other activities of the evening, I wrote a letter home, as I recall. Then, at about 9:00 p.m., the corporal convoyed us back to the terminal and after some bickering over accommodations with a sleeping car conductor, we boarded a Cotton Belt RR. Train – the *Morning Star*, I think – and we spent the night in a sleeper – two to an upper berth. We awoke somewhere in Arkansas (I remember going through Pine Bluff) and proceeded southwest through such places as Texarkana and Marshall, Texas, until, after being transferred from train to train, we arrived in Waco, Texas, at about 2:00 a.m., and

spent the next few hours in the depot, either trying to find a place to sleep or prowling around the place. At about 8:00 a.m. or so, we boarded yet another Cotton Belt train, which took us slowly to North Camp Hood, Texas. A thermometer mounted on a pillar in the shade of the station platform read 120 degrees.

We were taken, probably by truck, to a barracks area. North Camp Hood was a brand new camp, with many areas barely ready for occupancy. The water supply had not yet been declared safe, so all drinking water had to be taken from Lister bags in which purifying chemicals had been added. There was a suspicion that the water, taken from, as I recall, the nearby Brazos River, might even be a cause of polio, which at that time was uncontrollable – the polio vaccine was not developed until the 1960s.

We were installed in barracks, and processing began. I recall being given three or four shots at one time, with medics on each side of us, using both our arms for the shots. We had a lot of free time, but were not allowed to leave the area, since every so often we would be assembled and taken through another step or two in the orientation process.

Water discipline was an important part of our indoctrination. We were in a dry part of the country, and almost all of us had come from the North. We had no idea of how to live – and fight a war – in a dry climate. So gradually we learned to do without water until specified times, and to consume large quantities of salt tablets to avoid depleting the body's supply of some essential elements. At the noon meal, we were required to pick up a handful of salt tablets and consume them on the spot before being allowed to proceed through the chow line.

Eventually we began our basic training as a Tank Destroyer Training Battalion. Camp Hood – both North and South – was a base for tank destroyer units, while we were there to be given a 13-week modified infantry basic training course, and, at that point, the people who ran things had not been made fully aware of the nature of our status, and those who were to be our “cadre” had not yet been organized; probably some of them hadn't even arrived in the camp yet...

So for two weeks we trained as tank destroyer trainees. The officers and non-coms were knowledgeable, effective instructors who, I think, were pleased to be able to interact with a group whose AGCT scores were probably higher than theirs. I remember one lieutenant named Basile, who was from New York, and had been an actor of sorts before his Army service began. He assumed that we were all headed for officer status sooner or later and treated us as such. At one point he digressed from his established lecture to give us advice on how to conduct ourselves when we were required to mount a podium and speak to a group of people, without being nervous. His instruction was simple: Assume the audience consisted of a group of people whose mental ability, subject knowledge, etc., was far below your own, and proceed to give them your speech.

Ultimately, someone decided that we were not to be given tank destroyer training, and we moved again to another area, where we became part of a ASTU battalion – all destined for college. We spent the rest of August, September and October learning how to be basic soldiers. The training was instructive, and degrading. It toughened us to Army life and taught us how to live in close proximity to other human beings – some of whom were most likeable while others took high places on one's hate list. As an age-old military saying goes, it "separated the men from the boys." It also *made men out of boys...*

My only pictures from that period were taken in Waco, Texas, where we went on one weekend pass. They are badly faded and show me with a Longfellow cigar, which I seemed to enjoy when I could find them. Though most of the passes were for one day – after Saturday morning inspections, which were conducted by sadistic noncoms and officers, who in our opinion, wanted nothing more than to find a reason to "gig" us and keep us from going on pass – I recall some of us had passes that lasted from noon on Saturday – until midnight Sunday.

One of us, from New York City, had enough military training in high school or college (ROTC?) to impress the cadre and to attain the rank of cadet sergeant. He managed to get more passes than we felt he deserved – probably at the expense of someone else – and we decided that this required some sort of retributive action. And so, when he returned from his pass, about midnight Sunday, he found that his bunk had been disassembled, moved to the rafters of the latrine and reassembled atop thereon. Anger such as his is rarely seen or appreciated...

One of the guys in the barracks where I "lived" had a significantly different background from the rest of us. He had spent most of his youth, living in Japan. I can't remember why his parents lived there, but he spoke the language and knew his way around the country.

As our term neared the end, we were being given instructions about packing, when to be ready etc., and one of those days he disappeared. I can't remember having had any conversations with him, though some of the guys who bunked nearer to him got to talk with him a bit. One of the guys who did get a chance to socialize a bit with him told us that he had expected to be transferred to a place in California where people were given special training and attention because of their knowledge of Japan. We presumed that he had been sent there, but, as far as I can recall, none of us ever heard from him again.

Basic concluded with several activities. One was an obstacle course featuring stream-crossing on a rope (I fell in); crawling under barbed wire and live machine gun bullets; and jumping into a foxhole just before a tank rumbled overhead. This ruined the fatigue uniforms we had been issued, so we were allowed to wear our "class A" uniform pieces – shirts, pants – as fatigues for the rest of basic. Another part of the



conclusion was a bivouac maneuver in the hills of Camp Hood. It was so cold at night that I learned to drink coffee, because it was hot.

We also organized and presented a series of skits lampooning the Army and our cadre. A large part of our battalion consisted of a trainload of men from the Coney Island area of Brooklyn, New York. (They had boarded a train in Camp Upton, New York and ridden all the way to Camp Hood in suburban coaches with wicker seats.) Some of this group had experience in the entertainment field, so our production was well directed and rehearsed. I played the part of our executive officer, with a caricature performance of an inspection. He laughed about it and complimented me.

About halfway through basic, as a result of some horseplay, I broke my glasses, the civilian pair in which I had entered the Army. No one had told me about getting GI glasses, so I had no spare pair. As a result I went on "sick call" and was examined and GI glasses were ordered. Time passed, and apparently somewhere in the mysterious, unduly convoluted pipelines of the Medical Corps, my record had been lost, causing at least one more trip for another examination. I can't recall all the details, but I remembered being picked up at company headquarters by a command car and driven to the hospital where another, final examination took place and in a short while I had two pairs of GI glasses. Meantime, most of basic had passed and, among other things, I spent time on the rifle range, firing an Enfield rifle, and barely qualifying, because I had trouble seeing the target.

## ASTP

**W**hile we were on the rifle range, we underwent our STAR unit processing. Many ASTP-bound GIs were treated to a week or so on some college campus, living soft lives while they went through this process in order to be assigned to the appropriate training course and school. We, however, were treated to a short interview with a major sitting at a card table beside the rifle range.

Finding that the two programs that I had found interesting were not available to me, I asked the good major what courses were, and his answer was simple and singular: basic engineering. So, at the end of basic, most of us boarded the ubiquitous 2-1/2 ton Army trucks and left our basic training home for Denton, Texas, and North Texas State Teacher College, home of an ASTP unit in Basic Engineering training.

We left the trucks in front of a group of two-story, wood frame buildings which had apparently been taken over by the Army for our use. They had been home to a dormitory unit, and in the center there was a dining room unit. As time went on, it became fairly obvious that this group of buildings should have been condemned some time before World War II. They were cold, and the only heat source was a small natural

gas burner in each room which had to be lit with a match and which we were cautioned should not be left on overnight, because they could clog and then emit lethal doses of gas. On some nights, the temperatures got well below freezing inside as well as outside. And when the wind picked up, the buildings could be felt to sway as well as letting in some pretty substantial drafts.

The commander of the ASTP unit was just leaving, to be replaced by a nice enough major named Menefee, I think. The previous commandant left under a cloud for having colluded with a local contractor to benefit by a means of punishment involving digging specifically sized holes at specific locations, as designated by the contractor. The punishees were men who had arrived a term before we did.

Of course, the whole way of life was decidedly utopian, compared with the life of a basic trainee living in tarpaper barracks in North Camp Hood. We actually had a pint of milk with almost every meal, instead of a small container for the whole table back at Hood. And in all other ways the meals were great, cooked and served by college employees, not Army cooks and KPs. There was no KP here.

Even the housing was ultimately improved, when we moved into Chilton Hall, a brand new, totally modern dormitory – a two-story, U-shaped building that took up most of a city block. We had heat, a much better dining room, and concrete floors which one could clean by merely standing in the corner opposite the door and blowing – the dust would all exit over those highly polished floors.

The course of studies was a full one: Geography, U.S. History, Math (the same course I had just completed at Madison), English, Chemistry and Physics. I did alright in everything but chemistry, and I'm sure I would ultimately have flunked out of the program because of this. However, I hung on through the two exams that counted – mid-term and final. Equivalent to one college semester, the term was three months long.

At Christmas, we had a few days off, and I contacted my aunt Ruth Toussaint, who had been forewarned and made arrangements for me to visit her good friends the Cassagnes in Westwego, a suburb of New Orleans. I took a fellow student with me, whose first name was Bob and who came from New York State, but I can't remember any more than that about him, since once we were transferred from ASTP, I don't think I ever saw him again.

Boarding the train in Fort Worth (Texas & Pacific RR), we arrived midafternoon on Christmas Eve in New Orleans. We had a good time at the Cassagnes; they showed us around a rainy, steamy New Orleans and took us to dinner at one of the leading hotels, where we sat about two tables away from movie star Robert Taylor. Because they had no room for us in their home, however, we had to stay at a servicemen's center in downtown New Orleans. Then, on Christmas Day, in the evening, we boarded the train for the return trip. It was an interesting, exciting, exhausting experience that introduced me to whiskey-and-7-Up.

At the end of the first term at Denton, we had a seven-day furlough plus four days' travel time. It was my first trip home since entering the Army the previous July, and now it was February, around the 8th. (February 8 became a sort of fateful date for me, as this narrative will later explain.) I got to see Bob Rhodes on this trip, since he was in ASTP in Fargo, North Dakota and his term end was about the same date as mine. I'm sure we had a good time together, and I had a lot of time with relatives as well, but I don't recall as much about the time at home as I do about the trip to and from.

Because we all were to leave Denton at once, the railroad company made special arrangements. Instead of having to change trains at Denison, Texas, our car was transferred to the Dallas section of the *Texas Special* (Missouri-Kansas-Texas, or Katy Railroad) and we rode all the way to St. Louis on the same car – not the most luxurious that the railroad owned. I changed in St. Louis to the *Abraham Lincoln* on the Chicago & Alton – B&O, and was met in Chicago by Mother and Grandma Toussaint, and we proceeded to the other side of the Union Depot and came home on the Milwaukee Road.

On the train from Milwaukee to Madison, I talked enviously with an ASTP soldier-trainee who was studying Polish at the University of Wisconsin Madison because he was able to speak *French* fluently. I couldn't get into the ASTP Language Program because, with only four years of high school Latin and one year of college Spanish, I couldn't speak a foreign language fluently. The connection between French and Polish escaped me then, as now.

As we entered the second term in February, 1944, rumors began to circulate about the possibility that the entire ASTP program was about to be abandoned. The war was moving along, and forces were being built for invasions, both in Europe and the Pacific. If we were to be of any value in the conflicts, it would not be while sitting in a classroom in the States.

## Camp Howze

**W**ord finally came in early March, and on March 16, we boarded trucks for the 40-mile ride to Camp Howze, near Gainesville, Texas, on the Red River. It was most depressing. My new "home" was in the tarpaper-covered barracks of Company G, 409th Infantry Regiment of the 103d Infantry Division. This was in marked contrast to my former residence in a second-floor room in Chilton Hall. Instead of four roommates, I was now part of the 40 or so members of the company's first platoon, known in Army patois as a rifle platoon in a rifle company of an infantry division, which at full strength consisted of roughly 15,000 souls. The barracks

resembled our quarters at North Camp Hood, Texas, which many of us had thought we would never experience again.

Arriving in late-winter drizzly weather, we generally felt that we had been less than warmly welcomed by our barracks mates and the various platoon and company noncoms. Before daybreak on March 19, they left, along with the rest of the battalion, on trucks for a week of maneuvers near Decatur, Texas. It was cold, rainy, and generally miserable, and we former ASTPers were most happy to be considered unprepared for such activity and to stay back.

Meanwhile, back at Camp Howze, we new residents underwent a sort of refresher course of infantry basic, designed to change “college boys,” as our barracks mates loved to call us, into battle-ready infantrymen. We were less than happy, having been herded back to life in an Army camp, in tarpaper barracks, with a lot of men who were less than happy to have us there, and eager to make these “Joe College” types toe the line.

I was not a happy camper. This was not the sort of Army life or duties I had expected. During the next few weeks, many of us tried any way we could think of to get a transfer out of the infantry. I contacted my aunt Caryl Miller, who knew a colonel in Washington over whose desk many transfers passed and who had been known to arrange for changes – transfers – to units more in line with the transferees’ expectations. He replied that ASTP people were too hot to handle; they had been carefully spread around the infantry to try to raise the intelligence level, since the average AGCT score for an infantry noncom had been around 85, while 100 was average. The goal was to create a more effective infantry, more reliant on their own small-unit abilities. My thought had been to transfer to a railroad battalion, but to qualify required railroad work experience. Model railroads didn’t count.

In early May, I was given a 12-day furlough. Packed and ready, after going through an inspection whose only purpose seemed to delay my departure, I was finally allowed to leave the camp for the Santa Fe station in nearby Gainesville. There I boarded a Santa Fe “streamliner,” bound for Chicago. There I was to meet my father who would join me for the ride to Madison, Wisconsin, my home town.

As we left Texas and traveled north, our train had to be rerouted because of flooding in Kansas from heavy rains. As an avid rail fan, I spent a lot of time in our car’s vestibule, with the top half of the door open so I could observe the passing countryside. As we moved along – more slowly than a streamliner is expected to move – water was overspreading the neighboring land. As we cleared a curve, I saw ahead a trestle over an overflowing stream that had backed up under and beyond our train. I left the vestibule – in retrospect, my best route of escape. We made it over the bridge, with the rising water even with the rail head and continued to cross Kansas, arriving in Chicago about 12 hours late. My father had given up and returned to Madison, and I found my

way to the Union Depot, where I remember spending a fortune for a shave in the station barber shop.

The furlough was wonderful, with many greetings, visits with family and good friends who also happened to be home on furlough. Though I wasn't happy as a doughfoot in a rifle platoon, I proudly wore my newly acquired Expert Infantryman Badge as well as the blue piping on my cap signifying an infantry soldier. I also made a couple of trips to the family dentist, Dr. Sullivan, who made me a fixed bridge to cover the gap caused by a tooth extraction the Army had insisted on, knowing that I was going overseas where dental clinics were not always accessible and the tooth could have caused me great pain.

Then off to Chicago to catch another streamliner back to Gainesville and the infantry – less than a pleasant thought. The southbound streamliner I boarded was overflowing with GIs as well as civilians. What to do – spend the next 24 hours standing in vestibules? I found another train – a slower-moving run that stopped several more times than the streamliner, and required a change in Kansas City to a similar “local.” My dad had come to see me off. I will always remember looking down as we began moving out of the Chicago depot, seeing my dad on the station platform, who was trying to catch a glimpse of me, and no doubt wondering when – if ever – he would see me again. I had the same kind of thoughts.

Back at Camp Howze, I hated the life of a rifleman, and I hated several noncoms that seemed to delight in making our lives hellish. We went out on problems; we sweated in the sweltering North Texas heat; I had KP; I had guard duty – this time with a loaded rifle. Somehow I began to be noticed by the right people.

About mid-summer, some of us were moved around after some of our personnel were shipped out as replacements for units that had landed in France during the Normandy invasion. A Sergeant Jim Sawrey, who was in civilian life a secondary schoolteacher and principal in a rural district in one of the Dakotas, had me reassigned to his platoon – the company's Weapons Platoon – where I became a member of a mortar crew.

Aiming a mortar required mathematical calculations that I never mastered. Before anyone noticed, however – maybe two weeks – I was picked to attend a messengers' school, and before long I was transferred to company headquarters, where I became a messenger and radio operator, under Sergeant Paul Attebery. During my time at Camp Howze, the only change in my status noted in the morning reports was a “promotion” for just about all of us from ASTP, from private to pfc. [private first class].

By comparison with the other parts of a rifle company, this was heaven. In this same barracks were the cooks, mess sergeant, clerks, and the first sergeant. The whole atmosphere was more relaxed, and the duties were far less strenuous. Indeed, when the company went out on its next weeklong bivouac in the Decatur area, we had no

responsibilities. We just tented, had good warm meals at battalion headquarters mess, and took jeep rides and evening walks.

By mid-summer, it was quite apparent that the division was slated for the real thing, though in which theater we didn't know – at least down in the bottom ranks where we were. Life was relatively easy for those of us in company headquarters. Once in a while we had a night problem, and the runners might have a message-carrying mission, but we had no more “extended order drill” such as the rifle platoons were undergoing, and there no more rigorous, chicken-shit inspections such as the First Platoon – my initial assignment – was undergoing.

I pulled guard duty sometime in mid-summer, and with the help of the old-timers in the barracks, plus a pretty snappy manual of arms with my carbine, I made Colonel's Orderly. This meant, instead of walking a post, two hours on and four off, for 24 hours, I sat in regimental headquarters, took a couple of messages here and there, and woke the officers in their barracks the next morning, after having been awakened on my cot in headquarters by the CQ (Charge of Quarters). It was an easy 24 hours, and I earned a day's pass for my efforts.

Over the four-day period August 14-18, the company completed 20 hours of air transport training. We were taken to an area of Camp Howze where a barebones mock-up of a glider interior was laid out. As I recall, our training consisted mostly of walking into the mock-up and finding our make-believe seats. Thankfully, we never had to use the training.

Later that summer, I heard that the division was to be inspected by General Somervell, head of Army Service Forces, and a full-fledged review would take place in his honor. I announced to the first sergeant that it was on that day that I would take my pass, and he had to grant it. I spent the day in nearby Gainesville, doing very little, but happy in the thought that I wasn't out on a hot, dusty parade ground.

Gradually, the division began preparing for the move, many of us still unaware of where we were going, Europe or the Pacific. However, when we began crating our equipment and labeling it for shipment, we found the address we were to have was APO (Army Post Office) New York. This was the PO for Europe, while APO San Francisco meant the Pacific Theater. Most of us, myself most definitely included, found some relief in this knowledge...

And so, at the very end of the summer of 1944, September 21, 1944, some 15,000 103d Infantry Division troops boarded trains in Camp Howze, Texas, for the experience of a lifetime, and, for many, the final experiences of their lives on earth. Fortunately, they were “only the beginning” for Frank Monroe Rogers Jr, Private First Class, Serial Number 36826601.



*Route from Howze to Shanks (my notes):*

*AT&SF Howze to Fort Worth*

*T & P Fort Worth to Shreveport LA*

*IC Shreveport to Meridian MS*

*Southern RR Meridian to Bristol VA*

*N & W Bristol to Lynchburg*

*Southern Lynchburg to Alexandria*

*B & O Arlington to Newark NJ*

*NYC Newark to Shanks (Orangeburg NY)*

*Arrived at Shanks, September 24, 1944*

**D**uring our stay at Shanks, I got two 12-hour passes to New York City. I had dinner one night at Jack Dempsey's restaurant, took a trip to Long Island in search of Harpo Hanson (who had already been transferred to Massachusetts), was televised via a primitive closed-circuit setup in Radio City, and got my pocket picked in the 42nd Street ferry terminal while waiting to cross to Weehawken for the train (West Shore RR) back to Camp Shanks. The second of these two passes was from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and allowed us to witness sunrise over Manhattan, a sight which impressed us all.

When we were in an orientation session, an officer/speaker told us that we would be wise to cancel our savings bond deductions and, instead, to authorize deductions from our pay to be sent to someone in the States. His rationale was that, as combat soldiers, we were already doing more for our country than buying war bonds. Actually, the biggest reason for this position, I suspect, was that this would save the government a lot of money that would otherwise be spent tracing beneficiaries when the owners of the bonds were no longer among the living . . . Anyway, I took his advice and my parents put the money away for me – unfortunately, in a safe deposit box instead of a saving account.

In general, life in Shanks was easy. We helped prepare our units for the trip overseas, removing anything that identified us as the 103d. (Instead, we were Task Force 6299.) We enjoyed good meals and the scenery – a wooded area, covered with hardwoods that were nearing their fall-color peak. The nights were pretty cool, sometimes leaving ground frost – to the displeasure of our company commander, Captain Craddock, and the other southerners among us.

## Over There

The trip from Shanks on the Erie RR was made in commuter coaches. At a pier in New York, we boarded the *USS Monticello*, a former Italian luxury liner that the Navy had commandeered in a Brazilian port. The Navy had removed all of the “luxury,” installing five-high bunks in staterooms and holds. I was on B Deck, fortunately, so that I made the trip well above the water line.

We spent two weeks on the *Monticello*, sailing first along the Atlantic coast to a point somewhere south of the Florida peninsula, then across the Atlantic to the African coast off Dakar, then north to the Straits of Gibraltar. From there we passed along the North African coast, close enough to see the Atlas Mountains and some of the destroyed French fleet. Keeping open waters to a minimum, we then turned north and landed at Marseilles on October 20, 1944.

The ocean voyage was not without its interesting/exciting moments. We were in a large convoy, with many ships smaller than ours (not all of the division was on the same boat). We were under strict blackout conditions at night to avoid detection by German U-boats, but in spite of this, we heard – and felt – depth charges being set off because there was some kind of indication that U-boats were among us.

We went through a very rough storm that lasted a couple of days, and caused waves that made us toss and roll, lifting the *Monticello* so that her screws left the water, then returned and thrust us forward, again and again – making many of us seasick.

Generally, we were fed twice a day, but those on work details got three. I was on a detail assigned to chipping off the untold coats of paint, dating back to luxury liner days, on the after gun deck. We were as far aft as the ship went, and the Navy had mounted a 5-inch antiaircraft gun there. The job wasn’t hard. Mostly on our hands and knees we used special hammers with chisel-like heads which went through the paint layers fairly easily. No one really pushed us. (The Navy knew what they were taking us to, and they had a certain amount of respect for us.)

When the storm hit us, the detail’s duties were suspended, and nothing much happened until the weather cleared. By then we were near the Straits.

All troops on the ship were given a chance to view Gibraltar, as we passed slowly through the Straits. The passage, of course, required the convoy to line up “single file”, more or less, so it was indeed slow going. Where the risk of submarine attack was high, the Navy escort vessels hovered close by,

Each section came up, and slowly passed along the front of the vessel, so we could see the Rock on the left. We were then told to hurry along, so others could have the chance to view it, but everything stopped as a school of dolphins danced right across the water in front of the ship. We all stopped, spellbound at the sight. We could understand where the “sea serpent” myth might have been reinforced by such a view.



## Marseilles, France

*October 20—November 5, 1944*

**W**e arrived in the Port of Marseilles on October 20, 1944. By the time we set foot on solid ground, on the pier at which the *Monticello* was moored, darkness had set in. Smoke was filling the air, but we quickly realized there was no fire. Instead, this was smoke being generated to hide the harbor from the eyes of a German observation plane. We sat and waited until it was determined that it was safe to proceed.

Proceed we did. We walked up out of town. It was dark, and we merely followed as we were told to do. I remember at one point we passed a sort of viaduct, and as I turned to look, I watched the silhouette of a steam locomotive as it drifted downgrade – my first sighting of a French engine.

We trudged on and on that rain-soaked night. We took breaks, lying on our full field packs, and got up and trudged on, generally uphill. It was well after midnight, when an order came down to stay put and try to get some sleep on the wet ground.

We were roused by dawn's early light. We got back on our tired feet and arrived shortly at the staging area on a barren briary and rocky plateau overlooking Marseilles and the Rhone River Valley. After drying out, Bill Purtell and I pitched our two-man pup tent and set up housekeeping. We prepared, in various ways, for the next step – transportation to the front. During this time, we had inspections, were issued items of clothing we would need, and assembled duffle bags full of belongings that we wouldn't be taking with us in our full packs. These bags went into storage and we didn't see them again until the shooting stopped.

The weather was, in general, mild and usually sunny. We had a cloudburst one day, when water flowed right under the blankets which served as floor in our tents. And as abruptly as the rain started, it stopped and the sky cleared, showing us that the headquarters' pyramidal tents, located in a sort of trench beside the road that ran through the camp, were under water right up to the top of the vertical sides, and foot lockers started floating out, as we watched, and as we took apart our own tents, laying the blankets on the ground in the sun to dry. And dry they did, in a very short time.

We had a mail call, and in my letter from home, I received the advice, "Take care of yourself . . ." I shared this with those around me, for a good, loud GI laugh.

Sometime during our stay in the staging area I got a letter from my parents, asking me – begging me – to let them know if I was all right. They had received a call from the Madison postmaster, asking one of them to come to the Post Office to identify a wallet that they had received from the Jersey City Post Office; it was mine, lifted from my pocket in the Weehawken ferry terminal, minus the money in it. It was a time of great stress for Dad and Mother as well as my grandparents and other relatives when

Dad came home with the wallet. Dad was just about convinced I had been “rolled,” and my body was decomposing in one of the rivers around New York City. I had written to them immediately to explain what had happened, but they didn’t receive my letter for some time.

Since I had become a messenger in company headquarters, I was among those who received special training in sketching. It was intended to prepare company runners to be able to convey messages that would identify landmarks, profiles, horizons and so on to help our comrades find their way into battle. While I never used the training, it treated me to several delightful days of leisurely walking through some beautiful countryside, including overlooks of the Rhône River Valley.

I think I had two passes to Marseilles. During one, we found so little to do that we went to a movie – *Wuthering Heights* in English, with French subtitles. We also ate in places where we were in line with soldiers of other countries for the first time (though there were a few, mostly British, in New York). I specifically recall the Moroccans, with their red fezzes and red cummerbunds, over otherwise GI wool shirts and pants. We thought the fezzes made them look like Shriners . . .

I was also part of a detail sent to the Marseilles dock to unload some of the material that had accompanied the division from the States. The Navy had such respect for us who were about to go to the front that they asked very little of us. Instead, they took us into their ships, and dockside offices, gave us coffee and talked. We noticed that there were other soldiers on the docks, with clothes labeled “POW” – captured Germans and Italians who were made to unload ships and otherwise make themselves useful. One Italian POW came from the same part of Italy as one of the men in our company, and they had a long talk – carried on as inconspicuously as possible because this kind of fraternization was expressly forbidden.

One day we were made to dig prone shelters in the almost solid rock around our tents, with the reminder that we had been visited by a German spotter plane on the day we landed. This meant that we could also be visited by planes with bombs and guns. Ergo: the prone shelters.

Shortly after digging them (mostly with picks instead of shovels), we were ordered to strike our tents and re-pitch them in a more orderly manner – straight lines. This meant, in some cases, pitching tents right over the shelters we had just been ordered to dig, with the result that some of us had very rough floors in our tents. It took a lot of work to make them suitable for sleeping. Of course, we all made it known how ridiculous we thought this order was – suggesting that pitching our tents in straight lines was being done to make it easier for the Germans to strafe us.

Purtell and I became close friends, sharing many of our experiences at home and in school, our aspirations for the future, if the fates allowed us to have any . . . We told each other about our families, our backgrounds – so different. The more we were together, the stronger the bond between us grew. Our frontline duties were to be a

walkie-talkie radio team. We would alternate carrying the radio on our backs; it weighed 42 pounds when loaded with the larger-size battery (which we always used). One day I would carry the radio, while Purtell carried a double pack, his belongings and mine. On the next day, he would carry the radio, while I would carry the packs.

Our communications chief, Sergeant Attebery, was our immediate superior, and we got along well with him. Whenever we were in action, we were either with him or Captain Craddock. I don't think we had our radio with us until we reached the final assembly areas near the front.

There were some radios around us, probably in battalion headquarters. These units could pick up BBC as well as German broadcasts aimed at us. On one such broadcast, we heard "Berlin Sally" welcome the boys of the 103d Infantry Division to the front: "We've got some nice warm foxholes for you boys up in the Vosges Mountains. We'll be waiting for you, boys." We had moved all the way from Camp Howze to Marseilles under the tightest of security, with no marks identifying us by our unit name or number. Yet, the Germans knew exactly where we were and where we were going.

Sally reminded us that Marshal Foch had said, in World War I, that the Vosges "literally devours infantry . . ."

## **Motor Convoy North**

*Left Staging Area November 5, 1944*

**W**e left the staging area on November 5 by motor convoy toward the front in northeastern France. The trip north was as pleasant as riding in 2-1/2 ton Army trucks can be. If we could see anything, we found the scenery interesting; after all, none of us had ever been in France before, and everything was strange to us. The people were all friendly, waving to us as we passed. And when we stopped along the way, for nature calls, we found people eager to talk to us, if we were allowed to get close enough.

We stopped for the night near Valence and the second day near Dijon. We slept on the ground. I don't remember pitching tents, though we may have. At Dijon, we were close to a rail yard, and I could hear the high-pitched steam whistles, and the chugs of steam engines in the distance. Also, we were camped in what had been one of the world's leading zoos, until the war had destroyed many of the animals.

On November 7, we arrived in Charmois, France. My recollection is that we entered a wooded area, in a drizzly rain, and bedded down wherever we could. Again, I don't think we pitched any tents, though the regimental history says we did.

## Taintrux Valley

*Arrived November 9, 1944*

On November 9th, we became combat soldiers, albeit green ones—relieving 7th Infantry, 3d Division overlooking the Taintrux Valley. We stood around and waited, watched Captain Teitelbaum try to lead his company to the rear instead of the front (as he had done in maneuvers in Louisiana a year or so earlier). We were issued live ammunition, and we walked into the woods across the road from the forester's home, which had been taken over as battalion headquarters.

G Company was in reserve, and located on top of a hill across the road from the hill that led to the front. E and F companies were on line. It had been snowing, a heavy, wet snow, and while it had melted on the road (black top), partly from vehicular and foot traffic, the forest had a cover four-six inches deep. The temperature was probably in the mid- or high 30s.

I was assigned to stay with others from company headquarters, while Purtell was assigned to stay at battalion headquarters to carry any messages to the company. Neither of us really had anything to do, but get acquainted with life in the rough, what to do about artillery (most of it was outbound), how to live in real foxholes, and how to look death in the face. On one occasion, I remember, I stayed with Attebery in battalion headquarters, probably because it was not safe to wander around at night, and we happened to be there at the end of the day.

We had a large foxhole, big enough for several of us, rather well "appointed," courtesy of the 7th Infantry unit whom we relieved. It even had shelves dug into the dirt, large pine boughs arching overhead covered with pieces of German clothing, shelter halves, etc. On several mornings, after a four- or five-inch snowfall over night, we took the covering off, to avoid collapse, and cleaned the snow from it. In so doing, on two consecutive mornings, I discovered German percussion grenades in the pockets of a German overcoat.

Before our arrival, this hill had been the scene of several German counterattacks, and when we arrived the units we relieved had lost a lot of men; they were way understrength and were to go to the rear for a well-deserved rest. They left behind many corpses, both GI and German, well preserved because of the weather. I remember one day, early on, when I was returning from battalion to the hill, when Sergeant Springborn stopped us and told us to come over to him. When we did, he said, "You're going to have to get used to seeing this . . ." and he pulled a shelter half away from a GI, sitting upright behind a machine gun. He looked like a wax statue, and just about in the middle of his forehead there was a bullet hole. This was not the first corpse we had seen, but it left a lasting impression on us. There were others lying all around, and a graves registration detail was organized to remove and identify them.

Purtell's living area was near a pen where the forester had kept some animals, principally goats. Obviously, they had not been well cared for since the front had moved into the area. On the first morning that I came down the hill, for some reason, we greeted each other, and asked how we were doing. Purtell's answer was, "I'm OK, F.M., but the goat died!"

German patrols were expected at night, and during the day we received artillery shells from the enemy side – "incoming," as we called them. Tree bursts were especially dangerous to us, because once the shell exploded, by hitting some part of a tree (and this was a forest, full of evergreens), the shrapnel would rain down on us, and cover a bigger area than a shell would by hitting flat ground.

Our duty was not strenuous while we waited here. We were in reserve, with other companies to our front, where the action was. There wasn't much, except for small counterattacks, patrols at night, and at times a German soldier coming in to surrender and get out of it. Several who did told of German officers holding guns to the heads of men, warning that any attempt to desert would mean death.

## **Purple Heart Hill – First Action**

**Taintrux, France**

*November 16, 1944*

**T**he day started out gray, overcast. We had some kind of a meal, probably K rations, and we packed up and walked down the hill to the area around battalion headquarters. I was assigned to accompany the battalion wire team, two men who were to reel out phone wire and attempt to keep the forward units in touch with battalion. Purtell carried the radio and advanced with Captain Craddock and the company, as it took over a frontline position from one of the other companies.

The objective was a conical-shaped hill that overlooked the Taintrux Valley and the village of Taintrux.

My two companions from battalion were easterners. They knew their jobs better than I did, so my principal contribution was to help carry reels of wire. We led off, downward at first from Haut Jacques in the general direction of Taintrux. I remember crossing a small planting of corn which had not been cut down, probably because the forester left when the front approached. G Company had already passed, and had begun to climb what turned out to be "Purple Heart Hill."

The hill was covered with a fairly dense pine forest, but there was a well-used trail leading toward the top. Occasionally, as we climbed, we heard rifle and machine gun fire, as well as artillery.

G Company had captured its first prisoners, and as the wire team moved upward, we encountered about five Germans being escorted downward. They paused at about the same spot where we did.

Of course, there was no reason to respond to their presence, other than to be sure they were indeed securely captured. Indeed, I had no idea how one would or should recognize them. Suddenly, the German opposite me on the trail said, "Vell, for me da var iss ober!" He volunteered more information, such the fact that he was an engineer and had been drafted, and ended in the infantry (Alpine troops). I would guess he was probably never the military type – a "sad sack" as we would call such misfits in our army.

He seemed quite satisfied – happy – that he was out of action. I thought of him occasionally after our brief encounter, sometimes with envy . . .

I recall spending that first night at the top of the hill that was the company's first objective. Coming up with the wire team, I was too late in getting a start on any kind of a shelter from shrapnel and bullets.

I remember trying to find shelter as a mortar barrage began. Where I had just seen a GI beginning to dig a hole under a large rock, it seemed no time at all before the hole was big enough for him, as tree bursts began to plague us. I snuggled up to the base of a large tree, whose protection was probably minimal, but the best I could find. In the end, I never did dig a hole. Instead, I spent most of the night in a hole crowded with several people, including Captain Craddock, practically sitting on his lap most of the time.

Not every unit had reached its objective, which meant that our flanks were somewhat exposed, and the Germans made use of this fact. G Company had reached its goal for the day – the top of a well-forested hill overlooking the road to Saint-Dié, our next objective. Sometime during that day we had crossed the Taintrux River, but I don't remember it.

What I do remember was that night: Filled with the cries of a wounded man, Sergeant Dorgan. We tried to get help to get him evacuated. Dorgan had a nasty abdominal wound and he was in terrible pain. Our medics – some of whom we had lost – could do nothing to help him. There were no roads, only the trail that we'd used to get to the top, and we had no stretchers with us, on which to carry a wounded man away from the front.

He moaned, cried out, and there was nothing we could do for him. Further, we all feared that his cries were helping the enemy locate where we were. Dorgan died from his wounds on 21 November 1944.

The next day we were off again. Our problem on the second day was trying to keep up with the front. I remember coming across an abandoned German campsite in the woods – a picnic table, some utensils and a buck saw. Then, beside the area we spotted German telephone wires, and we wondered whether they might lead to enemy

phones. I got out my trench knife, held the wire across the wooden handle of the buck saw and hacked at the wire. I missed the wire and struck my left thumb. I still have the scar. The medic who bandaged it after we caught up with the company told me it was not a Purple Heart wound because it was "self-inflicted." I have no idea why a wire team didn't have pliers with a wire-cutting capability.

The company's second day was far easier than the first, and casualties were light, because the enemy had apparently abandoned their effort to protect Saint-Dié, and had left the second hill. It was at this point that I returned to the company, and ended my role as a member of the battalion wire team.

At that point the 409th was relieved by the 411th, and we went into a reserve position. I remember sitting around a small fire, with others of company headquarters, and the officers, especially Captain Craddock, passed around a whiskey bottle, part of the officers' liquor ration which had just been delivered. The next morning we moved out, I think by truck, and ended up in the vicinity of the Meurthe River.



**N**ovember 21, 1944: Received 14 replacements . . . Sometime about now, we were in a small village, in reserve, and in back of the house we were in was a small vegetable garden. The garden had been abandoned, of course, as the front moved through and the owners had to flee, or were captured, or killed. Some one of us realized that, even though there had been a frost, there were cabbages still in the garden. He picked some, and we cut them up, put them in our canteen cups with some water and put them over a fire. We had boiled cabbage, our first meal of anything fresh for a long time.

## Roadblock

Vicinity of Colroy-la-Grande, France

*Thanksgiving 1944*

**W**e were told, sometime during the day that we would have a hot turkey dinner, but it would not arrive until the following day, instead of on Thanksgiving. At this point, we really didn't care; we were willing to wait. It turned out that our turkey dinner became our breakfast, and soon after we had eaten, we were loaded on trucks and went into frontline action to help relieve another battalion that was in trouble. And I can still taste the metallic flavor of the Thanksgiving dinner, after it had spent too long in transit in big GI tubs . . .

We left the trucks near a small railway station, and began doing what infantrymen do best – walking. With the station on our right, we walked toward some wooded hills. We went around a sort of U-shaped curve, and started a slight upward grade, into a more densely wooded area. Suddenly, we heard rifle and burp-gun fire, and the column came to a stop. I can't recall whether I was carrying the radio or the double pack, but I wasn't at or near the head of the company column. (According to the regimental history, G Company wasn't at the head of the column; E Company was.)

The problem was that the column had come to another U-turn in the road, in the middle of the woods, and the Germans had built a really massive roadblock, called an *abatis*. It consisted of large trees having been felled from both sides of the road, falling across the road, entangling and making the road entirely impassable. Then, as soon as the column had approached the roadblock, the Germans opened up with small-arms fire and pinned down the whole column. After some attempts to penetrate the roadblock, it was decided to give it up for the day and withdraw to a large storage building near the railway station. At least that's where G Company ended up; I would guess there was a main line of resistance set up somewhere between us and the Germans, with the battalion's two other rifle companies involved.



**W**e were up early next morning – long before dawn, as I recall – and we again trudged up the road toward the *abatis*. Again, the column was stopped again by enemy fire, and G Company was elected to try to go over the spur of forest around which the blocked road ran. As we started up over the spur, we had two men out in front – standard practice – as scouts. Teschendorf was from Milwaukee and Friedlander from Brooklyn, New York. They had disliked each other for most of their time together, and verbal arguments were commonplace. Nevertheless, they went out in front of the company, and proceeded to do the jobs for which they had been trained – lead the company into enemy territory and seek out and warn of enemy presence. The warning they gave us was to draw burp-gun fire, and both of them were fatally riddled with enemy bullets. The company withdrew from enemy range.

In a densely wooded area like this, it was impossible to know where the enemy was and how to eliminate his capability to pin us down. I remember an open depression, running from the crest of the spur down to the road on our side of the *abatis*, and time and again, as we crossed this open space, burp-gun fire would erupt. This was, I think, where the three men were wounded. As we moved, we all had to cross this space, and I remember trying to run across, with my 42-pound radio on my back. It seemed like it took a lifetime to make it across, and I could not get up enough speed to really run. But be assured it was a very fast, hunkered-down dog trot.



During one of the lulls, when we were pinned down, and we were standing in the woods as a light mist fell, I turned to First Sergeant Edwards and asked him if I was correct that he had been in the Army for some time before the war and he had volunteered for most assignments. He said I was correct. So my next question, standing in the midst of these miserable, precarious, life-threatening woods, was, "Then what in the hell made you choose the infantry?" He didn't respond, but it was obvious that he did not appreciate being asked . . .

That night we went back to our warehouse and the next morning the battalion was prepared for a massive assault, including 4.2-inch mortars and heavy machine guns. When we marched forward, over the top and near the roadblock, we found nothing. The enemy had pulled out, according to a French family nearby, in the very early morning hours.

After moving through the roadblock area, we marched on to Fouchy, and then Lalaye, where we had a few days in reserve to recover.



Somewhere in this time period, I can recall a couple of events. However, I have no idea where they happened or exactly when. The first involved a nearly all-night march, in rain, to get to a town where we were all in reserve, but presumably moving toward or with the front. I was not carrying the radio – maybe neither of us was, since we were not in action – but I had been given an assignment at a road intersection to peel off and direct the next units down the right road, since we were proceeding without any lights. After the last unit (probably a platoon) had passed, I fell in at the rear of the column.

Near the end of the column, I had Herbie Bradshaw behind me, holding onto my pack. Herbie was nearly illiterate, with no sense of direction. He required someone's attention at all times to be sure he remained out of harm's way. He never should have been allowed to be a part of a unit in which each person's life depended on the other unit members. No one could depend on Herbie. On December 2, 1944, he was wounded and evacuated to a hospital. No one in our unit ever saw him again though it was rumored that some officer – colonel or better – with a sense of humor, took him under his wing and used him as an "orderly." There was never anything orderly about Herbie Bradshaw.

Anyway, when we got to the town where we were to spend the rest of the night and the next day, we were divided up so that we all had some kind of shelter. I was in a large barn, with a lot of others, including the special "combat patrol," that had been formed of members of each company in the battalion and was used for special assignments as needed. It was about the size of one rifle platoon.

We awoke from the bellowing of Ed “Pop” Shebel. He had managed to bed down next to a hole in the floor of the barn’s loft, and during the night he had moved so that he had his butt jackknifed over the hole. The farm wife was jabbing him from below with a pitchfork to bring down hay from the loft to feed her stock.

Shortly, we heard another outcry, as another member of the patrol couldn’t find his way out of his sleeping bag. He had managed to turn around in the bag so that he faced the back rather than the head opening. He was claustrophobic; the situation made him panic.

I also remember a time when I had the radio and we had begun to advance in the direction of Sélestat, along a rail line. We had to wade across an icy-cold stream and, as usual, just slightly deeper than the tops of our otherwise waterproof shoe-pacs. As we began to parallel the railroad track, on which there were still some freight cars, we began receiving artillery fire from the enemy. It was very close, and I climbed under a boxcar, radio and all. I tried to send a message that we were pinned down, but I doubt that it got through. In any event, we managed to withdraw, and I think this must have been Thanville. I remember receiving replacements there.

A lot of our time was spent walking from one village to the next, sometimes out in front, sometimes in reserve, as the Germans withdrew. Then, suddenly, we would find ourselves in a firefight, as the Germans decided to dig in, or perhaps to make a major withdrawal over a stream or some other obstacle that required them to go more slowly. The burp guns would sound, and maybe we would get an artillery round or two, and we would “hit the dirt” and look for shelter. And once in a while we would come out of it with one or two – or more – killed . . .



**W**e were now in the part of France where more German was spoken than French. Before World War I, it had been part of Germany, and in addition to those two languages, it had one of its own – Alsatian. I felt more comfortable here, more able to understand what the natives were saying and what the signs said. Even though I had little trouble understanding written French from my one year of college Spanish and four years of high school Latin, my family background, and hearing our neighbors speak German, made me feel a little more at ease.

To attack the city of Sélestat, we had to go through Sherwiller, a sort of suburb. Our company was not the lead unit, but we weren’t far behind. As we got closer to Sélestat, we received more and more German artillery and mortar fire. A lot of it landed in G Company’s territory, regardless of our reserve status.

Before we left Sherwiller, things were calmer. I remember the company sitting down along a street, with houses on both sides keeping roughly five-yard intervals

between us in case of fire, when a woman came out of the house on our side of the street and looked at us. She asked us in German if we wanted some schnapps. I seemed to be the only one who understood her, so I asked the men nearby if they wanted some. Of course, they all said yes, so she went back in the house and brought out a beautiful, delicate, little glass tray, with a glass – probably crystal – pitcher and matching tiny goblets. I guessed each goblet might hold a thimble or two of liquid.

My first thought was that I should not have accepted her offer because, obviously, if this was all she could offer, her supply was sadly limited. Nevertheless, she poured schnapps – a clear, oily liquid – into the tiny goblets, handed them around and we who took them lifted them skyward and let the fluid slide down our throats. At once, our entire digestive tract, from mouth to abdomen, felt like we had been hit by a flamethrower. The schnapps was powerful, and we all learned to sip it slowly whenever we had it again.

We spent the night around Sherwiller, and the next day we moved on toward Sélestat. Craddock had been evacuated on 23 November 1944 to a hospital with pains that indicated he might have appendicitis. A Lieutenant Robertazzi, our then executive officer, took command of the company. No one cared much for him; he seemed much too inexperienced to lead a company in combat.

## Scherwiller, France

*December 2, 1944*

Purtell had the radio that day, but I was not far away. As we approached Sélestat, we received artillery and mortar fire several times. Once, near the outskirts, the three of us were hugging the ground as some fairly vicious artillery fire hit us. Robertazzi's large Roman nose got in the way of a piece of shrapnel, and he found himself bleeding profusely, with much of his nose mashed. Purtell maintained that Robertazzi's nose saved his life, because Purtell's chest was next in line for that piece of shrapnel, after Robertazzi's nose.

Cogozzo, a platoon sergeant, got a piece of shrapnel in his thigh, but before he could get attention from a medic, it had worked its way out, because he had continued to use his leg and flex his thigh muscles. The medic merely bandaged the wound and let Cogozzo remain with us.

We were not carrying our full field packs that day. Instead, I was carrying a U.S. Mail bag in which I had a second battery for our walkie-talkie radio. At one point, when we were slowly inching our way forward, expecting more artillery fire, Sergeant Attebery spied a hutch of domesticated rabbits behind a house. He ran to the hutch,

grabbed at least two of them, and had me open the mail bag so he could stuff them in, announcing that he had just “liberated” our supper.

We proceeded toward the center of town, and as we did so, enemy fire diminished, probably because the Germans decided they were outnumbered and had to withdraw. Nevertheless, progress was slow, and we frequently had to stop. As every doughfoot knows, when you stop, you either sit or lie down, and that’s what we did, as often as we could. At one point, a woman came out her front door and, in good enough English she warned us to avoid patched spots in the black-top paving, because these were mines the Germans had planted. We asked her where she had learned English and her reply was, “I used to live in Milwaukee!”

Near the center of town, on one of our frequent stops, I had laid the mail bag down on the curb. The rabbits began moving around inside the bag, and this drew curious stares from the civilian population, watching our advance from the street and from second-story windows and balconies. We couldn’t hear what they were saying, but it seemed that they had the feeling the moving bag was some sort of secret weapon.

One of our men spied a bakery, and several of us, including Attebery, went around the back of the building where the bakery was located. A civilian jokingly pointed his finger at us, pretending it was a weapon, and he came close to losing his life before we realized he was joking with us. These civilians were deliriously happy to be free of the Nazi yoke that they had borne for so long. We made known what we were after, *brot*, and we were given several loaves of very dark bread. I don’t recall who carried it from there, but we soon reached an abandoned hotel, which our company took over as our headquarters for the night.

Attebery, Purtell and I set up the radio, with an antenna sticking out a window. Then Attebery went to the kitchen, which was well equipped, and began preparing the evening meal – fried rabbit, mashed potatoes (I don’t remember where they came from), and champagne (probably from the hotel’s stores).

The weather was not all that bad – some rainy, chilly days, but nothing like early December in Wisconsin – and no snow like there had been in the Vosges.

At this point, the German resistance we encountered was sporadic—minor delaying actions rather than determined stands like we faced later. Thus, we would prepare to take a village or a piece of high ground – perhaps begin by pouring in artillery and mortar fire and then start to move forward. Scouts out in front would move cautiously, maybe receive a modicum of answering rifle fire, or maybe nothing but dead silence. Sometimes, we would walk from town to town with no interference and be greeted at the edge of town by civilians, occasionally the mayor himself, and be told that the enemy had pulled out under cover of darkness the night or two nights before. The objective then would change, maybe to be sure we still had contact on our right and left, maybe to try to catch up with the Germans to preempt any counterattack.

Basically, a lot of time we spent “marching,” walking doggedly along a road, through village after village, keeping the familiar “five-yard interval” to minimize casualties if we came under enemy fire. I would be carrying either our double pack or the radio. When I had the radio, I would mostly be with Captain Craddock (who had returned to duty on 6 December 1944), while Purtell would be close by, with the runners. Attebery would be with the radio operator and Captain Craddock most of the time.



Often, as we were walking along a road, “scouts” or “flank guards” would be trudging through fields and woods on either side of us to ensure we weren’t ambushed. No one knew exactly when the Germans would stop and open up on us with rifles or burp guns from some unseen angle.

Even when we spent long periods without enemy contact, we could usually hear artillery or small-arms fire in the distance. The tension was always there, as we wondered where the resistance would be, or what shape it would take. At unpredictable moments, the Germans would fire a few harassing artillery rounds. A shell or two would burst nearby, and sometimes one of us would be hit.



Among the 21 replacements we received on December 11 was Harold Branton. Captain Craddock told him that he would become the company’s executive officer, because he outranked the other officers in the company, but he would not take over any command until he had spent some time in combat. He had been a training officer at Fort McClellan, Alabama.

## Oberhoffen, France

*December 15, 1944*

We had advanced during the day, with little or no interference from the enemy. Captain Craddock ordered a patrol, equipped with a walkie-talkie radio, to go up a ridge to try to spot the enemy. In the early 1990s, Purtell and I discussed this event at his home in Connecticut. Both of us had been under the impression that we had the radio duty that day. One of us is wrong . . .

Attebery had just obtained a new M3 submachine gun, called a grease gun because it looked like the mechanic's tool – no wood, thick wire retractable stock. He decided that he would take the patrol duty with the radio, in hope that he would have a chance to use his new weapon.

The patrol was not gone long. The patrol was apparent spotted by the Germans, who fired a mortar round that burst practically on top of Attebery. I didn't see Attebery's remains, but the radio he was carrying was brought back by someone, including the handset he was carrying – the half of it that was left, the other half having been pulverized. Other members of the patrol said they couldn't understand why he had just sat down and not taken cover when he heard the warning of an incoming mortar round.

Bill and I reflected, what if Attebery hadn't replaced one of us?



**D**ecember 17: When we were ready to jump off into the Fatherland, we were supported by a tank destroyer unit made entirely of black enlisted men and officers, except for the battalion commander. We overheard an interesting verbal exchange between a gun sergeant and his platoon leader, a lieutenant, as we awaited our orders to move out.

We were deployed along a road which ran parallel to the front, at a point where another road intersected it at right angles – probably the road we followed later as we advanced. The gun sergeant had deployed his 3-inch towed gun behind the road parallel to the front, and sent his half-track back “into defilade” – sheltered from the front. When the lieutenant saw the site selected, he told the sergeant that the gun was to be repositioned to a spot on the other side of the road. The sergeant replied that he had already sent his half-track to the rear to be “dug in.”

Lieutenant: “How many men we got, Sergeant?”

Sergeant: “Eight, sir.”

Lieutenant: “That countin’ you an’ me?”

Sergeant: “No, sir.”

Lieutenant: “With you that’s nine, and with me that’s ten. Le’s move the gun!” And the ten of them pulled and hauled the gun up and over the road and down into a firing position selected by the officer.

Soon after, we started to move ourselves. I don't recall any action in crossing the Franco-German border or, for that matter much of anything about our climb up the hill on which we found ourselves a cluster of Siegfried Line pillboxes.

On the other hand, they didn't let us stay there without a price . . .

## Pillbox Hill, Siegfried Line

*December 18-22, 1944*

Each day there were skirmishes, we were shot at and peppered with “tree-burst” shrapnel. The Germans didn’t want to give up these pillboxes. The irony of this was that when we sent out patrols to connect with units on our right and left, we found huge gaps – on one side, 1500 yards – through which the Germans could have effected pincer counterattacks which would have sent us all either to Valhalla or a German POW camp.

Each morning we could hear the German unit, probably a tank, coming up their side of the hill. Infantry units usually accompanied the tank. This, of course, after “softening” us up with artillery or mortar fire. For us, this was trench warfare, because we occupied all the trenches which connected the three pillboxes atop the hill.

(For at least three or four of these attacks, I found myself ensconced in our latrine, off one of the trenches, performing my morning function at the time the attacks were the strongest; that may have saved my life, since this was a well-protected installation.)

The pillbox in which we had set up headquarters was a large one, with bunks for between five or ten people. It was solidly built, of very thick concrete and sustained many hits from German artillery rounds. Outside the pillbox, several of our people were dug in, and on one occasion a round hit the very tip of the pillbox, just above these men. One suffered some sort of concussion as a result, and was sent back to the hospital with a case of “shell shock.” He rejoined us near the end of the war, and was never much good to us because of a high degree of nervousness.

One of our men had been sent out on some sort of mission, and when he came to a corner in the trenches, he nearly ran into a German. Both soldiers turned and ran back in the direction whence they came.

On several occasions we captured Germans and sent them down to the rear. One day, among those captured were some very young boys, in Luftwaffe uniforms, but obviously newly conscripted. They were not flyers, but rather support troops like truck drivers. One in particular, I remember, was standing outside our bunker, waiting to be told what to do next, with a look that suggested the he feared for his life. (Many Germans were under the impression that Americans would kill or torture them if they allowed themselves to be captured.)

I was approaching my twentieth birthday; this kid was about 14 or 15. He was scared to death. I felt sorry for him – this was not his war. I reached in my pocket and pulled out a chocolate bar, just as our “fearless” first sergeant, James Edwards, came along. He bellowed at me to get away from the boy, didn’t I know he was the enemy, etc. I turned and left the scene, about as close to breaking down emotionally as I ever was in combat, a lump in my throat big enough to choke me. Sherman was right.

My job while we were in the pillboxes was mostly to stay out of the way, and keep from being hit by enemy fire. Purtell and I manned the radio, but we also had wire communications, and anyone could answer or use the field telephone, which was in the big pillbox. Occasionally we would receive a direct artillery hit on the wire, and a couple of us would have to go follow the wire down, to the rear, until we found the break and then splice it back together. We often noted that these tiny telephone wires and artillery rounds seemed to be attracted to each other.

Early on, as I was standing in one of the connecting trenches, we noticed that there was something coming out of the top of the one remaining bunker that we had not taken; we could see it just over the top of the hill from us, not even a half city block away. As we moved, we noticed that the top of the pipe-like object seemed to be turning with our movement. It was then that we deduced that the object was the top of a periscope, and someone shot it out of use. We then realized that this bunker, whose opening mostly faced the enemy side of the hill, was probably occupied by Germans.

A patrol was organized, with Sergeant Willard Springborn in command. He had received special training in Howze on how to attack a fortified position, meaning how to open up a bunker with explosives. He and I think two others (for covering fire) went forward, probably after a few artillery rounds went over, and laid a charge of explosives against the steel door of the concrete bunker, and retreated.

When the charge went off, the effect was to cause a monumental concussion inside the bunker. The steel door held, but the concussion caused 9 German soldiers to come out fast, hands over heads, absolutely white from head to foot, and severely dazed, from the very, very dense cloud of concrete dust which the explosion had caused. I would guess that their hearing was permanently damaged, maybe lost, and they may have had other, internal injuries as well.

As a result, we took over the last remaining bunker in that sector, but, because of the damage from the explosion, I don't think we ever used it. Also, as a result, Springborn was awarded the Silver Star and the other patrol members got the Bronze Star. Later, Springborn was awarded a British medal, personally placed on him by General Montgomery.

In general, this period was no picnic, but for those of us involved in communications, we had little to do. We participated in some of the fire fights, first thing in the mornings, when the enemy usually arranged a counterattack. Apparently, however, he had decided that G Company's position was not the one to try to penetrate, while other parts of the regiment had more problems. Then, on the 21st, relief came, as the 45th Division came on line to replace the 103d.

We walked back down the hill, once our relief company arrived. It was pleasant, I recall, being able to heat K rations over a fire. I recall heating a can of cheese, partially opened, which exploded, sending small bits of hot cheese over many of those around



the fire. I merely reached over the fire, unhooked the can and left the scene, while others proceeded to scrape cheese bits off their clothing . . .

Then, as we were standing around – waiting again – we heard an explosion. Assuming it was firing up on the line, we took only passing notice, until one of our medics came running up from farther down the hill, holding his arm in the air. There was no hand on the end of the arm, only two white bone ends, with flesh hanging from them.

While walking back toward us, after tending to someone's minor complaint – stomach problems, probably – he had pulled his handkerchief from his hip pocket. On the end of the handkerchief was the pin from a hand grenade, which was still in the same pocket. He had taken the grenade from a wounded soldier whom he had treated and sent to the rear.

When he saw the pin, he immediately reached back and took the grenade from his pocket. He was standing right next to an unused foxhole, and he intended to throw the grenade and jump in the hole. However, instead, he jumped in the hole without letting go the grenade, and it exploded while he held it above his head. (Medics weren't trained to handle weapons of any kind, including grenades.)

The last we saw of him, he was riding a mule, which had been brought up to help move rations and ammunition, being led back to the rear, his arm still held skyward, but now with a bandage around the remainder of his wrist and forearm. I will never forget the scene.



**D**ecember 23: In Wissembourg, we boarded trucks to Diffenbach, France – about 75 miles. When we got off the trucks, we were led into a large, high-ceilinged building. It could have been a gymnasium, or it could have been a huge, now empty warehouse. Anyway, it was shelter for us, because by this time it was cold outside and, I think, snowing.

It was here that I was introduced to carbide lamps, those little lanterns that burned so brightly, with a little cloth mantle inside which became brightly white when burning. And, I found out, they generated a very hot heat out the top.

Anyway, we had a good night's sleep, though probably not long enough. The following morning Captain Craddock approached me and asked me to step outside with him. It was not bitterly cold, just cold enough for snow not to melt, and we were dressed warmly anyway.

At that point, he told me that he was having orders cut to promote me to sergeant, to replace Attebery as company communications chief. He probably told me a few more things, about what to expect – first off, we'd need a replacement for me as

part of the radio team. And then he told me something I'll always remember. He said that there would be times in the future when he would address me in very unflattering terms – roar at me, etc. -- and that I wasn't to take it personally. Rather, he said, just try to take it lightly, because he probably wouldn't mean much of it. But at times, he just had to sound off to relieve the tension. I told him I would try to remember that.

Craddock was probably a little more than five years older than the rest of us – in his mid-twenties – and he took very seriously, and very well, I thought, his responsibility to the 185 men he commanded in a life-and-death situation. I respected him, as did most of us. We often said we would have followed him anywhere.

## Christmas 1944

**D**ecember 24: Later that day, we boarded trucks and moved again, this time to a small village where we were to stay for some time. The war slowed in our sector, as the Germans concentrated on the Bulge in Belgium. Our major effort here was to organize an in-depth defense against the possibility that the Germans would attempt a sudden turn to the south, perhaps with parachute troops. This had happened somewhere along the front, and we were to prepare a line of defense against any penetration attempt.

First, however, there was Christmas. The mail caught up with us, and we all received many boxes from home, filled with candy and other edibles, as well as some clothing. (I asked my parents to enclose at least one nice, white T-shirt in every box; it felt so good to have something like that under my wool Army clothes, whether they were clean or filthy.) We ate well, both from home and from our own kitchen, which was set up somewhere nearby.

I remember the night of Christmas Eve. It was very cold, and the ground and streets were covered with ice and snow. I walked down to the village church with someone, probably Purtell, and we saw that it was so full that it was hard to keep the light from leaking out (we were in a total blackout situation, waiting for an enemy paratroop attack). I could hear singing, and while it was never part of our family routine to attend a church, memories flooded through my mind of many Christmases past, at home with my parents and grandparents.

I was not a happy camper, but I was alive . . .

Christmas Day: "Very calm and beautiful day. We attended services, had a good dinner, watched a huge flight of B-17s pass."

December 26: Received 11 replacements.

Like a "going to work" routine, we would go each morning a few kilometers to our front to improve regimental defensive positions to prepare for a possible

counterattack in our sector. Even though we were digging foxholes in frozen-solid ground, there wasn't too much grouching about this assignment, because, after all, we were off the front for a while, living in homes back in Guenviller, and returning to our quarters for supper.

Company headquarters was in the house of George Brun. From here, we had radio and wire communication with battalion, and, of course, this is where the company runners were located, along with the communications sergeant-to-be.

George Brun treated us like his long-lost relatives. He showed us campaign cards for soliciting votes for another Brun – cousin, I think – for the position of sheriff of Des Plaines, Illinois. In the second floor of George's unheated home, he had laid out last fall's apple harvest and invited us to take whatever we wished. Even semi-dried fruit was a real treat for all of us. In addition, he gave me a corkscrew from the area around Bordeaux where he had either visited or been stationed during World War I. Over my desk, as I write, I still have George's corkscrew, which I carried – and used several times – during my tour of Europe.

Each day in Guenviller – and at George Brun's house – was much the same. I remember once an alarm in the middle of the night, when someone thought some German paratroopers were landing. Nothing ever came of it, but a lot of soldiers lost sleep in the cold, snowy night looking for an enemy that wasn't there . . .

On January 3, 1945, my twentieth birthday, I received a copy of the orders promoting me to sergeant. I had really made it, out of the depths of the Army, into the "upper class." No longer would I have to take the sort of snobbery and sadism that had become a real hated part of my Army life. I needn't say "Sergeant So-and-so" to these NCOs; I could just call them by their last names, as derisively as I felt was their due.

## **Merlebach, France**

*January 11, 1945*

**L**ocated a short distance from Guenviller, on the German border, Merlebach was a small city, part of the Saar region. Because it was a border city, it was suspected of harboring German sympathizers as well as former German soldiers and Nazi Party officials who had thus far escaped capture by the Allies. Since we were in reserve and, probably because it was not expected that we would be needed urgently, we were assigned to comb through the town for "contraband" as well as any suspicious people who had no ID or couldn't account for why they were here.

Our company headquarters was established in a house, with a nice warm fire going in the kitchen. Sometime during our stay in town, I had a haircut and shave by a lady barber, the shave being done with a straight razor and cold water.

At one time, we had a member of the Army's intelligence unit with us, as he received from the French police a man who was suspected of being a collaborator. The CIC [Counter Intelligence Corps] man took the suspect into the kitchen, where the stove had been stoked up to make it quite warm. The CIC man invited several of us to be present in the kitchen as he interrogated the suspect. Our presence was probably intimidating to the suspect, as the CIC man probably intended. As the interrogator leafed through a file the French policeman had given him, he would ask the suspect questions in French. We couldn't understand much of the dialogue, but the suspect was clearly denying much of what the interrogator was suggesting.

Dressed in winter clothes, the suspect began to sweat profusely. When he began to unbutton his coat, the CIC man made it plain that the suspect was to keep his coat on. Finally, the questioning ended, and the suspect indicated he was ready to accompany the CIC man. The CIC man evidently told the suspect he was going to turn him over to the French authorities, and he began to contact someone to send a French policeman. The suspect was scared to death. This meant he would be at the mercy of the very people whom he had apparently hurt during the occupation. He literally begged, crying, to be spared this fate. The last we saw of him, he left in the custody of the French.

In general, most of the time we were a dirty lot. We had limited laundry and bathing facilities. One method was to take water from a source such as a farm watering trough, in a helmet, and give ourselves what my family used to call a "sponge bath." Most of the time this wasn't practical other than for shaving. Sometimes a householder was kind enough to give us hot water from the well of their wood stoves.

Even if we were fortunate enough to find a way to bathe, we didn't carry clean clothes with us. For these luxuries, we had to wait for the Quartermaster-operated portable shower units. They consisted of two large tents, connected by a sort of canvas tunnel. We would go in, take off our clothes, take a hot shower, and receive new clothes when we came out the other end. Whether the clothing was brand new or washed and returned to stock for reissue didn't matter to us, so long as it was clean.

(I don't remember what we did with our personal things such as our wallets, while showering. On the other hand, we really didn't have much that would be of interest to any would-be thieves.)

The morale booster of hot showers and clean uniforms occurred only when we were in reserve, far enough back from the front to be assured of complete security. My recollection is that they happened no more often than about once a month.

## Maginot Line

### Vicinity of Lembach, France

*Mid-January 1945*

**A**fter Merlebach, we were shifted to defensive positions that gave us a snug headquarters in a building that had been a command post and communications center in the Maginot Line. It was a well-built, concrete structure, of, I think, a couple of stories. It was not meant to be a frontline fortress. On the other hand, I think the remainder of the company had been deployed along some sort of front; during this time the Germans staged some counterattacks, according to the regimental history. It also could have been that our whole company, or battalion, was in reserve.

Anyway, we managed to eat fairly well, having been issued 10-in-one rations – the kind issued to armored units who could carry them on their vehicles and were the envy of foot infantry. Intended to provide one meal for ten men, it offered more variety to soldiers – containing canned vegetables and meats, and we had the facilities in our building to heat or cook this kind of food.

And whenever we got back in a position like this, we received what we called PX rations – a large carton containing enough items for 200 men for one day. They had candy, cigarettes, pipes and pipe tobacco, razors, shaving cream, blades, etc. In theory, a rifle company was to receive one of these each day, but of course when we were on the front it might take days before we could be reached. So back with our kitchen, in a truck, were stored all these supplies. Later, when we began to get passes, Captain Craddock ordered the kitchen to dispense a certain amount of cigarettes, chocolate bars, etc. to the people going on pass to be used for bartering.

It was here that I learned how to make ice cream in a canteen cup. It was cold here, cold enough so that the ground was snow-covered, and more snow fell during our stay. We would take our mess kit spoons – a little bigger than a standard tablespoon, and fill our canteen cups with snow, packed down quite hard. Then we would add a generous quantity of condensed milk (from the 10-in-1 rations), and several spoonfuls of sugar. Then we would stir the mixture as vigorously as we could, producing a slushy concoction that was as close to ice cream as a frontline soldier could find.

In defensive positions, we were called on from time to time to send out patrols to make sure the enemy was still there, hadn't withdrawn or wasn't about to mount a counterattack, or to harass them. One day we got an order to provide a recon patrol, and Craddock asked me about two or three of our people. Not knowing why, I gave him my assessment of each, especially about a man named Kiddle, who had also been in ASTP, though not at Denton. The next thing I knew he assembled several of them, and named Kiddle as patrol leader and sent them to battalion for orders.

On January 20, Kiddle, Born, Siggelkow, and Reno were wounded on patrol. I eventually told Kiddle that I might have been a factor in getting him wounded – a lot of shrapnel in the butt from a “Bouncing Betty” mine. He took it philosophically, with no ill will toward me.

## **Straightening the Line**

### **Withdrew from Lembach to Schalkendorf, France**

*January 21, 1945*

**T**he next day we prepared to move back about 17 miles, to eliminate a somewhat untenable bulge in our line. G Company was assigned to occupy the very point of the bulge until all other units had left. We were then to move out cautiously and right behind us the engineers were to blow up all bridges.

I was assigned to take a jeep and driver to regimental headquarters and be prepared to carry back to the company any last-minute messages after communication lines had been destroyed. The driver and I sat in a small house, where regimental headquarters staff were located. They had telephone and radio communications to the various units as well as to division. Colonel Claudius Lloyd was there, lying on a pile of blankets, definitely not feeling well – a case of stomach problems similar to those the rest of us suffered from time to time. From his makeshift pallet, the colonel was issuing orders, making decisions, suffering and swearing. The original plan was to transport G Company from near their position on trucks to be supplied by Regimental Service Company. Before the trucks were ready for this assignment, they had to be used to transport all of the regiment’s equipment and supplies. During the previous 24 hours, however, we had experienced a blizzard-like snowfall, and as night approached it turned very cold, and the moon shone brightly.

As time passed, Lloyd became more concerned about the trucks, since they were still hauling supplies, and not in any position to transport troops. He finally turned to Major Urban, regimental operations officer, and told him to call the 2d Battalion and inform them that G Company would have to walk out of the bulge, notwithstanding the bitter-cold weather and icy roads newly covered with snow from the night before.

Urban began the call, and when he got the 2d Battalion operations officer, he began explaining about the reasons why the trucks would not be available as planned. In the midst of his rather detailed prefatory remarks, Lloyd interrupted, saying, “God damn your soul, Urban!!! We don’t tell ‘em WHY! We just tell ‘em what to DO!” No one in the room said a thing, as Urban gave the final words of explanation and the order to tell G Company to be prepared to march instead of ride. It was some time after 10:00 p.m.

At 11:00, the regimental headquarters was shut down, and we all prepared to leave. I had a map, and one of the officers told me the name of the town we were going to. I was to proceed with my jeep and driver as the last of five jeeps. The total journey was about 25 miles in length to the new regimental CP [Command Post]. It was a still, cold, moonlit night. The road we started out on was almost untraveled, merely a ridge beside a row of power poles, with a depression on each side. Not long after we started, we were to turn onto a main road, which was to have been used as a withdrawal route for vehicles of the 14th Armored Division. The plan was that the 14th would have completed its withdrawal by 11:00 p.m.

Because the road was so ill-defined, my driver followed right behind, in the same tracks in the snow as the jeep ahead of us. When that jeep ended up off the road in the ditch, so did we, while the first three jeeps kept going. We pushed and hauled the two jeeps until we were back on the road. It turned out that I was the only one who had a map and knew where our destination was, so our jeep took the lead – and, as I recall, we saw no more of the jeep that was to follow . . .

As soon as we came to the main road leading out of the bulge, we encountered long lines of tanks, half-tracks, trucks, and other vehicles of the 14th Armored – slowed by the icy roads. With so much traffic over roads with a heavy coat of new snow, as cold as it was, the snow had packed until it was, for all practical purposes, ice. Consequently many vehicles slipped and slid, causing the convoys to slow to a crawl. Often one or more of these vehicles slid off the road into the ditch. Then, if it was decided that there was no way to get the vehicle back on the road, it had to be disabled so it would be of no use to the enemy. Not only did we see tanks and trucks that had been disabled, but also big artillery pieces, “Long Tom” artillery guns that had had their breeches blown. The withdrawal was surely a very costly one for the Allies.

We now found ourselves floundering around in an open jeep, in the midst of a convoy that was moving at little more than a walking pace. We would stop often and wait until the vehicles ahead of us began to move again. When we did stop, we would get out and stomp around on the road to try to keep our feet from freezing. Ironically, we found ourselves among a medical unit, behind an ambulance, and several times I thought of asking if we could warm ourselves inside, but usually the convoy would begin to move, and I would dismiss the thought and keep trying to move my toes.

While I was trying to keep warm in that convoy, the company had begun to walk back from their point position. We had been moving at about the same pace as those on foot. By the time we had reached the new regimental headquarters, we had been on the road over eight hours, and we had managed to move only 25 miles.

I remember warming myself in a house, either in regimental headquarters or Shalkendorf, probably the former, and feeling life surge back in my feet. Thawing out my feet was terribly painful.

I ended that day in a house in Shalkendorf in company headquarters. Other units of the company were also billeted inside. Once the Germans had taken control of the ground we had given up and the situation stabilized, we would be battalion reserve; the other two rifle companies were on line. But at that moment, we were redefining the front. So the next morning we all left for a piece of high ground, overlooking what we assumed would be the front, and began to prepare a line of resistance.

Here we experienced an example of very poor communications, which I subsequently used in classes I taught on effective supervision. As we looked out over the land below us, mostly snow-covered, but not deep snow, we saw, among other things, a unit of our supporting tank destroyer battalion, digging in, in *front* of us. Also we noted that there was a railroad track paralleling the line that we thought of as the front – right near the TD emplacements. We were told to begin to “dig in” – dig foxholes, machine gun emplacements, shelters, all of which would be on the high ground *behind* the tank destroyers.

Because I was in no mood to begin digging holes in frozen ground, unless my life depended on it, I launched into a tirade about the seeming stupidity of wasting our energy on such a project. I was working up to a pretty explosive level when *a train passed going toward the front!* It was a passenger train with a steam engine pulling eight to ten coaches. That did it; I really got off on a stream of profanity about the total lack of logic, the questionable ancestry of our commanders, etc.

At this point, Lieutenant Harold Branton, now our executive officer, approached me and, in a low voice so only I could hear him, told me that he didn't think it was my place – a non-commissioned officer – to make disparaging remarks about the way the Army was being run. He told me that it was not in the best interests of the Army or those who had to follow our orders to hear such remarks from a sergeant.

At some time during this exchange – maybe even before it began – the train came back, the engine backing up, and the coaches full to overflowing with civilians.

My response: “Lieutenant, if you can tell me how it is that a goddamn train is running out in front of the spot where we're supposed to be digging in on a *front*, I'll stop my bitching . . .”

Branton: “I've been wondering about that myself . . .”

Thus ended our conversation. I later learned that the train had been expressly ordered, to make a special run to two nearby towns to offer transportation to any civilians who wanted to leave in view of the likely arrival of the Germans. If someone had let us know this, as well as the fact that we were digging where we were to repulse any attack that the front line of resistance couldn't contain, we might all have felt more like we were doing something useful.

We stayed in this general area for over a month. We were either on line, on outpost, or in reserve, in towns like Shalkendorf, La Walck, Pfaffenhoffen, Ringeldorf,



and Buswiller – but never really occupied the line which we dug when I had my exchange with Branton.



**W**e sent out patrols, mostly to find out where the enemy was, what he was doing, etc. On January 25, Basara was wounded on patrol. I don't remember this event in particular, though I do remember men leaving the CP in Shalkendorf, having received their instructions. They were dressed in snow camouflage – white cloth worn over the OD wools – to blend in with the snow-covered landscape.

It was not particularly cold, probably in the mid-twenties or higher. The roads were always wet from passing vehicles, marching feet, and melting snow. If the road wasn't paved, it was churned into mud.



**Z**utzendorf was one of the villages along the Moder River where we spent so much of the dead of winter. I think it was where we had our CP in a house out of town. The woman of the house had apparently become mentally unstrung. We didn't see much of her; she kept to her room, or was kept there. We saw her husband, the man of the house, but not any more than necessary. There was a daughter, about the same age as we were, maybe a little older, but she never seemed attractive to any of us, maybe because so much of the time she was working with the family's livestock – including mixing slop for the pigs.

The entrances to the house were facing our rear, which was convenient, since the enemy was less likely to see our movements. To the front, there was a rise in the ground, and our platoons were deployed along this rise. I remember walking along this front at night, for some reason long forgotten, and realizing that my wrist watch – GI with a luminous dial – was shining brightly, in the direction of the enemy. I promptly, almost in panic, shoved it halfway up my forearm.

One day, I remember standing outside, in back of the house, taking in the warm sun and gazing out toward the fields, which probably should have been worked but lay inactive because the front was so close. The snow had melted, and the sun felt good. The daughter came out, probably to dump something onto the trash pile in back of the house (The pile was growing at a good pace, due to all the cans we threw there, along with other trash from our rations). She saw me, came over, and began a one-sided conversation, probably a mixture of Alsatian and German. I understood enough of what she said to remember it to this day.

Look around you, she said, swinging her arms toward the fields surrounding us. Every one of those fields, all of the earth, must be planted every year, to provide enough for us to eat and to earn our living. You Americans are so lucky; you can let a field lie idle once in a while, to regain its fertility and produce better crops. Here, we must plant every available bit of land, even though it becomes tired and less productive. We must do all we can to find and apply horse and cow manure, garbage, anything to keep the land productive. You are so lucky . . .

She convinced me. I have never forgotten her lecture.



**I**n Buswiller, we stayed in Haus No. 32, the home of Georg Krieger who was the town secretary and proprietor of a small package-goods grocery shop in a back room of the house. Owning the grocery shop was certainly advantageous for the town secretary, whose responsibility it was to issue and control ration stamps. To our knowledge, however, Georg never abused this arrangement.

The Krieger household consisted of Georg, his wife who we all called Mama Krieger, and their teenage daughter, Marie, who we saw only rarely. The Kriegers were just a bit wary of the influence all these young Americans might have on her. None of the Kriegers knew any English. Their languages were Alsatian, French and German.

I think it was First Sergeant Stanek who developed a means to identify each of us, so we would know to whom the Kriegers were referring, and so we could differentiate between ourselves when we were trying to make ourselves understood. So, since I had charge of the telephones, I became "das Telephone Mahn." Stanek became "das Top Keek". Captain Craddock became "das Old Mahn." Corporal Ken Jenewein, the company clerk, became "das Pencil Pusher."

The Kriegers had no indoor plumbing, and their outhouse was accessible only by walking through their barn, where lived four or five cows and two or three of the biggest pigs I had ever seen. The route through the barn was a walkway behind the cows, and then, turning left, along a three-foot-high concrete wall behind which were the pigs. Still having gastric problems lingering from Christmas boxes, I often had to walk along this passage at night, with the help of a flashlight. As I passed the pig pen, the biggest boar would snort loudly, rise up and plant his front feet on top of the waist-high wall, so that he seemed about to leap out at me. I would hurry along to my destination.



Initially, we had little to do at Haus No. 32. But very shortly, activity picked up. Captain Craddock left for consultation with battalion and higher headquarters. He even got to ride in an artillery observer plane, though none of us was sure why. Then he took some of us aside and showed us aerial photographs of our front, particularly the enemy-held town of Kindwiller.

On the night of February 7, having been advised to get some rest during the day, we were given a tremendous meal at about midnight – I think it included steak and Savini's famous donuts.



## Kindwiller Raid

*February 8, 1945*

The Kindwiller raid was about the most harrowing episode of combat of the whole war for me and where I probably had my closest call. The purpose of the night raid was to capture Germans and bring them back for interrogation, since we had been without any significant intelligence for too long a period, the front having been static for so long. It was a company-size raid, involving 110 of us. It was carried out at night because the ground between La Walck and our objective was mostly open.

The day before the raid, we had white circles, about three inches in diameter, painted on the backs of our helmets so as to be only visible from directly behind, enabling us to maintain visual contact with the man in front of us as well as to distinguish him from the enemy. That evening we had steak!

At one in the morning, we left La Walck and began walking through plowed fields that had thawed and were basically mud. I thought of my high school principal, Volney Barnes, when he gave his Armistice Day speeches about his experiences in World War I: "Mud. Mud! MUD!"

With me were two runners, one being Rodriguez. In addition, we had Lieutenant Barrett, a red-headed artillery forward observer who was there to direct artillery fire and "artificial moonlight" via the telephone we carried and for which we had strung wire from the rear.

As we slogged along, sometimes falling over as the mud sucked our feet, I was reeling out wire from the outpost at La Walck as the company advanced toward Kindwiller. This line I was laying allowed us to connect to a field telephone at the outpost, monitored by the battalion intelligence officer, and was in turn connected further to the rear and to Barrett's artillery battery and searchlights.

Each time I came to the end of a spool, I had to make a splice onto the next spool. I accomplished this, without any insulating tape over the splice, by using square knots in the wire, and keeping the splices at least a foot apart, on each side of the line, so the moisture/water on the ground would not cause a short. (I was later criticized for using this technique, but it was totally effective, and could be completed in less time.)

When we arrived at a point still outside of town, we lay down in the mud. There were Barrett, the two runners and me. My carbine was equipped with a grenade launcher to which was attached a green star parachute flare that I was to fire when ordered to signal to the raiders that they should withdraw.

Only when the raiders entered the town did the Germans open fire. The assault platoons charged into town, blazing away with full automatic weapons. Given the signal to "turn on the moon," Barrett used the telephone to call for "artificial

moonlight” – powerful anti-aircraft searchlights that, when turned on, reflected off of the low-lying cloud cover and illuminated Kindwiller.

Firing was tremendous, with the Germans using all of their firepower to try to fend off the raiders. Machine guns and burp guns could be heard firing almost continuously, and as we lay outside the town waiting, we followed the trajectory of countless tracer bullets, which were usually loaded at every fifth round in burp guns and machine gun belts to guide the gunners’ direction of fire.

The raiding force moved fast; 14 minutes after being discovered, the raiders began to withdraw. We saw movement and people coming out of town toward us. At that moment, something hit my face hard – I had no idea what it was – but I could feel fluid dribbling down my face and over my glasses. I threw off my glasses, told Rodriguez to take them, and asked if he could make out what happened to my face. He told me he really didn’t know, but it didn’t look serious, like maybe it was just muddy water. At that point, the dim movement in front of me turned out to be a group of captured German soldiers being herded out of town by the raiders.

Soon after, the word came to me, “Fire the flare!” I set my carbine upright and pulled the trigger. The flare went up, and exploded into a green light. I pulled on my carbine and found it was held tight in the mud from the recoil, but with effort that comes to one in such moments, I managed to pull it free. Barrett called back to turn off the artificial moonlight, which threw the town back into darkness. The prisoners had been pushed on past us, and we decided to leave. I can’t recall anyone telling us to do so, but it was apparent that the raid was drawing to a close, and we had no idea whether the Germans would attempt to pursue us as we withdrew back to our lines. Our artillery and cannon fire covered our withdrawal.

I knew, basically, that I had to move away from Kindwiller, keeping it at my back, until I came to a pathway or roadway before reaching the Moder River, which we had crossed on our way to Kindwiller. Having left Kindwiller, I knew we had to veer to our left to reach the La Walck road. I found Lieutenant Branton standing at the place where I knew we could safely turn left. He told me to go to the right. I told him that we should be turning left, not right, and if we went to our right we would end up on the wrong side of the Moder, in enemy territory, just as we presently were. He disagreed and virtually ordered me to turn right along with him. My reply, as closely as I can recall, was that if he wanted to go to the right, he would have to do it alone, and that we would see each other at the end of the war.

I can’t remember much about the walk back to La Walck, but I’m sure it was done as quickly and quietly as possible, since we were in enemy territory. In La Walck, we assembled around a street intersection in the middle of town and tried to find familiar faces. The wounded were coming back, either on their own or on stretchers. We lost eight dead. At least two on the WIA list died soon after being evacuated: Olivas was one – he was a platoon sergeant – and Lacy, who was one of our runners.

I passed Lacy's stretcher as we were assembling. He had a serious abdominal wound, probably from multiple hits by a burp gun. I called his name, and he tried to respond with a sound that I can still hear as I write this today. It was probably one of the last sounds he made . . .

As I stood on a corner, next to a building, a man approached me and said, "My God, you're alive!" I agreed that I was, and he then said, "Do you know what happened to you just before we left?" He was referring to the splattering of something all over my face, when I threw off my glasses. (It was around then that Rodriguez handed my glasses back to me.) I replied that I thought a clod of dirt had landed right in front of my face, probably thrown up when an artillery shell exploded in the town. By then, I knew it had been dirt – mud – nothing more lethal.

"Dirt, hell!" he said. It was Lieutenant Barrett, who had been lying to my left, his head close to mine, so we could communicate and he could use the field telephone that Rod and I had been carrying.

Barrett had seen a tracer round land right in front of me that kicked up the mud onto my face. The burp gun or machine gun tracer must have come from the town, probably among the few scattered shots the Germans fired in pursuit of the raiding force. Years later, in 2003, at the only division reunion I attended, Barrett was there and told me that a tracer bullet had landed between two of his fingers and left burn marks.

It was now very early morning, still dark. We moved back to Buswiller by truck, I suppose; I don't recall. When I walked into Haus No. 32, Mama Krieger rushed up to me and cried, "Ach! Mein telephone Mahn!" She quickly got towels, soap, and water and cleaned up my face, which was totally caked with mud – how did Barrett recognize me in La Walck? – and she hovered over me to make sure I was all right.

I heard the next day that when Craddock reported to battalion – probably for what we today call "debriefing" – as he walked toward the building that housed headquarters, he saw the Germans we had captured and brought back. The story we all heard, from those who claimed to have witnessed it, was that he walked down the line of prisoners and slapped each of them across the face with his gloves. Craddock took this raid very hard; it was a success, by rules of military tactics, but it cost the lives of at least eight of his men, and the suffering through wounds of an even greater number.

The following day we had a visitor in Buswiller. General McAuliffe, of Bastogne fame, who had become our division commander after the Battle of the Bulge, appeared before the assembled battalion and personally pinned Bronze Star medals on several members of our company, including Captain Craddock.

I thought I should have been one of those as well as Lieutenant Barrett to receive a Bronze Star. Had it not been for the way I laid the line of assault wire, spliced it, provided phone communication to the company as well as the artillery, the raid might well have been a very costly exercise, a failure. On the other hand, I prefer to be alive, unwounded, and able to look back on these events as I am doing at the moment. It just

hurts a little to know that some people who were awarded Bronze Stars did nothing more effective than I did and at no greater risk.

(In 2001, I learned that all World War II soldiers who had been awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge were eligible for retroactive awarding of the Bronze Star Medal. Having qualified for my Combat Infantryman Badge in late 1944, I submitted an application, with required documents. My Bronze Star arrived in August 2001.)



Sometime during a lull in combat, I was with Craddock – a rare moment when we both had a chance to relax – when he remarked how fascinated he was with combat and frontline command. As well as I can remember, he said, “God, I love this. If there was only a way to indulge in combat without the WIAs and KIAs, I would want to do this for the rest of my life . . .”

Decades later – in 1976 -- Dee and I visited his wife and him at their home in San Antonio. He had retired as a full colonel, commanding Fort Sam Houston. Soon after we arrived, he and I went for a short stroll at the start of which he declared right out he didn’t intend to engage in any reminiscences about the war.

## Outpost Duty

### La Walck, France

*February 15-20, 1945*

We were on outpost duty in the village of La Walck for five days. From the outskirts of La Walck, we could see the church steeple in Kindwiller, the town that we had raided. In front of the *main line of resistance* (“the front”), we kept a sharp lookout for any movement on the part of the Germans.

A few times the Germans fired some artillery rounds in our direction. As a result, I had to send Montross and Rodriguez out to find breaks and repair our phone lines. The Germans, however, never came close to hitting our headquarters, which was comfortably housed in a shoe factory. (Where most of the machinery was still in place, Montross occupied himself examining it. I can remember he “liberated” a beautiful vernier caliper in a fine carrying case.)

Our job – communications – was to keep lines open to two or three outposts, located at the very edge of town, facing but concealed from the enemy, plus phone lines to the rear. Purtell’s squad – he had his stripes in time for Kindwiller and was a squad leader – was located in the last house in town on the road to Kindwiller. It was a two-

story house, in plain view of the enemy, as I recall, but I don't think they ever received any fire.

The communication lines to these outposts were through sound power telephones. These units consisted of a telephone handset with two wires leading from the speaker end, with alligator clips on the ends, only a couple of inches from the phone. The power for these phones was the voice of the user, the vibration of the voice being picked up by the speaker diaphragm, which must have been connected to a magnet (in the speaker end of the phone), thereby creating electricity that was transmitted over the wires to the other sound power phone. They were quite effective, but had one drawback – they had no ringer. Instead, the caller would whistle into his phone, and the other phone would pick up the sound. This meant that each person with one of these phones had to remain quite close to it and listen for the whistle. On the other hand, the constant complaint we had from the outposts was that, especially at night, the sound of our whistle was much too loud, and they were constantly fearful that the sound would give away their positions. They, in turn, were most reluctant to make any sound into the phone that the enemy might pick up.

Kindwiller was to our left front. Bitschoffen, also held by the enemy, was to our right front, and apparently the food and supplies for Kindwiller were transported from Bitschoffen, following a road that crossed in front of us – in other words, paralleled the front. Because it had become too dangerous for the Germans to use the Kindwiller-Bitschoffen road in daylight, their routine was to send food in a horse-drawn wagon to the Kindwiller troops sometime after midnight. We had been clued to this by the company we relieved, and each night, when we thought the wagon had reached the halfway point – we could hear the rattle of what must have been kettles or pans – we would call in artillery. There must have been several days when the troops in Kindwiller had very little to eat.

During the day, we would often hear aircraft approaching, and if possible we'd run to a spot where we would watch our Air Corps, usually P-51s, drop bombs on our neighbors.

On our last day in La Walck before being relieved and put in reserve, someone in our company discovered in the basement of a building in Pfaffenhoffen what had been a German army officers club. It must have been hastily abandoned, since the supply of liquor seemed to be pretty much intact. Craddock ordered one of our jeeps with a trailer to come up to Pfaffenhoffen and load up the booze.

The next day and night, when we were in reserve in Shalkendorf, virtually every one of us got drunk. Each of us was "issued" one or two bottles of champagne and another one or two of brandy. I can't remember much more about that day or night.



## Preparing for the Final Push

Obersoultzbach, France

*Arrived February 21, 1945*

**W**e moved into a reserve position, where we trained and reequipped for the push to the Rhine. I can remember conducting classes in various wire and radio communications techniques (and bawling the hell out of one smart aleck who wasn't paying attention). I can also remember, right after we arrived, being up on a retaining wall next to a house on the town's main street, stringing wire, and listening to a pair of civilians right below me who thought I wouldn't understand them. They were discussing how it was to have the Americans in town. "They're continually asking for wine, wine, wine . . . ," they were saying, not plaintively, but in a rather puzzled tone.

Life was easy here, with a lot of time to ourselves – suggested by the photos of various members of our headquarters section taken in Obersoultzbach. The Army's pattern of "hurry-up-and-wait" seemed to be in effect, but of course it took time and planning, on a lot of levels, between a lot of different people, to organize the final drive across the Rhine and into the heart of Germany. We went to movies in makeshift auditoriums; one was a church with a lot of stained glass windows, and when our artillery fired many of the shells went over us, rattling the windows so much we would put our steel helmets on.

One day I was greeted with a surprise announcement: My name was up for a pass to Nancy. So was Purtell's. We arose early on the morning of March 15, when the company was to move to Schillersdorf, while Bill and I went to the rear by truck. At Saverne, we boarded a train that took us the rest of the way to Nancy.

Nancy was a pure delight. Showers, new clothes, with seamstresses to sew on stripes and patches. And then a pass to wander at will any place we wished throughout the town. I can remember seeing a couple of movies, having coffee and donuts in a Red Cross facility, buying French pastry, which Bill remembered having heard about from his aunt, who was in France in the First World War. We agreed that the French were not yet equipped to turn out such delicacies; the ones we bought tasted like cardboard.

Meanwhile, our company was having a rough time of it doing their part in the Rhine offensive. The 409th regimental history describes G Company's actions in the Allied drive to the Rhine.

When we left Nancy, we expected to join the company somewhere along their route to the Rhine. However, when we got back to the 409th Service Company, where we were dropped off the truck that picked us up at the railhead (which, I think, was still Saverne), we found that our company was on the move in combat so that it would be

difficult to find it. Moreover, without our steel helmets, weapons, other gear, and clothing, we weren't exactly equipped for our return to combat.

Then, when our company stopped moving, the Service Company's vehicles were doing what they were supposed to be doing – bringing up supplies to the front line.

So we either walked around, enjoying the sunshine and safety of the rear, or volunteered for various duties. One was guarding German prisoners as they dug pits to protect ammunition from air attack. The Germans told us flat out that there was no danger of air attacks from the Nazis, since they had no fuel for their aircraft. I remember also demonstrating how our M1 Garand gas-operated, semi-automatic, clip-fed rifle operated. The Germans were duly impressed – one more reason why they agreed their cause was hopeless; I think they were relieved to have been captured and to have three square meals a day, clothing, and shelter.

During the Rhine offensive, the Army used mules brought from Italy to transport supplies and ammunition to the front. They were under the care of an all-black quartermaster unit. Purtell got the bright idea volunteer to help bring back the mules from the front once they got out of rough country. We were taken up to a town just back of the front – where the mules were grazing in an orchard, to be walked back to an assembly area about four-five miles further to the rear. We slept on the floor in a house, and next morning we got up early and waited while the quartermaster troops rounded up the mules, put on their cargo pack saddles, and tied five mules together with ropes from their muzzles to the pack saddle on the mule ahead. Then each of us was given a “train” of five mules to lead down the road to the rear.

The QM troops treated us like kings, out of respect for the fact that we were infantry. The breakfast they served us that morning before we took off was one of the best we had anywhere in the Army. They were committed to doing all the work of getting the mules ready for us and helping us in any way they could.

I remember their first sergeant, who was out in the orchard with the rest of his men, rounding up the stubborn beasts. He was having trouble with one and took to striking it on the side of its jaw, while using a string of profanity to tell the mule what to do. Finally he said, “When Ah git out of this goddamn Army, Ah'm gone buy a dozen o' these bastards, an' evah mo'nin' Ah'm gone git up an' kill one o' dem sumbitches!”

Not too long after we got started, the paved, two-lane road we were on went across a wooden bridge, maybe 15-20 feet long, that spanned a small stream. A few moments after I had crossed, pulling gently on the rope fastened to the first of my five mules, I heard someone calling me. I looked back and saw that half of my mules, having become untied from the lead mules, remained standing on the other side of the bridge.

Having no idea what I should do, I just stood there. After a few minutes, a T/5<sup>†</sup>

---

<sup>†</sup> Technician Fifth Grade (abbreviated as T/5 or TEC 5) was a U.S. Army technician rank during World War II that was often referred to as “Tech Corporal.”

on horseback came along. I looked at him, handed him the lead rope for my two or three mules, and told him what had happened. He thanked me and said he would take the train the rest of the way.

Having given up my charges, I found the rest of the walk delightful – a warm spring day, sunny, with beautiful scenery, and peace . . .

By the time we reached our destination, the T/5 must have had some 20 mules tied to his horse, owing to people like me not being up to the job. Nevertheless, when we reached our destination, the QM unit had another meal fit for royalty laid out for us.

## Return to Company

### Reisdorf, Germany

*March 21, 1945*

**A**ccording to the March 21, 1945 morning report, Purtell and I rejoined the company while it was occupying reserve positions in the vicinity of Reisdorf, Germany in support of 1st Battalion. All I can recall is, vaguely, that we spent a period with regimental Service Company, and when our company was again in a static situation, and regiment could spare transportation, Bill and I were reunited with G Company. They told us a lot of stories about the Rhine offensive, and there were some faces missing. Bill and I had missed the whole thing because of the passes.

One of the first stories we heard was about “Big Ed” (our name for him out of his range of hearing) having been wounded in the foot. In early January, First Sergeant Edwards had been given a field commission and made a second lieutenant. Given the high casualty rates among infantry second lieutenants and knowing he lived in fear of being up front and getting shot at, I can’t imagine he wanted this promotion. Gene Montross, one of my runner/radio operators, claimed he had actually seen Ed reach down and pull the trigger on his carbine. Ed always carried his carbine muzzle down anyway. Big Ed never came back to us, so we’ll never know what really happened. In the March 18, 1945 morning report, he was listed as having been lightly wounded in action (meaning not life-threatening) the previous day, evacuated to the 95th Evacuation Hospital, and dropped from the unit rolls (meaning the unit could fill the empty slot with a new person).

We had more war coming, but as the Allied forces gathered on the west banks of the Rhine River to commence the invasion into Germany, Allied advance to the Rhine, the end was in sight.

## Occupation Duties

In Ludwigshafen, we were billeted in a factory that was part of a huge industrial complex of the I. G. Farben chemical empire. We had no more duty except to be part of a reserve element. From the west bank of the Rhine River, we could watch German soldiers walking guard duty on the east bank in Mannheim.

During our stay in Ludwigshafen, we were offered entertainment of various kinds by the Army's special services branch. One of their offerings was an appearance by Marlene Dietrich, a high-profile entertainer who performed for Allied troops on the front lines. Several of us were infuriated that we were *ordered* to attend the performance, though we managed – I don't remember how – to not go. I have never regretted it.

On April 2, we were trucked to Harxheim, still west of the Rhine. I was sent ahead with Captain Craddock, as a sort of "quartering party" for the company – mainly to locate quarters for company headquarters. We found a suitable house and settled in. Meanwhile, members of our company had located a brewery warehouse back in Ludwigshafen that was still well stocked with beer. A jeep and trailer were sent to the spot so that we were able to set up a small "beer hall" we could frequent when not on duty.

We continued to move from one location to another. I don't remember much else about this time other than it was peaceful and pleasant enough. In Bad Orb, however, we received word that President Roosevelt had died. It was a shock because we had no idea that Roosevelt's health had been in decline for months. Here was a man who had been President since most of us were children. I was eight when he was sworn as President in 1933. To many of us, Roosevelt and the presidency seemed almost inseparable. Further, he was our commander-in-chief. Who now would carry on? Who knew enough to finish the war? We learned that Harry Truman had succeeded to the presidency, but no one knew enough about him to have any idea of how he would affect our fates. We were shocked and unsettled, but Army routine kept us occupied with other thoughts.

In Bad Orb, there were seven large hospitals, all filled with wounded German soldiers. Located southeast of town, in a wooded area that must have been beautiful in peacetime, was a German prisoner-of-war camp. Stalag IX-B had been one of the worst Stalags. I was to find out later that my high school friend Bob Reppert was among the thousands of Americans captured in the Battle of the Bulge held here. He was serving in the Engineers Company of the ill-fated 106th Division,

Our job was to occupy this area, serving as an arm of the Allied Military Government. We were to take care of the needs of the area, including the seven hospitals and the liberated prisoners who had been held at Stalag IX-B. My job, along with my runners and radio operators, was to provide communication between our

platoons, including a platoon of H Company that had been detailed to add to the strength of our company, and Allied POWs. The Stalag occupants included British, French, Polish, Yugoslavian, Soviet, and Italian prisoners. A British artillery officer was the ranking officer in the camp and therefore we considered him to be camp commander. All American POWs had been quickly repatriated after the camp was liberated.

The downtown area of Bad Orb consisted of several small shops that had served the tourist trade before the war. Since Eisenhower had specifically forbidden "fraternization" with the Germans, we were not permitted to buy from any of the shops; but it was our job to patrol the area and "keep the peace," including handling townspeople's requests and complaints.

One incident involved a couple of former POWs from the camp who were now free to wander through the town. They had walked into one establishment and stabbed the proprietor. When our people arrived, they openly admitted their act. Having been detailed as slave labor to work for this proprietor and been badly treated by him, they felt their actions were wholly justified. I think we did too. I don't recall what, if any actions we took.

One of my well-worn World War II stories: Laid alongside the road, the surface telephone line to the commander's quarters in the POW camp ended up lying in water and developed a short. When we turned the crank to ring the phone, it turned very hard – a sure sign of a short. This meant that the phone on the other end would ring only very weakly. I cranked and cranked, and finally the major picked up his phone.

"I say," he said, "did you ring?"

"Yes sir, we did," I answered, "and we wanted to let you know that your line is being repaired. There is a short in it, due to water, and we should have it fixed soon."

"Oh, good," he said, "Because this time, all I could hear was *a bit of a tinkle*."

We had to get used to another oddity here – seeing uniformed German officers walking the streets. They were doctors who were treating the many wounded German prisoners in the hospitals. They wore Red Cross armbands to identify themselves. At times, they would request medical supplies. At one point, there was a critical shortage of dressings.

There was a lot of military traffic on a main road just at the edge of town. An entire army was on the move on this road for several days and nights. One night, when I was on the switchboard, "harnessed" into the home-built headset that included an earphone and mike, a German plane flew over the town to strafe the convoy. To me, on the second floor of, I think, the town hall, it sounded like the plane was firing right into the building. It must have been a funny sight to see me trying desperately to untangle myself from the headset to allow me to get under the table and out of, I thought, the line of fire. In reality, the plane had come from behind me and was strafing the convoy along the road. We were so far behind the lines, with little likelihood of any Luftwaffe

units being able to get off the ground, that the vehicles in the convoy had their lights on, making it easier for the German pilot to find targets. The following day the town mayor, shaking with fright, came in to see Craddock and showed him a 20 mm. shell that had gone right through his bed frame the night before, courtesy of the German pilot.

## To the Rescue

*April 23, 1945*

**O**n April 23, we were called on, from reserve status, to free an encircled battalion of the 410th. Craddock was furious. "How," he asked, "could a whole goddamned battalion get itself surrounded?" – when one of the three units (in this case, company) of any Army organization was always to be held in reserve to handle such situations. I had no answer, and he didn't expect one, but he needed someone to listen as he vented his frustration.

About coming to the assistance of the surrounded battalion, I recall our having to climb a steep hill, covered with wet leaves, by grasping small trees and bushes and pulling ourselves up, slowly, and sometimes slipping back farther than we had progressed. We met little resistance and quickly freed the battalion and moved on to take the next objective.

I also recall one day, when we were near the point, walking along a blacktop road, and watching a deer run through a meadow off to our right. Then, as the road rose and we went through a small cut at the top, the deer surprised us all by leaping off the top of the cut and landing on top of one of us. The soldier's steel helmet went clanging along the pavement, and the rest of us were really startled, because what we were expecting was some sort of contact with the enemy, not with a deer.



**S**omewhere along in here, we were traveling on trucks of an antiaircraft unit. The truck I was on was towing a trailer with a mount of four 50-caliber machine guns. The arty people were most respectful of us doughfeet. They gave us the choice seats on the trucks. There were probably no more than five or six of us on their truck, plus the arty crew and supplies. They had equipped the truck with an easy chair that they had "liberated" from some German home, and the chair was at the rear of the truck, next to the tailgate. Occupying this chair one day was a man known for his heavy drinking and his inability to stay sober, even after a moderate amount of liquor. He had managed to purloin a supply of schnapps and had imbibed enough to bring him close

to unconsciousness. All of a sudden, as we were driving along, he fell out of the truck. How he managed to avoid being run over by the trailer, no one will ever know. Within a few moments, a vehicle from the rear drove up and delivered him back to our truck, somewhat sobered up, but basically uninjured.

Also, while riding with the AA people, we were strafed by a German fighter plane. Our experience with air attacks was so limited we hadn't developed any instincts for self-defense. The AA people had, however, and their first action was to evacuate the truck, which had stopped immediately. They evacuated right over us infantrymen, stepping on our helmeted heads in the process. I remember having to wrench my helmet off my head after this episode, but being grateful for the protection it provided.



**O**n April 29, I accompanied Captain Craddock in a jeep to reconnoiter the situation in Shongau, on the Lech River. A recon unit had managed to get several M8 light armored cars across the Lech bridge before the Germans detonated charges and partially destroyed it. The roadway was still above the water; the two piers had been destroyed, creating two ramps connecting the main part of the bridge, but definitely impassable for any motor vehicles.

On the scene was 2d Battalion commander Hennighausen (nicknamed "the Mouse" -- alluding to his big nose protruding from under his helmet, along with his small stature). His orders -- direct from Colonel Lloyd, the regimental commander -- were to move up the river, cross the river on a footbridge upriver, and come down the other side to the town and where the armored cars were cut off. We went up to assess the situation. When we had crossed the footbridge and started down the opposite bank, we encountered a brush-choked ravine that emptied into the river. To cross the ravine would have required many hours -- either cutting a path through the wall of brush or trying to go up and around -- not knowing what we might find up there.

Our company commanders immediately began counseling Hennighausen to return to the blown bridge and cross it -- which seemed far more possible than getting across the ravine. Hennighausen's orders had been issued by a man who had never seen the situation firsthand and was doing all his planning based on a map -- a map on which the ravine was not well marked.

Finally, the Mouse was convinced that it might be better to go back the way we came and try to cross the damaged bridge. On the way back, in our jeep, Craddock leaned back to me and said, "Rogers, if Colonel Lloyd had told him to cut off his arm, his only reply would have been, 'Which arm, sir?'"

We easily crossed the damaged bridge. While the trapped recon vehicles were being freed -- I don't remember how -- the rest of our battalion came up to Shongau. Late

that afternoon, we boarded trucks to move out. As we did, we noticed the sun shining on what at first appeared to be a bank of white clouds nestled down to the horizon. Suddenly, we realized what we were seeing was the snowcapped peaks of the Alps.

## End in Sight

*May 1945*

**W**e drove well into the night, sleeping as well as we could in bouncing 2-1/2 ton trucks. In the middle of the night, we stopped and stumbled into buildings and went back to sleep, exhausted, having no idea where we were. When we awoke, we saw the town was blanketed by snow and surrounded by the snow-capped Alps. We were soon back on the trucks, for the next move.

On the very slow-moving trip down from Mittenwald, the convoy stopped many times while the front elements cleared buildings or small villages. At one point, we noticed that there was a train on a track not too far from the road. It had stopped, probably some time ago, because this line was electrified, and the power had been cut off. It was a freight train, and some of our people ran over to look more closely. On at least one freight car, they discovered cases of jars of pickled vegetables, and of course, they had to try them. They said they tasted sour, as they probably were intended to be.

Around that time, a jeep passed through the convoy and suddenly, up ahead we heard an explosion. As our trucks advanced – still slowly – we saw what had happened. The jeep had apparently struck a mine in the road, or more likely on the shoulder, as it tried to pass the convoy. The explosion had killed both the driver and his passenger, and the bodies were really maimed – separated into masses of meat, it seemed.

Walking by were some concentration camp survivors – gaunt, some moving with difficulty, dressed in filthy black-and-white striped concentration-camp clothes. The ex-prisoners seemed to linger near the human remains – enough to rouse several GIs with rifles to threaten them to back away. On the move, we had no extra food to give them. Now, as I write this, so many years later, I still struggle to grasp the horror of it all . . .



**T**he last days of the war were for us pretty much a cake walk. Those of us who were at the point were busy mostly with telling surrendering German soldiers what to do, where to go to give themselves up, and get out of our way. I don't remember much of anything about our stay in Innsbruck, except that German soldiers kept coming up to any of us to surrender.



The long-rumored German surrender happened on May 8. Company G was now in charge of occupation of a sector of Austria, with headquarters in Aldrans, a small village overlooking the Inn River Valley and the city of Innsbruck. My job was to provide telephone communications between the four platoons of the company as well as with battalion headquarters.

We ran wire down to battalion and to all the platoons and used our German 10-drop switchboard, operated through a German field telephone. Montross was the genius who had found the board and phone in a Maginot Line communications center near Lembach and persuaded Captain Craddock it was worth keeping. Montross hooked it up with American equipment. The setup was the talk of the battalion; we were probably the only rifle company with a 10-drop switchboard.

Hale, Montross, and I staffed the board 24 hours a day, each of us working a third of the day and a third of the night. This responsibility conveniently got us excused from most other assignments, including the big Memorial Day/Victory parade held in Innsbruck – *que lastima* [“What a pity”] . . .

We mostly ambled around, looking at the beautiful mountain scenery, under a warm spring sun. In early June, we spent two delightful days at the regimental rest center in Pertisau, a small village on the L-shaped, six-mile-long Achensee Lake, high in the Alps. With the Army’s intent to make us as comfortable as possible, we stayed in resort hotels and had free use of kayak-like boats, in which I paddled over a lot of the lake. There was a small steamboat that made the rounds of the villages on the lake, delivering and picking up people and mail. A reminder of the war was a cave-like opening along the shore that we were told led to an aircraft parts factory the Germans had built underground to protect the factory from bombing.

While we had shifted from military operations to occupational duties, the Pacific war raged on. On July 4, 1945, I was among 51 enlisted men from the company transferred to a regiment in the 45th Division. I was still in Company G and still commo chief, but now in the 179th Infantry. We were being shipped back to the States. After a 30-day “furlough” and amphibious training, we were headed for the Pacific Theater to invade Japan. We hadn’t even left Europe, however, when Japan surrendered, ending World War II.

## After the War

**S**o, I came home wearing the thunderbird patches of the 45th Division. When I arrived at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, I was assigned to a unit of the 6th Service Command, with a counselor MOS. During the couple of months I served as a

counselor at McCoy, waiting for my points to qualify me for discharge, I wore a 6th Service Command patch on my left shoulder and the 103d on my right.

I suspect that the separation papers most of my fellow members of Company G got upon discharge didn't mention their service with the 409th. Mine did because I made my own discharge document and saw to it that that it referenced my assignment as Company G, 409th Infantry.

## My Infantryman Badges

Paratroopers, pilots, and other military occupational specialties were issued skill and qualification badges that carried levels of prestige akin to military decorations, while in the first years of American involvement in World War II, the infantry received no comparable recognition for our proficiencies and the fact we faced the greatest risk of being killed or wounded in action. In 1943, the War Department established the Combat Infantryman Badge and the Expert Infantryman Badge to boost the morale and public recognition of the infantry. Upon demonstrating infantry skills proficiency requisite to being awarded the Expert Infantryman Badge, an infantryman's base pay was increased by five dollars per month.

I received my Expert badge at Camp Howze in the summer of 1944, after completing the last requirement – a nighttime compass run, where I had to use a compass to follow a course of written directions. As I came to the end of my instructions, I tripped over a stake, looked at the number, reported it to the officer nearby, along with my name, and was told it was the correct number.

The Combat Infantryman Badge was awarded to an infantryman who had personally fought in ground combat. After being committed to action, we became Combat Infantrymen very quickly – and very proudly – in late fall of 1944. Not everyone in the division received the badge at the beginning, however. For example, our cooks, who never really saw frontline combat, received theirs much later, and only after Captain Craddock learned that other kitchen personnel in the 103d had received them. The Combat badge was worth ten dollars per month.

I have received several items of recognition in my lifetime – diplomas, credentials, certificates of achievement. I take more pride in my Combat Infantryman Badge than I do in most of them. That and my sergeant's stripes I wore with almost *fierce* pride when I came home from the war.

**ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION  
HONORABLE DISCHARGE**


1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL <b>ROGERS FRANK M JR</b>		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. <b>36 826 601</b>	3. GRADE <b>SGT</b>	4. ARM OR SERVICE <b>INF</b>	5. COMPONENT <b>AUS</b>
6. ORGANIZATION <b>CO G 409 INF</b>		7. DATE OF SEPARATION <b>12 JAN 46</b>	8. PLACE OF SEPARATION CENTER <b>CAMP MC COY WIS</b>		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES <b>1124 MILTON ST MADISON 5 WIS</b>			10. DATE OF BIRTH <b>3 JAN 25</b>	11. PLACE OF BIRTH <b>MADISON WIS</b>	
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT <b>SEE 9</b>			13. COLOR EYES <b>BLUE</b>	14. COLOR HAIR <b>RED</b>	15. HEIGHT <b>5-11</b>
			16. WEIGHT <b>178</b>	17. NO. DEPEND. <b>NONE</b>	
18. RACE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WHITE	19. MARITAL STATUS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SINGLE		20. U.S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES		21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. <b>COLLEGE STUDENT X-02</b>

MILITARY HISTORY					
22. DATE OF INDUCTION <b>25 JUN 43</b>		23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT <b>9 JUL 43</b>		25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE <b>MILWAUKEE WIS</b>	
26. REGISTERED SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES		27. U.S.S. BOARD NO. <b>#1</b>		28. COUNTY AND STATE <b>MADISON WIS</b>	
29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE <b>SEE 9</b>		30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. <b>COMMUNICATION CHIEF 542</b>			
31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (i.e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) <b>COMBAT INFANTRYMAN BADGE</b>		32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS <b>RHINELAND, CENTRAL EUROPE</b>			
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS <b>GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL</b>		34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION <b>NONE</b>			
35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES SMALLPOX: <b>JUL 45</b> TYPHOID: <b>JUL 45</b> TETANUS: <b>JUN 44</b> OTHER (specify): <b>TYPHUS JUL 45</b>		36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U. S. AND RETURN DATE OF DEPARTURE: <b>6 OCT 44</b> DESTINATION: <b>ETO</b> DATE OF ARRIVAL: <b>20 OCT 44</b>			
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE CONTINENTAL SERVICE: <b>1 6 25</b> FOREIGN SERVICE: <b>0 11 9</b>		38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD <b>SGT</b>			
39. PRIOR SERVICE <b>NONE</b>		40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION <b>CONVENIENCE OF THE GOVT RRI-1 (DEMOBILIZATION) AR 615 365 15 DEC 44</b>			
41. SERVICE SCHOOLS ATTENDED <b>NONE</b>		42. EDUCATION (Years) Grade: <b>8</b> High School: <b>1</b> College: <b>0</b>			

OFFICE OF REGISTER OF DEEDS,  
BANE COUNTY, WISCONSIN  
*Received for Record Jan 1946*  
*A. D. 1946 at 11:00 o'clock a.m.*  
*and recorded in vol. 18*  
*of Discharges on page 48*  
*A. O. Martin Register*

PAY DATA					
43. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES YEARS: <b>2</b> MONTHS: <b>6</b> DAYS: <b>18</b>		44. MUSTERING OUT PAY TOTAL: <b>\$300</b> THIS PAYMENT: <b>\$100</b>		45. SOLDIER DEPOSITS <b>NONE</b>	
46. TRAVEL PAY <b>\$5.70</b>		47. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER <b>134.40 H L OLDENBURG MAJ FD</b>			

INSURANCE NOTICE					
IMPORTANT: IF PREMIUM IS NOT PAID WHEN DUE OR WITHIN THIRTY ONE DAYS THEREAFTER, INSURANCE WILL Lapse. MAKE CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO THE TREASURER OF THE U. S. AND FORWARD TO COLLECTIONS SUBDIVISION, VETERANS ADMINISTRATION, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.					
48. KIND OF INSURANCE Nat. Serv. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U.S. Govt. <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>		49. HOW PAID Assignment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Direct to V. A. <input type="checkbox"/>		50. Effective Date of Allotment Discontinuance <b>31 JAN 46</b>	
51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) <b>28 FEB 46</b>		52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH <b>\$6.50</b>		53. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO Continue <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continue Only <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue <input type="checkbox"/>	

54.  RIGHT THUMB PRINT	55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directives) <b>AMERICAN THEATER SERVICE MEDAL EUROPEAN-AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN THEATER SERVICE MEDAL ONE (1) OVERSEAS SERVICE BAR LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED; ASR SCORE (2 SEP 45) 47 INACTIVE SERVICE ERC FR 25JUN43 TO 8 JUL 43</b>	
	56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED <i>Frank M. Rogers Jr.</i>	
57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization) <i>Carl L. Butler</i> <b>CARL L. BUTLER 2DLT AC ASSISTANT ADJUTANT</b>		

WD AGO FORM 53, 55  
1 November 1944  
This form supersedes all previous editions of WD AGO Forms 53 and 55 for enlisted persons entitled to an Honorable Discharge, which will not be used after receipt of this revision.

## PART II / Sidebar

*I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, for vengeance, for desolation. War is hell.*

—William Tecumseh Sherman

Union Army General during the American Civil War

**A**s I read back through my written account of World War II, it seems, well, rather “sterilized” – failing to convey the “hellish” aspects of what I had experienced. There were many . . .

“Living conditions” certainly were one part of this hell. Our diet could be a hell factor. In the field, when our kitchen couldn’t prepare meals for us, we subsisted on field rations. Especially in the Vosges Mountains, the problem of getting food and rations into the hands of frontline troops was difficult. At times, we scrounged food from local inhabitants or took what we could find from empty houses and abandoned gardens.

As documented by soldiers who served in the Pacific, jungles and swamps produced their own brand of hell. Sent to Europe, I saw much of our service and action in hilly to mountainous terrain during the coldest, wettest winter that northwestern Europe had experienced in three decades.

Our kind of water hell was our inability to walk on it. We had our streams to cross, often without the benefit of bridges. They were always cold, often fed by snowmelt. And while some of them that I can remember were little more than knee-deep, they were usually at least an inch over the tops of our boots or shoepacs. This meant that for the rest of the day, at least, we walked in wet shoes and socks, sloshing along on numb feet.

We usually had one extra pair of socks and another set of felt shoepac insoles, and if we stopped long enough – and safely enough – we could change and put the wet articles inside our shirts to dry out. Sometimes we were lucky enough to stay in a house with a stove or room heater to dry our wet articles.

The worst scenario was to encounter the water-crossing early in the day and have no chance to change – or even air-dry our feet – all day long. Feet stayed cold, water swished between toes, and by the time it was possible to take off shoes and socks, your feet were waterlogged, and usually blue with cold. Cold injuries had a major impact on our military operations.

In addition to moving through water, moving over land often provided its own part of hell. Infantry sometimes moved down paved roads, one column on each side. This was usually not especially hellish, unless the weather made it so. Also, if your unit was the first to traverse the area since the enemy had been there, mines became an additional hazard, especially on unpaved surfaces.

When the unit was involved in an attack, movement along a road was less likely than to be running, walking, or crawling across fields or through woods. As the unit worked its way forward to seize an enemy position, they used the terrain to maximum advantage, keeping behind contours and cover, and emerging from cover to dash across open spaces when there was no alternative.

All of the hells of war are for me overshadowed by the ones associated with engaging the enemy in all the ways that can take. To understand what ground combat is like, without experiencing it, is just about impossible. The nearest comparison to the sights and sounds of battle I can think of is to be overtaken by the most violent thunderstorm, with loud, continuous roar and rumble of thunder and the skies ablaze with constant lightning flashes, producing lots of ground strikes. Lightning strikes just yards away, and you may well be the next one hit. People around you are getting struck, and they're calling for help, dying or dead. You're unable to help, because you are doing a job that must be done. Indeed, those who have been in combat have used the storm metaphor, as in "artillery storm" or "storm of war," to describe what they went through.

The stress level of being in ground combat is indescribably high. While people caught in a thunderstorm usually can take shelter, the soldier in combat may be called on – ordered – to advance under fire and further expose himself to the "storm of battle."

All of these hell factors are physical, at least in part. There are psychological factors as well. In addition to the fear that comes with enemy fire, even if the soldier is lucky enough to avoid being hit, his fellow soldiers may not be, and seeing a comrade wounded, dying or dead, or hearing of his loss, is a form of hell all its own . . .

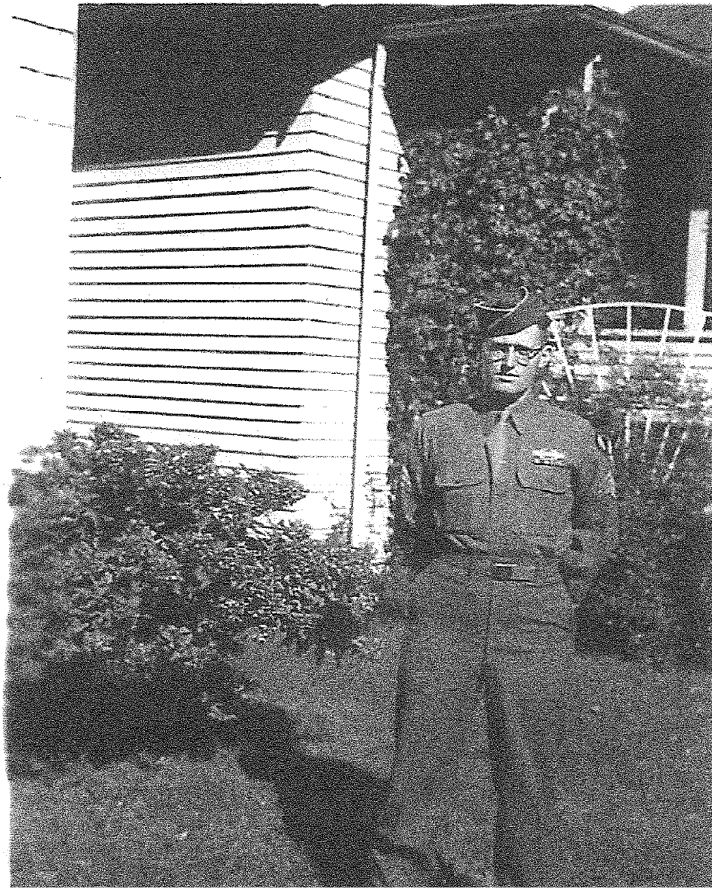
Was I scared? You bet! Times I was "scared" that come to mind: Sitting in Craddock's lap while artillery and mortar shells exploded all around us and tree burst shrapnel coming down on us – unable to find a place under a rock that wasn't already occupied. . . Trying to run across a meadow, with 42 pounds of radio on my back, while burp guns were firing at me from higher ground . . . Hearing the loud, shrill howling noise of incoming German rockets, aptly nicknamed "Screaming Mimis," not knowing whether they might hit the house I was in . . . Riding along in an artillery truck when a German fighter strafed the convoy . . .

But after each particular event passed, and we were no longer concerned about the next minutes and whether we – especially I – would make it that day, I can't say that I could really describe what "fear" was. Fear in combat could manifest itself in bodily reactions such as soiling one's shorts, breaking out in a sweat, or crying. When a



wave of fear swept through my mind and body, I would quickly try to quell it and move on, as if I could extinguish fear itself, until the next time I was overcome with fear and, again, quickly tried to put it behind me.

I'm finding it difficult to put into words what combat was like and the fear I felt being in it. For one thing, I think the actualities of war test the limits of language. And in part, it was so terrible that I have spent my postwar life trying to blot out the worst. And maybe that's just as well . . .



**Company G, 409th Infantry**  
**KILLED IN ACTION (KIA)**

ASHTON	Charles A	PFC	11/16/44
BALLESTEROS	Lawrence B	PFC	11/16/44
DAOUST	Robert V	PVT	11/16/44
EARLEY	James B	SGT	11/16/44
EDGELL	Fleming E	PFC	11/16/44
HANKS	Kenneth W	SSGT	11/16/44
HERNANDEZ	Domingo	PVT	11/16/44
LANCASTER	Thomas B	PVT	11/16/44
MAURER	John P	PVT	11/16/44
PERRYMAN	Lloyd G	PFC	11/16/44
POTTER	Irving	PFC	11/16/44
SNYDER	Elwood C	PFC	11/16/44
SOBOTTA	Max A	SGT	11/16/44
BROWN	Stanley W	PFC	11/17/44
DORGAN	Francis X	SGT	WIA 11/16/44> DOW 11/21/44
FRIEDLANDER	Raymond	PVT	11/24/44
TESCHENDORFF	Robert A	PFC	11/24/44
FITZGERALD	James E	PVT	12/01/44
MEESE	Carl J	PFC	WIA 12/02/44> DOW 12/03/44
ATTEBERY, JR	Paul E	SSGT	12/15/44
KINGSLEY	Paul E	PFC	12/18/44
LOHMANN	Arnold H	PFC	12/18/44
MURPHY	Marvin A	PVT	12/18/44
CHANCE	John H	PVT	12/19/44
NORDLUND	Rudolph H	SSGT	12/19/44
SCHMID	Roger C	PVT	12/19/44
SMITH	Lester E	PFC	12/20/44

GARTRELL	Willis M	SGT	12/20/44
HAVLICHEK	Louis F	PFC	12/20/44
HOWARD	Dalton E	T4	12/20/44
MILLER	Vernon G	PVT	12/20/44
SMITH	Lester E	PFC	12/20/44
GAJDA	Thomas J	PFC	01/20/45
COCKRELL	Parks L	PFC	02/08/45
FIAMINGHI	Santi J	PFC	02/08/45
GUCK	Elmer N	SSGT	02/08/45
LACY	Jerome M	PFC	02/08/45
MCQUARRIE	Edward F	PFC	02/08/45
O'ROURKE	Leonard J	PVT	02/08/45
SLAVENS	Walter E	PVT 409 Med Det	02/08/45
DEMARS	Norman E	PVT	03/22/45
NAPOLITANO	Augustine A	PFC	03/22/45
SPRAGUE	Earl E	PFC	WIA 03/22/45> DOW 04/03/45
ARNETT	Herman J	PVT	04/09/45

**Company G, 409th Infantry  
WOUNDED IN ACTION (WIA)**

ANTKOWICS	Edward M	PVT	11/16/44
BAKER	Lewis D	PFC	11/16/44
BLASKE	Howard H	SGT 409 Med Det	11/16/44
CABALLERO	Jesus M	PVT	11/16/44
CAMP	Robert E	PVT	11/16/44
COMPTON	Forrest S	PFC	11/16/44
COOLEY	Frank	SGT	11/16/44
DOBBERTIN, JR	Paul W	PFC	11/16/44
DORGAN	Francis X	SGT	11/16/44



FOLTZ	Ralph P	SGT	11/16/44
FREY	William S	PFC	11/16/44
HERBERT	Raymond C	PFC	11/16/44
HISS	Thomas X	PVT	11/16/44
KITZMAN	Norman E	T5 409 Med Det	11/16/44
RANDALL, JR	Campbell L	PFC	11/16/44
SAWREY	James M	SSGT	11/16/44
SLAVENS	Walter E	PVT 409 Med Det	11/16/44
THOMAS, JR	Trevor P	PVT	11/16/44
TODARELLO	John F	PVT	11/16/44
WHITE	Kenneth C	PFC	11/16/44
WHITTINGTON	Taylor H	SSGT	11/16/44
YACINICH	Mike	SSGT	11/16/44
HOUGLAND	Robert D	SSGT	11/18/44
MILOBAR	Steve J	PFC	11/18/44
TAYLOR	Norman D	PFC	11/18/44
WILKINS	John W	PFC	11/20/44
FISHER	Richard E	T4	11/23/44
BLOOMFIELD	Donald L	SGT	11/24/44
HATCHER	Claude M	PFC	11/24/44
MAYS	William M	PVT	11/24/44
HOLZ, JR	George G	2LT	11/29/44
POST	Fred N	PFC	11/29/44
HOAGLIN	George F	1LT	12/01/44
JOHNSON	Joseph M	PFC	12/01/44
WESTON	James J	PFC	12/01/44
AGUIRRE	Ben C	PFC	12/02/44
BRADSHAW	Herbert C	PFC	12/02/44
COGOZZO	Ludovic P	SSGT	12/02/44
HALL	Edgar F	1LT	12/02/44

PIERCE	Robert L	TSGT	12/02/44
ROBERTAZZI	Albert J	1LT	12/02/44
SCOLES	James C	PVT	12/02/44
STULTZ	Adrian A	SSGT	12/02/44
WALLIN	Robert E	PFC	12/02/44
MCDONALD	Odell H	PVT	12/06/44
DAPPER	Herbert W	PVT	12/13/44
EULINGER	Keith E	PFC	12/17/44
CONGROVE	Stuart C	PFC	12/18/44
HARSTAD	Gilbert M	PFC	12/18/44
HORKY	Richard P	T5	12/18/44
LEHMANN	Leon E	PFC	12/18/44
MILLER	Mortie G	PVT	12/18/44
TOMCHECK	Francis A	PVT	12/18/44
ARMSTRONG, JR	James W	PFC	12/19/44
CRAMER	Charles W	PFC	12/19/44
KOCHAN	Albin J	PFC	12/19/44
DALY	William	PVT	12/20/44
HARPER	Henry C	SSGT	12/20/44
LESLIE	Robert L	PFC	12/20/44
NAUMAN	Francis R	PVT	12/20/44
SYLLA	Leonard L	PVT	12/20/44
WHETSELL	John F	PFC	12/20/44
ANDERSON	Matthew P	PFC	12/21/44
HARRIS	Warren P	PVT	12/21/44
GREY	Cecil N	PFC	12/23/44
KULISH	John	PFC	12/23/44
LERI	Simon P	PVT	12/23/44
BRECHT	Raymond D	2LT	12/31/44
BRECHT	Raymond D	2LT	01/02/45

ENOCHS	Hugh Y	PFC	01/04/45
SCOTT	Leon C	T4	01/13/45
MOSELEY	Dannie F	PFC	01/19/45
BORN	Sheridan A	PFC	01/20/45
KIDDLE	Robert F	PFC	01/20/45
RENO	Ivan J	PFC	01/20/45
SIGGELKOW	Edwin O	PFC	01/20/45
MCDONALD	Odell H	PVT	01/22/45
BASARA	Eugene C	PFC	01/25/45
ARNOLD	Raymond C	PFC	02/08/45
BOSTICK	William M	SSGT	02/08/45
COOK	William C	PFC	02/08/45
EBEL	John C	2LT	02/08/45
FERRERE	Charles M	PFC	02/08/45
FOWLER	Wallace	PFC	02/08/45
HALL	Edgar F	1LT	02/08/45
JOFKO	Michael	SGT	02/08/45
MURRAY	Arthur B	PFC	02/08/45
OLSEN	Borje E	PFC	02/08/45
OLIVAS	John M	SSGT	02/08/45
PALACIOS	Fernando M	PFC	02/08/45
PHELPS, JR	Harry B	PFC	02/08/45
POHLMAN	William R	PFC	02/08/45
SCHOOR	Abraham L	T5	02/08/45
VEGA	Robert	PVT	02/08/45
WADE	James L	PFC	02/08/45
WILKS	Gerald H	PFC	02/08/45
SHEPHERD, JR	Robert A	PFC	02/11/45
PARTON	Walter J	TSGT	02/18/45
EDWARDS	James H	2LT	03/17/45

SCOLES	James C	PVT	03/17/45
KLEMAN	Donald W	PVT	03/18/45
BRINTON	John G	PFC	03/19/45
JACKSON	Gilbert C	PFC	03/19/45
FREISE	William J	PFC	03/21/45
NAUMAN	Francis R	PFC	03/21/45
NUNES	Manuel V	PFC	03/21/45
ROUGHLY	Thomas	SSGT	03/21/45
TAPP	Paul M	PFC	03/21/45
TICHY	Raymond T	SGT	03/21/45
ARMSTRONG, JR	James W	SGT	03/22/45
MOSELEY	Dannie F	PFC	03/22/45
POND	Forrest W	SGT	03/22/45
EISENMENGER	Carl K	SSGT	03/23/45
HERBERT	Raymond C	PFC	03/23/45
MAYS	William M	PVT	03/23/45
MORENO	Silvester L	PFC	03/23/45
WINCHESTER	Andrew J	PFC	03/23/45
BENEFIELD	Claude H	PFC	03/27/45
HOAGLIN	George F	1LT	04/23/45
SHIMEK	Edward	PVT	04/23/45

## 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 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 was 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, the relative casualty impacts were random, as the matrix suggests. That randomness worked against Company G, 409th Infantry (shaded row), which suffered the highest number of men killed in action and fourth highest number of battle casualties among the 103d's 27 rifle companies.

—Cranston R. “Chan” Rogers

(Co G/409, transferred to  
45th Infantry Division, January 26, 1945)

		Casualties			
Regiment	Company	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
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1308</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>925</b>
	<b>Average</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>103</b>
	410th	A	137	26	11
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
<b>Total</b>		<b>875</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>600</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>97</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>67</b>
411th		A	138	33	1
	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
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1574</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>1208</b>
	<b>Average</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>134</b>
	All Rifle Companies	<b>Total</b>	<b>3757</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>374</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>139</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>101</b>

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