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**Note**

**The newspaper articles, Order of  
Battle narrative and memoir of Second  
Lieutenant William D. Sproesser Sr.  
follow**

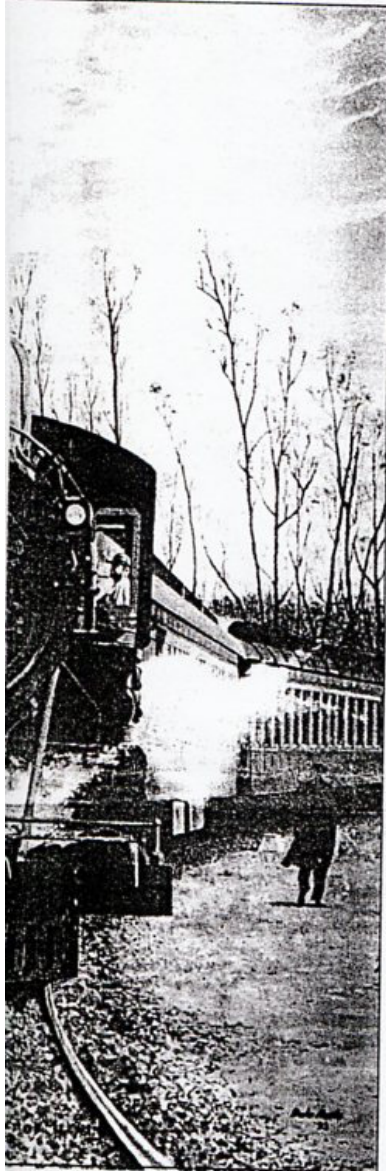
# HOCKESSIN COMMUNITY NEWS

the Creek Valley

May 26, 1994

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Castle of Hockessin

original of a

## "I found a true hero in France 1945!"

By Jean M. Toman

As the nation celebrates Memorial Day, many thoughts will be on D-Day, the 50th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy, what many historians record as the first major landing of allied forces on the European continent, although allied forces were fighting in Italy. Normandy marked the first time the allies had enough soldiers and weapons to mount a march in the European theater against the Germans.

While attention is on Normandy, is it a January day in 1945 that is remembered by Hockessin's Bill Sproesser.

"For the past 50 years, I have thanked God each morning for his creation of a wiry 135-pound Irishman by the name of Jack Scannell, because he gave me those 50 years of life," said Sproesser.

Sproesser, a retired DuPont

Company engineer, said were it not for Scannell's actions, he would not be a retired engineer, small business entrepreneur, father and husband.

### January 19, 1945

The scene is Sessenheim, France, on January 19, 1945. Sproesser was a 21-year-old rifle platoon leader, 1st platoon Company L, 411th Infantry, 103rd division.

"I was involved in capturing a so called empty town in eastern France," said Sproesser. "Ten minutes into the attack, it was obvious that we faced a fiasco. They

were waiting for us!

"With our supporting tanks knocked out, absolutely no ground cover and the sun coming up, I decided that with the deck stacked against us, the only thing to do was walk into town with guns blazing, as John Wayne would have done in this situation. I fired one burst from the 'Tommy-gun' and a tremendous blow to my left thigh cartwheeled me. A single bullet had hit me in the thigh



The hero and his rescuer 41 years later...Jack Scannell and Bill Sproesser (right).

and exited between my legs. I sent the platoon into town with the thought that this decision would be the safest for them. They were all captured."

So began the day of days for Sproesser. A military historian once said that no matter how much the generals plan, once the troops begin their mission, everything can change in the blink of an eye. That's what happened in eastern France.

"Seeing that I was wounded, the platoon runner Santos Garcia came

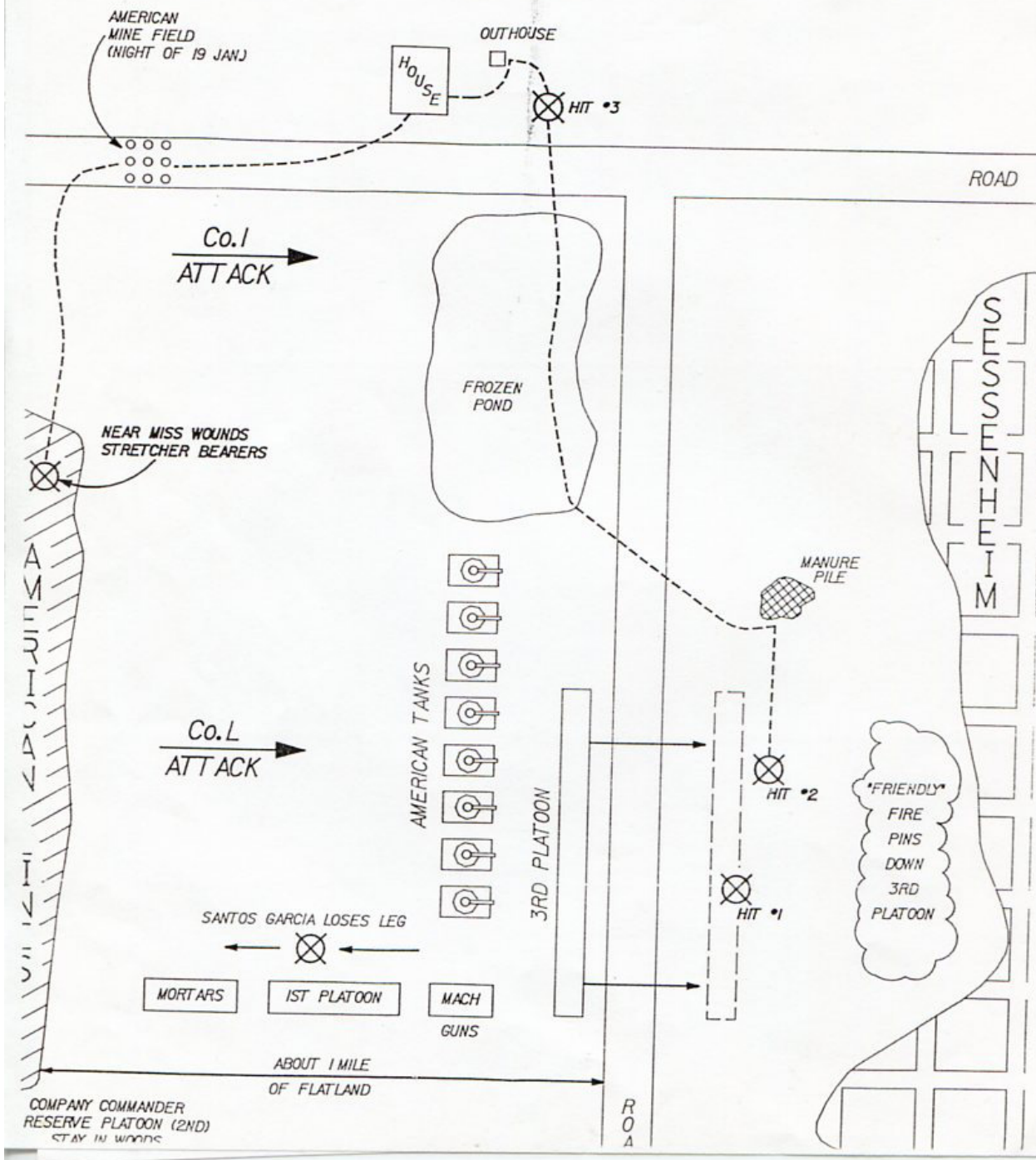
See A True Hero Page 3



MAP SKETCH

ATTACK ON SESSENHEIM JAN 19, 1945

NOT TO SCALE



# "A true hero who gave me 50 years of life I shouldn't have had"

back to help me," remembers Sproesser. "He pointed out that the company to our left was running to the rear in complete panic. Santos wanted to get me to safety but I knew it was impossible for him to carry my weight, or we would both end up dead. I ordered Santos to the rear to tell the company commander what had occurred, thinking this was the safest for him. On his way back, Santos was hit by an 88mm artillery shell causing him to lose his leg.

"After Santos left, I attempted to access my damage. Unfortunately, once I got my three layers of pants down, I couldn't pull them back up or get them off. Two mortar shells landed near by. Fragments from the first shell hit me in both knees throwing my legs in the air. One fragment from the second shell hit me in the right side of my buttocks while my body was extended skyward."



Sproesser (right) with Santos Garcia and his wife, Celia, at the 1988 Company L reunion in Wilmington.

### Jack Scannell-Hero

Enter Sgt. Jack Scannell, a hero who received a Silver Star for what was about to happen.

"Shortly after the shells, I heard a call from Jack, a mortar squad leader, inquiring about my problem. I told him I was hit. I realized if he came

objective was a farmhouse in the middle of the field about 300 yards from the town and about a mile from the American lines.

"He had just hoisted me to his back for the final dash to the house when it felt like a freight train had hit us. The concussion of an exploding 20 mm shell, basically an anti-aircraft gun, separated us. Jack was blown 15 feet out from under me and while I was still hanging in mid air I took shrapnel through my left biceps and chest. I looked at Jack and he appeared to be lifeless. I called to him and after several seconds, he rolled over and said he guessed he was all right, but how was I doing. In checking the left sleeve of my coat, I noticed what remained of my biceps was sticking up through my coat. This view shocked Jack more than his secret fears that I might have lost my private parts with the first bullet (the aid station assured me that these parts were all intact).

According to Sproesser, Scannell just kept coming back, determined to reach his goal and not let these interruptions get in the way.

"Again, Jack hoisted me up and headed for the house. After depositing me on the floor of an outhouse, he went inside the farmhouse to see who was in occupancy—American or German. He returned to say that an aid man and six wounded Company K I mem were in the basement. When he got me to the stairway leading to the basement, he said he was going to have difficulty in getting me down the stairs, because of my superior weight of 70 pounds. Jack noticed a bottle of schnapps nearby and after I took one good belt, I was able to carry some of my own weight. Once in the basement with the feeling of relief and help from the schnapps, I promptly went into shock.



Lt. Bill Sproesser...before the odyssey

*including Bud BAKISH*

"When we arrived at the aid station, I was not just happy, but hysterically joyful. All that remained of my clothes were my boots, my wool knit cap and the collar and right sleeve of my shirt. They asked me why I was so happy when I was so full of holes. I simply said I had no right to get out alive."

All said and done, Sproesser found 13 holes, no broken bones and "and the best friend a person could have," said Sproesser.

### The Aftermath

According to Sproesser, for six months, he heard nothing about the men he sent into Sessenheim and were captured. At the end of the war, he found out that all the men had survived their ordeal.

"Nine months later, while I was working in a "war criminals camp," I discovered a German soldier who had been at Sessenheim. He said the town was empty on January 18, but a regimental task force was sent in early on the 19th to be the spearhead for the second Bulge known as operation NORDWIND. It was our attack that made the Germans think more troops were coming and they decided not to continue on this plan and our attack also gave the allied forces about three days for an orderly withdraw, possibly saving



over to help me that we would have made a good group target to shoot at, so I told Jack to go to the rear. He sent his men to the rear and crawled over to me. Fortunately for me, he disregarded my suggestion.

"For the next two hours, Jack pushed, pulled, carried and finally wired my hands together and dragged me like a sled over a frozen pond. His



Portrait of a hero, Sgt. Jack Scannell

four hours of feeling resigned to death, that I was becoming cautiously optimistic about our survival."

The odyssey was not yet over, according to Sproesser. There was still the trip to American lines and safety.

"Jack is always telling me that I don't know how to play the guitar," said Sproesser, pictured at the 1988 reunion.



As for Jack Scannell, on January 30, 1945, he was presented with the Award of the Silver Star for his action on January 19, by Brigadier General A. C. McAuliffe, commandor of the 103rd division. Scannell was also the best man at Sproesser's wedding to Betty Jane Williams. Scannell later

#### Facing court-martial

"That night Jack went back for the stretcher bearers to get us out of there. Along the road he came across an American mine field. In the dark, Jack, not knowing anything about mines, carefully removed each one to the side of the road then proceeded on for help (Jack finally located help). Though being threatened with court-martial if he attempted the rescue, he led stretcher bearers back to us. *Col. Robert Cheval*

"Jack and the stretcher bearers arrived at the house just before dawn. They gathered up all of us and carried us out under the cover of darkness. As we approached the American lines, a German 88 shell landed about 100 yards in front of us. When the next one fell behind us about the same distance, I thought, 'Oh hell, here we go again!'

"Just then the next shell was a direct hit, but it exploded in a tree above me. Since I was centered over me shrapnel mushroomed around me. One fragment broke in the leg of the stretcher bearer at the head of my stretcher. My only damage was to my ears.

married and is the father of 12 children, lives in Detroit and is retired from the Dariyman's Credit Union.

"Sgt. Darwin Kyle was a squad leader of mine. He was the only person to get in and out of Sessenheim on January 19. Six years later we heard that he had been killed in Korea and received the Congressional Medal of Honor Posthumously," said Sproesser.

In 1988, Sproesser planned and hosted a reunion of Company L in Wilmington. Scannell and Santos Garcia were both in attendance, and so was someone else who was part of the January 1945 odyssey, a man whose name Sproesser never knew.

"After notices went out about the event, I received a telephone call from a Bucky Morland in South Jersey. After a long conversation he said he had been hit on January 20, 1945 while carrying a stretcher containing a lieutenant. I asked him if he knew who was on the stretcher. He said no, and I said, 'Me.'"

LUKE - THIS WAS PUBLISHED AT THE REUNION LAST YEAR -  
THE HOCKESSIN NEWS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED BEFORE  
EUP BARISH &  
BOB CROUCH  
WERE WEDDED

The Columbus Dispatch

# War veteran finds his rescuer after 51 years

By Felix Hoover  
Dispatch Staff Reporter

It probably wouldn't have taken so long for a California man to thank his rescuer in World War II if he had the fellow's name right.

But after more than a half-century, Howard Barish of Beverly Hills finally met Jack Scannell, the sergeant who helped Barish and others during the Battle of the Bulge.

They met this week at the Holiday Inn-Worthington for a four-day reunion of the Army's 103rd Infantry Division. The reunion ends today.

For 51 years, Barish thought he was looking for someone named Scannell. After years of searching in old rosters of the 103rd Division, Barish decided to check out a man named Scannell, whose name appeared on the reunion list.

When Barish, 73, called Scannell in April and told him he was seeking a sergeant who pulled him from a basement during the Battle of the Bulge, there was a long pause.

"It was me," Scannell said. That sparked a long, teary phone conversation.

Yesterday, Barish and others affected by that rescue told of how attacks on Sessenheim, France, blocked them in on Jan. 19, 1945.

"Intelligence said it wasn't fortified with the enemy," Barish said. "Much to our surprise, it was."

When eight U.S. tanks were wiped out in about 10 minutes, the infantry retreated.

Most of the soldiers were killed or captured, said Barish, who holed up in a farmhouse.

Scannell also wound up in the house, but not before pulling bullet-riddled Lt. Bill Sproesser inside.

Sproesser turned to Scannell and promised, "you're going to be the best man in my wedding." That became reality in 1946.

Scannell found a walkie-talkie and tried to call for help from U.S. troops, who were in a forest about a mile away. When that drew fire from the Germans, he stopped.

The best plan seemed to be for Scannell, the healthiest man, to wait until dark and go to the forest.

As soon as he left the house, Germans fired a submachine gun burst that disheartened the Americans, who thought Scannell was



Tim Revolt/Dispatch

Howard Barish, Jack Scannell and Bill Sproesser, from left, met for the first time in 51 years at a reunion of the 103rd Infantry Division.

killed.

But Scannell made it to the forest, where he asked a lieutenant to send help to the men. The lieutenant, who thought the mission too dangerous, denied the request.

Scannell sent a plea up the chain of command to then-Maj. Bob Crouch. With a combat patrol and men supplied by Crouch, they got all troops to safety.

Along with Barish and Scannell, Sproesser and Crouch also attended this week's reunion. Each said that

Scannell is the reason he is alive today.

"It was nothing," a modest Scannell replied. "Anybody would have done the same thing."

Sproesser, 73, now lives in Hockessin, Del. Crouch, who retired from the Army as a colonel, lives in St. Simon, Ga.

Scannell, 76, a retired milkman and credit union manager, lives in Allen Park, Mich.

His heroism earned him the Silver Star.

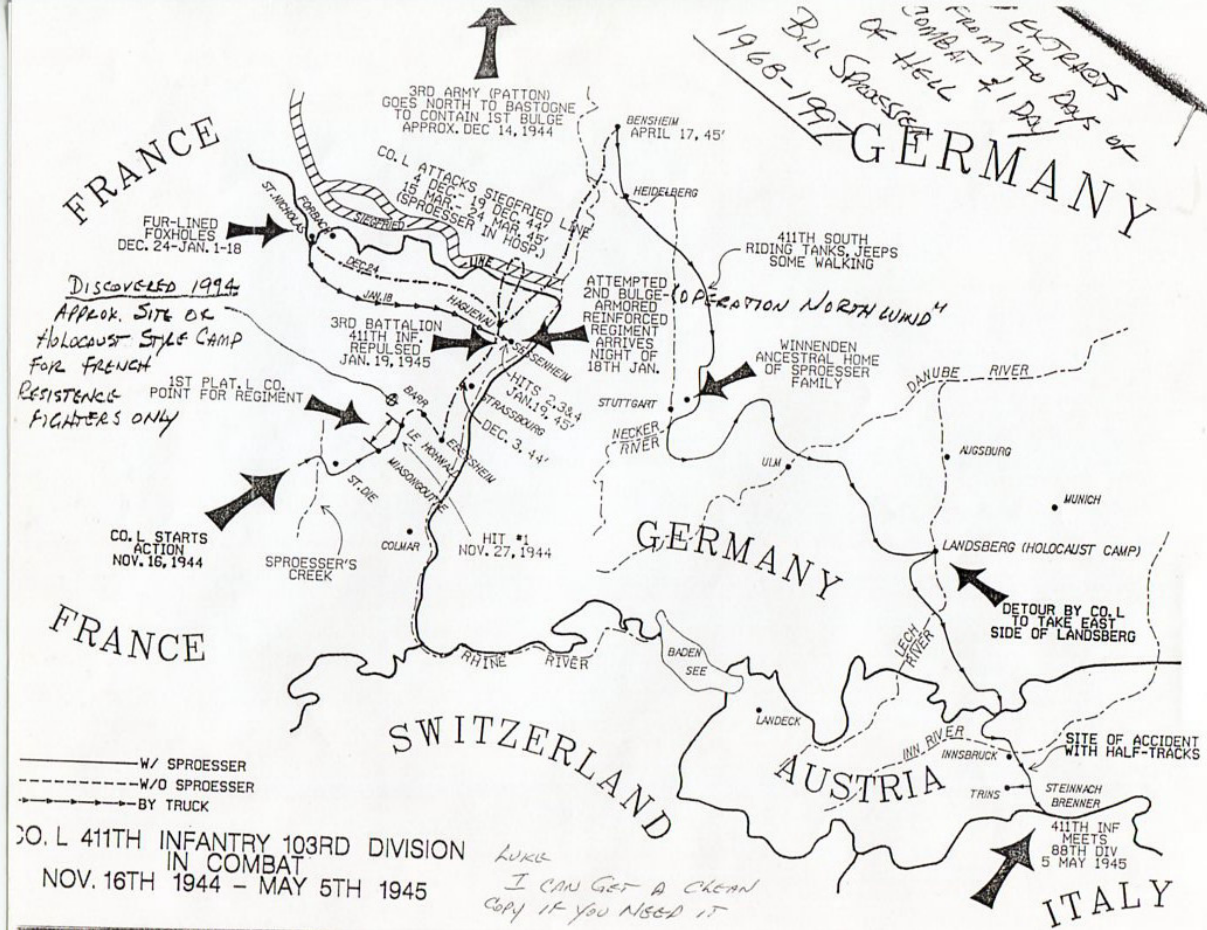
EXHIBIT 6

**Northern Lighting**  
A Division of Northern Electric Co. Inc.

**THE ORIGINAL MATT FACT**



*EXTRACTS  
From 170 Days of  
COMBAT + 1 DAY  
Bill Sproesser  
1968-1997*



FRANCE

GERMANY

GERMANY

FRANCE

SWITZERLAND

AUSTRIA

ITALY

CO. L 411TH INFANTRY 103RD DIVISION  
IN COMBAT  
NOV. 16TH 1944 - MAY 5TH 1945

*Lukas  
I CAN GET A CLEAN  
COPY IF YOU NEED IT*

- w/ SPROESSER
- - - w/o SPROESSER
- BY TRUCK

3RD ARMY (PATTON) GOES NORTH TO BASTOGNE TO CONTAIN 1ST BULGE APPROX. DEC 14, 1944

CO. L ATTACKS SIEGERIED LINE  
4 DEC - 19 DEC 44  
15 MAR - 24 MAR 45  
(SPROESSER IN HOSP.)

HEIDELBERG

BENSHEIM APRIL 17, 45'

411TH SOUTH RIDING TANKS, JEEPS SOME WALKING

OPERATION NORTH WIND

ATTEMPTED 2ND BULGE ARMORED REINFORCED REGIMENT ARRIVES NIGHT OF 18TH JAN.

WINNENDEN ANCESTRAL HOME OF SPROESSER FAMILY

STUTTGART

NECKER RIVER

ULM

DANUBE RIVER

AUGSBURG

MUNICH

LANDSBERG (HOLOCAUST CAMP)

DETOUR BY CO. L TO TAKE EAST SIDE OF LANDSBERG

SITE OF ACCIDENT WITH HALF-TRACKS

INNSBRUCK

TRINS

STEINACH BRENNER

411TH INF MEETS 88TH DIV 5 MAY 1945

HITS 2, 3, 4 JAN. 19, 45'

TRASSACKING DEC. 3, 44'

WIESBADEN

COBLENZ

ST. DIE

WASSERKOPFE

LE HONVAL

SPROESSER'S CREEK

COLMAR

HIT #1 NOV. 27, 1944

3RD BATTALION 411TH INF. REPULSED JAN. 19, 1945

1ST PLAT. L CO. POINT FOR REGIMENT

DISCOVERED 1994 APPROX. SITE OF HOLOCAUST STYLE CAMP FOR FRENCH RESISTANCE FIGHTERS ONLY

FUR-LINED FOXHOLES DEC. 24 - JAN. 1-18



William Sproesser tips his cap during reunion with fellow soldiers in Sessenheim France where he was wounded in combat. At his left is Jack Scannell who saved Sproesser's life. Scannell's tribute to Sproesser is on page 15.

### WILLIAM SPROESSER

## War veteran, activist in local affairs, dies

*By Community Publications Staff*

William D. Sproesser Sr. a Hockessin resident who served with distinction in World War II and was a member of many local organizations, died April 3. He was 76.

Sproesser served as a captain in the infantry in World War II and won a Silver Star and a Purple Heart with three oak leaf clusters. (An account of Sproesser's courage under enemy fire and his dramatic rescue is on page 14.)

After the war, Sproesser graduated from Georgia Technical University and worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority before starting a 30-year career with DuPont in the Engineering Department. Six of those

years were spent in Tampico, Mexico.

He retired from DuPont in 1982 and then founded and became president of First Contact Design of Hockessin.

Sproesser served on the board of directors for Wachovia Bank, the Greenbank Mill and the Lamborn Library in Hockessin. He was a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, Disabled American Veterans and the Rotary Club and was named Corporate Contributor of the Year by the Delaware Historical Society in 1988.

One of Sproesser's passions was the Military Order of the Purple Heart organization in Delaware, where he was a

— See Sproesser Page 14

charter member and filled dual roles as finance officer and Americanism officer.

He was also an avid guitar player and singer and was active with the Brandywine Dulcimer Fellowship.

Sproesser is survived by his wife, Betty, his sons, William and David, his grandson Wills, a granddaughter Elizabeth, all of Delaware, and sister Ann Sproesser of Pumarejo of Tampico, Mexico.

Burial was in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va. In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions be made to a charity of the donor's choice.



# A grieving friend pays tribute

When John Scannell learned that his friend William Sproesser had died, he wrote the following tribute:

When Dave called to tell me you had left us, I had a real problem with it because I had long ago concluded that you were indestructible.

My thoughts quickly turned to that long ago early spring of 1944 at Camp Howze, Texas. Our troops were in the field. I had been assigned "Charge of Quarters" and you were "Officer of the Day." It was our first association that differed from the usual officer-enlisted man relationship. We had the company street to ourselves and you came up with a football. I think you saw the company street as the practice field at Georgia Tech. We ran out for passes from each other until I was exhausted. While you were game for more, I knew then that you were the better man.

Many months later, under different circumstances, we had another meeting. You were on a medic's stretcher on the ground in miserably cold weather waiting to be taken to a field hospital. It was about four in the morning of January 20, 1945.

Twenty four hours earlier, you led the "L" Company attack on the heavily fortified Alsatian town of Sessenheim. You had the dubious honor of leading more attacks than any other "L" Company officer.

But now, you're laying on cold ground still in "No Man's Land" and thanks to enemy fire, you're full of holes! This was the setting in which you said, "Sergeant, I want you to serve as best man at my wedding."

Not sure if you whether you were lucid or hallucinating - making a request or giving a command - with no end of the war fin sight - wondering if you were going to last long enough to get proper medical attention it occurred to me that this idea was a bit

premature. Your optimism defied reality. You were so damned casual - you were making a mockery of your misfortune!

My response was something like, "Sure, I'll be there." Never expecting to see you again, we shook hands and wished each other luck.

Several months later you went "over the hill" from the hospital, returning to "L" Company in time for the assault on Landsberg. You could have remained in the comfort and safety of an area away from the war zone but you didn't and the rest is history.

In the early months of 1946, you wrote several times giving me your wedding plans and asking me for my suit size. All of which I shamefully ignored. You surprised me when you appeared at my home in Detroit, telling me we were leaving together for Atlanta and your home at Fort Benning, Georgia where your dad, the old Colonel, was Post Inspector General. We decided to visit several old army buddies in Chicago before heading south. None of us had married yet - so with the Chicago folks we went to the then very popular Aragon Ballroom. And, Bill, here's where because of you I suffered humiliation. My ego was shattered. I was utterly devastated.

While I was dancing with a lovely young lady, I thought I almost heard her say that was dancing with a young Fred Astaire - when she abruptly said - "I'd like to meet your handsome, curly-haired captain - who was standing, bored to death, on the sidelines, Bill, I was crushed. I told her I didn't know you - never saw you in my life. She said she saw us together earlier in the evening and she was determined to meet you. I tried to tell her that you were already "spoken for" by an Atlanta beauty and that you hadn't danced with anyone all night. It

made no difference. She insisted on an introduction. After 54 years - even though the memory still embarrasses me and the pain lingers - I forgive you Bill.

And now I look back on so many fond memories - your wedding - our vacation - our "L" Company and Division reunions - our 1944 return to Sessenheim - and the hundreds of phone conversations which I'll miss so much. I look back on your success on getting the much deserved Bronze Star awarded to Santos Garcia some forty years after the war. Not many of us would have been so persistent.

You were always a good listener - making friends easily - an ego builder in most people you met. Every man in "L" Company admired and respected you for the courage you displayed on the field of battle and the genuine respect you've always shown freely for others. I know these words embarrass you Bill - but they're all true and you've earned the right to be proud of yourself.

You're a most decent man, Bill Sproesser. You're a soldier's soldier.

Goodbye Bill - for awhile.

Jack Scannell



Sgt. John Scannell who rescued William Sproesser under enemy fire

## Bill Connell Just Listed. Just Sold.



Chestnut Valley

3 bedrooms 4 Bedrooms 2 1/2 Bathrooms

# 40 Days of Combat

And

**1 DOWN  
10 UP**

# HELL

By Lieutenant William D. (Bill) Sproesser

L Company, 411th Infantry Regiment, 103d Division

(Written around 1995)

## FORWARD

The day of Hell was an unsuccessful attack on the town of Sessenheim in Alsace, France, on January 19, 1945. This prose is dedicated to all the men of Company L, 411th Infantry, 103d Division who participated in this action, with special recognition to the members of the First Rifle Platoon and Weapons Platoon who were isolated in Sessenheim and spent six months of hardship in German prisoner of war camps; to Sergeant Joe Bowden, who was killed in this action; to Santos Garcia, who lost a leg carrying my message back to the company commander; and especially to my lifelong friend Jack Scannell, who gave me 50 additional years of life.

I doubt if these words have any historical value. As they used to say, we were out of touch with the "big picture."

What follows is mostly a series of vignettes attempting to show the humor, the filth, the physical problems and in some cases, the emotional problems we encountered.

Much as I hate to burst any patriotic bubbles, few of us fought for God, mother and country. After the first few days, we fought to stay alive, to protect the men on either side of us and—yes—for pride.



## World War II – Order of Battle

By Shelby L. Stanton

The following is an official description of the 103d Division combat history “World War II – Order of Battle” by Shelby L. Stanton:

Arrived at Marseilles 20 October 1944, relieved 3d Infantry Division at Chevry, France, 8-9 November 1944. Attacked toward St. Dié in Vosges Mountains 16 November 1944 and fought through strong opposition to clear the hill mass below the town. Crossed the Meurthe River 20-24 November 1944 and took the evacuated objective of St. Dié the next day with the 409th. The division then outflanked Steige Pass 22-23 November and followed in the wake of the 14th Armored Division toward Sélestat, which it helped clear in house-to-house fighting 2-4 December. The division crossed the Zintzel River at Griesbach 10 December 1944 as it fought the Battle of Mertzwiller, overcame rearguard resistance at Climbach, and crossed the Lauter River into Germany on 15 December 1944.

The division then relocated to the Sarreguemines area to defend against the Germans' Ardennes counteroffensive, which never reached its sector. On 14 January 1945, the division moved to Reichshofen to take over the zone of Task Force Herren (70th Infantry Division) along the Saar River, which was accomplished by 17 January 1945. A limited attack at Sessenheim was repulsed on 19 January 1945, and in view of the German force concentration, withdrawn to the Moder River. A German attack on 22 January 1945 forced the division from Offwiller and the next day the Division was pushed back past Rothbach. Further German attacks on Bischoltz and Mulhausen were defeated 24-25 January 1945, and by 26 January 1945 the division had cleared Schillersdorf and restored its lines. The division then took over the zone of the 101st Airborne Division on 5 February 1945.

The division went on the offensive 15 March 1945 and the next day took Zinswiller and Oberbronn and reached the outskirts of Reichshoffen, which fell on 17 March 1945. The division fought the Battle for Reisdorf 19-21 March 1945. The division reached Klingenuemster and mopped up west of the Rhine from 22 March 1945 until relieved by the 71st Division along the Rhine from Oppau south to Speyer 28-29 March 1945. It then engaged in occupational duty until it returned to the front. The division started its offensive from Kirchheim on 21 April 1945 as it followed the advance of the 10th Armored Division and cleared bypassed resistance. By 23 April 1945, it had closed German escape routes southeast from Stuttgart and reached the Danube northeast of Ulm on 25 April, which it crossed the next day. Continuing to follow the 10th Armored, the 411th took Landsberg, the 410th reached the Lech River at Lechburg, and the 409th cleared Schongau on 28 April 1945. The division began negotiations for the surrender of Innsbruck as the 411th moved to Brenner Pass and effected the junction with Fifth Army forces from Italy. All hostilities ceased in the division's sector on 5 May 1945 with the surrender of German forces in southern Germany.

**THE FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF SEVERAL OF THE CAMPAIGNS.**

**AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A YOUNG, GREEN LIEUTENANT.**

## TRAINING

After my graduation from high school, my parents decided I should attend the best R.O.T.C. college that they could afford. This proved to be Ripon College, Wisconsin. During my first year at Ripon, my father, an activated National Guard officer, was transferred to Atlanta. He decided I should become an engineer and continue R.O.T.C. Georgia Tech seemed to be the logical combination.

I entered Georgia Tech as a sophomore in R.O.T.C. and a freshman in everything else. Fortunately, I held up my end with R.O.T.C., because everything else was less than mediocre.

I was rushed by a fraternity whose name I can't remember, but it was at one of their functions that I met Betty Jane Williams. I realized instantly that she was the fulfillment of all my dream fantasies. I was absolutely smitten by her 50 years ago and still feel the same way today.

For a short time, I also went with a nice lady named Marion. However, I shot myself in the foot one day when I called Marion's number and asked for Betty. Smooth!

About this time it was announced that my Georgia Tech class could enlist in the Enlisted Reserve Corps or be drafted. I was sick of school, but my dad said, "Go to the Enlisted Reserve Corps and stay in school." He must have seen a lot more promise in me that I saw in myself. However, everything turned out all right because the Enlisted Reserve Corps was the first to be called up.

Our class headed to basic training at Fort McClelland, Alabama. This, to me, was heaven! No school, and I could play all those cowboy and Indian games I'd always liked. It was here I picked up the nickname "Nice." I asked them why they had given me this name. They said, "Whenever you're asked how it's going, you say, 'Nice.'"

There was only one guy more gung-ho than I was. This was my good buddy George Sheppard. We were so nutty that Shep carried a football in his pack. On 20-mile marches, we'd get a 10-minute break every hour. Shep would dig out the football and we'd have a 10-minute throw-around. Then back to marching.

It was at Fort McClelland that I first learned one of the methods the soldiers can voice their displeasure without the officers being able to pinpoint the offender. The scene is a long march—middle of the night—climbing a long hill under so-called "combat silence." One man would yell out "48!" Another would yell "49," a third would yell "50!" Then we'd all yell out in unison, "Some shit!" It was humorous watching officers running up and down the line trying (in vain) to spot the culprit.

Since our class was all college boys, the instructors didn't know what to think of us. There were a lot of 3:00 a.m. inspections to try to keep us in our place. During the last week of class, we were finally told that when we were "right"—we were the best company to go through the training session. But when our hearts weren't in it, we screwed up worse than any preceding class.

I was 19 years old in basic training. On a leave home, my father asked me how things were going. I said, "No problem, but some of the older fellows did have problems." He said, "How old do you mean?" I replied that we had people as old as 24. He never let me forget it.



I probably received my greatest compliment ever shortly after the training session ended. I was the only man in my class offered a job on the training cadre as an enlisted man. However, I decided to go back to Tech with my friends.

After our 17-week basic training, the Georgia Tech boys were returned to Tech. We didn't know what they intended doing with us. I was flunking most of my subjects. My friend George Sheppard decided he was going to volunteer for the paratroopers. I thought this was a great idea, but my dad said, "Wait a little bit. They have something in mind for you."

To break up the monotony, two of us R.O.T.C. boys were selected as first sergeants to "control" the new A.S.T.P. imports to Georgia Tech. These A.S.T.P. men were Army veterans of two to three years who had been selected to continue their schooling. I instantly acknowledged they knew a hell of a lot more than I did. I never was much of a parade ground soldier, but they protected me, as all my friends have done.

A disaster was averted when I took over for the cadet company commander at an annual review. I was marching in front of the company, with a 16-man front. My first recognition that there was a problem was a yell from the front rank, "For God's sake, Bill, right turn! Right turn!" They finally made the right turn without an order. Left to my own resources, I would have marched the company up into the bleachers. People always seem to come to the aid of a clown.

As it happened, Shep shipped out for the "jump" school at Fort Benning. The rest of us left a week later for Officer's Candidate School (OCS), also at Fort Benning.

OCS was a grind. You were under observation constantly. Our "bird dog" was called a TAC (Training, Advising, and Counseling) officer. They were totally fair and impartial, with absolutely no sense of humor. They actually lived in our barracks and would give fatherly counseling at any time, night or day.

I continued my gung-ho attitude and got along well for about five weeks. Then my Achilles' heel became exposed. While I talked constantly, I had never spoken to a group before. I got up before a class and butchered a lecture. The TAC officer called me in that night and told me bluntly that I had been doing well, but one more episode like that and I was history.

When we got to the sixteenth week, I thought I was going to make it. I found this was a false assumption when I was "selected" to be the company commander in a live ammunition problem. I was turned over to a major who said he would double-check my orders so we didn't kill anybody. I knew they had me.

The major described the situation: Live artillery on the hill, live mortar fire and machine guns. All I had to do is tell him when to stop the firing and send in the men. I had no idea what he was talking about. He suddenly told me to return to my unit.

I was thankful, but confused. I asked my classmates what happened. They said, "The artillery shot down the liaison (artillery spotting) air plane." It seemed the airplane (Piper Cub) had flown directly into the trajectory of a high-explosive 105mm shell. Obviously, both pilots were killed.

Six months later I was in Texas as a second lieutenant. I went to the Officers Club, had a couple of drinks, and, to my great regret, started telling the story of how I got through OCS. When I completed the story, a man I had only known for a month stated that he knew all about it. I was horrified when he said his brother had been one of the pilots. He made it easy on me, but the damage had been done.

After receiving my commission, I was assigned to the 103d Division at Camp Howze, Texas. It was amazing to me that the lieutenant bars could change people. Two of my classmates turned into the biggest horses' behinds in the world. The rest of us knew we were just starting our education.

The sergeants now took over our education. My first lesson occurred about two weeks after I arrived at Camp Howze. We were out in the woods in a mock-up of combat. Always the eager beaver, I ran around from foxhole to foxhole checking on the men. When I returned to my foxhole, I noticed the platoon sergeant lounging nearby. Although I was reluctant to comment, I said, "Sergeant, shouldn't you be checking on the men?" He replied, "I thought so, Lieutenant, but you seem to be doing everything. So I thought I'd rest until I'm needed." Touché!

My Achilles' heel of poor lecturing, first exposed in OCS, followed me to Texas. About a month after I joined Company L, 411th, I was told to give a one-hour lecture on "The Handling of Prisoners of War." I had a one-hour notice and was given one page from the field manual as reference. I had no idea what to say! I ran out of words in 10 minutes. I was told that this was the first time the company had a 10-minute lecture and a 50-minute break to fill in the hour.

Among my personal favorites—as a number one character—was a fellow "shavetail" (second lieutenant) by the name of Bob. Bob came from Hawaii and much to every GI company commander's consternation, he could be found in the enlisted men's barracks serenading them with a ukulele. It seems that he had been transferred from the Air Force to the infantry when he landed his airplane behind his instructor, in a separate airplane, and chewed up the instructor's tail assembly with his propeller. We got along famously. He was a good officer, but couldn't stand the typical army crap.

One of my favorite recollections concerning my six months of training as an officer concerned a particular night field exercise. Three of us were selected to infiltrate a perimeter defense and just raise hell in general. I loved this type of assignment as long as nobody was shooting at me.

With my tremendous acumen for scouting, I was captured shortly after we started the exercise. Two young soldiers escorted me to the "black-out" tent. It was pitch black and both of the guards were behind me. A portly major came into the tent and said, "Where's the prisoner?" Quick as a wink, I said, "Back there!" When the major passed me, he blocked the path and I took off through the night. I think I was unconsciously following a white tape fastened to trees. I had run about 50 yards when I fell in a six-foot deep hole. I pulled myself out, took three steps and fell in another. It seems I had set some sort of record as the first lieutenant to fall into two latrines in 30 seconds.

I was still free inside the perimeter and did my dastardly deeds. These included taking a sleeping soldier's rifle and sticking it in the ground bayonet first. I now knew the password, so decided to brazen it out and slip back outside the perimeter. Unfortunately, I somehow became disoriented. I was challenged and gave the password. The answer was, "You're right, you S.O.B. We've been looking for you for an hour. This is where you came in."

They forced me to sleep outside under guard. By the next morning, all 15,000 men in the division knew about the shavetail who had fallen into two latrines.

After several months of what seemed to us as foolishness, several of us volunteered for the paratroopers. It was approved through the regiment, but stopped at the division level when it was announced we were going overseas.



About this time—and I can't remember the reason—a prissy master sergeant in battalion headquarters became upset with me. He had the power though and I was selected to originate and run a live ammunition exercise for a 10-man squad.

Although I was angry at first, I suddenly recognized that I was in my element. No rules—just come up with something new. I came up with an exercise with two parts. I also decided to use loaded rifles instead of saying, "You're now under fire."

The first part concerned a hinged dummy in a tree. A rifle, pointed down range, was tied to the base of the tree. I would tell the lead scout privately to drop when the gun went off. We would then check the reaction of the second scout. The hinged dummy would drop and it was up to the second scout to shoot the dummy. We never had a problem in running 40 squads through the first part.

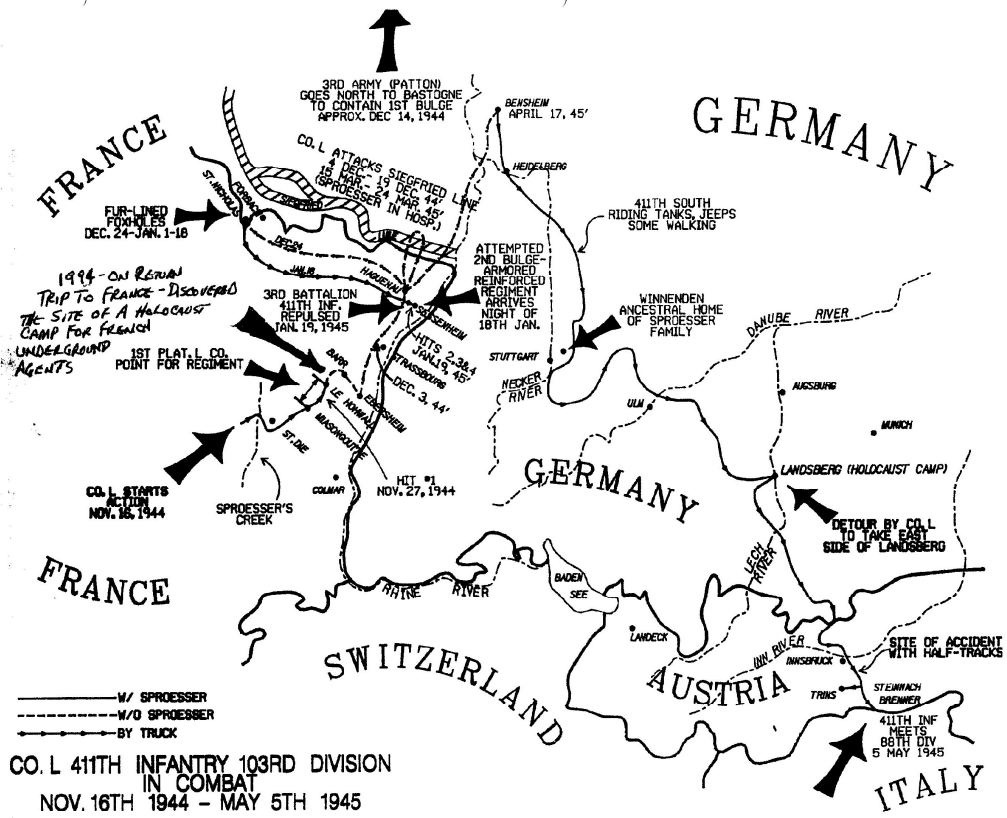
The second part was a little more complicated. A pillbox was built in a hole in the ground surrounded by rocks. There was a 12-inch square window in the rock wall. A loaded rifle was tied inside the pillbox with a long string on the trigger. Fortunately, I had two helpers to keep me out of trouble.

The "school" solution was when the squad would hear the gunfire, they would start firing at the pillbox. The squad leader would send two men with hand grenades around the flank. When they were in position, the firing would stop and the flankers would stick the grenades in the window and release the lever. The grenades would go off and the squad would rush the pillbox. I would jump in the pillbox and put the safety back on the rifle.

I decided, for safety reasons, I would accompany the flankers. Each time I would caution them, "Don't throw the grenades, you can't hit that little hole." We had run 20 squads through the exercise without incident. Unfortunately, I may have become complacent. On our twenty-first run, both flankers threw the grenades. Both grenades hit trees and bounced back. Somehow, nobody was hurt, but I tightened up my lectures.

On the thirtieth run, things were going smoothly. The grenades went off successfully. I jumped in the pillbox, put the safety on the rifle and stood up just in time to hear the squad leader yell, "Assault fire on the pillbox." Fortunately, my man down below jumped in front of the men and stopped the threat of violence. I have never felt so naked.

From here on, things moved fast. A "highly secret" move by train to Brooklyn and a cruise on a former Italian luxury liner to Marseilles. This highly secret move by train became a farce when Jim McCormick stepped off the train at Lima, Ohio and was greeted by his entire family. Call it American ingenuity.





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## COMBAT BEFORE SESSENHEIM

Fifty years ago, I had one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. Had I known that at the time, I would probably have quit. It has taken me 50 years to collect the facts.

I was an infantry rifle platoon leader. The average life of a rifle platoon leader in combat was three days. One reason for this short lifespan among second lieutenants (shavetails) was that their sergeants required at least seven days to educate them. I listened carefully to my sergeants; so I lasted 11 days in my first "tour of combat."

As I recall, I did have plenty of warning about the hazards of my trade, but I thought those warnings were for others. A grizzled combat veteran, 35 years of age, addressed our class at my graduation from the Infantry Officers Candidate School (OCS) at Fort Benning. He opened his talk with the comment, "Six months from now, two out of three of you will be dead." This remark did not sit well with the mothers and fathers who had come to watch their sons become "officers and gentlemen." On our eleventh day of combat, I was shot through the foot. The men who were above me and below me on the OCS roster were both killed. Seventeen members of my graduating class, including myself, attended Georgia Tech. Two were killed on their first day of combat and one was shot through the jaw. Tech football star Jim Luck and I combined for a total of eight Purple Hearts.

So how did I get into this mess? It all started quite innocently when I was assigned to the 103d Infantry Division in the spring of 1944. In the fall of 1944, we were shipped overseas. We were told the war was practically over and that we would be in the Army of Occupation.

The first hint we had that someone was pulling our leg was the radio greeting we received from "Axis Sally" when we got off the ship in Marseille. If you old folks recall, Axis Sally was the Milwaukee-born bimbo who broadcast propaganda messages in English for Adolph Hitler. Sally said, "Welcome, boys of the 103d Division. We will kiss you hello at the Belfort Gap on November 11th." We all laughed. She hit the day right on the head, but missed the location by 50 miles.

When we were about four miles from the front, we were told to load our weapons in case the Germans broke through. As you might imagine, we were all quite nervous and a number of weapons were discharged accidentally. After about 10 hours of this dangerous condition, the order was reversed. It stated simply, "Unload your weapons. We'll gamble that the Germans won't break through." This order arrived early in the morning. In a pup tent near me, two men were sleeping side by side. Upon hearing the order, one of the men sleepily tried to take the cartridge clip out of his rifle. The muzzle was under his arm pit. The rifle discharged and the bullet went through his shoulder. His tent companion jumped up and, draped with the tent, headed for the nearest woods on a dead run. Of course, this was a combat introduction for our medics.

When it was announced that we would see combat the next morning, November 16, 1944, near St. Dié, we were told to dig in for the night. I believe this was the last order I followed without question. Before I started digging, I removed my lined coat and laid it on the snow, lining up. I did not know it at the time, but the snow in the trees was thawing and in a short time my liner was soaked. I finished my foxhole after dark. I did note that there was about two inches of water at the bottom of my hole, but I had my orders; so I put on the coat and got in the hole. The temperature had dropped to below freezing. After an hour of this torture, with my teeth chattering so badly I was afraid I'd chop off my tongue, I decided there was no worse thing than freezing to death. I got out of the hole and started walking in circles to get

warm. I encountered the company commander, who henceforth will be known only as "The Jumper." He suggested I share the hole he shared with the executive officer (second in command).

The mail arrived. In it was a letter from my future wife, the beautiful Betty. In a few words, she described the warmth of the south Georgia beach and how attentive the Navy boys were. My morale hit a new low.

The first thing I remember about our introduction to combat was a stray bullet flying overhead. After two years of training, I remember thinking that someone was actually trying to kill me. Talk about a shock!

Our company was in battalion reserve so the Jumper told me that my platoon would lead off the next day. The lead companies disappeared in the fog after they had gone 50 yards, but we were told to stay in the woods. During this time, we were issued our combat spare clothes, which consisted of an extra pair of socks. We would keep one pair inside our shirt and wear the other pair. The next day we'd switch. Sorry, ladies, ground combat is not for you. It's not the danger; it's the filth.

At dawn the next morning, the Jumper told me to lead off since I had been "watching" things the whole previous day. No compass bearing, no nothing. I didn't even know from which direction the sun would be rising. As I led the 150 men across the valley, we encountered a fast-moving stream about 25 feet wide. The weather was about 15 degrees Fahrenheit and cloudy. I decided to cross first and gauge the depth. The maximum depth I discovered was about five feet. About two-thirds of the way across, it seemed to suddenly get shallow. Apparently I had stepped on an underwater tree limb. One more step and I really found a deep hole. I finally clambered out on the far bank and started searching for a shallower crossing. I searched for about 10 minutes. (I've been told numerous times since then that I stopped looking too soon.)

As I looked back across the stream, all I could see was 150 men strung out in the misty light of dawn and I could only imagine the Germans opening fire from their positions behind me. I told the men to come across. I apologized to each man individually as he came out of the water. There were no complaints, no swearing, just disbelief. Each one of them looked right through me like a zombie. They also walked like zombies when their clothes froze on them. I thought you automatically died when you got that cold. Even the Jumper didn't complain, although he might have walked across on the surface of the water.

We had no fires and walked for 10 hours up a snow-covered mountain and down the other side. No colds or trench foot occurred from this incident, but nobody talked to me for three days. Because my semiautomatic carbine froze up, I discarded it and picked up a discarded sniper's rifle with a broken scope. I wanted something non-automatic that might scare somebody. Per my schooling, lieutenants never fired a shot in combat. I removed the scope and shouldered the weapon. (More later.)

The time between the stream crossing and the Maisongoutte adventure passed quite quickly. The only things noteworthy were little items which are not listed in chronological order. This was, after all, only 11 days:

- The company's first man was killed. He had both legs severed while on patrol. We could not get him out in time; so he bled to death. It hit me pretty hard because I had censored a letter of his applying for a job in the aircraft industry after the war.
- One night the Jumper called me over to lead my platoon to contact Company G. He said with assurance that if I followed a compass reading of 85 degrees, I would surely have success. I



said, "What if I miss them?" He said, "Start talking German!" We fell into a foxhole on top of two sleeping G Company members as we were heading out of their perimeter.

- The longest night walk I ever had lasted 10 hours. It was done 10 steps at a time. Apparently scouts went out to check every five minutes. I had an arrangement with Sergeant Mike Hawkins. He would fall asleep and fall backwards; I would fall asleep and fall forward. We'd meet at about a 30-degree angle with no damage done. The Jumper's orderly hit the ground hard, in a deep sleep, about six times that night. By dawn, we had walked through the German lines without firing a shot.
- The strangest place we defended was a cemetery on a bare, round hill between two high wooded hills. We dug in between the gravestones. The first dumb thing that occurred was the regimental commander being driven in his jeep to the base of the hill. He would then crawl up the hill and shout to the nearest foxhole, "Everybody OK?" As soon as he got an answer, he'd run down the hill, jump into his jeep and speed away. Five minutes later, in would come the German artillery. He may have felt better, but we didn't!
- The order to evacuate the cemetery came about two in the afternoon—broad daylight! I tried to talk the Jumper out of it and wait for dark. No luck! So we had one person run out every 15 seconds and collect their new sleeping bags and K-rations at the bottom of the hill. By this time, I figured we were working for idiots.
- Another incident occurred when a young field artillery forward observer was introduced to me and said that he'd been ordered to level some buildings (hiding places) in front of us. The first shell landed about 100 yards beyond the buildings. He ordered the artillery to come down 300 yards. I asked him if that wasn't a little too much. He informed me that it was none of my business. The shell landed *behind* us! He disappeared to the rear shortly after that.
- I performed one of my "planned" morale-boosting feats about this same time. We were trying to clear some German refugee women and children off the battlefield. Escape lay across a 12-inch plank crossing a narrow ditch. Everyone crossed but a six-year-old girl. Like a big deal, I picked the kid up and fell off the plank halfway across the stream. She never got wet, but here I was holding this kicking, screaming kid at arm's length. The men showed their respect by lining the stream, hooting and hollering and making no move to help.
- Thanksgiving was particularly remembered for the lack of food. They even ran out of our highly concentrated K-rations. The Cracker Jack-sized boxes held items like a chocolate bar, fruit bar, a napkin, and four cigarettes. Under these conditions, we did not feel cigarettes were harmful to our health—unless a sniper saw the glow.

Even in those days, the Army worried about bad press. The day after Thanksgiving we were pulled off the line, trucked to a reserve area and given a meal of creamed turkey, with all the trimmings. Any nutritionist can tell you that concentrated foods and creamy, whole foods do not mix. The GI's ("Aztec quick-steps") developed about four hours after the banquet. With a column of men on either side of the road, every few minutes a man would roll his eyes up and say, "Sorry, I'll catch up when I can," and fall out to the side of the road to answer nature's call.

The eleventh day was one to remember. At dusk we pulled into the little town of Maisongoutte. Since we'd been on the road for almost two weeks, the regimental commander took pity on us and let us sleep in houses. This proved to be a disastrous mistake.

The Jumper called me in and told me I would have the honor of leading the regiment with my "point" platoon. Whenever you're told you have the honor of doing anything in the Army, it's the equivalent of being kissed by the Godfather on both cheeks.

The "point" is probably the most dangerous job in the world. It's also the easiest to understand. One man with a rifle walks right down the white line in the middle of the road until he is shot at. He and the men immediately behind him are meant to draw enemy fire, thus exposing the German positions. The regiment slowly builds up behind him in numbers until there are 5,000 men on the road.

Gus Kyle had come to me first thing in the morning and told me that since everybody else had trench foot, he would take the "point." No volunteering, no by your leave, sir. Just "I'll take the point." I didn't argue.

As soon as we left the houses in the morning, an "88" shell fell just short of my platoon. I chased the men out into the open field and the next shell landed on the near side of our platoon. I think we were the only platoon in the regiment to have no casualties that morning. The shells walked right down the main street of the town causing unbelievable havoc and casualties. We had two platoon sergeants killed that day—Lawson Bynum and Mike Hawkins.

It was obvious that the shelling wasn't going to back up, so I followed the route chasing stretcher-bearers out into the open to help. It was good for my ego because they paid attention to my threats on their lives with an entrenching tool. Jack Scannell and Bill Hughes spotted the German artillery forward observer in a nearby tower. They fired in unison and both received credit for the kill. I was told later that the colonel's orderly dug a foxhole near the 88. He called artillery in, by radio, on his location. The orderly survived, but the artillery wiped out the 88.

After the initial fear of leading the regiment was over, I felt like King Kong—total freedom! Nobody was going to challenge me for this "honor." So, for the first time in my life, I became quite cheeky. The Jumper would send the word up by word of mouth to "push the point faster." I would send the word back, "If you want it pushed faster, come up and push it yourself." No takers!

Our plan was that sergeants Mike Magera and Santos Garcia and myself would roll over with the first shot, strip off our pack and get up running with only a rifle to try to outflank the snipers.

By four in the afternoon, we'd been fired on six times without casualties. The three of us were pretty tired from our sprints up the hill in addition to just walking 16 miles. Also the diarrhea was taking its toll on us. At about 4:10 we were fired on again. After completing our sprint to the left of the road, I told Magera and Garcia to keep going on the left and I would run across the road and try to surprise them from the right side. Apparently the Germans didn't see me cross the road because directly in front of me, about 30 feet away, was a German looking around a tree up the road. I raised my sniper's rifle without the scope and pulled the trigger. The safety was on! I had never fired it before. After what seemed an eternity, I got the safety off and pulled the trigger. It was very disconcerting to see the German still standing and still looking up the road. I fired again and he still didn't move. After the third time, he slowly walked away. Gus Kyle, our lead scout, said he found him later and I had apparently hit him several times.

I ran up to the road and noticed a man in a German fur coat thrashing around on the pavement, obviously wounded. I almost shot him, but at the last minute I noticed the boots—they were American boots and the man thrashing wasn't a German, but was our BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) man. I called back for a jeep to evacuate him and was told only the colonel's jeep was in the vicinity. With my newfound bravado, I yelled that I didn't give a damn whose jeep it was. The jeep arrived shortly, without the colonel, and we evacuated our man on the hood.

We formed up again and five minutes later a German machine gun opened up on us. As I rolled, I noticed the little dust jets kicking up, coming toward me just like in the movies. I suddenly had a feeling of being kicked in the foot. I froze—primarily from fear—and yelled for a medic. There was no pain, so I figured I was mistaken—and embarrassed. I felt much better when I saw two holes, one on the inside of my foot and an exit hole on the top.

There was no more firing since I had noticed, out of the corner of my eye that Magera and Garcia were quickly working up the left side of the road. I crawled a short distance to a trench where our medic, Paul Bealer, was waiting. While he was bandaging my foot, diarrhea hit again. It was now my turn for a jeep ride and I was one happy dogface.

There was some delay getting back to the aid station. When I arrived, I encountered six men from the Second Platoon. They said that the Second Platoon had replaced the First Platoon at point shortly after I was hit. They had gone several hundred yards when they ran into a hornet's nest. Our platoon only had two casualties in eight hours and the Second Platoon had six casualties in 15 minutes.

Back in the hospital, the doctors told me all I had was a good, clean Purple Heart. However, I couldn't walk for about a month because of the severed ligament. So I had a good rest. The important thing I remember about the hospital was finally getting enough to eat.

I returned to Company L and combat in early January 1945. I had been shot with no pain and was an 11-day combat veteran. For the first time in my life, I felt that I was very good at my trade. I was soon to get a lot smarter.

When I returned, the company was in a defensive position in the hills overlooking the little Alsatian town of St. Nicholas. Since we didn't have much to keep us occupied, we started improving our dwellings. Foxholes were joined together and made into dugouts. The dugouts were fitted with stoves and mattresses "liberated" from neighboring houses. Most of us made log roofs for the dugouts and covered them with dirt. Our weapons platoon, innovative people that they were, put in a skylight and a vanity with mirrors. The minute any shelling started, they crammed into the corners or into our much safer dugouts.

One of our pastimes was to watch John Feldman negotiate a tripwire. The tripwires were our crude version of a household electronic alarm. Two steel posts were driven into the ground about 50 feet apart. A hand grenade was wired to one post. A wire was attached to the pin ring and stretched to the other post. If a German patrol would approach at night, they hopefully would trip over the wire, pull the pin and BOOM! Back to John. John must have been the model for Bill Mauldin's cartoons. A heavy black beard, wool knit cap pulled low over his eyes, and his steel helmet tilted back on his head. As we watched from the safety of a tree trunk, John would walk briskly up to the wire and at the very last minute lift his foot just enough to clear the wire.

Things were pretty quiet, but we did send out a couple of patrols. The first patrol was performed in the snow, wearing white parkas. The white parkas reversed all normal patrol tactics. Instead of seeking shadows, you remained in the open, since the white parkas would stand out in the shadows. The biggest problem with the parka was that hearing was diminished when the hood was over your head.



For this patrol, I asked for volunteers. About five hands went up. Among the volunteers was a man named Shapiro. I was very proud of him, but I knew from experience that he couldn't walk 10 feet in the dark without getting lost. I was disappointed that our best man, Gus Kyle, had not volunteered. When we got up to go, Kyle put on his helmet and grabbed his carbine. I said, "Where the hell are you going?" He replied, "I'm going along to take care of you. You're not smart enough to take care of yourself." Again, I never argued with Kyle.

Our objective was to find out where the German positions were. We were walking down the streets of Forbach, behaving like a well-trained unit and arguing about what we were going to do next. This was quickly called off when a German about 20 feet to our left and above us called for us to halt and then commenced firing with a bolt-action rifle. We could hear every click. I fired one burst from my Tommy gun and was fascinated at the amount of flame that came out. I dove over three of the men to get away from the sniper. One at a time, each man got up and tiptoed across the road. Had one man run, it would have been curtains for the rest of us.

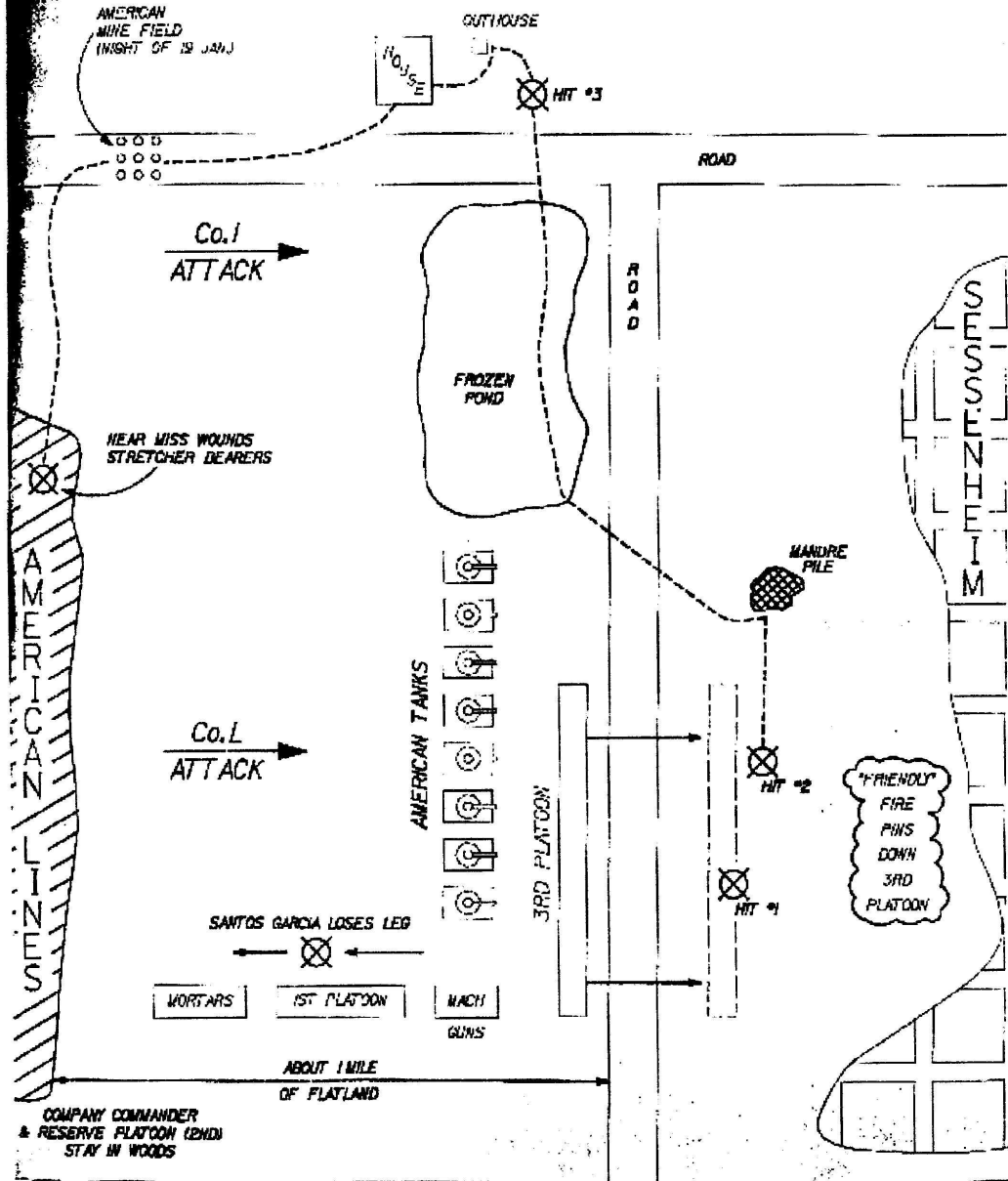
As soon as all of us were across the road, we ran madly for the middle of a field. When we started counting heads, we realized Shapiro was not with us and Shapiro had the radio. I went back looking for him without too much enthusiasm. When I returned to the group, I fell over them since their parkas were perfect camouflage. When we got back to the company command post, we learned that Shapiro had called in asking, "Where am I?" Through the use of landmarks, they talked him back in about 45 minutes.

Sometimes you do things when the results are quite different than you anticipate. As many times as we corrected them, our heavy weapons company would drive their communications jeep between two of their machine gun positions. This, of course, pinpointed their positions to the Germans. I observed this while I was on the radio talking to the Jumper. He said curtly, "Well, stop them!" I was about 100 yards from them so I fired a burst from my Tommy gun over their heads. The driver didn't even hit the brakes. The two men just dove out of the jeep. The jeep continued down the road and eventually hit a tree. They were somewhat upset with me, but we never saw the jeep again.

We got little news except we knew we were spread very thin to allow Patton to move north and help eliminate the "Bulge." On the morning of January 18th, we loaded into trucks for a trip to the little town of Sessenheim.

# ATTACK ON SESSENHEIM JAN. 19, 1945

NOT TO SCALE



## SESSENHEIM

It all started about 5:00 a.m. on January 19, 1945. Patton had recently helped beat back the German offensive at the "Bulge," but in so doing had left his right flank spread very thin. The Germans, aware of this, attempted to make one last breakthrough just north of Strasbourg, France. During the morning of the 18th, we had been pulled out of our defensive positions near Forbach and trucked behind the lines to a woods about two miles west of Sessenheim, France, not far from the Rhine River. We slept in the woods that night.

At the early morning meeting with the Jumper on the 19th, we were told that little resistance was expected since scouts had entered the town of Sessenheim the previous day without incident. The plan for the Company L attack was for the Third Platoon (under Lieutenant Al Eagler) to advance in a line as skirmishers; First Platoon (of which I was the platoon leader) with the machine gun section, with the mortar section and the Second Platoon following on the right flank of the Third Platoon in a column.

We were to advance to a road about 200 yards from the town and await the arrival of our supporting platoon of tanks, at which time the town would be thoroughly shelled for 10 minutes. At 7:00 a.m., just at daybreak, the shelling would be lifted and we could walk into town and round up any prisoners.

We reached the road without incident, having traversed the flattest mile of ground I had ever seen. The town was then given a thorough blasting by our artillery. The first inkling I had that we might be in for a bad day was the sight of many German gunners bellying up to their machine guns and 20-mms, like so many snakes going through a field. What's more, our tanks hadn't arrived and the sun was coming up.

Realizing that we were about to get caught in an exposed position, it was decided to make the advance without the tanks. We had pushed about halfway to town when the tanks came out of the shadows behind us. They were now to my left and providing supporting fire for our attack. Sergeant Chester Czopek, the weapons platoon sergeant, suddenly came running to tell me that the tanks had mistakenly fired through the Third Platoon, killing several men and pinning down all the others.

We decided that the only possible plan was to swing the remainder of the company behind the tanks and continue the attack. The tankers, by this time, had become confused and they stopped in their tracks. We were finally able to get the attention of one of the tank commanders to point out the disadvantage of our position with the sun coming up. He headed for town; but when he found the other tanks weren't following, he beat a hasty retreat. Within 10 minutes, all eight supporting tanks had been destroyed. I was about 20 feet from a tank when it was hit. It had the appearance of being struck by lightning. The crew cleared the hatch in about 10 seconds and ran off through the field.

Because of the increasing daylight and the burning tanks, I was able to see the men of my platoon more clearly and realized that we had no choice but to run for the town. Supposedly to set an example, but actually to build up my own morale, I started firing my Tommy gun and moved toward town. I had gone about three steps when a tremendous force picked me up and slapped me to the ground. I was numb from the waist to knee but felt no pain, only nausea. I was to find out about an hour later that a bullet had entered the front of my left thigh and exited between my legs.

The men around me seemed to stop, so I told them to get into town while there was still time. The last thing I saw of them was their white helmets bobbing as they ran. A blanketing snow had fallen



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several days before, which prompted an order to paint the helmets white. But the snow melted on the 18th, one day prior to this action.

I sensed, rather than saw, somebody at my side. It was my runner, Santos Garcia. Santos pointed out that I Company, on our left, had broken and was running to the rear. So I decided to stop what was left of L Company and sent them back. I told Santos to go find the Jumper and tell him what had happened. (I later learned that Santos lost a leg on the way back.)

Just after Santos left, two mortar shells dropped nearby. Fragments from the first one hit me in both knees and I can recall seeing my feet outlined against the gray sky as I was thrown in a near-vertical position onto my shoulders when a second shell managed to deposit a fragment in the right cheek of my fanny—all this in a matter of seconds.

I was not really calm—probably just in the first stages of shock—but seemed to have a feeling of resignation. I decided to try to take stock of where I had been hit and attempted to remove the canvas pants I was wearing over the wool pants. I got the pants as far as my knees and was unable to go any further. However, I didn't have the strength to raise them again. By inadvertently sticking my finger in it, I discovered a large hole in my inner thigh, caused by the first bullet. Though my knowledge of anatomy was limited, I thought this should be near a main artery. But since there didn't seem to be excessive bleeding, I decided to concentrate on crawling.

By this time, I felt that the only reason the Germans hadn't finished the job was that they were laughing too hard to shoot accurately. It must have been quite a sight to see a shavetail crawling with his back end high in the air and his pants around his knees.

About this time, I heard a voice at my left. It was Sergeant Jack Scannell, checking to see what the situation was. He asked me what my problem was and I said I was hit but that he would just draw fire to me by trying to help. Jack told me to "Go to Hell" and, after sending his men to the rear, slipped off his pack and rifle and crawled over to me.

We decided that going straight back to the woods was out of the question, since there was absolutely no cover. Our burning tanks had created some smoke so we headed toward a small mound to our left. Jack, with his five-foot-six, 135-pound frame, somehow hoisted my 200-plus pounds on his back and ran, bent double, until the whistle and sap of the German machine gun bullets indicated that they were getting close. Then he hit the ground and pulled me along for 10 yards or so until he figured that he had thrown them off target. He repeated that process about five times before we reached our first objective.

We took a breather at what appeared to be a protective mound, which turned out to be a pile of horse manure. Jack pointed out that this pile was not going to help us for long since he could see shells going through a farm house about 500 yards to our left. We continued in this same manner from the manure pile to a frozen pond, a distance of about 100 yards. The weather was about 20 degrees Fahrenheit and cloudy—a typical Alsace winter day.

When we reached the frozen pond, Jack found a piece of telephone wire and wired my hands together. Treating me like a sled, Jack towed me over the ice, running, slipping and sliding in such a manner that he seemed to be dodging the bullets. The pond ended at a gravel road about 200 yards from a house. We crawled across the road where Jack again got me up on his back and ran toward the house.

We'd traveled about 50 yards when I felt that we had been hit by a freight train. Jack flew through the air and landed about 15 feet away. I was sure he was dead. I called and asked him if he was all right. After several seconds, he turned over and said, "Yes, I guess so. But how about you?" He crawled back to

me and was shaken at what he saw. All he could say was, "Damn!" Had I not been in my first stage of shock, the view of my torn bicep sticking through the sleeve of my coat would have been far more frightening to me than it was. Then Jack asked me if I ever prayed. I assured him that I had been working quite hard at this for the past two hours.

Apparently a 20mm antitank shell had exploded in our vicinity. The concussion blew him out from under me before the shrapnel reached me.

Our next objective was the stone outhouse on the German side of the farmhouse. Jack propped me against the seat of a "two-holer" and ran inside the house to see which side was in possession. I'll never forget the few minutes I spent alone, sitting on the floor of the outhouse overlooking the German lines. I remember wondering why anybody would go to all the trouble of building an outhouse out of stone. With time to reflect, however, I was strangely relieved Jack had gotten me this far and now anything seemed possible.

Jack came running back to tell me that a medical aid man and six wounded I Company men were in the basement. He carried me to the top of the stairs and told me that, due to the narrow stairway and our weight differential (60-plus pounds), I would have to help him get me down the stairs. To assist us, he had found a bottle of schnapps.

One good belt of the schnapps enabled us to get down to the basement without too much trouble. It was now 11:00 a.m. We had been through three lifetimes in the past four hours. We were temporarily safe. So with that relief and the schnapps, I promptly went into shock. I slept most of the day. The medic had cut away most of my clothes and, finding no excessive bleeding, applied sulfa powder and bandages.

During the day, a wounded GI kept calling incoherently from outside the house. Jack wanted to go out after him. We asked him if he could see where the man was hit. Jack said he was shot through the head. We told him that seven of us were depending upon him to get us out and that sulfa and bandages could do nothing for the man outside. It was obvious that Jack wasn't convinced, but he finally had to agree to the logic. Throughout the day, Jack kept going up the stairs and crawling to the window to look for him.

Just after dark, Jack prepared to head back for help and the medic announced that he was going along. Jack at first suggested that his place was with the wounded men, but the medic persisted. After further argument, Jack told him that he would be more hindrance than help and that he didn't have time to argue. He then told him that if he didn't stay, he would shoot him. Jack went alone and headed west toward where he assumed the American lines were.

The clouds kept the moon well hidden, which was a help since he knew he was a target for either German or American patrols. Once he was out in the open, he could outline the American lines by the flashes of the German artillery shells. After traveling about a mile, he noticed what appeared to be lumps of mud on the road. A closer check proved these to be a hastily arranged minefield, obviously left to delay attacking German tanks. Knowing that he'd have to bring stretcher-bearers through the area, Jack gingerly moved the mines to the side of the road. He had just reached the fork in the road near our jumping-off point of the previous morning when a sixth sense told him to hit the ditch. Sure enough, a shell fell on the road junction.

He finally arrived at the company CP. Two hours had already passed. The Jumper agreed to a rescue patrol. Just as the patrol was to leave, the battalion commander called to say that the 3d Battalion was withdrawing immediately. The Jumper told Jack that the patrol would be canceled and all the men, including Jack, would withdraw with the company. Jack told the Jumper that he would "catch up" with

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the company when he could, but that he was not leaving without the men who were waiting at the house. A number of things were said in haste, including the word "court-martial," but Jack took off.

The woods were lit up with tree bursts from German shells when Jack started looking for other American troops. He finally ran into the First Battalion and was directed to the battalion commander. A patrol was organized immediately and sent to the house under Jack's leadership.

During the night, it had been fairly quiet at the farmhouse. We were all nervous, expecting a German patrol to pop through the door any minute! The medic, of course, had the most to lose since he was healthy. He kept voicing his doubts as to Jack's ability to return with help. I kept reassuring him that Jack would get us out.

At 5:00 a.m., just before dawn of the 20th, the patrol arrived. I recall passing out several times as they carried me up the stairs. However, within a short time, I had no sense of direction at all, lying on my back, but I felt very secure with the knowledge that we were safe at last.

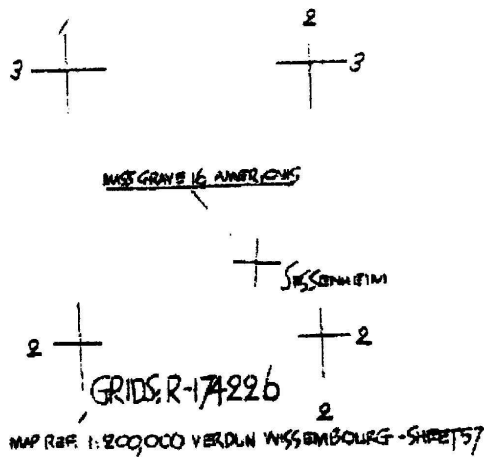
Shells continued to drop some distance from us, but after my previous close associations, these seemed harmless. My attention, however, was directed toward one particular shell that landed about 150 yards from us. I became even more alert when one landed 150 yards on the other side of us. I remember thinking, "Oh hell, here we go again!" The next shell was a direct hit.

Fortunately for me, it exploded upon contact in the branches overhead. When the flash of light went off in my face, the shrapnel mushroomed all around me. The litter bearers dropped me and ran for cover. I discovered later that the man at the head of my stretcher had his leg broken by a shell fragment. I later discovered that I was completely deaf above 250 cycles.

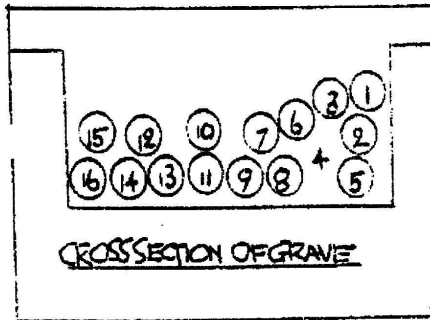
Realizing that I had come through this one without a scratch, I started to call for Jack. In a few minutes, he appeared, running through the woods. After reassuring me, he disappeared to return with help from the nearest foxhole. By 7:00 in the morning, we were in the battalion aid station. Twenty-four hours had passed since our ill-fated attack began.

I had no clothes except a wool knit cap, a pair of boots and the collar and right sleeve of my shirt. All the rest had been cut away by the medic while dressing my wounds. I did have my life, a million memories and the best friend a man could ask for. They kept asking me why I was so happy when I was so full of holes.





ORDER REMAINS REMOVED



1. REX R. WRIGHT - 30290124
2. RAMIRO AGUILAR - 38454580
3. UNKNOWN X - 997 (H4081)
4. GERALD M. KOEBS - 32352082
5. UNKNOWN X - 992 (G7450)
6. WILLIAM B. HUDSON - 30920961
7. UNKNOWN X - 995 (B-1595)
8. JOHN VAN SCHAICK - 31358378
9. UNKNOWN X - 994 (M1496)
10. FLOYD R. SHERRELL - 37510978
11. UNKNOWN X - 993 (SGT. E 1955)
12. JOE B. BOWDEN - 34581954
13. THADDEUS E. STASIAK - 53425592
14. JOHN A. GALBAS JR. - 36716460
15. WENDELL F. LELAND - 36967136
16. UNKNOWN X - 996 (5762)

H 40 21  
24/11/45

OVERLAY BY PFC JACK BUTTILL & TS WILFRED  
 BIOGRAVES REGISTRATION CO.  
 1ST PLATOON 21 SEPTEMBER 1945

- Others -
- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Gerald L. Erb        | (33501955)      |
| Blaine M. Hollopeter | (33574081) - #3 |
| Henry Altergott      | (36715962)      |
| Clarence L. Huston   | (35087910) - #9 |
| Donie Blea           | (17091595)      |
| Ralph W. Hulbert     | (31301435)      |
- \* Ramiro Aguilar (38454580) - #2 - 781st Tank Battalion

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## SESSENHEIM—AFTERMATH

The “empty” town of Sessenheim was truly empty on January 18. However, it had filled with German paratroops, infantry, and artillery that night in preparation for an attack. This I found out from a German while I was stationed at a war criminals internment center in Garmisch after the war. Scholars of World War II state that this was to be the start of the second “Bulge”—Operation Nordwind.

For six months, we did not know the fate of the men who reached Sessenheim, but expected the worst. One day just prior to the end of the war, we heard that John Feldman, a member of the First Platoon had walked away from a German prisoner work detail and kept walking until he reached American lines. John announced that, to his knowledge, everyone reaching Sessenheim had been captured without loss of life.

The conversations at our Company L, 411th Infantry reunions, held every two years, constantly return to what happened at Sessenheim and why. The “why,” although not obvious at the time, is that our aborted attack bought about three days’ time. This allowed an orderly withdrawal and reorganization of the American defenses.

Gus Kyle, one of the squad leaders in my platoon, was the only man to get in and out of Sessenheim on the 19th. Gus received a Silver Star for knocking out an “88” with a bazooka before he left town. After Gus returned to the American lines, he read the riot act to the entire battalion staff. After receiving his Silver Star, he was transferred to the 45th Division in less than 24 hours. Gus was killed in Korea, as a second lieutenant, and received the Soldier’s Medal and then the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously.

As was true of most of us, Jack Scannell had his problems becoming adjusted to civilian life. After four years of trying to settle down, he finally married a wonderful girl named Norma in 1950. Jack and Norma are now the parents of 12 fine children and are living in Allen Park, Michigan.

Jack and I had not discussed Sessenheim in detail in the intervening years. There seemed so little that I could say, though he has always known how I felt.

About 20 years ago, I called Jack in Detroit. We finally got around to discussing “that day.” In the course of the conversation, he asked me how many men had been removed from the house. I said, “Seven, including the man who was shot through the head. He died on the stretcher next to me on the hospital floor.” He said, “My God! That’s been bothering me for 26 years! I thought I’d left that man out there.”

In 1988, I “volunteered” to host the L Company reunion in Wilmington, Delaware. The reunion was advertised in most of the “service” magazines. I received a call from a Bucky Moreland from New Jersey. After a long discussion about the L Company reunion, he mentioned that he was from C Company of the First Battalion. After further discussion, he mentioned that he had been wounded on January 20, 1945 while carrying a stretcher containing a wounded lieutenant. I said, “Do you know who was on that stretcher?” He said, “No.” I said, “Me.”

## AFTER SESSENHEIM

My three months spent in the hospital after Sessenheim offered me a time for reflection. I marveled at what Jack had done for me and the others. I felt it was a true Congressional Medal of Honor performance because most truly heroic feats in combat are results of spur-of-the-moment decisions—possibly moments of temporary insanity. An entire incident may be terminated in a matter of minutes. The rarity is the man, who through some great inner strength, is able to force himself to return again and again to fight against incredible odds. Our particular ordeal lasted almost 24 hours. This Congressional Medal of Honor performance was turned into a Silver Star through the incompetence of the person who wrote up the citation.

As far as I was personally concerned, it was obvious to me that I'd had enough of gunfire. I had pointed for a career as a rifle platoon leader for several years. I entered combat with fear, particularly since I was adverse to physical-contact sports as a teenager. My confidence built up through my first four weeks, and I was convinced I was at the top of my game as a rifle platoon leader. But with the physical and mental anguish associated with Sessenheim, I was back to ground zero. I was a has-been at 21 after a four-week career.

Shortly after I reached the hospital, I received a letter (attached), which has been my most important keepsake. It certainly helped heal the emotional problems I encountered after Sessenheim.

I did keep one secret though—I didn't play eager beaver going out with the patrol. I was requested by the patrol leader to accompany him in an advisory capacity. I never volunteered for anything. I must confess as a 21-year-old rifle platoon leader that I had many fears, but the overriding fear was that I might be responsible for the death of someone under my command.

I have never discovered who authored this letter. My best guess would be that it was someone not associated with our first day of combat and the river crossing experience. If I live to 110, no one will ever allow me to forget that fiasco.

It took about three weeks to get to the point where I could wear pajamas and hobble around. My first surprise was that Santos Garcia was in the same hospital. Santos, of course, was going through the painful rehabilitation of recovering from his amputated leg. I only heard him complain once and that was because the nurses babied him. Santos was 18 at the time, but looked no older than 14.

I finally got the story from others on Santos' survival. Because of the panic that existed at Sessenheim, Santos was forced to save himself. After his leg was blown off, he applied his own tourniquet and crawled about 500 yards. When he was carried to the aid station, he had apparently turned black from loss of blood. His performance made my survival look very secondary. The lack of a medal for Santos' bravery was another example of incompetence.

After three months in the hospital, it was decided that I would be placed on limited service—no combat. I was sent to a replacement depot to await assignment. It was then that I made one of those insightful decisions that I've become famous for. I decided I could outsmart the Army.

I received word that the 103d Division was in reserve—never to fight again. We knew the war was almost over. I decided the combat troops would go home first. So I went AWOL (Absent Without Leave). Back to the 103d I went. As I checked into the division, they said, "Good to see you back, but you screwed up the paperwork again."



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I was welcomed back by the cleanest GIs I'd ever seen. No more fighting! They even smelled good. Three days later, we were back in action. I spent the majority of my remaining combat time kicking my own butt. I was essentially useless. Every time I'd hear gunfire, I'd hit the ground and, in one case, one of my fellow officers had to kick me in the foot to get me up.

One day the Jumper came down with combat fatigue—or something. Since I was now the executive officer, I inherited the company. Typical action: a column of men on each side of the road. I was walking back and forth cheering on the troops. As we approached the top of a long hill, one of the scouts suggested we take a break. Checking my watch, I turned around and made the "break" sign. We dropped to the ground and the Germans opened up. I couldn't even move a finger. Finally, our tank destroyer people came up with their armored cars and 50-caliber machine guns and got us out. The black troops had gained fame and a unit citation for their actions at Climbach, France in support of the 411th Infantry, while I was back in the hospital.

Returning to the rear of the column, I walked into the worst and most deserved tail-chewing I have ever received. That battalion commander called me everything under the sun because I had gotten myself out of position to command the company. It was another day of learning.

One reason I had no resentment for the tail-chewing is that I had great respect for the man. This respect was further justified when he pulled one of the smartest moves I've ever witnessed. The regimental commander was trying to outdo George Patton. We were worn out, but the colonel said, "Keep moving." The battalion commander decided to quickly "take" six towns. In the sixth town, he told us to get some sleep. Each hour he would call in our arrival at one of the preceding towns, thus buying us six hours of sleep. As I look back, I feel that our battalion commanders were our strongest leaders.

Approaching the city of Landsberg, site of one of the infamous Holocaust camps, we were told that 700 Hungarian troops in the east side of the city—Landsberg is divided by a river—wanted to surrender. One hundred German soldiers on the south side of the city didn't want the Hungarians to give up. While the rest of the regiment was liberating the concentration camp, Company L was assigned the job of mopping up the Germans.

The plan was to be trucked upriver, go through a tunnel inside the dam, and walk downriver toward Landsberg to get the Hungarians. As we started walking north in a single column, we received some harassing fire from the Germans in the hills. The company became split up into five parts, with no one part knowing where the other four were. Obviously, we had radio silence; so all communication was by word of mouth. Jack Scannell spotted a jeep-like vehicle filled with Germans. He initiated the message, "Stop that jeep—pass the word." The message kept moving up the line—as the jeep disappeared in the distance.

We finally became consolidated behind a dike on the bank of the river near Landsberg. We couldn't get over the dike because the Germans were shooting at us from the wooded hills. Jack Scannell went through another tunnel under a dam and brought the cannon company to the west bank of the river. As soon as the cannons started firing over our heads, we assumed it was safe enough to climb the dike. I looked back to see a large explosion at the location of one of the cannons. I first assumed it was counter-battery fire. I found out later that this particular cannon had been set up behind a tree in their haste to help us. The explosion occurred when the cannon fired a shell and hit the tree in front of them. Casualties, but no deaths.

When things calmed down, we did see some of the concentration camp survivors—gaunt people in striped prison clothes celebrating their release. Company L did not enter the camp, but we later saw photos of the stacked bodies.

As we headed south to the Austrian-German border, we knew the war was just about over. We did feel, however, that the taking of the Brenner Pass would be bloody. It was difficult to find volunteers in the last two weeks of the war. “What, *me* become the last person killed? No way!”

We were in the town of Mittenwald, staying in houses. As I went back in to turn off the radio—don’t ask me why—a BBC newscast said the war was over in the south. Our big problem was to convince a gung-ho barracks of German officer candidates that this was true. Their radios were dead. After a day of negotiating and with discussions with their commanders on our radios, they finally gave up. To say we were happy would be putting it mildly. Unfortunately, we couldn’t find anything to drink, but even that seemed to be secondary.

When we got to Innsbruck, Austria, it was decided to send two jeeploads of GIs south to the Italian border to link up with the 88th Division traveling north through Italy. A major task force, including Company L and the 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion would follow at a leisurely pace as backup.

In those days, before the superhighways, the road south from Innsbruck was very dangerous. About 30 miles south of Innsbruck, two of the tank destroyer half-tracks towing 3-inch guns lost their brakes. Both drivers decided to drive into the hill instead of going over the edge. The 3-inch guns caught up with the half-tracks, throwing the entire assembly high in the air. The half-tracks were both filled to overflowing with black and white soldiers. This was the single biggest incident of carnage I ever witnessed. There were broken backs, fractured skulls—one driver had his arm amputated, but no one was killed. All we had was an aid man with bandages. The road was so narrow we had to bounce a jeep around to send it back to Innsbruck for help. **AND THE WAR WAS OVER!**



Sessenheim, France