ONE MAN'S WAR

By

Major Alvin W. Morland

308th Field Artillery
78th Infantry Division
World War II

January, 1941 - May, 1946

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Postscript

Alvin W. Morland

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Historical accounts of wars are usually confined largely to a condensed version of the more important battles and the effect they had on history. A combat soldier knows little of the overall importance of a battle - he is concerned with the next hill, bridge, town or the next bend in the road for that is where he may die.

This account contains little of historical significance in itself; it is simply a chronicle of one man's experiences in World War II. It includes participation in three engagements that played an important role in hastening Germany's surrender: The Battle of the Bulge, the battle at the bridge over the Rhine River at Remagen, and the Ruhr Pocket.

After reading some preliminary chapters of my memoirs, one of my nieces said she was surprised to find that much of my time in battle was spent in a house - she said she thought battles were fought out of foxholes. She - and I expect many others - fail to realize that in order for soldiers to work cohesively with their commanders they must have direction or they would be little more than an armed mob.

To be able to plan and direct a battle, the command group must be able to see maps. In the case of field artillery, the branch in which I served, maps are necessary to pinpoint location of guns and target, to calculate the difference in elevation of guns and targets, to measure the angle between them, and to convert this data into numbers that the gun crews can use to direct fire on the targets.

Before going into combat, we were instructed not to keep a diary or take photographs, for if we were captured this could give useful information to the enemy. Fortunately, after the fighting ended and my division was in the province of Hesse waiting to relieve the 101st Airborne Division as the U.S. occupation force in Berlin, I had time to write notes covering the first part of the time we were in combat. I would not have been able to write this account without these notes.

Two things kept me at this task: The thought of how much an account of the experiences of my maternal grandfather, John Newton Cowan, who was a Confederate soldier in the War Between the States, would have meant to me.

I am indebted to several relatives for their assistance. My older son, Douglas Verne, spent countless hours organizing the material and my brother, Richard, provided counseling.

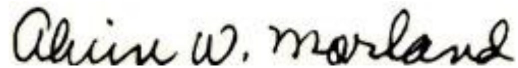
My nieces, Becky Word Hasemeir, Susan Word, Evelyn Word Jones, and Laura Morland Rhodes offered encouragement.

I deeply regret that my maternal grandfather, John Newton Cowan left nothing of his experiences in the War Between the States. He died long before I was born, and his widow, Laura Blanche Kerr Cowan, the grandmother who lived with us, could furnish only a little information. She was his second wife (his first one died), and they were not married until well after the end of the war. I obtained an official record of my grandfather's service from the Department of Archives, Washington, D. C.

A book entitled From Selma To Appomattox, The History Of The Jeff Davis Artillery, by Lawrence R. Laboda (Oxford University Press, New York), includes the following information about my grandfather's service with the Confederate army.

> John N. Cowan (fr. Lowndes Co.)
> Enlisted July 10, 1861 at Selma, Ala.; mustered in July 27, 1861;
> July 1 – Aug. 31 - Oct. 31, 1861 shown as sick in camp

If anyone in years to come should find these memoirs of interest the time spent in recording them will be justified.



Alvin Morland, Major
Field Artillery, USA-Res.
78th Infantry Division
World War II

Pompano Beach, Florida
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Chapter 2

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

1. Summary

Commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant, Field Artillery, U.S. Army Reserve, upon graduation from Auburn University in 1937. Called to extended active duty in December, 1940 - about a year before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Served with the 78th Infantry Division in European Theater, and fought in the battles of the Bulge, Remagen Bridgehead, and Ruhr Pocket. After the fighting ended, I served in the occupation forces in the province of Hesse, and then briefly in Berlin.

Awards: Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and three campaign stars. Furloughed to Active Reserves in May, 1946, and retired from the active reserve in 1955.

2. Outline

The following is a brief chronological outline of the military experiences that are detailed in this volume.

May, 1937:

Commissioned 2nd lieutenant of Field Artillery, U.S. Army Reserves, following completion of four-year R.O.T.C. course at Auburn University.

Summers of 1937-1940:

Spent two weeks each summer training with regular army units at Fort Bragg, N.C. Drew pay of a second lieutenant, plus $.05 a mile for travel from my home in Birmingham to Fort Bragg.

December 20, 1940:

Received telegram ordering me to go to Fort McClellan, AL, to take physical exam, and if passed to report to Fort Sill, OK, on Jan. 1, 1941, to take Battery Officers' Course at Field Artillery School.

April, 1941:

Upon completion of course at Fort Sill, I was ordered to Field Artillery Replacement Center, Fort Bragg, NC. Assigned as Executive Officer, Battery A, 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment. Several months later was give command of Battery B, same battalion and regiment.

July, 1942:

The commanding officer of the FATRC, Col. Edwin Parker, was promoted to general and given command of the 78th Infantry Division being formed at a new post, Camp

Butner, NC. I was promoted to captain and transferred to the 78th Division with Gen. Parker, and assigned to 307th F.A. Headquarters as S-3 (Plans and Training Officer).

October, 1942:

Attended special 4-weeks course at the artillery school, Fort Sill. Returned to my unit at Camp Butner after completing the course. At various times put on temporary duty at division headquarters as acting assistant G-2 (Intelligence), acting assistant G-3 (Plans and Training), and as acting Special Services Officer.

January, 1944:

78th Division sent to Tennessee to participate in winter maneuvers.

April, 1944:

Winter maneuvers ended and 78th sent to Camp Pickett, VA. I was relieved of duties at division head-quarters and assigned to 308th F.A. as S-3. In May ordered to field artillery school to take Officers' Advanced Course. The division's infantry privates and first class privates were sent to England to as replacements for anticipated casualties in D-Day invasion. We had to train men transferred from Air Corps to infantry, setting back our combat readiness by several months.

August, 1944:

I returned to Camp Pickett after visiting my brother Howard in Shreveport, LA, and family members in Birmingham. I was there only a few days when sent to Camp A.P. Hill, VA, to umpire artillery firing tests, and then returned to Camp Pickett.

October 4, 1944:

78th Division ordered to Camp Kilmer, NJ, a staging area for troops headed to Europe. On Oct. 13 division went to New York Port of Embarkation, and a few days later boarded the USS John Ericcson and sailed for England.

October 25, 1944:

Landed at Southampton and went by train to Bournemouth on English Channel.

November, 1944:

Crossed channel on LSTs (Landing Ship - Tanks) and sailed to Le Harve and then down Seine River to Rouen. Convoyed across northern France to Hoesselt, Belgium, a village near Liege.

December 8, 1944:

78th Division took position in Huertgen Forest (part of the Ardennes) at Lammersdorf, a tiny town on the German side of the Belgium border. Our mission was to attack through the Siegfried Line and securing the Schwammenauel Dam on the Roer River. My battalion was assigned to give direct support to the 309th Infantry Regt., and I was the liaison officer with the 1st Battalion of this regiment.

My task was advise the infantry commander on use of artillery, to give location and nature of targets to be fired on targets as requested, to maintain contact with the artillery forward observers, and when in best position to see targets to direct fire on them.

December 13, 1944:

At daybreak the 78th launched an attack through the Siegfried Line with initial objective of taking four villages on road system leading to the dam. Suffered many casualties but breached the Siegfried Line and took three of the four villages but could not capture and hold Kesternich, the village on the highest ground in the area. The Bn our artillery was supporting took and held Simmerath.

December 16, l944:

We had no way of knowing it but this was the first day of the German breakthrough that came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, and the 78th held the position of the north shoulder of the Bulge. I was wounded when caught in an exposed position while trying to get a compass fix on the line of fire from which the shells were coming so I could direct fire on their artillery. I was hit in the calf of my right leg by a shell fragment, and although the wound was not serious had to be evacuated to the rear for treatment.

After darkness fell, an ambulance took me to the rear and I was given treatment in a hospital set up in a warehouse in Eupen, Belgium. The next day I was sent to a hospital in Verviers, Belgium, and operated on. Later I learned that Verviers was a primary objective of the breakthrough. The next day I was put on a hospital train and sent to Paris where my wound was evaluated. I was then sent to a field hospital on the Cherbourg peninsula.

January 10, 1945:

The hospital was converted into a hospital for German prisoners of war and GI patients transferred to another field hospital on the outskirts of the city of Cherbourg. On New Year's Eve the officer patients were invited to a party in the nurses' recreation tent. It was unusual affair for many patients, including me, were on crutches, one who had been wounded in the buttocks, had a pillow strapped on his buttocks.

After I became ambulatory, I often walked with other patients around the forts the Germans built to repel an invasion in Normandy. Once I and two other officers patients went inside an abandoned fort, and were surprised to see several black GI's from a service organization there with a French woman, obviously a prostitute. They had come there in a GI truck which was parked outside the fort.

It galled us to see the men here when our units were fighting in bitter weather in Germany. We debated whether to take the truck, but I said, "I'm senior officer. Let's take it." We did.

February 8, 1945:

Discharged from hospital. Another officer, Capt. Britton of the 7th Armored Division, was discharged at the same time. Our units were fighting side by side and to avoid

returning on a troop train, we got our orders changed enabling us to return to our respective units on our own. We obtained a ride on an going to Paris, and after a couple of days there hitched a ride with a Red Cross officer who was going to our sector. When I returned to my unit, instead of going back to the infantry as liaison officer I was placed in charge of the night shift of my battalion fire direction center. A few days later we captured the Schwammenael Dam but not before the Germans had destroyed its control valves and the area where the 9th Army planned to cross the Roer was flooded.

March 2, 1945:

Crossed the Roer River and met comparatively light resistance as we fought across the Cologne Plain towards the Rhine River.

March 9, 1945:

Reached town of Remagen on the Rhine River where the 9th Armored Division with a combat team from the 78th found a bridge still standing over the Rhine River. Elements of the 9th succeeded in getting across the river in spite of heavy fire and some mines on the bridge being detonated. It was the first time since Napoleon that a conquering army had crossed this formidable barrier. My battalion was the second artillery battalion to get to the east side of the Rhine.

The Germans used every weapon available in a futile effort to destroy the bridge and wipe out our forces. Rockets, dive bombers, and frogmen with explosives were some of the weapons they used. The first night we were at Remagen I directed about 800 rounds of artillery at their positions.

In spite of an all-out effort to push us back across the Rhine, our troops broke out of the bridgehead and one of our regiments got across the Autobahn, denying the enemy the use of this arterial highway. We trapped a large body of Germans between the Rhine and our forces to the east, and the Rhur River. We fought north with the river protecting our left flank in a battle that came to be known as "the Rhur Pocket."

When we reached the Sieg River, a stream that flows into the Rhine almost opposite Bonn, a division newly arrived from the U.S. took our position on the south bank of the Sieg, and we moved to the east and then turned north, crossing the river and advancing toward the industrial area of Essen. Resistance was collapsing and German soldiers surrendered to us in droves to avoid being captured by the Russians. We advanced rapidly, making nine displacements in ten days. Our final objective was the city of Wuppertal, just south of Essen, and the Germans surrendered shortly afterwards. We were sent to a rural area of the province of Hesse to await going into Berlin as occupation troops.

November, 1945:

78th Division took place of an airborne division as American occupation force in Berlin. About four weeks later I was eligible to return home and joined a convoy going to the port city of Bremerhaven to take a troop ship to New York.

December 24, 1945:

Boarded USS LeJune in Bremerhaven, Germany, and sailed to New York City. I edited a newsletter for the troops as we crossed the ocean.

January 5, 1946:

Arrived in New York. Went by troop train to Camp Kilmer, NJ, and then to Fort Meade, MD.

January 10, 1946:

Furloughed to active reserves with rank of major.

Chapter 3

PRE-PEARL HARBOR

1. College

My experience with the U. S. Army began in January, 1934, when I entered Auburn University (then Alabama Polytechnic Institute). All male freshmen were required to take two years of R.O.T.C. (Reserve Officers Training Corps) unless excused for medical reasons. Participation in junior and senior years was optional, and those who completed the four-year course plus six weeks of training with the regular army were commissioned second lieutenants in the U. S. Army Reserves. Engineering students (except chemical) were commissioned in the Engineer Corps, and the other students in the Field Artillery.

A big incentive to take advanced ROTC was the pay - $21 each quarter. This small sum seems laughable in the 1990s, but in the depression days of the 30s a hot dog cost a nickel and a hamburger a dime it meant something. The local banks made loans to students with the "war checks," as we called them, as collateral.

Tuesday and Thursday mornings were drill days for students taking R.O.T.C. We wore uniforms and had classes in gunnery, driving and draft with the 75mm cannons, or on the parade ground practicing close order drill. Unfortunately, neither the army officers nor the students took the program seriously - something we regretted when we were called to active duty.

Those who opted to take advanced ROTC were required to spend six weeks in the summer between the junior and senior years in training at Fort Benning, Ga., receiving the same pay ($30 a month) as privates in the regular army. In addition to the pay, there were other advantages in taking advanced R.O.T.C. The Military Ball was one of the big social events of the year, and cadet colonel one of the most prestigious positions a student could attain. Saving on clothing was another advantage as R.O.T.C. students were required to wear military uniforms on "drill days," two days each week.

Ten regular army officers were faculty members at Auburn with the title of Professor of Military Science and Tactics. The cannon on which we were trained was the same as used in World War I, the French 75 millimeter, a World War I weapon as no new artillery pieces had been developed since that time.

The cannons were drawn by horses, and about 80 were kept at Auburn. Most were draft animals, but some were saddle horses. The officers played who had played polo coached the school polo team. The team played teams from nearby Fort Benning, and also other colleges. In my senior year I wrote up the matches for the school newspaper.

This reporting led to an unexpected bonus almost 50 years later when Prince Charles of England, accompanied by Princess Diana, came to Palm Beach County to play in a polo match. I went to the editor of a Fort Lauderdale magazine, told her I had experience in writing about polo, sprinkled the conversation with polo terminology, and asked for an assignment to report on the match. I got the assignment, saw the match from the press box while eating a sandwich and drinking a beer, and was paid for my article.

2. Summer Camps

In the summer of 1936 I went to Fort Benning, Ga., for six weeks training. The weather was extremely hot, and working with the cannons and horses in hot weather made it worse. We were practically dehydrated at the end of the day and it seemed that no amount of water could quench our thirst. That's when I learned to drink beer.

That summer was also the first time I heard the term "GI" used as a synonym for a soldier. At first it was applied to garbage cans for they were issued by the government, and applied to almost everything we used. We learned we could date the daughters of officers stationed at Fort Benning (we could for we were college students whereas practically all of the enlisted men were not). That's when we began referring to them as "GI dates." I dated one named Gillem whose father later became a top ranking general and an authority in the use of tanks in warfare.

The six weeks at Fort Benning was good training but all of us were glad when it ended.

3. After Graduation from Auburn University

Upon my graduation from Auburn in 1937, I went to Fort Bragg, N. C. for two weeks training. I received a second lieutenant's pay ($125 a month) plus about 5 cents a mile for travel from my home in Birmingham. But I didn't receive much training. Soon after arriving at the army post, I felt a sharp pain in the right side of my abdomen. The next morning I was assigned to ride with the cannons to the firing range where we were to take turns directing fire on assigned targets.

Luckily, I wasn't called upon as I felt worse as the day wore on. When it ended, my right side was so sore that I had a difficult time mounting my horse. A gunnery class was scheduled for that evening and by this time I was in severe pain. Someone suggested I take a laxative, but fortunately I declined.

We passed the station hospital on the way to the class, and I asked to be dropped off there as I wanted to check with a medical officer. An examination revealed that my white corpuscle count was abnormally high and I was diagnosed as having an acute attack of appendicitis. I was operated on less than an hour later.

After I recovered from the anesthesia, the surgeon told me my appendix was the largest he had seen, and that I had a severe case of peritonitis. He explained three drainage tubes had been placed in my side, and I would have to remain in the hospital for at least 3 weeks.

The next three years I returned to Fort Bragg during my two-weeks vacation periods to take further training. Two of these training sessions were with an artillery battalion of regulars, but did little to in preparation for duty as the time was too short. The other was in training Civilian Military Training Candidates - an utter waste as far as I could tell. The second lieutenant's pay and travel allowances did help my budget, however.

Chapter 4

ACTIVE DUTY

A few days before Christmas, 1940, I was at my desk in the Sales Promotion - Advertising Dept. of the U.S. Steel subsidiary in Birmingham when a messenger walked in and put a telegram on my desk.

"Ha ha," he said as he left, "you're in the army now."

The telegram ordered me to extended active duty in the army and to report to Fort McClellan (near Anniston, Ala.) on Dec. 27 to take a physical exam. If I passed the physical, I was to report to the Field Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, on Jan. 1, 1941, to take the Battery Officers' Course. After completing the course I was directed to report to the Field Replacement Training Center in Fort Bragg, N.C.

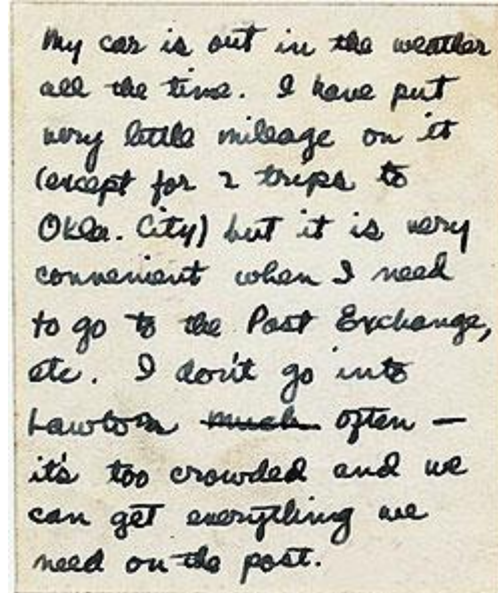
Jim Moreman, an Auburn classmate, and I drove in my almost new 1940 Chevrolet to Fort McClellan, passed the physical exam, and prepared to go to Fort Sill. I knew it would be cold so I bought several pairs of heavy underwear. Unfortunately, the only ones in the Birmingham stores were light weight cotton "longies," and they proved totally inadequate for warmth while conducting artillery fire from a high and windy hill in Oklahoma.

1. Field Artillery School – Battery Officers' Course

Fort Sill had been built during the Indian Wars, and Geronimo, the famous Indian warrior, had been kept in prison there. An order forbidding soldiers from shooting buffaloes from windows was still posted.

Jim Moreman had attended West Point until he "washed out" because his English was not up to the academy's standards. On our way to Fort Sill we stopped for a meal in Denton, Texas, and were surprised to get a steak for only 25 cents. When we arrived found we were billeted in a new section of the fort and the streets and walkways were nothing but mud. I wore rubber overshoes with the strap for the spurs under my boot to prevent the overshoes from being pulled off by the sticky mud. Later a sidewalk of tongue-and-groove boards gave us some relief.

I was enrolled in Battery Officers' Course No. 6. The army was in the process of changing from horse-drawn to motor-drawn batteries, and in all but one of our classes the cannon were drawn by trucks. We were given a choice at the urging of a fraternity brother at Auburn who had been on extended active duty with the army for several months, I chose to enroll in the horse-drawn section.


My car is out in the weather all the time. I have put very little mileage on it (except for 2 trips to Okla. City) but it is very convenient when I need to go to the Post Exchange, etc. I don't go into Lawton ~~much~~ often – it's too crowded and we can get everything we need on the post.

Lawton was the closest town to Fort Sill, and Jim and I went there that evening. Soldiers were wandering aimlessly around the town. Oklahoma was a dry state so there were no bars or other places where they could hang out except for a limited time in some restaurants.

Most of the officers in the Battery Officers Course lieutenant to captain) had been on extended active duty for several months and were far better prepared than those of us just called to active duty from civilian life.

Our class was divided into eight sections of about 20 officers. Seven of the classes towed cannons by trucks, and one section used horse-drawn cannons. I was undecided which one to choose until Reid Rouche, a fraternity brother at Auburn, urged me to get in the horse drawn section, and I enrolled in that section.

I was appalled to learn that all of the weapons were those used in World War I. We were told that the new 105 mm howitzers, our basic artillery piece, was expected to arrive anytime, but meanwhile we had to train on the French 75mm cannon. Our anti-aircraft weapon was the Browning automatic rifle, a good weapon to use against personnel but useless against aircraft. Our anti-tank weapon was the 50mm cannon which was far too small to be effective against tanks. The M1 Garand rifle, jeeps, and other new equipment were months away from being put into service.

This hopelessly outdated equipment was the result of years of cutting down on military expenses. I recall some of the arguments against putting more emphasis on getting modern equipment was that the money could be put to better use in education. That argument had merit but was unrealistic for after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor our men had to fight the Japanese with outdated equipment.

Classes at the artillery school included gunnery, tactics, ordnance, map reading, poison gasses, driving teams of draft horses pulling cannons (horse-drawn section only), and motors classes for the other sections. We also rode horses as part of our training. One trail was along the top of a high bluff and we were warned (needlessly) not to let our mounts get close to the edge of the bluff.

Gunnery classes were geared more to experienced officers and moved at a fast pace. We joked that if anyone who dropped a pencil on the floor would miss half a semester of college math while retrieving it. There were no classes to assist any who might need help.

This is the way we dress when going out on the range. I have on a "winter cap" which really feels good when we've been on the range three hours in this sharp wind. I live in a building like the one in the background. It is nicer on the inside than the outside appearance would indicate. All of these are new buildings many of which have been completed since I arrived. (Ft. Sill, Winter, 1941)

After a presenting some problems in a class, the instructor would ask if there were any questions. If there were none he erased the material on the blackboard and said, "Take a writ" (written test). We had written tests almost daily.

The gunnery classes included being tested on our ability to bring artillery fire on designated targets. This required spending many hours at an observation post overlooking the firing range and directing fire on the assigned targets. We had to do all our calculations in our heads as we were not permitted to use paper and pencil.

The winter months in Oklahoma were windy and usually extremely cold and most of us were not dressed for this kind of weather. (I bought long underwear before leaving Birmingham, but all the stores had were thin and didn't afford much protection against being outdoors for extended periods.

The 3-month course ended April 1st and both Moreman and I were ordered to report to the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center at Fort Bragg, N.C., near Fayetteville. We drove there in my car, stopping in Birmingham for a brief visit with our families.

2. Fort Bragg – FARTC

Jim Moreman and I arrived at Fort Bragg about April 1, and found the weather a welcome change from the Oklahoma cold. I was assigned to Battery A, 1st Battalion, 1st Training Regiment. Every three months a new group of draftees arrived to take the basic course in field artillery. We were housed in the Bachelor Officers' Quarters (BOQ) of my regiment.

Our mission was to give three months of basic training in field artillery to draftees and then they were shipped to combat units. We had to train them on the French 75mm cannons as the new 105mm howitzers had not been received. The carbines, slated to be the personal weapon of artillery men, were yet to arrive so we had to train the recruits on the 1903 Springfield rifle and the Browning Automatic Rifle. The latter was one of the few World War I weapons used in World War II.

Most of the officers assigned to the FARTC were ROTC graduates. The largest number were from Auburn, Florida, and Princeton, and a few from Purdue, Texas A&M, Harvard, Cornell, and other universities with field artillery ROTC courses. We had it much easier than the officers in the combat units across the road in Fort Bragg as they had to go on extended field exercises and extensive maneuvers. They complained that while they were away we had no competition for dates with the daughters of the senior officers living on the post or nearby. I also dated a Fayetteville girl whose father was a West Point graduate who had retired from military service.

Battery B - 1st Regiment heading for the parade ground at the Field Artillery Replacement Center. Capt. Alvin Morland commanding.

For recreation we usually went to the Officers' Club and those of us who were bachelors dated daughters of officers and girls in Fayetteville. We didn't have to go on maneuvers as did most of the other troops stationed at Fort Bragg, so there was time for social activities. On weekends we would sometimes go to White Lake near Fort Bragg, or to the ocean beaches in Wilmington, N.C. or Myrtle Beach, S.C.

One afternoon after the drills were over for the day, an event took place that resulted a friendship that still exists. As I finished showering, Lt. Col. Marcus Findlay, my battalion commander, who was just starting to take a shower, asked me to meet his wife and daughter who were scheduled to arrive by car and tell them where to meet him.

"They are driving a Buick with Fort Sheridan license plates," he said.

I met them when they arrived and was pleased to see that the daughter, Jean, was an attractive young girl. Later I had a few dates with her although I was somewhat embarrassed to go out with a girl who was about six years younger than I was.

I sometimes dated a girl who lived in Southern Pines on the west side of Fort Bragg and when I returned to my quarters on the post, would take a short cut through back roads. One night after a field exercise on the far side of the post, I was riding back with Col. Findlay and he remarked he was tired and wanted to get back to his quarters as soon as possible.

"I know a shortcut, Sir," I said.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

I assured him I did and he told the driver to follow my directions. As we near the post, Col. Findlay said, "Hrump, I'm glad to know that some good is coming out of your nocturnal meanderings."

We enjoyed our weekend visits to the Atlantic Ocean beaches even though shortages caused by the war made it difficult for hotels to supply their guests with such basics as bath towels. Once when we stayed at the Ocean Forest Hotel in Myrtle Beach, we were reduced to snatching towels off a maid's cart when she stopped to clean a room. One officer we knew had an adequate supply, and told he dated one of the hotel employees and she got them for him.

On weekends I went to Myrtle Beach with a group that included Charles McKinney and Dobby Kilduff, both Princeton graduates. On Sunday morning, Charlie woke up with a terrible hangover. He was given a glass of tomato juice with the assurance that it would cure his hangover. It did but he soon had another problem - he was drunk for the tomato juice included a heavy lacing of vodka.

Looking through a battery commander's telescope adjusting artillery fire. On the left is Lt. W. Dobson Kilduff. (Summer, 1941)

We drove to the beach in Dobby's car but as we started back he had someone else drive, saying he was sick. He lay down in the back seat and kept moaning, "I knew I shouldn't have eaten crab meat - it always make me sick." That was my first experience with a person who was allergic to a certain food.

On Sunday afternoons during the winter we often drove across the Fort Bragg reservation to Southern Pines to see the steeplechase races. It was the first and only

With fellow soldier Bianchi (New Haven, Connecticut) in the winter of 1942.

time I saw these races. I usually went with Lt. Bob Elder of Rhode Island, a Princeton graduate, and we became fast friends. He married a Fayetteville girl and I was an usher in their wedding. After the war he came to visit us a couple of times at our home in Pompano Beach. Later I dated Louise Matthews, one of the girls who was a bridesmaid in the wedding.

One of my assignments at the FARTC was to teach a class in how to field strip and fire a Browning Automatic Rifle, one of the few WW I weapons that were still used. After completing the preliminary courses, we went to the firing range. Firing at a paper target was rather dull, and I got the idea of filling rubber balloons with helium gas and firing at them. Fort Bragg was 26 miles wide so there was no danger of firing at the balloons provided the rifles were aimed in the right direction. We careful to see that they were.

The men enjoyed this and its success reached the higher ranking officers, possibly leading to my promotion to captain. This and Col. Findlay's recommendation led to me being chosen by General Parker to be part of the cadre when he was given command of the newly-activated 78th Infantry Division at Camp Butner, N.C., about 15 miles north of Durham.

Working with the cannons and other equipment in the hot summer weather was not pleasant, and Col. Findlay decided to go on a field exercise near the North Carolina coast. We were delighted and towed the cannons to a vacant area on the west side of the Intracoastal Waterway near Wrightsville. We conducted simulated firing exercises in the mornings and arranged for boats to ferry us across the Intracoastal and the men swam in the Atlantic Ocean.

On one of the trips across the waterway the operator of the boat, a local man, needed pliers. When we passed near another boat he shouted to the operator to lend him a pair of pliers. The boat veered toward us and when it was a few feet away, the pilot pitched the pliers into our boat and sped away.

I was somewhat familiar with the local accent, but the men, most of whom were from New York City, didn't understand what was said or what happened. I hear one of them ask another what was going on.

"Damn if I know. Maybe that's the way they say hello down here," he replied.

3. Camp Butner

Capt Alvin Morland
Clowning around in the snow, Ft. Bragg, NC, winter 1942.

In early July, 1942, I reported to the 78th Infantry Division at Camp Butner. It was a new camp and construction had not been completed. Barracks and the mess were ready, but some of the streets had not been paved. Signs in the barracks warned the water was not potable, and we had to fill our canteens at the mess hall for water to drink and to use in washing our teeth.

I was assigned to the 307th Field Artillery commanded by Lt. Col. Roswell B. Hart, a West Point graduate. I asked for command one of the batteries, but Col. Hart said he wanted me on his staff as Plans and Training Officer (S-3). The principal part of my position was to write three batteries in the division. My work must have pleased him for he gave me a "Superior" grade when rating the officers serving in his command on their efficiency.

The division was activated in formal ceremonies on July 15. The weather was stifling hot, and a number of men passed out when we were standing in formation for a long period of times during the ceremony.

After the ceremonies ended, we entered on a rigorous program of training for combat. Physical fitness was a must, and the first hour of each day was usually devoted to it. The program included running an obstacle course and climbing over a wooded wall about 15 feet high using the ropes dangling down its side.

We practiced towing the howitzers, pinpointing their location by a survey, and bringing fire on targets within a limited time. After the firing was completed we had to clean the howitzers and trucks before going to dinner. We also had training on the newly-received carbines, the artilleryman's personal weapon, close order drill, gas masks, first aid, motors, and other subjects.

As was the case with many other army posts, the nearest towns to Camp Butner, Durham and Raleigh, did not have facilities for hordes of soldiers on the weekends. I was fortunate for a Birmingham friend knew Mrs. Van Tryne, whose husband was

manager of the telephone company in Durham, to propose me for membership in the Hope Valley Country Club. I telephoned Mrs. Van Tryne and she graciously recommended me.

I often went to the club on Saturday evenings for dinner with music for dancing. This was a real luxury for most of the other soldiers had to vie for a table in one of the crowded restaurants.

One of the girls I met at the club was Betty Wackerman, a graduate of Duke whose father was head of the university's Forestry Dept. After Betty and I had dated a few weeks her family kindly allowed me to stay in the guest room of their home on Saturdays when I did not have duty at the post. Their home was only a few yards from the club, and it was not only pleasant staying there but staying overnight at the Wackerman's saved me from having to return to the post. This was important for gasoline was rationed and I could not have gone to the club more than twice a month if I had had to return to the post after going to Durham.

Betty and I got somewhat serious about getting married but nothing came of it, and eventually she married another officer who was also a graduate of Duke. I shall always be grateful that Betty and I were not married for then I wouldn't have met Gretchen.

I also became fast friends with Geri and Charles Lyon, a Princeton graduate was in the 78th, and I often stayed in their home overnight. Both were from well-to-do families and could afford to rent the home of the president of Duke who chose to live somewhere else.

In October, 1942, Lyon and I were sent to Fort Sill to attend a special 4-week course. After completing it and returning to Camp Butner I was assigned to temporary duty at division headquarters filling in for officers who went to the Command and Staff school at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for a three month course. I served as acting assistant G-2 (Intelligence), acting assistant G-3 (Plans and Training officer), and as acting Special Services Officer. This was interesting duty but it would have been better for me if I had stayed in the artillery and obtained needed experience in my branch of the army.

Training in the field under simulated combat conditions was an important part of our training, and in the fall of 1943 we convoyed to upstate South Carolina for three weeks of field exercises. Part of my job as an officer in Intelligence was to give a name to the passwords. One of my first was "Purple Sage." Lt. Col. Wilson, the G-2, recognized it immediately for its origin with a Zane Grey novel, but some of the enlisted men apparently were not familiar with Grey works and had difficulty remembering it. In the future I selected future passwords that were better known.

4. Winter Maneuvers - Tennessee

In late 1943 the 78th Division was ordered to leave Camp Butner in early January and go to Tennessee for three months of winter maneuvers. I left my car with John Lipscomb, a friend in Durham who was exempt from military service.

I was in the advance party that left early to go to the maneuver area. I rode in a command car with Lt. Col. Don Zealand of Chicago, the division G-4 (Supply Officer).

Don was a fine man who was killed at the Remagen Bridgehead by a bullet that fell to the ground, ricocheted, and struck him in the base of his spine. His death was needless for he was watching the Nazi planes attack the bridge when he could have stayed in a protected area.

The 1944 Tennessee winter maneuvers were held in an area east of Nashville stretching from Murfreesboro on the south to Gallatin, near the Kentucky state line. Headquarters were in Lebanon. The weather was cold with frequent rains that filled the slit trenches dug for latrines. This disturbed the medical officers, but nothing could be done except to dig new trenches. They also filled with water, usually in a couple of days. (When women insist on serving in combat units I wonder how they would take care of their sanitary requirements when faced with such a situation as this one.

I was working in division headquarters, and had it easier than the infantry and other troops that faced the "enemy." They were moving constantly and had to dig a foxhole and sleep in it or on the ground beside it. I usually slept in my sleeping. When it rained I would dig a shallow trench around my pup tent and was comparatively comfortable. Except for two Saturday nights when I was able to get a hotel room in Nashville, I slept on the ground every night from January through March.

My job as Acting Special Services Officer included responsibility for presenting a movie on Saturday evenings after the week's maneuvers had ended. They were shown on outdoor equipment in the woods. I was also responsible for publishing the division's weekly newspaper.

Each week of maneuvers ended at noon on Saturday, and except for skeleton crews most of the men went to Nashville on a weekend pass. There was little to do there, however, and many of them went to a movie and slept. A letter to the editor of a Nashville newspaper asked why they would pay to see a movie and then sleep through it. The letter writer failed to realize that the soldiers slept because it was difficult to get much sleep when on maneuvers. The movie was warm and dry and seats comfortable and no one bothered them - conditions they didn't have during the week.

Our maneuvers played havoc with the farm lands in which they were held. Tanks, trucks, and jeeps tore up the ground and destroyed fences, and the foxholes and gun emplacements left deep scars in it. The division's engineering battalion followed the troops and made as many repairs as they could.

Accidents were probably unavoidable as hundreds of soldiers, tanks, and other military vehicles operated under simulated combat conditions. The danger was greatest after dark for the tanks and vehicles could use only dimmed lights.

The greatest loss of life occurred during a night crossing of the Cumberland River. The situation included troops being ferried across the river to establish a bridgehead and the engineers to construct a pontoon bridge to expedite more troops getting to the other side. Unfortunately, the motor on one of the ferries failed and it overturned throwing about 20 of the 26th (Yankee Division) men into the cold, swiftly flowing water. Dressed in heavy winter uniforms and wearing boots, they had little chance of surviving, and most, if not all of them, drowned.

When I went to the scene shortly after daybreak the men had crossed on the pontoon bridge, but ferries were still being used to get some equipment to the other side of the river. I saw a ferry carrying an ambulance being swept downstream when its motor failed. The pontoon bridge stopped it but the ambulance was forced under the bridge by the swift current. There was nothing we could do except watch the ambulance gradually sink into the water as the current sucked it under the pontoon.

5. Camp Picket

Winter maneuvers in Tennessee ended about the first of April and the 78th Division was ordered to Camp Pickett, Virginia. We formed convoys and headed for Virginia. As we drove through the area northeast of Knoxville, we passed by a large area protected by a chain link fence. We were told a secret weapon was being built there. Many months later we learned that is where the atom bombs dropped on Japan were manufactured.

We stopped in Wytheville, Virginia, and pitched our tents in a large cow pasture. The ladies of the town were waiting for us as we arrived and served us coffee and doughnuts. It was a hospitable gesture that made a favorable impression.

As we drove through the mountains my jeep driver almost ran off the road when trying to round a sharp curve. When this happened the second time I asked him if he was an experienced driver.

"No sir," he replied. "I was shot in the foot in the campaign in North Africa and couldn't march with the infantry so I was assigned to drive this jeep. I never had much driving experience."

That was enough for me. It was strictly against regulations for an officer to drive but I did. When we reached Camp Pickett an M. P. officer asked why I was driving. I explained and never heard anything more about it.

We pitched camp in a pasture just outside Wytheville, VA. A group of ladies from the town had been told we would be there and they had coffee and doughnuts for us when we arrived.

The next morning we continued on our way to Camp Pickett. When we were within a few miles of the post, our convoy was halted so we could clean our vehicles. They showed the effects of weeks of maneuvering in the Tennessee woods, and General Parker wanted them to be "spic and span" when we entered the post.

6. Field Artillery School - Officers' Advanced Course

A few days after we arrived in Camp Pickett I was assigned to the 308th Field Artillery and ordered to go to field artillery school at Fort Sill, OK, to take the Officers Advanced Course. My quarters was in a 4-cornered tent that I shared with three other officers.

I was far better prepared for this course than for the Battery Officers Course that I took in early 1941 because of the experience gained since that time. Also, I coped with the summer heat far better than the bitter cold of winter at Fort Sill. Most of our

classes were in conducting fire on targets, computing firing data, and tactics, requiring us to be in the blazing Oklahoma heat.

It was quite hot on the firing range and the only water available was in the canteens we were wearing. The water was so warm, however, that it lacked a great deal of being refreshing. We tried to keep it cool by soaking the inside of the canteen carriers but it didn't work.

As we were preparing to go to breakfast on June 6, 1944, our radios boomed with the announcement that it was D-Day and the Allies were landing on beaches in Normandy. We eagerly soaked up every word, knowing that we would join the invasion forces soon.

Chapter 5

OVERSEAS

1. Camp Kilmer

The 78th Division boarded a troop train late one evening in early October, 1944, to go to Camp Kilmer, N.J. for final processing in preparation for going overseas. Before leaving Pickett, I wrote Gretchen Bickelhaupt, the girl I met in Richmond, thanking her for taking us to dinner and inviting her to have dinner with me if she should happen to be in New York that week. I knew that it was extremely unlikely she could accept, but I suppose I felt the invitation would warrant a reply. I was right on both counts.

Cmdr. E. J. White, my sister Ethel Morland Pruett, and me in Richmond, September, 1944.

We had to remove the division shoulder patches on our uniforms for security reasons. About midnight the troop train stopped at the station in Richmond, and Red Cross ladies handed us coffee and doughnuts through the train windows.

At Camp Kilmer we kept busy packing our gear for overseas duty. We had time, however, to visit New York City once or twice. The camp provided entertainment such as a presentation by a professional group of the opera, "Porgy and Bess." Dances were held at the officer's club attended by girls from nearby New Brunswick. I recall asking one of the girls for a date the next week. She said I may not know it but I had one foot on a troop ship and probably wouldn't be here that long. She was correct.

Some afternoons when we were free, the officers in my barracks played touch football. Once we decided the "touch" games were too dull so we changed to tackling even though we did not have equipment for this type of football. I remember a group of air force officers stopping by to watch us, and marveling at our tough we were to be tackling without protective equipment.

2. Troop Ship

One evening in early Oct.10 we left Camp Kilmer under the cover of darkness and got on a train that took us to a dock at the port in Jersey City. There we boarded the

Kungsholm, a Swedish cruise ship that the movie star, Greta Garbo, sometimes sailed on prior to the war. Our ship was part of a convoy of troop ships headed for England.

Richmond, Virginia
August, 1944.

My quarters were a stateroom built for two but eight of us were crammed into it. My accommodations were luxurious compared to two companies of infantry who had to sleep on an open deck. The only water available for showers was seawater.

Contrary to what we expected, we didn't have to line up with mess kits for our meals, but were seated at a table covered with a white table cloth. The division band often played during dinner - another surprise.

My duties on shipboard consisted largely of teaching infantry officers how to conduct artillery fire on targets by using the "forward observer" method. This was done by identifying a target, giving its location by map coordinates, adjusting fire by reporting the number of mils right or left of the target, and number of yards short or over the target the shells landed. This was not as accurate but far simpler than methods taught at the field artillery school. When using the latter methods, the observer's adjustments had to include consideration of the size of the angle the observer was off the line of fire of the guns and target.

My stateroom was close to the ship's theater and there was a continuous showing of a movie starring Diana Durbin, a singer, and Franchot Tone. In the final scene of the movie Diana sings "One Fine Day" from Puccini's "Madam Butterfly," one of my favorite arias. When I heard her start singing this aria, I hurried to the theater, and must have heard it at least a half-dozen times.

Except for sailing from Key West to Havana in 1931, this was my first trip on the seas, and I enjoyed watching the sparkle of lights on the waves created by the ship as it plowed through the water. I went to the ship's library and learned that the sparkling points of light were created by tiny, phosphorescent sea creatures displaced by waves as the ship plowed through the water.

The threat of an attack by submarines was a constant worry for troop convoys were the Germans' favorite target. Fortunately, we crossed the ocean without being attacked.

3. England

About ten days after we sailed from the U.S., we entered the English Channel and put in at Southhampton. We saw a number of buildings that had been demolished or partially demolished by German bombings, but there was no threat of an air attack now, thanks to the RAF and our Air Force.

After docking in Southampton, we loaded our gear on a train and went to Bournemouth, a resort city on Poole Bay, about 95 miles southwest of London. I was billeted with several other officers in a private home on Glenfurness Ave. The occupants of the house had moved out as part of a reverse lend-lease agreement between the U.S. and Britain. We took our meals in another house used for a mess hall.

The middle part of the pier extending into the channel was blown out to prevent invaders from using it in any landing operation. Sentry boxes guarded bridges in the town, but there were only a handful of tanks in all Britain, and if the Germans had invaded England after Dunkirk it is doubtful that the defenders could have stopped them. One of the worst Hitler decisions made was his belief that Britain could be bombed into submission and did not invade.

Our infantry practiced bayonet drills I rented a bicycle to ...

Our three-week stay in Bournemouth had been pleasant and we hoped to spend Thanksgiving there, but in the middle of November we received orders to move out. A cold rain was falling as we began a 60-mile drive to Portland Bill, a few miles from Weymouth, where we were to boards LSTs (Landing Ship - Tanks) for France. We were issued French occupation francs although we had little opportunity to use them.

While we waited in line for our turn to board a LST we were served coffee and doughnuts by two American Red Cross girls. One life preserver for each man was dropped into our vehicles, and instructions on how to use them came over the ship's public address system.

Suddenly we heard the roar of airplanes mixed with bursts of machine gun fire. At first we thought we were being attacked, but then we saw it was British aircraft practicing strafing targets in the channel. A plane that had been shot down lay on one side of the harbor road.

ABOARD THE LSTs

Finally we were ordered on board and we drove our vehicles through the open doors on the bow of the LST. The smaller ones were hoisted by elevator to the upper deck, and the heavier ones stored on the lower deck. All were lashed down securely.

I was assigned to a stateroom with two other officers. It had 3 bunks, a clothes closed, bookshelf and nothing else. The officer who usually occupied the stateroom had a small library of reading material which we enjoyed in the 5 days we had to wait for calmer water so we could cross the channel. We were kept busy with gunnery classes during the wait.

On November 2 we sailed out of the Weymouth harbor, and as soon as we left the protected waters the LST began to pitch and roll. Unfortunately, the gyrations

started just as we were sitting down to the noon meal. The army officer sitting across from me buttered a slice of bread, looked at it, excused himself, and left on the run.

His hurried departure triggered teasing from the naval officers at our table, and made me determined to finish the meal. A few minutes later, one of the naval officers who had been doing the teasing suddenly leaped to his feet, pushed his chair away, and vomited on the floor.

4. Belgium and France

Sometime during the night the ship stopped its wild bouncing. As soon as it was daylight I went on deck and saw that we were in the mouth of the Seine River at Le Harve. The fog prevented me from seeing much, but later it lifted and I could see the harbor had been severely damaged. All of the piers had been destroyed and the Germans had sunk vessels to prevent the Allies using it. Those that blocked the main channel had been removed by our engineers, but mines made it dangerous.

We could see some of the intricate defenses the Germans had prepared to repel an invasion. Barricades and underwater entanglements protruded above the water. Camouflaged gun emplacements studded the cliffs a few yards beyond the beach. One of the emplacements had been blown up but cannons protruded from others.

MOVING UP THE SEINE

A guide arrived on a small boat and we started up the Seine River. We were told only a small channel had been cleared of mines, and a few days ago a LST had hit a mine and sunk. The sailors put on their life jackets for the first time since we left England.

As we proceeded up the Seine we saw towns and villages in ruin. Only a few buildings along the river escaped damage, and many of those still standing bore evidence of the fighting. The factories were mere skeletons. The bridges were destroyed and canals blocked by sunken barges. German armored cars, half-tracks, cannons, and vehicles, destroyed beyond repair, were strewn along the road that followed the river bank.

At one point a mass of demolished German army vehicles, apparently caught by our Air Force while attempting to cross the river, lay in scattered heaps. Later we passed a shipyard where several ships and one submarine, destroyed while under construction, lay rusting away, parts of scaffolding still clinging to their sides.

Many people waved at the ship as we passed what remained of towns and farm houses, most of them enthusiastically. One lady, dressed in black, continued to wave until as long as our ship was in sight. We saw one house covered with a tarpaulin to replace its damaged roof.

When it began to grow dark the LST dropped anchor because the possibility of mines made it dangerous to continue with limited visibility. I took advantage of the opportunity to take a shower for we were leaving the ship the next day, and I didn't know when I would next be able to take a "real" bath. It was good that I did for the next several weeks the only bath I had was a sponge bath with my helmet for a wash basin.

GOING ASHORE AT ROUEN

We reached Rouen, our debarkation point, the middle of the next morning. As we neared the shore we saw some black soldiers working. They stopped working and yelled, "The war is over; you can go home." We knew this was not true and ignored them. They seemed disappointed when we didn't respond.

When preparations for disembarking were completed, the LST nosed onto the bank, the doors on the bow opened, and we drove our vehicles ashore. I hoped we would be able to visit the famous cathedral and the place where Joan of Arc had been burned at the stake in the 15th century, but there was no time for sightseeing. As soon as our convoy was formed we headed for our bivouac area, a muddy field near the village of Yvetot.

There was no danger of an attack so we pitched our pup tents in parade ground formation. The kitchen was put under a large tent, but pup tents were the only protection the troops had from the constant rain.

The next day was Thanksgiving and we were served a turkey dinner. We ate it in a driving rain standing in ankle-deep mud, and every time I bent my head to take a bite a stream of water ran off my helmet into my mess kit.

HEADING FOR GERMANY

The following morning the 78th moved out of Yvetot and headed for Germany. The artillery and other motorized units rode in trucks, and the infantry traveled in the famous 40 and 8 railroads used in World War I. It was bitter cold, and when we stopped for the night we were grateful to be billeted in private homes by the community. I went to a nearby store to make a purchase and was surprised to learn that we were in Belgium and our French occupation money was not acceptable.

As we drew nearer to front, waves of "buzz bombs" (crude rockets named by GIs for the buzzing noise they made in flight) passed overhead on their way to targets in Belgium or in England. As we neared Liege, a railroad center, we could hear the bombs explode when they landed. Some errant bombs hit the ground near us, shaking the ground violently, and giving us our first taste of what it was like to be under enemy fire.

My battalion (the 308th Field Artillery) bivouacked near Hasselt, a tiny farming village a few miles from Liege. The first two nights we slept in pup tents, but after that we were billeted in private homes through a "reverse lend lease" arrangement. Seven other officers and I were billeted in the home of a young couple named Matthew and Lucy and their two small children. We slept in our bedding rolls on the floor of an upstairs room. It was a nice house but had no bathrooms. We used a privy dug in the back yard. The only heat in the house was the kitchen stove.

We were in the Flemish part of Belgium, and the young couple spoke only Flemish and a smattering of French and German. We learned to communicate fairly well by using a combination of French, English, and German and charades. The language guide books issued by the army were a big help. We had no difficulty understanding their feelings toward the Boche.

"If your country had been invaded twice in one generation you would understand how we feel," Matthew said in his faltering French. As an example of their privation, he showed us a can of something that looked like dirty lard, and said except for pregnant women, this was the nearest this thing to soap they had.

We ate our meals under a tent in an open field. One evening our executive officer, Major Thomas Fulbright, raised Cain because the food wasn't hot. He had the mess sergeant put it back on the stove, and when it still wasn't hot enough to suit him, slammed his mess kit on the table and screamed, "Dammit, I want hot food!"

The other officers thought he was being childish for expecting hot food under field conditions, but could do nothing for he outranked all of us except Col. Higgins, the battalion commander, who wasn't present. We felt he was taking advantage of the fact that his brother was U.S. Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas as he sometimes did while we were training.

A VISIT TO THE FRONT

One day Col. Higgins said we had permission for a few officers to visit the 30th Division sector of the front lines and I was to go to the division artillery CP. Early the next morning Sgt. Goldman, PFC Deeb (jeep driver), and I set out in one of three jeeps making the trip. We crossed the Albert Canal on a bridge built by our army engineers as the other bridges had been destroyed. Several sunken barges littered the canal, and engineers were repairing roads damaged by the fighting and by military vehicles.

A short time later we drove into Masstreicht, a city in southern Holland, near both the Belgium and German borders. Somehow our jeeps became separated in Masstreicht, so after finding the one bridge over the Maas River still standing, we headed into Germany without the other two jeeps.

After driving several miles we reached a point where the road split into three trails. The map didn't make it clear which one we should take, and I knew if we took the wrong one we would be fired on. While I was trying to decide we saw a lone farmer working in a field beside the road.

"Captain," Sgt. Bob Goldman said, "I'll ask that farmer."

"How can you do that?" I asked. "You don't speak Dutch."

"No sir, I don't," he replied. "But I understand it's similar to German and I learned some of the language from hearing them speak it."

I felt it worth a try and told him to go ahead. He did, and with the help of some wild gesticulating came back with information about the road network.

As we approached the front lines I didn't want to be exposed to enemy fire any more than necessary, so I stopped at the CP of an artillery battalion to ask the way to the CP of the 30th Division artillery. The CP was in the cellar of a farm house, and when I entered it I saw three enlisted men and two officers bending over maps and firing charts. I tapped a major on the shoulder and he looked up and said, "Alvin Morland - what are you doing here?" It was Joel Robert Kincaid, a college classmate. There was a lull in the firing and we had quite a reunion before I left.

A short distance down a muddy road we came to the CP of the division artillery, and learned a lot from the combat experienced officers. Although the house was damaged part of its roof was untouched, and I was amazed at the amenities less than a mile from the enemy lines. The table was covered with a white cloth, and we dined on china and silver they found in the house.

After supper we said we were returning to Masstreicht where we would spend the night. They advised against it because after dark the Germans shelled and planes strafed it, we would have many miles of black-out driving over shell-torn and muddy roads. We were convinced and slept on our bedding rolls in the basement of a nearby house. Before going to sleep we listened to the Army-Navy football game on a radio rigged up by a major, a West Pointer. Then we slept soundly in spite of firing of howitzers only about 200 yards from us.

When we returned to Belgium we continued to attend classes in gunnery and communications. In the evenings we wrote letters, "conversed" with Matthew and Lucy, and sometimes went to the tiny bar in the village for a beer or cognac.

PREPARING TO MOVE OUT

About the first of December, Col. Higgins called the officers to his command post. "This is it," he said, "get ready to move out." He then gave details of move but didn't give our final destination.

Matthew and Lucy knew from our preparations that we were leaving for the front, and seemed worried about me as they had learned I was not a Catholic. I made motions of lighting a candle and offered them 100 francs. Finally they understood and Matthew said, "Gut, sehr gut."

We started out early the next day. A light snow covered the ground, empty telephone wire reels left by our troops as they advanced were strewn along the road. Late in the afternoon we reached rugged, heavily wooded country, and shortly before dark we drove through Eupen, a few miles from the German border.

Chapter 6

FIRST COMBAT

1. Preparations

In early December 1944 the 78th Infantry Division was ordered to take a position on the Belgian-German border near Roetgen and prepare to attack. I was a captain in the 308th Field Artillery Battalion, one of four artillery battalions in the Division. The 308th, under the command of Lt. Col. Gregory Higgins, was assigned to provide artillery support to the 309th Infantry Regiment. Based on our training in the U.S., I considered Col. Higgins a highly competent officer and was glad to be going into combat under his command.

As we neared the town of Roetgen, we could see flames from fires in the ancient city of Aachen glowing in the distance. The 308th FA set up headquarters in Lammersdorf, a village in the Huertgen Forest [1] near Roetgen. The 8th Infantry Division was on our left (north) flank and the 2nd Infantry Division on our right. A gap between the 78th and the 2nd was filled by roving patrols from the 102nd Cavalry Group.

THE 78's MISSION

The 78th Division's mission was to attack through the Siegfried Line and secure the Schwammenauel Dam, largest of the dams on the northward-flowing Roer River, before the Germans could blow it up. If they did it would flood the area to the north. Elements of the U.S. Ninth and First Armies were to cross the river north of the dam and its destruction would make the crossing more difficult.

The Siegfried Line on the German-Belgium border (Revisited in the summer of 1945).

A church steeple in the town provided a good observation point, so Sgt. Bob Goldman and I climbed a rickety ladder in the steeple to take a look at the enemy-held territory where we would attack.

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[1] For an extensive collection of materials on the history, timeline, maps, photos, and veterans' stories about the Battle of Huertgen Forest collected by Patrick (aka "Scorpio"), a Belgian citizen, see this website – home.scarlet.be/~cv920172/.

THE SIEGFRIED LINE

The ground sloped gently into a draw with the vaunted Siegfried Line stretched across it. In his book, Hell-On-Wheels Surgeon, Dr. John Erbes describes the Siegfried Line as follows.

> . . . "the Siegfried line made up of several rows of steel-reinforced concrete blocks that resembled tall pyramids. They measured six or seven feet thick at the base and tapered up like an obelisk tower to a height of about four feet. They were protected by German pillboxes, also of concrete reinforced with steel. The walls were six feet or so thick. The pillboxes had two or more gun ports through which they could shoot with antitank guns, machine guns, or small arms. The pillboxes were situated so that they could observe the pillars of the Siegfried line as well as two other pillboxes, so that the pillboxes had no blind sides.
>
> "Behind the pillboxes the enemy had dispersed tanks and tank destroyer guns that could be moved along ditches to places where the enemy (us) might be trying to break through.
>
> "In addition to the Siegfried line and the supporting tanks and antitank guns behind them, the Germans had their mobile artillery in the rear from which they could concentrate fire on any Siegfried line breakthrough.
>
> "I sometimes think that ignorance is bliss, because if we had realized what we were up against, we might have packed up and gone home. . ." (p. 149)

When an attack on the Siegfried line appeared imminent, tanks and tank destroyer guns were dispersed behind the lines, and artillery positioned to concentrate fire on any breakthrough.

Snow covered the road leading to the Line, and we could see only a few of the pill boxes on the far side of the dragon's teeth, but we knew there were plenty of them. A church steeple protruded above the trees in the village of Simmerath, our first objective.

A deathly silence hung in the air - a harbinger of the deaths that would take place when we attacked. A light snow began to fall obscuring our vision, so we climbed down from the steeple. Our feet made crunching sounds in the snow as we walked to our jeep, and I hoped the noise wouldn't alert the enemy when we launched an attack.

That evening I went to my battalion Command Post (CP) in a dimly lit basement in a house in Lammersdorf and was given maps, radio code, and an overlay with numbered concentrations (predesignated targets).

PREPARING FOR COMBAT

At 2300 hours (11 p.m.), I took my liaison section consisting of Sgt. Bob Goldman, Cpl. Fred Sommerhalter, Technicians 5th Grade Clayton Agee and J. R. Cupp (radio operator), and Private First Class Ed Deeb, and started out in our two jeeps for Pastenbach, a small village where the 1st Battalion of the 309th Infantry Regiment, the unit which my battalion supported, had set up its CP.

Its commanding officer was Lt. Col. Robert Schellman, a young West Pointer, who impressed me as extremely capable. My job was to advise him on the use of artillery support, to maintain control with the fire direction center of my battalion (Bn FDC), to coordinate the work of the artillery forward observers (FOs), and to direct fire on targets when I was in a better position to see the targets than our forward observers or those in observation planes (Piper Cubs).

We started to set up our radio in a house overlooking Simmerath, but some men from the 102nd Calvary Group warned against it. They said they used it as an observation post (OP) during the day, but withdrew at night after setting booby traps because German patrols often entered the area after dark.

We were convinced and set our radio in a house about 200 yards farther from the enemy. We then laid a telephone line to our FDC, heated some canned food, and tried to get some sleep. Sgt. Goldman slept with radio receiver at his ear.

ATTACK ON SIMMERATH

Before dawn the next morning I set out walking to the Infantry C.P. I started to go through a hedge when someone called out, "Don't go through there." I stopped and one of the 102 Calvary sentries said they had booby trapped the passage through the hedge and it hadn't been removed. He cleared it and I continued on, stumbling through holes and over telephone wires until we found the wirehead. We tied into it and set up our radio.

Even though no snow was falling visibility was limited to less than 100 yards. In the field beside the house the frozen bodies of two cows killed by artillery or mortar fire, lay on their backs, legs sticking straight up in the air.

Radio silence was in effect, but we had permission to break the silence if our FOs called for artillery support. An hour dragged by without any sounds of battle. Suddenly we heard the sharp crack of rifle and machine gun fire and the thud of mortar shells exploding. Then silence. My Bn CP kept calling for information but I didn't have any to give them.

About 10:30 my radio began to crackle calling "14," my code number. "This is 13 (code name for Lt. Norman Schofield, FO with B Co.). Don't fire Concentration 827. Our doughs are all over the place. Get some medics out here - some of them are in pretty bad shape."

"Can you observe Concentration 827?"

"No, I've been hit in both legs and I'm lying flat on my back in the snow. Can't observe anything."

"Are your wounds serious?"

"Negative, but some of these guys are in bad shape. Get some medics out here quick."

This was the first we knew that our troops were on the outskirts of Simmerath and I reported it to Col. Schellman. He radioed Col. Ondrick, the regimental commander,

who said he would commit his reserves, the 2nd Bn, 310th Inf, at noon and they would take medics with them. I radioed Lt. Schofield that help was on the way.

Early that afternoon the heavy fog began to lift slightly and we could see our infantry moving across open ground toward Simmerath. At 1500 hrs (3 p.m.) Col. Schellman told us to get ready to walk to Simmerath as it was far too dangerous to take the jeeps. Sgt. Goldman and I decided to take T/5 Culp, the radio operator, with us and instructed Cpl. Sommerhalter, T/5 Agee and PFC Deeb we would let them know when they could bring the jeeps.

Just before we moved out we heard rifle fire and someone reported that snipers had located us. Some of our men fired at locations where the snipers could be hiding, and the sniping stopped.

An hour later Col. Schellman ordered us to leave one at a time, running a zigzag course until we were behind the embankment on the far side of the road. When all of us reached it, he told us to walk in single file so we would look like a patrol and not a command group.

Col. Schellman set a fast pace as he was carrying only a map case and his .45, but it was rough going for my liaison section as we had to carry our radio (an SCR 610) as well as our small arms and knapsacks. The radio was built to be broken down into two sections, each weighing 30 - 35 pounds, and we took turns carrying them.

ENTERING SIMMERATH

When we neared Simmerath someone shouted "hit the ground!" We needed no urging. A short time later word was passed back that snipers were firing at some troops just ahead of us. We were glad to have a chance to rest even though we had to lie in the snow without our overcoats as we had to leave them in the jeeps.

About 15 minutes later the order came to move on. It was getting dark, making the going even tougher. Suddenly we had to hit the ground again. I heard Col. Schellman calling for me and I ran a zigzag course to the him. He wanted to know if I could contact our FO (forward observer) in Simmerath. We set up the radio but couldn't reach him.

We lay on the ground almost an hour before the order came to move into Simmerath. Daylight was fading rapidly, casting an eerie light over the village, and we advanced cautiously, knowing we could be hit by sniper fire, artillery, or mortar fire at any moment.

Col. Schellman's aide located a suitable CP, a 2-story house with a fairly large basement. The infantry CP took up all the space in the basement so I set up my section in a room on the first floor. Our room was far more exposed to enemy fire, but we had no choice as my liaison section and radio had to be available to the infantry commander at all times.

Someone found some blankets in the house and we grabbed two of them. They were our only protection from the near zero cold when we tried to get some sleep.

The house had been hit by shells that left several gaping holes in the walls and in the floor. Frigid winds poured through these holes. A potbellied stove stood in a corner with some charcoal briquettes nearby.

We set up our radio and I reported our position by map coordinates to Bn Hq. I was told a wirehead had been laid to about 500 yards from Simmerath, and we were to tie into it. We had some difficulty finding the wirehead in the gathering darkness but managed to locate it and tie into it. It was none too soon for calls for artillery support began coming in from two of the three rifle companies in the battalion we were supporting.

I was puzzled that no requests for artillery support had been received from the other rifle company. Later I learned that when the company began receiving fire our forward observer became frightened and lost the hand mike to his radio and his maps. He was replaced and sent to the rear for psychiatric treatment.

THE GERMANS COUNTERATTACK

The Germans began shelling Simmerath, and for the first time I learned what it was like to be on the receiving end of artillery fire. In training I had spent many hours at the guns and at observation posts directing fire on targets in the impact area. At the gun positions, there was a boom as shells were fired and then the spotters would radio or telephone where the shells landed in relation to the target.

When I was at an observation post the shells would make a whooshing sound similar to that of a not-too-distant freight train as it rounded a bend. A few moments later a cloud of dust and smoke would appear in the target area as shells hit the ground, and then we would hear the sound of them exploding.

This is the way Marine Corporal Eugene Sledge described being under artillery fire:

> "To be under a barrage or prolonged shelling magnified all the terrible physical and emotional effects of one shell. To me, artillery was an invention of hell. The onrushing whistle and scream of the big steel packages of destruction was the pinnacle of the violent fury and the embodiment of pent-up evil. It was the essence of violence and of man's inhumanity to man . . ."

A scale built into field glasses enabled the observer to measure the distance in millimeters the shells hit from the target, and the fire direction center converted this information into commands and relayed it to the guns.

We continued to relay fire commands to our FDC as shells fell around us. It wasn't long before the shells cut our telephone lines, forcing us to rely on the radio for communication with the FDC. As soon as there was a break in the firing, Sgt. Goldman took two men and went out to repair the lines, but they were cut again when the shelling resumed. We continued firing missions by radio whenever Col. Schellman or one of his company commanders requested it.

At about 1 a.m. we lay down on the floor on top of one of the blankets we had found in the house and covered ourselves with the other. This was the best we could do as it was too dangerous to bring the jeeps with our bedrolls and overcoats to Simmerath. Goldman tried to sleep with the radio at his ear, but the bitter cold and shells bursting close by made it difficult to get much rest.

DAY TWO IN SIMMERATH

Just before dawn I was awakened by a GI who said Col. Schellman wanted me. I went down into the basement and saw the colonel bending over a map. He pointed to some suspected mortar positions and asked me to shell them. I relayed the map coordinates to our fire direction center. He then requested fire on other targets.

Meanwhile, enemy artillery and mortar shells continued to pound our position, almost every barrage killing or wounding some of our men. Once I had to chase away an enemy patrol by firing shells just in front of the foxholes of our men. One night I had to call artillery fire within one or two hundred yards of us, adjusting it by sound. This was dangerous but under the circumstances it was the only thing I could do.

One of my two jeeps. This one carried the reel of wire. The other one, my radio jeep, was hit but fortunately none of us was in it at the time. It partly burned & had holes in it but I still used it up to the time I left the 308th.

The cold was becoming unbearable so we decided to build a fire in the stove and take a chance on the enemy seeing smoke coming from the chimney. Doughboys and tankers felt the warm air when they passed the room to report to the CP and some asked if they could come in. We didn't have the heart to refuse and soon the room was crowded with GIs. There was no place for one of them to lie down so he napped sitting on a box by the stove.

On several occasions prisoners were brought into Simmerath and questioned before being sent to the rear. One night two PWs who walked into our lines and surrendered were brought into my room. They said they had been rushed from Berlin when we attacked, and had little food, inadequate equipment, and only 1,000 rounds of ammunition for each machine gun. They pointed out the location of their regimental CP and some artillery positions on a map. We forwarded the information to our intelligence officers for evaluation.

The next morning Capt. Nelson, a chemical warfare officer, and his two men came to see me to arrange a code and maps in order to coordinate fires of his chemical warfare Bn with artillery. The chemical mortars were being used as heavy mortars, firing explosive shells instead of chemical shells. As they were leaving to return to

their jeep I called the captain back for further clarification of the codes. This probably saved his life for a shell landed by his jeep, killing one of his men.

In addition to the constant shelling we also had the problem of snipers sneaking into Simmerath under cover of darkness. To combat this problem, our patrols entered every building as soon as it was daylight to make sure no snipers had sneaked into them during the night.

Our men fired at suspected sniper positions, and once I saw a GI firing armor-piercing ammunition at a brick chimney until he whittled it in two. Another GI kept firing a 57mm anti-tank gun at the upper part of a church steeple reducing it to rubble.

A jeep driver from BnHq told us Col. Thomas Regan, our division chaplain, had been killed when a shell fragment struck him in the throat. The chaplain was going to aid a wounded GI when he was hit.

The only thing we had to eat since beginning the attack was the canned GI food we carried in our knapsacks. One night we received word that a chow truck had made it to Simmerath with some hot food. We took turns going to the nearby house where the food was. I crawled through an open window to get into the basement and got a hot pork chop between two slices of bread. I didn't know such a simple sandwich could taste so good.

By this time I realized it wasn't possible to keep telephone communications with the fire direction center. Tanks always drew artillery fire as they clanked along and if we strung the lines on poles or trees incoming shells would cut them. If we laid the wire in a ditch beside the road the tanks would chew them up as they swerved around a bend.

Our radio (an SCR 610) was not too reliable so I asked my Bn Cmdr to add a radio technician to my section. He sent one to us and from then on we didn't have to rely solely on the telephone to maintain communication with the FDC.

A REAL HERO

Meanwhile, the battle for Kesternich raged. The 2nd Bn of the 310th Infantry was able to get into one end of the village, but on Dec. 15 the Germans counterattacked in force using tanks and flame throwers. The Bn suffered tremendous casualties, and had to withdraw.

Col. Schellman sent one of his rifle companies to help the 310th. I was with the colonel when the company commander, Lt. Jeff Sherman, was called to Bn Hq., and told to move his men to the new line and dig in. "Colonel, " Sherman said, "I'll move my men to the line, and we'll stay there. But they are too exhausted to dig foxholes in this frozen ground."

Exhaustion was written on Sherman's dirty, stubble-covered face and in his every move. When he left the CP I took him by the arm and led him to my room. "If ever I saw a man who needed a drink, you are the one," and poured him a drink from the bottle of Irish whiskey I brought from England. His look of gratitude was one of the best thanks I have ever received.

Sherman's men fought well and orders for his promotion to captain arrived a few days later. Unfortunately he was killed before they arrived.

One instance worth mentioning involves Col. Tom Hayes, a West Point graduate who commanded the 311th Infantry Regiment. Many West Pointers weren't liked by their men, but Hayes was an exception. In one instance one of his men was issued a new pair of boots. When the soldier tried on the boots, Col. Hayes bent down and felt the sides and toes to make sure they fit - an unheard of procedure involving a West Pointer.

One day Capt. Bill Schuler, an aide to Gen. Parker, came into Col. Hayes headquarters in the cellar of a farm house, saluted smartly, and said, "Sir, Capt. Schuler reporting as ordered by Gen. Parker. We couldn't help noticing in contrast with those of us who had been in direct contact with the enemy, Schuler's uniform was clean, his slacks still had a crease, and his boots were polished.

Hayes was hunched over a map under a Coleman lantern, the only source of illumination.

"Whadda ya want, Bill?" he asked without bothering to return the salute.

"Sir, I am ordered to mark the locations of your men's foxholes on a map and bring it to the General."

"OK, the situation map is on the wall. Take them off of it."

"But, sir, I am to go to the foxholes and spot the locations on my map."

For the first time Schuler got the colonel's attention. He took off his steel helmet and looked up at Schuler with bloodshot eyes.

"You do and you'll get your goddamn ass shot off."

Schuler didn't say anything but took the information off the situation map, and made a hasty exit.

2. Battle of the Bulge

In his book, The Battle of the Bulge, Danny Parker described the situation immediately prior to this famous battle:

> ". . . By December 13th, the 272nd Volks Grenadier Division [the northernmost division of a fortified line to fend off a U. S. counterattack against the right flank of the Sixth Panzer Army] was itself under attack by Maj. Gen. Edwin P. Parker's newly arrived U.S. 78th Division. The Americans were fighting to capture Kesternich some seven miles northeast of Monschau. The costly house-to-house combat for this gloomy little village surged back and forth inconclusively for days. As a consequence . . . the 272nd provided little assistance for the Germans in their fight for the corner at Monschau [the area through which the German offensive was planned]. Konig, who had just taken over the 272nd, had his hands full with the U. S. 78th Division."

The enemy shelling of our position in Simmerath intensified, and we suffered some casualties in every barrage. We had no way of knowing it but it was preparation for the last gasp offensive launched by the Germans that came to be known as the "Battle of the Bulge." Later it was described as the largest pitched battle on the Western Front in World War II, and one of the greatest military campaigns in history.

Dense fog prevented our airplanes from observing the huge number of troops and tanks into position to attack the Allied lines. To cover the sound of tanks and troops movements, the Germans flew their planes low over the forces moving forward.

The massive assault began at 5;30 a.m., Dec. 16, 1944, with the Germans firing a tremendous artillery barrage all along the 85-mile front in the Ardennes. The barrage continued for 30 minutes, and when it lifted 250,000 Germans attacked Allied lines with 2,567 tanks and assault guns. The first wave of the attackers was clad in white so they would be difficult to detect against the background of snow.

On December 16 the artillery barrages on Simmerath increased in frequency and duration. We had no way of knowing it but it was the first day of the Battle of the Bulge, and my division's position turned out to be its north shoulder. It was reported that German paratroopers had been dropped behind our lines and to be prepared.

Service batteries in a artillery battalion were usually positioned a few miles back of the front lines to reduce the likelihood of being captured or hit by artillery. All units were on the alert to guard against an attack by paratroopers although only one unit had actually been dropped behind Allied lines.

The call to be alert for paratroopers, however. One incident involving the service battery of my Bn (308th FA) is worth recording. It happened when one of the soldiers standing guard in the woods surrounding the battery heard a sound he thought could have been made by enemy paratroopers. He pulled the glove off his right hand, pulled the pin, and waited. (The grenade will not explode as long as the lever on its side is held down, but six seconds after the lever is released the grenade will explode).

He knew he couldn't hold the lever down but a short time and when he realized the sound he heard was made by snow-laden branches rubbing against each other he tried to replace the pin. He couldn't do it so he threw the grenade as far as he could. Unfortunately, it hit a tree and bounced back toward him. He hit the ground just before the grenade exploded. Luckily, he wasn't seriously hurt but his wounds required medical treatment so he made his way to the aid station.

He was afraid he would be punished if he told the truth so he said paratroopers wounded him. The battery commander ordered everyone out of their sleeping bags and sent them through the woods looking for paratroopers. Meanwhile, the soldier was questioned until he admitted the truth. The commander knew the soldiers would be furious at being rousted from their beds and sent through the forest in search of enemy soldiers who weren't there, so he immediately had him transferred to another unit before they had an opportunity to get revenge.

WOUNDED IN ACTION

The intense shelling continued and I decided to try to locate likely positions of the German artillery and direct fire on them. I timed the interval between the shellings

and figured the methodical Germans were following a definite pattern. The next time there was a lull in the firing I sent my wire crew to repair our lines, and I went to try to determine the line the shells were coming from. We were taught to do this at artillery school by taking a back azimuth on the direction marks made on the ground by incoming shells.

When I went outside I saw a medic lying on the ground where he been killed. Fresh blood stains discolored the snow by his body and shell fragments were scattered around shell holes.

I picked up some of the shell fragments, put them in a helmet discarded by a German soldier when he surrendered, and with the help of a GI lined up two sticks with the "V" pattern in the snow the shell made when it landed. The shell fragments indicted the caliber of artillery the enemy was firing, plus an indication of the range from which they were being fired.

I leveled my compass along the line of the sticks to take a compass reading on the direction from which the shells were coming. But before I could get one shells started exploding all around me. All I could do was hit the ground, and as I did I felt a sharp sting in the calf of my right leg. I lay there a few moments and looked around for some kind of shelter as I knew I couldn't survive in this exposed position. I spotted an outhouse a few yards away and ran to it as fast as I could, diving behind it as more shells pummeled the area.

GETTING TO THE AID STATION

When the shelling lifted I hobbled to an aid station in the cellar of a farmhouse, ducking behind whatever shelter was available along the way. Some soldiers had crowded into it seeking shelter, and I hopped down the stairs past them to get to the cellar.

I told an aid man I had been hit in the calf of my right leg, he gave me a tetanus shot, then removed my boot and slit my trousers leg to get at the wound. After working on it a few moments he said, "Here's a souvenir for you," and handed me a shell fragment about the size of the end of my little finger. It had gone through my leg and a piece of my bloody underwear was on it, but fortunately it didn't hit the bone.

I heard Cpl. Sommerhalter's voice in another part of the basement and was told he had been wounded in the buttocks. Sommerhalter was one of the men I had sent to repair our telephone lines and he was caught in the same barrage as I was. The soldier who was changing a tire on a jeep in front of the infantry CP had also been hit.

Chapter 7

HOSPITALIZATION

When it got dark a medic said an ambulance was ready to make a run to Lammersdorf and they would put me on it. I said I couldn't leave until I gave my sergeant some instructions, and told them how to find him. When Sgt. Goldman arrived I gave him my pistol and binoculars, and told him to change the map code as it had been compromised by one of our observation planes. After he left, I remembered there was some canned food in my duffel bag and tried to send for him and give him the key, but the soldiers in the aid station had frozen feet and couldn't walk.

A short time later the medics said another ambulance was ready and helped me into it. I was one of five "walking wounded" along with two stretcher cases - a GI and a German soldier. I knew more volleys of shells would begin landing at anytime, and was relieved when the ambulance got going.

We bounced along the rough road, well aware that the enemy shelling could resume at any moment, and also that we could hit a land mine as the road hadn't been completely cleared. One of the ambulances that had gone ahead of us hit a land mine, killing the driver and one stretcher case and wounding the others in the vehicle. It was a relief to get to Lammersdorf although we were still well within the range of German artillery.

COLLECTION STATION IN LAMMERSDORF

The collection station for the wounded in Lammersdorf was a big warehouse. Men were lying on stretchers on the floor with medics moving among them. A doctor looked at my tag, and asked me how I was. When I replied that I was OK he moved on to another patient.

Soon some soldiers came in with food in mess kits. One of them asked me if I had been hit in stomach. I told him I had not and he handed me a mess kit full of food and a cup of hot coffee. When I finished eating, some medics put me on a stretcher and said I was being moved to the rear. By this time my leg was getting stiff and I couldn't walk unaided.

A big, dirty infantryman lay next to me in the ambulance and I asked him where he had been hit. To my amazement, he began blubbering and crying.

"I'm not hit - not a scratch anywhere. They sent me back with some prisoners. I don't know why I was put in this ambulance. I want to go back to Kesternich - my buddies there need me."

As he was talking he began stuttering worse than anyone I had ever heard. Suddenly he stopped talking and asked if he was stuttering.

"Just a little," I lied.

TEMPORARY FIELD HOSPITAL

When we arrived at the temporary field hospital, I was carried into the operating room. A surgeon removed the bandages, looked at the wound, then redressed it. The doughboy who was next to me in the ambulance lay on the table next to mine. I noticed he was grimacing, grossly distorting his face.

I asked the surgeon about the soldier and was told he was one of several psychiatric cases that had been brought in during the past few days. Most of them respond to treatment, he added. A chaplain stopped by my stretcher but when he saw I was all right, moved on to other wounded men.

THE 45th EVACUATION HOSPITAL

A short time later I was carried to an ambulance and we started out on another rough journey, bouncing over a rutted road. Several times we were stopped at a check point, but finally arrived at the 45th Evacuation Hospital in Eupen, Belgium. I was taken into a warm room and heard soft music coming from a radio. A pretty nurse, dressed in olive drab slacks and shirt and wearing boots, walked by.

A medical officer examined my tag and then gave me a cup of coffee. I fell asleep but must have been quite restless for once I awakened and saw a nurse standing over me. She straightened my blankets and went away.

The next time I awoke I was being carried to another ambulance. I had lost all track of time; all I knew was that it was dark. When I awoke we were in an evacuation hospital in Verviers, Belgium. It's just as well that I didn't learn until later that Verviers was an intermediate goal of the German offensive.

My stretcher was placed on the floor among several others. The man next to me was a sergeant from the 309th FA, 78th Division, who had been struck by a large rock sent flying when a shell hit his battery position. His tag said, "Injured by secondary action."

When I next awoke, breakfast was being handed out in mess kits, but the nurse told me I couldn't eat anything as I was to be operated on that morning. About an hour later medics came for me and the sergeant wished me luck.

I was put on the operating table still wearing muddy clothes; only my boots were removed. While the surgeon was examining me the nurse strapped my left arm to a board. She then injected a needle into my arm and told me to open and close my fist as many times as I could. I made it to about five before losing consciousness.

RECOVERY

The next thing I knew I was back in my stretcher lying beside the sergeant. He asked if I remembered my conversation with the nurse. I said I didn't and he reconstructed it for me.

"The nurse asked you if you wanted anything to eat and you asked her where it was.

"In this mess kit," she said.

"You can't fool me - food comes in cans."

"He doesn't need anything to eat," the nurse said.

Later that day we heard rumors that the Germans had broken through our lines and captured two hospitals. It was decided to move the patients in this hospital farther to the rear, and two black soldiers with stretchers came to put me on a hospital train. As they slogged through the mud bearing my stretcher, air raid sirens sounded.

"Hear them sirens? Let's partee toot sweet."

"Don't partee anywhere until you get me on this train," I said. They did.

THE HOSPITAL TRAIN

The hospital train was a British baggage car with hooks for three stretchers on each side of the car. Enlisted medics passed down the aisle carrying bedpans or assisting those less seriously wounded to get to the latrine. The French engineer appeared unfamiliar with the American engine and sometimes the train lurched violently, causing some of the severely wounded men to scream in pain.

I had heard soldiers don't like to talk about their experiences in battle, but all these men talked about was the German breakthrough, what they were doing when wounded, and how the fighting was going in their sector. I would fall asleep and when I awoke they were still talking about the same subjects. I concluded the reason some soldiers don't want to talk about their wartime experiences was because they were never in combat.

Once when I woke up the man on the stretcher beneath me asked if I had been in some street fighting. He said twice I screamed, "Watch the other side of the street!" I replied we had trouble with snipers in the village we had taken, and this must have been on my mind.

A medic told us because of the breakthrough we were being routed through Brussels, far off the most direct route to Paris. I slept so much that I was not sure how long it took us to get to Paris, but I believe it was about two days.

HOSPITAL IN PARIS

When we finally arrived there we were put in ambulances and driven through blacked out streets to the 108th Evacuation Hospital. We were told this is where wounded Nazi officers received medical treatment during the occupation of Paris.

Medics carried me to a room with two beds, helped me undress, and handed me a pair of pajamas. I put them on and as I got into the bed I recalled it was the first time I had been between sheets since crossing the Atlantic on the troop ship.

A short while later, medics brought in a lieutenant and put him in the other bed. He was in a plaster cast from his waist down to his feet. He said he was a platoon leader in the 2nd Bn of the 310th Infantry, the unit that attempted to take Kesternich. He said his platoon had just received orders from the company commander to move out when a shell hit a tree near him, breaking off a heavy limb which fell on him, breaking his thigh and hip. He was in misery but fortunate for of the several hundred

men who attacked Kesternich all but about 80 were killed, wounded, captured, or were missing in action.

The next morning the lieutenant's pipe tobacco was missing and when I told the nurse she said she knew which one of the French orderlies took it. A short time later she returned with the tobacco and a few choice words about the French who would steal from people who had liberated them.

Later, a team of physicians made the rounds of all newcomers to examine the wounded. Those who were expected to be able to return to duty within a few months were tagged to be sent to a field hospital in France; those with more serious wounds were to be flown to England; and those whose wounds would prevent them from returning to combat were to be flown to the U. S. The lieutenant was designated to go to England, and I was tagged to go to a field hospital on the Cherbourg peninsula.

One of the nurses said there was a view of the Eiffel Tower from our window, but the fog was as thick as it had been in the Ardennes and we couldn't see it.

TRANSFER TO A FIELD HOSPITAL IN CHERBOURG

I had been in the hospital about two days when I was awakened one night and told to get dressed as I was being transferred to a field hospital. I was carried to an ambulance and driven through blacked-out streets to a rail siding and put on a train.

The train was similar to the one that brought us from Belgium, but the wounded soldiers were in much better spirits, having recovered from the shock of being wounded. I marveled at what being out of the fighting, some rest and hot food did for a combat soldier's morale.

The food was about the same as that on the train that brought us from Belgium. We were served a hot cereal in a bowl, and about ten minutes later a medic came by and poured hot coffee in the same bowl. Later a medic distributed sandwiches. Not much food but it didn't come from cans.

I was fortunate in that my stretcher was hung in the highest of the three positions as light coming through the window enabled me to read during the daytime, and the small bulbs on the side of the car gave off enough light so I could read at night. The only reading material available was a book of poems I had brought from the hospital in Paris. I read Kublai Kahn and the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.

I wondered if my v-mail letter from Paris would reach Papa before the telegram from the War Dept. notifying him I had been wounded in action (later I learned my letter got there first).

I also thought about my liaison section in Simmerath and hoped they were all right. I was having difficulty accepting the fact that Jack McIlwanne was dead, and once I dreamed I talked to him.

It was dark when we arrived at a field hospital on the Cherbourg peninsula. My litter was placed on the floor and a Red Cross worker gave me some coffee and cookies. A medic recorded my name, rank, and serial number. He appeared surprised at my rank, probably because of my muddy clothes. Then a medic and two German PWs carried me to a ward, gave me some pajamas, and helped me get undressed.

The hospital consisted of several tents set over a concrete slab about 150 feet long. A row of cots lined one side. The tent was heated by potbellied stoves, and there was a table at one end where ambulatory patients could take their meals. The latrines were in a tent just outside the ward.

My cot was next to that of an infantry lieutenant from Boston named Cully. One of his buttocks had been sliced open by a shell splinter as he lay on the ground during an artillery barrage. On Christmas Eve a Catholic priest visited Cully, and after he left, Cully said to me, "Hey, want a drink?"

"Sure," I replied. Where'd you like to go, Paris or Piccadilly Square?"

"I'm not kidding," Cully said, and showed me a small bottle of Scotch. "Courtesy of the priest," he explained. It was an unusual Christmas Eve.

CHRISTMAS MORNING

On Christmas morning the Red Cross distributed a gift to each patient, and some Negro soldiers came to the ward and sang carols. Later one of the nurses asked if she could do anything for us.

"Sure," one of the patients said. "Go take off those boots and britches and come back wearing your dress uniform and nylon stockings. She did and was cheered as she walked down the aisle.

At noon we were served a turkey dinner. Unfortunately, the turkey was tainted, giving all of us a case of diarrhea. The latrine was in nearby tent, but the walkway was covered with ice and it was tricky for those of us on crutches to get to it.

Every other day a radio was brought to our ward and we listened to the music of Sgt. Ray McKinley who became leader of the Glenn Miller band after Miller's plane disappeared on a flight from England to France. One of the patients in our ward was an excellent bridge player and he was constantly trying to get a bridge game. None of the others, including me, was in his class and I doubt he enjoyed playing with us.

A few paperback books were available in the hospital and I read several, including The Robe, by Lloyd Douglas, and The Summing Up, by Somerset Maugham. We also passed the time by writing letters and talking about our combat experiences.

LETTERS HOME

I wrote letters to friends and relatives but my mind kept drifting back to Gretchen Bickelhaupt whom I met in Richmond on a blind date a few days before going overseas.

Gretchen was among those I wrote to and somewhat to my surprise, she replied. Later in what was probably an audacious act, I asked her to send me her picture, and was both surprised and pleased that she sent me two. I still have them.

On New Year's Eve there was a party in the officers' mess tent, and patients were invited. Both Cully and I were given permission to attend although we were on crutches. Cully was an odd sight with a pillow strapped to his buttocks so he could sit down. The patients were in pajamas or combat jackets and boots, and the doctors

and nurses wore dress pinks. We were amused at officers from service units in the vicinity who wore dress blouses decorated with pre-Pearl Harbor and European Theater ribbons and marksmanship medals. They had no combat decorations.

On Jan. 2 I was given a dose of sleeping pills and carried to the tent that served as an operating room. The surgeon sewed up the wounds in my leg, and a few days later I could walk using a cane. I was glad to be rid of the crutches.

German PW patients were being brought into the hospital in increasing numbers so we weren't surprised to learn that it was being converted into a hospital for them, and the GI patients would either be returned to their units or transferred to another hospital. Orders to effect the transfer were received on Jan. 10, and I and three other officers were sent to a field hospital just outside Cherbourg.

AMMUNITION DUMP SABATOGED

While we were waiting to board a train to take us to the hospital, there was a blinding yellow flash followed by a loud explosion. Then a huge column of smoke billowed up from the town of Lision where the railroad siding was located. Some German PWs were pointing to the smoke and grinning. Later we learned an artillery dump near the railroad siding had been sabotaged.

We were loaded into ambulances and headed for Lision. On the way we heard another explosion, and when we arrived at the siding we saw most of the windows in our train had been blown out. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

Apparently, there was no other damage to the train and after medics covered the broken windows with blankets we headed for Cherbourg. I found an empty compartment and stretched out on the seat and got some sleep in spite of the bitter cold. It was only about 30 miles to Cherbourg but it took us almost 18 hours to get there. e. A foot or so of snow covered the ground.

The first person I saw when I walked into the officers' ward was Capt. R. B. Smith, an officer from the 903rd F.A., 78th Division. Smith had been wounded in the assault on Kesternich. He was anxious to know what happened after he was evacuated, so the nurse put me in the cot next to his.

It was bitterly cold and a foot or so of snow remained on the ground. We were permitted to visit the tent set aside as a club for hospital officers and nurses. A red-haired nurse from Tennessee named Amy Webster and a nurse from Georgia named Tommie shared their meager liquor rations with us. A few ingenious officers from the hospital increased their supply of liquor by requisitioning it from a nearby British depot. They made the requisitions on behalf of non-existent U.S. units as each one was severely limited on quantity it could draw.

Although I had to use a cane, I sometimes walked to Cherbourg with other officers. The city itself wasn't heavily damaged as it surrendered after offering only brief resistance, but the harbor was cluttered with sunken ships and its docks destroyed. We strolled around the town and sometimes purchased handkerchiefs, scarves, or hand bags from natives selling them in the market square.

WE COMMANDEER A TRUCK

One afternoon I was out for a walk with a couple of other officers who had reached the ambulatory stage, and we decided to go into some of the forts the Germans had built to protect against landings by Allied forces. The forts were built of reinforced concrete and the cannons placed to cover the beaches with cross fire. I was thankful I didn't have to come ashore against such formidable opposition.

We spotted an unattended army truck outside one of the forts and saw by its markings that it belonged to a service unit. We didn't think it had any business being there and figured some soldiers must be in one of the forts. We went into one and found some Negro soldiers with a French woman, obviously a prostitute. They were somewhat embarrassed but didn't think they were doing anything wrong.

After we left the fort we walked by the truck and we debated whether we should take it. We were disgusted at what these men were doing while our units were fighting in the freezing weather. I said, "I'm the senior officer - we'll take the truck," and we drove it back to our hospital. When I walked into the administrative officer's tent to tell him about the truck, he was on the telephone.

"I tell you we don't have trucks to do that," he was saying. I tried to interrupt to tell him we had a truck for him. He finally caught on and hung up the phone.

"Where the hell did you patients get a truck?"

"We found it by one of the coastal forts," I said and suggested that he keep it out of Cherbourg. He caught on and slipped us two bottles of whiskey. When the story about the truck got around the hospital we were heroes of a sort. The hospital used the truck for several days before the MPs found it.

We passed the time by reading, writing letters, playing bridge, and swapping stories about our experiences in combat. Once or twice we were taken to Cherbourg to attend musical performances. Coffee and cocoa was served about 8:30 in the evenings.

SOME GOOD ADVICE

I became friends with a Capt. Britton from Oklahoma who commanded a company of infantry in the 7th Armored Division which was fighting beside my division. I concocted some weird scheme of attacking the German lines and asked him what he thought about it.

"I think you are going to be the deadest goddam hero in the entire ETO [European Theater of Operations]," he replied. Britton had been in combat much longer than I had and as he had been awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, and three Purple Hearts, I took his advice.

Chapter 8

RETURN TO COMBAT

As the time neared for our return to our units, Capt. Brittan and I decided we would try to avoid taking a troop train to Paris, as we would be responsible for a bunch of GIs wanting a last fling before rejoining their units. One day he learned that an empty ambulance was being sent to Paris, and we talked the driver into letting us go with him.

When we were notified we would be discharged from the hospital, we went to the administrative officer and told him that our units were in adjacent positions and we had a way to rejoin them. He gave us orders releasing us from further treatment and directing us to report to our units.

HEADING TO PARIS

On Feb. 8th, we left the hospital in the ambulance bound for Paris. We drove through several of the Normandy towns - St. Mere Eglise, St. Lo and others - that had been the scene of some bitter fighting after the D-Day invasion. From the destruction of those towns I wondered if the residents would have preferred to remain under Nazi rule than for their homes to suffer such destruction.

We hadn't had anything to eat since breakfast, and late in the afternoon we grew quite hungry. The problem was that we had nothing to entitle us to get any of the strictly rationed food. Finally, hunger caused us to stop in one town and try to get some food.

Cafes were not permitted to be open except during regular meal hours, so when we saw a young boy we asked him where we could get something to eat. He didn't speak any English, but with the help of charades and a chocolate bar he led us to the back door of a cafe. After much pounding on the door the proprietor opened it. He didn't understand English so we said, "Manger, viande, pomme de terre" - all the French we knew having anything to do with food.

He shook his head but when we offered him a package of cigarettes he motioned us to come in, and brought us something to eat. After we wolfed it down we continued on the way to Paris.

It was dark when we reached Paris. Fortunately, the ambulance driver knew where the officers' mess was and took us there. It was closed so we looked for a cafe and

finally found one that was open, albeit illegally. A Frenchman at the table next to ours spoke excellent English, (he told us he had been to Harvard). He also said that the restaurant had been raided by the police the previous evening for being open after hours, but added it wasn't likely to be raided two nights in a row. Fortunately, he was right.

As far as we could tell, all facilities in Paris that were not essential to the war effort were closed, and the metro (subway), the only public transportation, operated on a curtailed schedule. We didn't have long to look for something to do as Brit found a Red Cross officer who was headed for rear echelon of the 7th Armored (Brit's division), and he agreed to take us with him.

STOPOVER IN RHEIMS

We reached the city of Rheims late in the day, and decided to spend the night there - never dreaming we were stopping in the city where the armistice with Germany would be signed. We had heard of the famous cathedral in Rheims and drove by it. Unfortunately, about all we could see of it was the spires as it was closed and sandbags were stacked around its front entrance for protection against bombs and artillery shells.

We found the officers' mess but couldn't find the one for enlisted men where our driver, a private, could get something to eat. We decided to pin some Red Cross bars on his uniform and take him into the officers' mess with us.

I spotted Major Louis Goldberg, whom I had known at Auburn, and we sat next to him. Louis, an architect, was in an engineering unit which kept him in the rear echelon. He said he had studied the Rheims Cathedral at Auburn, in graduate school at MIT and now was stationed close to it.

I noticed him looking quizzically at our jeep driver, and told him why he was with us. "I thought he must be the youngest Red Cross officer in the ETO," Louis said.

We saw a poster advertising a production of the "Barber of Seville," that evening. We were impressed by an opera being staged when fierce fighting was being waged only a few miles away, and decided to attend it. None of us knew the story of the opera and Louis, who was fairly fluent in French, asked a young woman in the row ahead of us to explain what was happening. She did until her escort showed resentment of this intrusion on his date, so we just listened without bothering about the story line.

The next day we reached the rear echelon of corps headquarters. I showed my identification and orders releasing me from the hospital, and asked for the location of my battalion. I was told it was against regulations to give out this information. Further efforts to get its location proved futile, so I decided to go with Brit and the Red Cross officer to the rear echelon of the 7th Armored and try to get the information there.

ARRIVING AT THE 308th FA

I had no trouble getting the location of the 308th FA from the 7th Armored rear echelon, and the Red Cross officer drove me there on Feb. 16. Just as we arrived the booming of cannons almost had me diving for cover but I realized this was "outgoing

mail" - our artillery firing at the enemy. It took me a day or two to adjust to the sounds of combat.

By the time I returned to my division it had fought through the Siegfried Line and was driving to the Roer River. Col. Higgins, my battalion commander, directed me to report to the 309th Infantry and teach the officers in the rifle companies the forward observer method of directing artillery fire on targets.

"Sir, I did that on the ship crossing the Atlantic," I said.

Col. Higgins looked up at me. "Go up there and see how many you recognize," I didn't recognize any of them for all of the platoon leaders who came over on the troop ship had been wounded, killed, or replaced.

The colonel relieved me of duty with the infantry and put me in charge of the night shift of the fire direction center. This meant far less exposure to enemy fire, a place to sleep (on my bedroll on the floor), and sometimes warm food.

ASSIGNED TO FIRE DIRECTION CENTER (FDC)

At fire direction center our job was to take information from forward observers and spotter planes describing the type and location of targets, use this information to convert into firing data, and send fire commands by telephone or radio it to the guns. I was fortunate to have capable men in the fire direction center, and we made no errors in computing the firing data.

Before I went on duty in the FDC, however, a call came from the infantry for an artillery officer to go to an infantry OP to fire a mission, and I was assigned to do it. When I arrived at the Inf CP, I was told they were receiving machine gun fire from a cabin on the Roer River and asked me to try to set it on fire with incendiary shells.

Telephone communications were working so I attached an extra line and an infantryman led me to the observation post in a house on the edge of a cliff. A couple of hundred feet below I saw a cabin in a bend in the river.

"That's it," said the doughboy. I sent the location of the target to my battalion FDC and in a few moments, "On the way" coming over the telephone notified me the mission was being fired. Much to my amazement, the first round landed on the roof of the cabin, and I could see phosphorus fragments of the exploding shell landing on the roof of the cabin. Unfortunately, some snow prevented it from setting the cabin on fire.

"Fire for effect!" (the command to fire all the guns in the battery or battalion depending on the target) I yelled into the phone. The next rounds were scattered over the target area, but none hit the cabin. It is easy to hit an area target with artillery fire but most unusual to hit a pinpoint target from the distance we were firing - about 5,000 yards. The normal dispersion, temperature of the powder, air density, wind currents, an error in surveying gun positions, and shrinkage of firing chart paper are some of the factors entering into this problem. I was extremely fortunate to hit this small target from this distance.

EAST OF THE ROER

A few days later we crossed the Roer River, the last natural obstacle before we would get to the Rhine, and we moved rapidly across the Cologne Plain toward the river. Resistance was spotty and we didn't spend the night in the same place two consecutive days. In successive nights I slept in on the floor of a pill box, log hut, church, on the floor of a farm house, a chateau, and a combination house and grocery store, and one night had no sleep at all.

The towns and villages east of the Roer were not as severely damaged as those west of it because resistance was far lighter, and the villages were taken with far less artillery preparation and house-to-house fighting.

CROSSING THE COLOGNE PLAIN

Except for some isolated pockets, resistance was light, and we moved as fast as an infantrymen with his equipment could walk. It was our first contact with civilians for many were in the towns we took. As the Germans retreated, the people who stayed in their homes apparently believed the war was lost and showed us where the soldiers had placed mines on the bridges over streams crossing the roads. We fired on a town only when we met resistance, and after we entered it we saw people crawling out of cellars of blasted buildings with a look of disbelief and fear. They were having difficulty realizing that their army had been pushed back so fast.

Some appeared resentful, others indifferent, and a few even waved at us. All seemed convinced that they had lost the war. Once we uncoupled our guns and began blazing away. We told them we wanted to use their two front rooms so they moved the furniture to one side. We had to knock out a window pane to get some equipment into the room and concussion from our howitzers took care of several more. Children stared at our cannons and peered into the truck that carried our radios and other equipment. We heated some food on their stove but didn't take any of theirs.

Unlike the places west of the Roer, no photos of Hitler or other evidence of Nazism could be seen, but crucifixes were in niches in walls and religious pictures were in every house I saw. This was due partly because this was an area dominated by Catholics and also because they wanted it to appear they were not Nazis. In one place where we spent the night was apparently a Hitler youth headquarters for it was decorated with photos of Hitler and other Nazi bigwigs. It also contained pictures of various weapons and instructions on how to use them.

Unlike the industrial regions we entered later, the people seem to have ample food although coffee and bread were made of ersatz materials and certainly tasted like it.

1. The Remagen Bridgehead

We continued eastward toward the Rhine River and guessed we were headed for Bonn, but suddenly were ordered to veer to the southeast. Then we learned the 9th Armored Division, reinforced by a combat team (a regiment of infantry and a battalion of artillery from my division) had reached the Rhine at the small town of Remagen, 15 miles south of Bonn, and were astounded to see a bridge over the river still standing.

The bridge was the Ludendorf, bearing railroad tracks and a foot path on both sides of the bridge, 80 feet above the swift flowing river. It was cut through a tunnel in a 600-foot-high cliff on the east bank. Allied bombing had seriously damaged the bridge and it hung only from its upper span. It was further damaged by German troops as they retreated across it. Our air force had destroyed most of the rolling stock of the German railroads, and its rails were covered with planks to enable vehicular and foot traffic to use it.

Unlike the German army, our field commanders could make important decisions without having to clear them with higher authority, and the division was ordered to cross the bridge. Heavy fire was coming from the tunnel but infantrymen raced across the river firing and pulling wires on mines set to destroy the bridge. Some of the explosives detonated, and although its supports further weakened the bridge it remained standing. Enough men succeeded in getting to the east bank to establish a bridgehead, marking the first time since Napoleon that a conquering army had crossed the Rhine. The date was March 7, l945.

The Germans launched attack after attack in desperate attempts to force the GIs back across the river, but they hung on. Hitler ordered every available weapon used to destroy the bridge - artillery, mortars, dive bombers, frogmen with explosives, and V2 rockets. The tall cliff on the east side of the river prevented the Germans from knocking out the bridge with artillery and mortar fire so they shelled its approaches, and our troops in Remagen were under constant bombardment.

When we reached the Rhine I stared in amazement at the bridge still standing over the mighty Rhine for bridges over even the smallest streams on the Cologne Plain had been destroyed. The bridge could have been an apparition looming in the dim light, and troops moving through Remagen seemed like ghosts. But the sound of our artillery firing and enemy shells crashing around us forced realism on the scene.

Soon sailors and their equipment were at the bridge having been sent to the Rhine to aid in an amphibious crossing. But the taking of the bridge at Remagen eliminated the need for this type of operation, saving an untold number of lives.

My battalion commander, Col. Gregory Higgins, called his officers to his CP and showed us a map of the area with a small circle on the east side of the Rhine.

"Does the overlay mark where our battalion will go into position?" I asked.

"Hell, no," came the reply. "That's all the land we have over there."

We put our guns (105 mm howitzers) in position on the west side of the Rhine and maintained almost continuous fire in front of our infantry to help ward off counterattacks. Every few minutes the radio crackled with requests to fire on enemy positions, most of them on areas suspected of being locations from which counterattacks could be launched. The first night alone our battalion FDC directed the fire of about 800 rounds of artillery.

As soon as it was daylight, waves of Stuka dive bombers attacked the bridge, and V2 rockets landed nearby. Our men fired at the Stukas with all available weapons, and sometimes spent shells hit the ground and ricocheted. Unfortunately, one of the ricochets hit Lt. Col. Don Zealand, our division G-4 (supply officer), at the base of his spine and a hurried operation failed to save his life.

I saw one Stuka burst into flames when hit and plummet to the ground just as in the movies. Hitler was so desperate to knock out the bridgehead that instead of waiting to build up a strong attacking force he ordered the troops to attack as soon as they arrived. The piecemeal attacks were another mistake by Hitler for it was easier to fend them off than if he had waited until more troops were available.

Our engineers worked frantically to repair the damage to the bridge by the mines. In addition to attacks by planes and artillery, frogmen tried to damage it by attaching explosives to its pillars. Sharpshooters on the bridge with instructions to fire at anything that might be a frogman prevented that from happening.

The autobahn – near where it was first cut by our division. Most of the bridges like the one pictured were destroyed by the Germans.
This is the only highway in Europe that can compare with those in the U.S.

(After the war was over, I read that Hitler was infuriated because the bridge was not destroyed before Americans could use it, and ordered the commanding officer of the forces guarding be executed. The officer in charge, a major, was tried by a kangaroo court, and although he had arrived there only a few days before we got to Remagen, he was ordered to be shot.

The major asked permission to write a farewell letter to his family and it was granted. When he finished writing the letter it was torn up in front of him, and he was marched down a path where the execution was to take place. He had gone only a short distance when he was shot in the back. Such was justice - Hitler style.

I was in charge of the night shift of my battalion's fire direction center and had to snatch what I sleep I could in the daytime. It wasn't easy because of the movement by tanks and vehicles and artillery and mortar shells exploding.

Our engineers succeeded in stretching pontoon bridges covered with wooden planks over the Rhine, and my battalion was ordered to cross the on one of them. As soon as we got to the east side we put our cannons in position and began firing missions. Meanwhile, the 78th's 309th Infantry Regiment had penetrated enemy lines and reached the autobahn, a superhighway parallel to the river built by Hitler to aid in rapid transportation of troops and war materials. When the 309th cut the autobahn in two, it prevented the Germans from using it for the remainder of the war.

(After the war it was reported in the press that the autobahn gave Gen. Eisenhower the idea of building similar roads in the U. S., and when he was elected president he had our system of interstate highways built).

When the U.S. positions on the east bank of the Rhine were consolidated my division was ordered to attack to the north with the river on our left flank. Ten days later, on St. Patrick's Day, the bridge, weakened by the mines detonated on it, collapsed into the river, killing 28 of our engineers who were working on it.

I was in charge of the night shift of my battalion's fire direction center leaving me free most of the daylight hours. I summoned my jeep driver and we drove back to see what remained of the bridge. The pillars that had supported the bridge jutted out of the murky water and remnants of its floor leaned against them.

The next time I saw the bridge site was 1980 when Gretchen and I stopped there briefly when we were in Germany. The bridge had not been rebuilt, and only the giant twin towers nearest to each bank marked where it had once stood.

2. The Ruhr Pocket

Ladislas Farago in his book The Game Of The Foxes credited the 78th Division with "holding the Remagen bridgehead in the face of desperate German counterattacks." After a few days we were able to break out of the bridgehead. One of our infantry regiments, the 309th, penetrated to the east and crossed the Autobahn, denying the Germans the use of this super highway for the remainder of the war.

A large body of German troops was trapped between U.S. troops on the south and east and the British on the north. This area that came to be known as the "Ruhr Pocket, and the 78th fought northward with the Rhine on its left flank as part of capturing these German troops. To keep the pressure on the retreating Germans, we moved out each day as soon as dawn broke and didn't stop until dark. Opposition was light so we advanced as fast as an infantryman could walk.

ATTACKED WITH ROCKETS

The Germans resisted with all weapons, including extensive use of rockets. It was the first time I experienced being under direct fire by these rapid-firing rockets, and it was frightening. The rockets made a whishing noise as five or six of them passed us at almost the same time and exploded slightly behind our position. The first time they landed near us a GI and I ducked in a house, dodged around a red hot stove, and hit the floor. The GI burned his hand on the stove in his haste for shelter - I don't know how I avoided it.

We moved up a hill and I heard a single rifle shot fired just around a bend in the road. A few moments later we came on the body of a German officer lying on his back beside the road, a gentle breeze ruffling his long blonde hair. This officer and a couple of his men rounded the bend in the road and came face to face with our advance platoon. The German enlisted men dropped their weapons and raised their hands but the officer jumped out of the vehicle and leveled his rifle at the GIs. A single shot killed him before he could fire a round.

We advanced across a field and I saw a dead German soldier lying on the ground. His ribbons indicated he had fought on the Russian front, and he wore an Iron Cross. I would have sent the decoration to his family if I had time to look for his identification, but we had to keep going. I knew the next GI who saw the Iron Cross would take it so I took it. I still have it.

"FRIENDLY" FIREFIGHT

When we entered one town we were greeted by small arms fire being directed as us from the left. Our men returned the fire. I dove for cover in a house but the door was locked.

"Stand back and I'll blow the lock off with my .45," I said to some GIs who were also seeking cover in the house.

"This is quicker, Captain," a huge medic said and lunged at the door, breaking it open. I was fairly certain the Germans had pulled out when we got close to the town, and figured the firing was from another company in our battalion that got to the town just as we did. They thought we were Germans and opened fire.

I climbed out a window and crawled down a deep ditch leading to where the firing was coming from yelling, "GIs, cease firing." Fortunately I was right and the firing stopped. It was a good thing for the situation could have been the beginning of a fierce fire fight between our own men.

OUR DENTIST DELIVERS A BABY

Once when we stopped for the night a pregnant German woman came to us and asked for a doctor. There was none with us at that time as the medical officer assigned to our battalion became ill and was sent to the rear. No doctors were available so Division Hq sent a dental officer, Capt. Hank Greenberg, to replace him.

In the U.S. army a medical officer's insignia is the caduceus and a dentist's is a caduceus with a "D" on it. The woman saw the insignia the dentist was wearing and thought he was a doctor as the German word for a physician is "Doktor" and the German word for dentist is "Zahnartz." In broken English she pleaded with him to deliver her baby. He tried to explain that he was not a doctor but he was wearing a caduceus and that was good enough for her. She continued to plead with him so he motioned for two medics to come with him and they managed to deliver the baby.

The next morning as we were pulling out, two other women walked in and asked if he would deliver their babies. But his career as an obstetrician was over because we had to keep moving. We hoped the governmental troops following us were able to help them as apparently no German doctors were available.

We began seeing more and more German civilian, most of them very young or very old. As we entered a village the men would say, "Nicht Nazi," and the women would wring their hands and say, "Alles kaput." The units who would govern the towns were following us (being careful to stay out of any fighting), and we would let them know how many men and women were in the town by saying, "X number of Nicks and Y number of Alices here."

RAID ON A MEAT PACKING PLANT

When we entered one city in this highly industrialized area, the infantry colonel and I drove passed a meat packing plant and saw the dressed carcass of one-half of a cow come flying over the fence. A man standing outside the fence caught it and ran. Then we saw another carcass thrown over the fence.

We had only a few men with us at that time but we drove into the plant and saw men looting the plant and throwing the meat over the fence. We fired our pistols into the air and motioned for the raiders to quit. They hesitated and we fired our pistols again. They saw we weren't going to shoot them so they continued looting. The colonel radioed for reinforcements and within a few minutes a tank roared up. The looters then disappeared.

Later we learned the residents of the area had been told by the German soldiers just before they pulled out that the Americans would take their food and let them starve. I said this wasn't true but it was obvious they didn't believe me.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

On an observation tower, April, 1945.

At this stage of the conflict both the Allies and the Germans launched campaigns of psychological warfare. We had advanced so far that our air force thought we were enemy soldiers and began dropping Safe Conduct Passes on us. They were written in both English and German and signed by General Eisenhower. They said the German soldier carrying this pass is to be disarmed, well looked after, to receive food and medical attention as required, and removed from the danger zone as soon as possible.

As we advanced we were inundated with German soldiers, a few of them women, some waving the passes as they walked toward us. They wanted to surrender to U.S. forces to avoid being captured by the Russians. There were so many of them that they impeded our movements. We turned them over to the MPs to guard until a unit prepared to handle prisoners reached us, and we continued to drive northward. I learned later that the 78th's Military Police platoon had to handle a total of 60,000 prisoners of war in this operation.

The Germans also showered handbills on us. They said there no point in getting killed in the final stages of the war, and described how to fake various illnesses that would be a reason to be removed from combat. This may have worked in a few cases, but I never heard of any.

A REAL SHOWER BATH

On March 28 a quartermaster company managed to set up a portable shower unit in our area, and I had the first real bath since leaving the hospital in France. Prior to this, the only way to bathe was to fill a helmet with water and wash with a hand towel. We were also issued clean clothing which was most welcome. When I was wounded all my clothes had been sent to the quartermaster in Liege or Paris and I was still waiting for them to catch up with me.

THE 78TH CROSSES THE SIEG RIVER

The Sieg River flows into the Rhine across from Bonn. When we reached the Sieg, a division newly arrived from the U.S. was put in our position and we moved eastward several miles and then crossed the river. Opposition was relatively light, but on orders from Hitler the Germans wouldn't give up and still resorted to chicanery. One large building on a hill with a commanding view was draped with a huge red cross. The Germans retreated as we attacked and when we reached the building we found field telephone wires strung all over it - indisputable evidence that the building was used as an observation post in spite of the red cross indicating it was a hospital.

Lt. Col. Lipscomb, a West Pointer who had just arrived from the U.S., replaced Lt. Col. Kennedy as commander of the infantry battalion to which I was assigned. One morning we were watching our infantry crossing a field toward some thick woods. "We were met by heavy fire when we approached those woods last afternoon. Lay down a barrage on it," he ordered.

With an Lt. Col. Kennedy, C.O. of the 1st Bn., 311th Infantry, on an observation tower as the infantry troops approached Wuppertal, Germany, in April, 1945. A few minutes after this photo was made, heavy fire on the tower from the German artillery forced us to get off of it.

Firing artillery over the head of moving troops is tricky for if the shells fall short many of them would be killed or wounded, I radioed our FDC to open up with one gun until I established a bracket and then bring in the rest of the battalion as ordered. The colonel wanted heavy fire immediately, but I continued to adjust with one gun until I was certain none of our rounds would fall short.

Just as I finished the adjustment, the advance platoon reached the woods and radioed to cease firing for the Germans had pulled out. "Some barrage," the colonel said to me showing he didn't realize the problem I faced in conducting this fire.

ZIPPING UP THE RUHR POCKET

The last city we took in the Ruhr Pocket was Wuppertal, a large industrial city south of Essen. The British closed in on the north side of the Pocket, and other U.S. troops were on the east, trapping the remaining Germans. This ended our combat role for while we were fighting up the east bank of the Rhine, other divisions had pushed to the east and were close to meeting the Russians at the Elbe River. Berlin had not yet fallen but we knew it wouldn't be long as the Russians were nearing it.

Chapter 9

OCCUPATION DUTY

1. Hesse

After the Ruhr Pocket was eliminated, my division was sent to occupy an area in the Province of Hesse in central Germany near the city of Kassel. The devastation in Kassel caused by Allied bombings was worse than anything I had seen. The center of the city was a mass of rubble giving off odor from the bodies still trapped under the debris. There was a rumor that Kassel was bombed in retaliation for the bombing of Coventry, England.

Downtown area of Kassel, Germany. Heavily bombed by the British in retaliation for the bombing of Coventry. (Summer, 1945)

POINT SYSTEM DETERMINING PRIORITY FOR RETURN TO U.S.

When the war in Europe ended not enough ships were available to return all troops to the U.S., so a point system was devised to determine an order of priority. Points were given for length of service, time overseas, awards earned, and for being married. I had almost enough points to be among the first to return to the U.S. but was short because I was not married.

A few officers were eligible for discharge and this called for some transfers among those remaining. I was transferred to the 307th F.A. Bn. and assigned to a battalion of infantry as liaison officer.

The 307th F.A. was sent to the town of Wetzlar in Hesse. Leica cameras are manufactured here, and when the town was taken by our troops, soldiers were stationed at entrances to the plant to prevent looting. The guards had strict orders not to let anyone - regardless of rank - to enter the plant.

GERMAN PRISONER OF WAR COMPLEX

A complex where German non-commissioned officers were trained was just outside Wetzlar. During the latter part of the war it was converted into a place for holding war prisoners captured by the Germans. When we arrived almost 1,000 Russians, 200 French, and a sprinkling of Yugoslavs, Czechs, and Italians were being held there. A few of the Russian PWs were women.

My battalion was assigned to operate the facility until the PWs could be repatriated. I was put in charge of the PW installation with about 30 GIs, one of whom spoke some Russian learned from his parents. The remainder of my battalion was stationed a few miles away. My men and I were billeted in the two-story headquarters of the complex.

The senior officer of the Russians was a captain who had been captured in the Battle of Stalingrad, and I conferred with him regarding matters dealing with his men. The language barrier made this rather difficult, but with the help of the Russian-speaking GI we managed.

The senior officer of the French was a rather dapper lieutenant who spoke good English. When I first met with him he asked if I spoke German or French. When I replied in the negative he expressed surprise that an American officer knew no language except his own.

"Do you speak Spanish?" I asked.

He said he didn't and I said, "Well, I speak Spanish.

My claim was quite an exaggeration for it was based on what I learned in high school.

A few days later the French lieutenant came to see me bringing someone with him. "Oh mi capitaine, I am so happy. Here is a soldier who speaks Spanish."

I knew enough of the language to ask them to be seated and the lieutenant asked if we should continue in Spanish or English.

"My Spanish is a bit rusty," I replied. "Let's continue in English."

Later he offered to teach me French if I would teach him English. "But you speak good English now," I said.

"Oh, but I want to learn American English."

INCIDENTS INVOLVING THE RUSSIANS

Shortly before we arrived at Wetzlar, some Russian soldiers had broken a store room, found some chemicals and experimented causing an explosion. It blew out one wall of the building and I suppose killed all the men in it.

In another incident, several of the Russians died from drinking a cocktail based on fluid used to propel rockets fired at us.

An indication of the low regard the Russians had for human life involved an incident that also happened before we arrived. Quite a bit of war material discarded by the retreating German soldiers was lying where it was dropped, and some of the Russian PWs found a hand grenade and played catch with it. One of them pulled the pin before tossing the grenade to another one. It exploded as he caught it, killing him.

When the soldier was missing at roll call the squad leader asked if anyone knew where he was. One man said, "Sure, he's right over there," and led him to a shallow grave with a crude wooden star for a headstone.

Unlike American soldiers, the Russians ate out of a common bowl. The squad leader would go to the mess hall and get a big bowl of food and a spoon for each man. One day Gen. Parker visited the compound and asked to see the mess hall. The men were eating when we entered, and the general was appalled to see them eating out of a common bowl.

"Make these men eat like our soldiers do," he said to me.

"I'll do the best I can, Sir," I replied, "but I don't speak Russian and the GI who translates for me has an extremely limited knowledge of the language." Fortunately, the general didn't return to check on his order for I made no attempt to carry it out.

TROUBLE WITH SOME POLES

A few days later I received reports that a mob of displaced Poles who had avoided being repatriated, roamed a rural area outside Wetzlar beating and robbing farm families. I took a few men and drove to the trouble spot to investigate. We were told about the problem and that the Poles were expected to return that evening.

I sympathized with the Poles for they had been brought to the area as forced labor but it was our job to keep order. I went to the village the Poles had been terrorizing the residents and were expected to return that evening. I stationed GIs in positions where they could intercept the marauders if they returned. Nothing happened for almost an hour and then I heard the opening notes of Wagner's Rienzi Overture sounded on a horn somewhere in the distance.

Within a few minutes a farmer came running up and said the Poles were raiding a village a few kilometers away. We jumped in our jeeps and sped to the village being attacked. When we arrived we saw a group of men armed with pitch forks. They leveled their pitch forks and moved toward us in a menacing manner. I drew my pistol and my men aimed their carbines at the men, but just before giving the order to fire I realized they thought we were the Poles.

"Halt! Amerikanish Soldat!" I shouted.

The men stopped, peered at us in the dim light, then lowered their pitch forks and said, "Danke, danke, danke!" and "prima, prima" and patted our weapons. It was a narrow escape for they were coming at me and we were about to fire on them.

I asked where the Poles had gone, and they pointed to a large patch of woods about two hundred yards away and shrugged their shoulders, indicating that was all they knew. I had one of my men fire several rounds toward the woods to let the Poles know guns were available to protect the farm families.

When I told my commanding officer, Lt. Col. Don Adams, about this incident he said I should have sent some men to the trouble spot, but should not have gone myself. I didn't tell him, but I have never believed in ordering my men into a potentially dangerous situation unless I shared in the danger.

A TRAGIC INCIDENT

One afternoon I heard an explosion, grabbed my .45 and rushed outside to a scene as gruesome as any I saw in combat. Three boys about ten years old were lying on the ground, one of them dead, another fatally wounded, and the third slightly wounded.

The boys had found a German hand grenade and were trying to take it apart when it detonated. One boy was holding the grenade by its wooden handle looking down at it when it detonated, blowing away the top half of his face. Fragments ripped open the front of another boy's lower torso, exposing his intestines. The third was standing back and had the top part of his ear ripped off.

Former Russian PW's pass in review at the 1945 May Day Parade in Wetzlar, Germany.

I yelled for a medic and told one of our men to call for a German ambulance. The medic sprinkled a powder on the boy's midsection to prevent infection. The medic could speak some German and later he told me the boy asked, "Am I going to die?"

"No, you are going to grow up to be a big, strong man," the medic replied. But he doubted that the boy would last through the night. He didn't.

Soon an ambulance came and carried the boys away. The medic was visibly shaken by this experience (so was I), and I told to come with me to my quarters. When we got there I said I've never seen anyone who deserved a drink as much as you do, and poured one for him. I don't recall how I happened to have any whiskey but it was put to good use for later when I was censoring the medic's mail his deep appreciation was included in a letter he wrote home.

A MAY DAY CELEBRATION

On May Day the Russians had a celebration which included a parade of all soldiers in the compound, and a dinner. I received an invitation written in Russian. The Russian-speaking GI translated it for me. Col. Adams was also invited. We were on the reviewing stand while the former PWs paraded in their tattered uniforms. After the parade ended, a battery of our artillery (four 105mm howitzers) drove on the parade grounds, positioned the guns, and went through a firing drill without using live ammunition.

That evening we were served a drink before the meal. "Vodka?" I asked the woman soldier serving us. "Nicht," she replied, "Schnapps." Regardless of what she called it there was no doubt of its potency.

The Russian captain toasted the Americans, Col. Adams responded by toasting the Russians, and a couple of other toasts followed. Col. Adams was a teetotaler but felt it would insult the Russians if he didn't respond to each of them. But before the banquet was over he became sick and passed out - a humiliating experience for all of us.

Reviewing Stand at the May Day Parade, Wetzlar, Germany, 1945.

FIGHTING BOREDOM

After about a month in Wetzlar, we were moved eastward to a hamlet named Hofgeismer, and told we were designated to move into Berlin to relieve the 101st Airborne Division as occupation troops in the American sector of the city. Meanwhile, keeping the men occupied was a problem for going through "dry run" drills (simulated firing of the cannons) when they had months of experience in actual combat was dull. Softball games some afternoons and the showing of an American movie in the few evenings they were available helped pass the time.

Some of the townspeople came to see our movies, standing in the rear. Apparently, some of the higher-ups considered this a violation of Eisenhower's non-fraternization policy for we received an order prohibiting them to attend the movies. I thought this was wrong for we were occupying the homes of many of them, and there was nothing else for them to do.

Supply trains were having difficulty getting sufficient food to our troops scattered over western Germany, and our meals were quite skimpy. The only dessert we had was canned peaches, and to this day I don't care for them. After we returned home, however, I was told canned peaches were not available in the U.S. probably because they were all being sent overseas.

PIANO LESSONS

The officers also had time on their hands and I was no exception. A piano was in the house where I was staying and as I had always wanted to learn to play one I decided to give it a try. One day a young girl who lived in the house came there to get some of her things, and I asked her where her piano teacher lived. She gave me the address. I drove to the nearby town of Warburg and found a music store with a book for beginners with facing pages in German and English. I bought it and went to the piano teacher's home.

When I arrived she was giving a lesson to a child while several others were waiting for their turn. I tried to tell her I wanted to take piano lessons but she thought I was going to take her piano and started crying, explaining that it was the only way she could make a living. I used charades and my limited German to assure her I didn't wasn't going to take the piano but only wanted her to give me lessons. She dried her tears and showed me her schedule of pupils. I pointed to the time I preferred and she wrote "Herr Hauptman" on it.

I held up German occupation marks in one hand and a few tea bags in the other to see which she preferred as payment. She immediately grabbed the tea bags, leaving no doubt she preferred them to the marks as stores had very little to sell.

The next afternoon I walked into her classroom and the children cringed - they were afraid of the military. I removed my helmet and pistol belt with my .45, ammunition clip, and first aid kit, sat down on the piano bench, and began my first lesson. She would point to the instructions in German and I would read the English translation on the opposite page.

My first lesson was to learn the scales while counting, "ein, zwei, drei, vier." Unfortunately, that's about all I learned for a couple of weeks later I was transferred to the 903rd Field Artillery in another town. We had the same problem of keeping the men busy and after going through routine drills and patrolling they often played soft ball.

THE JAPANESE SURRENDER

The rumor that our division might be sent to the Pacific was laid to rest by the Japanese surrender, and assured that we would go to Berlin. My battalion celebrated by having real eggs instead of the powered variety. It was the first time I had them since leaving the hospital.

SIGHTSEEING IN SWITZERLAND

To help keep up morale of the troops waiting to return home, SHEAF Headquarters designed trips to Switzerland, Brussels, and Copenhagen. Some of the officers and men weren't interested - all they wanted was a trip home. Not me. I had done a favor for the sergeant major in charge of arranging the trips, and told him I didn't want to deprive anyone of a trip, but I would go on any trip that didn't reach capacity. As a result, I got to go Switzerland, and Brussels. I was also sent to a seminar for officers held at the University of Paris.

The 10-day trip to Switzerland cost $35, including transportation, meals, and lodging. We were processed at Mulhouse, France, where we were oriented to local customs, and permitted to exchange $40 into Swiss currency. No other medium of exchange was legal, including U.S. money and American Express Travelers Checks.

The Lauterbrunnen Valley, one of the most spectacular glacial valleys in Europe, features the 300 meter high Staubbach waterfall.

We entered Switzerland at Basel and the next day went by train to Spietz on Lake Thune where we spent the next three days. I made friends of two lieutenants in the air force and a dental officer, and we stayed together during the trip. We rode the cable up Mt. Niesen, 2367 feet high, and enjoyed a beautiful view of the surrounding lakes and snow-covered mountain peaks. We also took a boat trip on Lake Thune from Spiez to Interlacken on a spit of land between the lake and Lake Brienz.

On the boat ride we noticed some large boulders on the shoreline, but as we drew close to them saw they weren't boulders but camouflaged positions for machine guns to use in case the Germans attacked Switzerland. We also learned that the tunnels leading into the country were mined, and all able-bodied young men had to take military training and be ready to fight. Some of them boarded our train dressed in uniform and carrying a rifle.

We were frustrated by having so little spending money, and I couldn't buy any of the watches displayed in the stores. I did have enough to buy a bottle of Chanel No. 5, and an alarm clock with a musical tune for the alarm. I don't recall what I did with the perfume but I decided to give the clock to Gretchen if I ever saw her again.

Our tour included a bus trip to Brig, a village high in the Alps, Lausanne, and another to Geneva before we headed back to Basel and then to France.

HELPING A COUNTESS

I was on a tram in Geneva when a well-dressed lady seated near me heard me tell an officer from another division that the 78th was going to Berlin soon as occupation troops in the American sector. The lady apologized for interrupting and asked if I would carry a package to an elderly aunt in Berlin. She explained that her aunt badly needed warm clothing as winter was approaching and there was no way of sending it to her. I agreed and she introduced herself as Countess (I don't remember her name), and asked me to meet her in the lobby of her hotel. I never met a real countess and was impressed.

The next day I went to her hotel. She met me in the lobby and gave me a package which she said contained a hand knitted woolen shawl. I took it with me when we moved into Berlin in November.

On the return to France, we had to change trains in Strasbourg. Buildings in the downtown area were pockmarked by bullets and there was other evidence of the street fighting that took place here.

A TRIP TO BRUSSELS

The next trip I had was by jeep to Brussels. On the way there I stopped at places in the Hurtgen Forest where we had fought. My jeep driver took my photo near the spot in Simmerath where I had been wounded. I also saw some of the terrible damage inflicted on Cologne, and although the railroad station (a prime target) was close to the cathedral it suffered some damage but was not destroyed - a tribute to the accuracy of our bombers.

This photo was taken in front of a bunker near Simmerath, Germany, in the Hurtgen Forest, near the spot where I was wounded in December, 1944.

The American Officers' Leave Club in Brussels held dances almost every night so we got to meet local girls (all of whom spoke English). I went with one of them a play. The actors' lines were in French but she translated enough for me to understand what was going on.

I went to a performance of "Tales of Hoffmann," by Offenbach at the Brussels Opera House. The plot is somewhat confusing and I asked a British officer about it.

"I really can't say. There's too many blokes running in and out of it to suit me."

We rode the ubiquitous trolley cars frequently and noticed the car cards as well as street signs were in both French and Flemish. One police officer whom I asked for directions spoke only Flemish.

STUDYING IN PARIS

A short time after returning from Brussels, I took the opportunity to attend the seminar at the University of Paris, and made the long drive from Kassel in a jeep with a driver.

Only essential repairs had been made to the roads since the fighting ended, and as jeep had no springs it was a rough ride. Again we stopped at some places where we had fought.

A view from the steps of the Cologne Cathedral, July, 1945.

Classes were held at the university in the mornings but the afternoons and evenings free for sightseeing. One day I had my jeep driver take me to Versailles, but it was a disappointment. The mirrors in the Hall of Mirrors had been removed for safekeeping, and its gardens not been kept up.

Other attractions also were effected by the war. The Louvre Museum was closed, and the first landing of the Eiffel Tower was the only one open to the public. We had a fine view of Paris from it, however. Beer was no longer served there as some GIs had thrown glasses off the tower endangering people on the ground.

VISITS TO THE PARIS OPERA

I attended two performances at the Paris Opera House, Thais and Herodiade, both by Massenet. One night when my jeep driver let me out in front of the Opera House, he asked if we weren't in Paris.

"Of course," I replied.

"It's Saturday night?"

"Yes."

"And you're going in THERE?"

I tried to attend a performance of Faust but it was a sellout, and people were still trying to buy tickets.

The operas began at 6:00 p.m. to so those attending them could catch the metro (subway) by 10:00 as they stopped for the day at that time. The only other means of public transportation was by taxi and they were prohibitively expensive. The last trains of the evening were packed and reeked with the odor of unwashed bodies.

Once I thought someone was trying to lift my wallet from my back pocket but were packed in so tightly that I could neither turn around or reach back to protect it. Fortunately, it was not taken.

2. Berlin

When I returned to my unit there was little to do while waiting to move into Berlin, but in November we finally received orders to go there. By that time the weather had turned bitterly cold, and we put up makeshift shields on the side of our jeeps to ward

off the bone-chilling winds. But just before our convoy moved out General Camm, artillery commander, ordered them removed as they were non-regulation. But later we saw he didn't remove the non-regulation shield on his jeep. RHIP (rank has its privileges).

We cleared the check point at Helmstadt, eastern boundary of Russian-occupied territory, and then moved on to Berlin. By terms of an agreement (which I still don't agree with), we had to let the Russians get to Berlin first.

We were the third U.S. division to occupy the American sector of Berlin. The first one was an armored division as tanks would be needed if fighting broke out with the Russians. Later an airborne division replaced the armored division, but there were some problems and the 78th was sent in to replace this division.

Berlin was a scene of utter devastation. Instead of surrendering when his situation was hopeless, Hitler ordered continued resistance and the Russians fired artillery with incendiary shells. The shellings set fire to the many parts of the city that hadn't been destroyed by Allied bombs, and the fired department was practically powerless to fight the fires because the bombings had knocked out miles of water mains. To make some of the streets passable bulldozers pushed rubble to the side, making just enough room for two vehicles to pass.

Berlin - Nov 1945
Statue of Russian soldier

The 78th's engineer battalion was assigned to guard the Templehof Airport and repair its damaged runways. (Templehof was in the Russian sector and I never knew why a U.S. division was given this assignment). Duties of other units in the division was to patrol the streets and to make the U.S. presence known in Berlin.

In order to see more of Berlin than the area we occupied, we engaged a woman who was a native of the city as a guide. When we came to a large open square with a building with a balcony, I asked our guide if this was where Hitler spoke.

"Oh, I don't know. I never came to hear him." We got the same answer when we asked about other places where Hitler may have made public appearances. None of the people we talked to would admit they had anything to do with the Nazi regime.

KEEPING A PROMISE

As soon as I had the opportunity, I took a jeep to deliver the package the countess in Geneva had asked me to take to her elderly aunt. Ed Jones, a lieutenant from Virginia, went with me and we drove through rubble-strewn streets to the address the countess gave me. We finally found it - a two story apartment building only slightly damaged by bombing but standing amid other buildings that were heavily damaged. It had no heat so I understood why the countess wanted the woolen shawl delivered to her aunt.

We climbed the stairs to the second floor, knocked on the door of her apartment, and heard someone say in German to come in. We entered and saw an elderly woman in a bed. I told her why we were here and gave her the package. She went at it as a child does when opening Christmas presents, tearing it open a fast as she could.

"No chocolates?" she asked after searching the package.

"I'm sorry, but no," I replied. Fortunately, Lt. Jones had a chocolate bar with him and gave it to her. She removed the wrapping faster than she did those on the shawl.

Not a single tree remained in the park by the Brandenburg Gate. A few Germans wandered through the park picking up the small branches lying on the ground to use as fuel. The first Russian tank to enter Berlin was mounted on a pillar as a shrine.

When the Russians entered the city they looted and raped and committed other atrocities. I asked a girl who worked at the house where we were billeted what happened to her. She said her mother kept her in the attic of their house until the Russian soldiers were brought under control.

I had been in Berlin only about three weeks when I had an opportunity to return home and I took it. I rode in a convoy to Bremerhaven at the mouth of the Weser River on the North Sea. It was a long drive in the bitter cold (no heaters in our vehicles), and it was dark when we arrived. When I awoke the next morning I was surprised to see the superstructure of a large ship gliding past we were billeted. I was not aware that we were close by a levee on the navigable Weser River.

Chapter 10

RETURN TO THE U.S.

1. Troop Ship

In the fall of 1945, I had accumulated enough points to become eligible to be furloughed to the active reserves, and was transferred to the 29th Infantry Division and returned to the U.S. The 29th was stationed in Bremerhaven, on the Weser River near the North Sea, the port of embarkation.

The weather was bitterly cold when our small convoy drove from Berlin to Bremerhaven. While waiting for orders to board the ship, I walked around downtown Bremerhaven. It was just before Christmas and the few stores that were open had a only pathetic display of a few handmade wooden toys for sale.

On Christmas Eve we watched troops disembarking from the John Ericcson. Someone remarked he felt sorry for these men. I disagreed, pointing out they would serve as an occupation force, whereas when we arrived we went into combat in near zero weather. I added that we had suffered a large number of casualties, and the newly arriving troops were not likely to have any.

When we boarded the ship I learned that the officers in my unit were to be assigned to take turns staying with the troops in the bottom deck to keep order. That didn't appeal to me so I went to the naval officer serving as liaison with the soldiers, told him I was experienced in writing, and offered my services as editor of the ship's newsletter. He welcomed my offer, saying he had been wondering how to get someone for this job.

The newsletter office was set up in the gunnery room as there was it was not needed, and three GI's and I produced the newsletter. We received daily news reports from the ship's radio, and every morning showed the ship's distance from New York by the location of a ball colored Blue and Gray (the 29th Division's informal name) on a nautical mileage chart. It was fun and a lot easier and more comfortable than being on duty in the hold of the ship.

On New Year's Eve I told my co-workers we would have a party, and produced a bottle of whiskey (I don't recall how I happened to have one). We toasted each other and our return home - a better celebration than the other soldiers could had. One of the men, a dingy GI, said to me, "I certainly appreciate this, Captain, and I hope I can repay you some day." I couldn't imagine what he could do for me but thanked him and asked what he did in civilian life.

"I'm an assistant manager of the Waldorf-Astoria," he said much to my amazement. A year later when Gretchen and I were planning our honeymoon trip to New York City, I wrote him and he made a reservation for us and visited us in our room.

2. Camp Kilmer

When our troop ship reached New York, we boarded a train bound for Camp Kilmer, NJ. We arrived about midnight and were served a steak dinner including a large salad. I looked down the long table and saw that without exception, the men were

eating the salad before attacking the steak. I attributed this to the fact that we had had meat but no salad since arriving in Europe.

Our deprocessing process included a discussion with a psychologist. I heard a chaplain with the German name of Stonecipher questioned about his experience as a prisoner of war. He said the Germans quizzed him at length as to why a person of German descent would fight against them. When it was my turn to talk to the psychologist, he asked about my experience when wounded, but soon dismissed me with a remark that anyone who grinned like I did couldn't have any emotional scars.

3. Return to Birmingham

When our deprocessing was completed, we were given orders to return on a troop train to the army post nearest our home. My orders were to be assistant commander of a train going to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia.

I wanted to be discharged at Fort Meade, Maryland, so I could visit Gretchen Bickelhaupt, the girl I met a few days before going overseas. I went to the officer in charge of assignments and asked that my orders be changed so I could be discharged at Fort Meade.

"What's the reason?" he asked. I forgot what I told him but he wasn't impressed.

"Your request is for your personal convenience," he replied, "and to change them we'd have to cut another long stencil."

"Besides," he added, "you're the assistant commander of the troop train (I was then a major), and that complicates the situation. Can't possibly do it." I asked if there were any reasons why my orders could be changed.

"The only reason is an obvious overseas error," he replied. I thanked him and went to New Brunswick, the nearest town to Camp Kilmer. It took quite a while, but I finally found a liquor store that had whiskey for sale and bought a bottle.

The next morning I to the office of the assignment officer and put the whiskey on his desk. "Obvious overseas error in my orders," I said.

"Damned if it wasn't," he said and proceeded to have them changed, sending me to Fort Meade. When the commander of troop train found out about he tried to get me to change my mind, but I wouldn't budge.

After completing the deprocessing program, I got a ride to Richmond with two officers who were returning to their homes in the Williamsburg area. I registered at the Jefferson Hotel, and the next morning telephoned Gretchen asked her to go to dinner with me. Somewhat to my surprise, she accepted. I rode a street car (at that time they went down Grove Avenue to Three Chopt Road) and then walked to her parents' home.

A day or so later I took a train to Raleigh and had a date with Louise, the North Carolina girl whom I had dated several times before going overseas. Then I went by train to Birmingham. My family wondered why it had taken several days for me to get there after landing in New York.

4. Post War Training

I was only a few years away from having served long enough to become eligible for a military pension when I reached the age of 65, so I continued my service by attending evening classes of active reservists and summer training at Fort Bragg. I was not recalled to serve in the Korean War probably because of my age and rank.

In 1953 I took a job as CEO of the chamber of commerce in Dothan, Alabama. I found the only reserve units there were in the Ordinance Dept., and as I had no training in that field I taught classes in general subjects such as first aid and map reading in order to remain active.

In spite of this service, however, I received notice that I had been passed over for promotion to lieutenant colonel and if passed over twice more would be furloughed to the inactive reserve and ineligible for a pension. I went to reserve headquarters in Birmingham and asked why I had been passed over.

"No reason," I was told. When I asked what else I could to it was suggested I take correspondence courses and attend local classes for reservists. I immediately enrolled in a correspondence course offered by the Field Artillery School in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and also attended a two-weeks training session at Fort Bragg, NC. When I moved to Dothan, Alabama, I taught a class in map reading for reservists. In spite of these activities, I was passed over again and in 1954 was retired to the inactive reserves. I concluded my potential pension was a casualty of a program to reduce funds for reservists.

Thus ended my military career.

A shadow box created by my family in the 1980's

POSTSCRIPT

Alvin Morland was an American patriot. A patriot in the best meaning of that word. A man who loved his country, his family, and his home and who was prepared to risk everything to defend them. As I only recently learned from another veteran, Alvin's role as a forward observer, directing his unit's artillery fire to its intended targets, was one of the most dangerous jobs in the army. As much as he talked about the war in his later years, he never mentioned that aspect of the role he played.

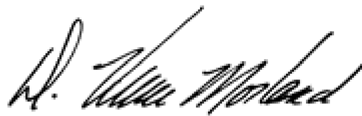
Alvin Morland was a modest man. He was an officer and a leader and he firmly believed that troops must be led, that they must be organized and disciplined or they would be "little more than an armed mob." Yet he presents his story as "simply a chronicle of one man's experiences." It touches on several of the key battles that decided the fate of the war in the European Theater, yet the focus of the story is intensely personal. It is this mix of military and personal drama that make his story so engaging.

World War II was a defining point in Alvin's life. As a member of the ROTC in college and as a reserve officer immediately thereafter, he prepared for war, though it was never the focus of his life. During the war he played his part with dedication, always intensely aware of and seeking to alleviate the cruel impact that war has on the lives of soldiers and civilians alike. His story is replete with instances of what one of his favorite poets, William Wordsworth, called "that best portion of a good man's life - his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love." After the war he returned to civilian life, but he never forgot the lessons he learned, both brave and tragic.

Alvin passed away on July 15, 2002, two weeks shy of his 88th birthday. In the last three weeks of his life, he faced a spiraling series of medical challenges. Despite his lifelong habit of staying fit, the combination of severe problems with his heart, his lungs, and, crucially, his hip were too much. To use a military metaphor of which he would have approved, his battle against death was much like an infantry company trying to take a well fortified hill. Progress was gained slowly and with great expenditures of effort and blood, but the reversal came suddenly and the path of retreat in the face of superior force was precipitous.

Alvin, the soldier and the man, is now at peace. His family and friends are glad for his life and the great blessing for us who knew him, loved him, and could call him our own. As Hamlet remarked to his friend Horatio upon learning of the death of his father:

> He was a man, take him for all in all.
> We shall not look upon his like again.



D. Verne Morland
Son of Alvin W. Morland
Kettering, Ohio
November 11 - Veterans' Day - 2004