

THE INFANTRY RIFLEMEN
BY GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY

The rifleman fights without promise of either reward or relief. Behind every river there's another hill, and behind that hill, another river. After weeks or months in the line only a wound can offer him the comfort of safety, shelter and a bed. Those who are left to fight, fight on, evading death, but knowing that with each day of evasion, they have exhausted one more chance for survival. Sooner or later, unless victory comes, this chase must end on the litter or in the grave.



Born 10/7/1902 Died 9/25/1985

Father Barry's obituary appeared in the Province Review November 1985.

REV. JOSEPH C. BARRY, CSC, of Holy Cross House, Notre Dame, died unexpectedly there on Wednesday, Sept. 25. He had joined the community as usual for supper the evening before and was apparently well. Death came as he was preparing to go to the chapel for the 7:a.m. community Mass at which he was a regular concelebrant.

Fr. Barry born Oct. 7, 1902, in Syracuse, New York, graduated from Holy Rosary High School (source of several other Holy Cross vocations: Frs. Michael Foran, Theodore Hesburgh, Charles Young (EP) and the late Regis Riter), and entered Holy Cross Seminary in 1923. He went to St. Joseph's Novitiate a year later and made his first vows on August 15, 1925. After graduation from Notre Dame in

1929, he studied theology at Holy Cross College, Washington, D.C., and was ordained in Sacred Heart Church, Notre Dame, on June 24, 1933.

Fr. Barry was first pastor of the new Christ the King parish, South Bend, for his first year after ordination, then assisted at St. Joseph's parish, South Bend, until 1941, a period interrupted only by a stint as teacher and prefect at Notre Dame in 1935. As army chaplain with the Thunderbird infantry division 1941-46 he survived some of the fiercest fighting of the war: in Africa, Sicily, Italy (Salerno and the Anzio Beachhead, the capture of Rome), and finally the invasion of Southern France and Germany. After the war, he spent two years as director of student affairs and prefect of discipline at Notre Dame, then was associate vocation director during 1949-51. He returned to Notre Dame where he was prefect of religion, pastor of Sacred Heart Church (1952-56) and assistant prefect of religion (1956-61). After two years as chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital, South Bend, he was appointed chaplain at Archbishop Hoban High School, Akron, Ohio, where he served for 19 years before ill health forced his retirement to Holy Cross House in 1982.

Throughout his half century of priesthood, serving in a wide variety of apostolates, Fr. Barry was truly a sign of faith and hope and Christian joy for all those to whom he ministered. His three happy years at Holy Cross House were clear witness to these lifelong gifts.

In his eulogy at the wake service in the Moreau Seminary chapel, Fr. William Craddick, assistant administrator and assistant superior of Holy Cross House, said: "At Hoban High School in Akron, happened what happened everywhere Father Joe went: he captivated young and old by his friendliness, cheerfulness and understanding. Many, and I mean many, Akron followers of Notre Dame football who came to home games would visit Father Joe at Holy Cross House and laugh with him. The Hoban High School affection for Father Barry was of no small degree. So beloved was he that when it came time to name the new gymnasium at the school, it was named after Father Joseph Barry."

In his homily at the funeral Mass, Fr. Christopher O'Toole (SP) former superior general said: "Two years ago in this church, at this same hour, we celebrated the golden jubilee of Father Joe's ordination. Today we celebrate a victory, the victory of one who has persevered in his commitment to the end. We are here not just to pray for Father Joe, but also to pray with him, for he is a member of the Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus. We are here not to emphasize his physical absence, but to emphasize his spiritual presence-his union with us. He has been listening (to the Word of God) from the time he entered the seminary at Notre Dame. From that day to this the Word of God has been sounding in the depths of his soul. The Word of God pointing Father Joe to the religious life; to the novitiate; to perpetual profession and ordination to the priesthood. That Word has shaped his entire life...."

This article was written by Robert E. Donohue, Company E, 157th Infantry Regiment, 45th Division

This incident happened in the Vosges Mountains during December 1944 while serving with Company E, 157th Infantry Regiment. Our company had made an attack during a full blown rain and ice storm and we ran into some major difficulties. During the fire fight I and another squad member name Strong got separated from the rest of the company. We unfortunately caught the attention of a concealed German machine gunner who began to systematically pursue the both of us in circles from tree to tree with a fusillade of bullets.

We spotted a cavelike outcropping of rock on the side of a hill and dove for our lives under that rock. The German gunner had spotted us and persisted in hammering the rock and kept us captive unable to move out into the open. Since it was late afternoon we waited for full darkness to make a run for it, and we did. The machine gunner apparently heard us moving out, as he proceeded to blindly rake the hillside in hopes of picking off a hapless pair. The gunner failed to hit either of us, but in our haste and due to the pitch of darkness, I got tangled up in a mass of brushy undergrowth which caused me to trip and fall, resulting in the loss of my helmet.

Later that night we made it back to our lines. I had just managed to crawl up an embankment onto a muddy road when a three-quarter ton command car skidded to a halt next to me and voice from within shouted: "Soldier, where is your helmet?" Without waiting for a reply, a hand thrust a helmet through the canvas side flaps and a voice said, "Here take this one."

The next morning when the company assembled to move out, I became the center of everyone's curiosity. Unknown to me, my new helmet had a bright silver cross on center front for all to see and wonder about. I learned later that the helmet donor was Father Barry the Regimental Chaplain. I kept the helmet for a long time, but Father Barry's silver cross lies somewhere in the woods of the Vosges mountains. (Father Barry retired to Notre University and is now deceased).

MY MOST REWARDING AND HAPPIEST REUNION

My website <http://www.45thInfantryDivision.com> has been responsible for reuniting many people. This story is about a once in a lifetime occurrence. Jessica Hickling from Longmeadow, Mass. and Kathleen Gordon Rowland from Darien, Conn. saw an announcement on the front page of my website that the 157th Infantry Regiment was holding its reunion at the Adams Mark Hotel in

Philadelphia, 6 to 9 September, 2000. Jessica and Kathleen did not know each other but decided to attend the reunion. Each was seeking information about their Dad, Robert A. Gordon, who served with Company "D", 157th Regiment, 45th Infantry Division and was killed 18 October 1944. Not only did they find information about their Dad but found each other. It was a very happy occasion and the climax of our reunion. I was exceptionally happy to have played a part in bringing Jessica and Kathleen together. My sincere wishes for continued happiness and joy to Jessica and Kathleen. The following story appeared in the Philadelphia Sunday Inquirer, 10 September 2000 written by Leonard N. Fleming.

Al Panebianco



A lifetime of wondering, waiting ends in tears of joy for sisters

Chance - and the Internet - bring WWII orphans together in Philadelphia.

By Leonard N. Fleming
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Half sisters Jessica Hickling and Kathleen Gordon Rowland never knew their father. And they had never laid eyes on each other.

What they did know was that their father, Robert A. Gordon, died in World War II. That, with the help of the Internet, led them to a veterans reunion last Thursday in

Philadelphia in an effort to find something, anything, about him.

When she arrived at the Adam's Mark Hotel last week from Longmeadow, Mass., Hickling, 59, posted her father's obituary on a bulletin board along with a note seeking information about him.

Then came the surprise.

On Thursday morning, standing in front of the bulletin board, Hickling was introduced to Rowland, 56, whose search had brought her from Darien, Conn.

They looked at each other through eyes that resembled their father's and quickly realized they were half sisters.

The two embraced. The tears flowed. And they hugged some more amid the backdrop of aging, teary-eyed veterans who served with their father and who made it back home all those years ago.

Both sisters began their bonding over lunch with their families in tow.

"It's quite a miracle," Rowland said yesterday. "I knew immediately . . . – even though I had only heard about her once – that this was my sister."

What brought them together was the reunion of the 157th Infantry Association.

Hickling and Rowland came to talk to veterans after both families discovered a Web site dedicated to the 157th Infantry. Their father's regiment secured routes to Germany through the treacherous Vosges Mountains in France. He was manning a machine-gun foxhole when he was killed on Oct. 18, 1944, at age 26.

At the reunion, Hickling's son, Richard, saw Kathleen Gordon Rowland's name in the reunion registry and suspected she was the sister his mother had been searching for. So they waited for the next morning to find out.

Rowland's son, Casey Ackerman, 21, who made the trip with his mother, said they didn't have high expectations of finding anyone.

"This is a huge, huge shock. We never expected to see anything like this," he said. "I'm extremely happy for my mother. She was the only child, and now she's got a sister."

The two sisters knew vaguely of each other's existence, but with different mothers, the passage of time, and not much to go on, they never could track each other down.

All Hickling had of her father was an obituary and three photographs.

Hickling learned at age 15 that her mother had put her up for adoption, and that her father had been killed in the war. She was told by her adoptive mother that her parents had given her up and had their marriage annulled because of conflicting religions – a story she is not sure she believes.

She also learned that her father had sent her adoptive family money to help them along when he went away to Africa for a job before he was drafted.

Years later, a minister told her not to try to find relatives because "you don't know if that would upset their lives."

"But it was on my mind every day of my life," she said, adding that she and her son searched through genealogy records.

Rowland, whose mother married Gordon before he was drafted and who was only a few months old when he went off to war, knew more about her father through nearly 500 letters to her mother from overseas. He last wrote the day before he was killed.

Rowland was 25 when her mom told her she had a sister, but "it was never mentioned again. You kind of learn not to ask questions."

But the existence of a sister stayed on her mind. She had even contacted a few detective agencies to try to track her down.

For Rowland, the quest to find out more about her father began last year when she heard about Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation*. That's when she learned of a group called the American World War II Orphans Network.

She soon joined the online organization, meeting others like her who had lost their fathers in battle.

Rowland then came across a Web site for veterans of the 157th Infantry, which told of the reunion.

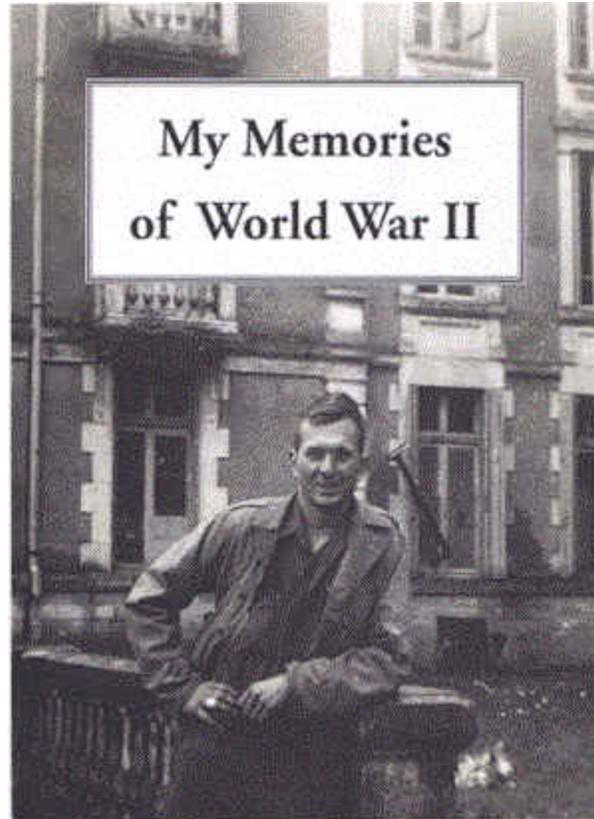
Plans are in the works for the sisters to join families and pore over the pictures of their young father and all the letters he wrote Rowland's mother during the war.

They parted yesterday the way they had met - with hugs and tears - but with the knowledge that they would see each other again.

Retired newspaperman Tom Riordan, a 60mm mortarman and communication sergeant for Company G, 157th Infantry 45th Division, tells us, “My wife Marilyn made me do it.” Riordan refers to a 72 page booklet about his World War II experiences, created as a Christmas gift for our six children and eleven grand kids. The project took three months. Actually I enjoyed the job. With a few tears here and there. Remembering Father Joseph Barry and buddies like Patty Williams, Orin Scott, Andy Korus, Wilmer Wood (who was killed at Bundenthal), George Courlas, Roland VanBuren, Bill Hundermark, Bill Lyford, plus other assorted characters. Riordan recounts his 35 month military career, from basic training at Fort McClellan, AL to Munich. Riordan told his offspring, “Please remember, Dad was not a war hero, just an ordinary soldier who always tried his best.” He dedicated the volume to seven of his 1940 classmates at Detroit Jesuit High School, all killed during WWII.



Tom Riordan - 2000



By Tom Riordan

TOM RIORDAN WORLD WAR II TIMELINE

June 18, 1942: As a 21 year old sophomore at Michigan State College, enlists in U.S. Army

April 12, 1943: Basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama

August 1943: Assigned to Camp Croft, South Carolina

December 1943: Joins 87th Division in Camp McCain, Mississippi

March 1944: Transferred into European replacement pool

April 1944: Depart USA on troop ship with 4,000 replacements to fill ranks of Italian campaign casualties. After speedy Atlantic crossing, arrive Oran, North Africa.

May 1944: With about 400 men taken by small British ship to Naples, Italy

June 1944: In hills near Rome, assigned to Company G, 157th Infantry Regiment, 45th Division as a 60mm mortarman. Given one-day pass to visit Rome.

July 1944 In area near Naples, 45th rebuilt and trains for amphibious landing into Southern France near St. Maxine.

August 15, 1944: Invasion of southern France.

Next four months: Combat with 45th battling through Vosges Mountains along western edge of France into Alsace.

December 17, 1944: Bundenthal, Germany hospital and Midnight Mass Christmas Eve.

January 13, 1945: Reipertswiller, France, one of 13 survivors from Company G.

January 26, 1945: Hangwiller, Alsace to refit 157th, promoted to company communications sergeant.

March 14, 1945: Transferred to 45th public relations to write releases for hometownpapers of men winning decorations.

May 7, 1945: Germany surrenders

May 30, 1945: Transferred into Army of Occupation, serving as sports editor of Ninth Division News.

October 1945: Shipped to USA on USS General Breckenridge.

October 24, 1945: Discharge from Army at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin.

January 1946: Return to Michigan State to complete college.

AUGUST 15, 1944 – THE REAL THING

Men of the 45th Division boarded giant LSTs – Landing Ships Tank – in early August at Naples harbor. Navy ships of various sizes escorted us, their big guns ready to pummel German defense emplacements. This was it. The amphibious invasion of southern France.

On the morning of the 15th we were aroused at 2 o'clock for breakfast. We ate quietly. "Hope this goes like the Anzio landing," an old timer said. "No Germans to meet us." Another replies, "Sure as hell not like Sicily. That was a real SNAFU."

Father Joe Barry, the 45th's Catholic Chaplin, who served as a dorm moderator at Notre Dame before joining the army, reminded us there would be a Mass in the

hold of the ship at 4:00AM. By 3:30 it was packed, GIs sitting on tanks, jeeps, trucks, boxes of ammunition and rations.

Just before starting Mass, Father Barry asked if someone could serve. I looked around. No one had volunteered. So I raised my hand. "Father I can serve, but I don't know all the Latin responses."

"That's OK soldier, I'll answer the ones you can't."

There I was, kneeling on the wide, wooden ribs of the LST hold. Father beginning, "In the nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen." I wondered, will this be my last Mass? Praise God. It wasn't.

For Company G, the actual landing was a breeze. In our sector heavy dawn bombardments by naval guns had silenced German pill boxes. Not a shot was fired by the Germans or us. Slogging through heavy sand, we saw French civilians watching at the edge of the beach. They were cheering. For me, there was one surprise. A plump, middle-aged French woman rushed towards us. Without warning, she planted a wet kiss on my cheek.

Our orders were to keep moving until we ran into resistance. We force marched for two days, mainly through rain, until reaching a little town called LeLuc – my baptism under fire. It lasted about 20 minutes. We set up our mortars, but they weren't needed. The Germans has quickly pulled back off.

Our company commander was about to signal us to move out when four French civilians joined him. They wore armbands with the letters FFI. We were seeing our first Free French resistance fighters. "Anyone in the outfit speak French?" the CO asked. George Courlas stepped forward. The Frenchmen excitedly began to chatter and wave their arms. George listened carefully. "They say there's a German Mark IV tank hidden in the next village, sir. They want to knock it out."

"OK, tell 'em to go ahead and do it." And they did.

As the weeks wore on we were in a variety of battles. For some, our mortars played solid support roles. In others we dug into defensive positions and waited. There were respites, even rest camp respites, hot showers and fresh uniforms. But mostly we continued to move along the northeast border of France.

My intention here is not to go into great details about these actions, settling on two in Germany, which I remember best.

The official history of the 157th Infantry states: "The mission of the 45th was to break through the back door into Germany by way of the Vosges Mountains."

That mission was accomplished.

Company G contributed its share.

NORTHWEST RECORD

PEASANT GIVES FRESH MILK TO DOUGHBOYS IN FRANCE

By PFC Tom Riordan

November 3, 1944

(France, Oct 6) – The French people are a sight to behold; their bright smiles and cheery greetings make a real hit with the American soldiers. Bedecked in wooden shoes, the men in baggy pants and the women in long plain dresses, the townsfolk are in front of their homes at all hours of the day and night to greet the doughboys as they tramp through in pursuit of the Germans. Ever so often the GIs would find a bottle of wine or basket of fruit offered to them.

One of the nicest gifts I received while our outfit was hoofing along on a very cool, rainy day was a bowl of rich warm milk just taken from the cow. When the company halted for a break, our platoon stopped opposite a tiny farmhouse. We had hardly sat down and loosened our equipment for the ten minute rest period, when the farm owner came hustling out of his home with a big pail of milk. Following close at his heels were his wife and two children all clutching little china bowls.

They immediately began serving the soldiers and everybody was smiling. As I sipped from the bowl offered me the chilly feeling left my body and I felt good all over. “Merci, monsieur,” we told the friendly peasant man of the soil, and proceeded to load him down with all our extra cigarettes. American tobacco hasn’t been seen in France since the Nazi domination four years ago, and the French smoker has had to puff on rationed German, “tabac,” which has a large content of wood shavings in it.

The smell of it burning is enough to make even the veteran G.I. smoker take off for the nearest exit. It’s horrible, but taking a whiff of it helps you realize how much the Frenchmen must appreciate our little gifts.

This unexpected act of love by a French farm family ranks as one of the sweetest events of my nearly 18 months in Europe during WWII. Imagine a blustery and rain November day, a forced march which seems to have no ending. That’s what the guys of Company G had going for ourselves. Presto, warm milk to sip from bowls. Fresh from the cows. That was a treat.

TWO TINY GERMAN TOWNS WITH JAWBREAKER NAMES

Let's start with Bundenthal during mid-December 1944. We'd been slogging through a deep snowfall in a forest of giant trees. As guys in the ranks, we had no idea we were entering a tiny corner of Germany. Or that the Siegfried Line was not many miles away.

It was late afternoon when we stopped. An officer huddled with the mortar squads. He said he had a small force of GIs had been trapped in Bundenthal. Along with about 25 riflemen we'd be strolling down the hillside and quietly rescue these GIs.

Our mission would start in about 45 minutes when it got dark. That left time for us to relax from the day's hike and enjoy a K-ration dinner.

When word to move came, we gathered our mortars, wondering what role they might play in the rescue. As it turned out none. Moving out single file, we slipped and slid down an icy path, which ran next to a large ditch. At the bottom of the hill the line of riflemen turned left at a road and we followed.

I noticed a wrought iron fence running along next to us. Suddenly there was a burst of German machine gun fire. We dove into a shallow ditch near the fence. Rifles began to pop. Our guys were in a fire fight. The Germans had apparently waited until most of the column had entered the town, then opened up. Now the rescue mission was itself part of the beleaguered.

We crawled back along the fence and discovered an entrance into a cemetery. The lieutenant decided we should hide among the tombstones. He said we'd head back up the hill at dawn. That's when we learned the ditch we'd seen in near darkness turned out to be a giant tank trap. It was cut in a series of ledges to the top of the hill. He told us to climb it, hopping up one ledge at a time. That worked fine until a German machine gunner spotted our exit and began firing at us.

Just ahead of me Andy Korus of Texas yelled, "I'm hit in the leg." I jumped to his ledge. Both of us hugged the ground while I tended his wound. There was another burst of fire, which just missed us. But tragically Corporal Wilmer Wood of New Jersey. Bounding up to our ledge, was hit in the throat and killed instantly. From that point there was nothing Andy and I could do but lay perfectly still, pretending to be dead.

At dusk, stretcher bearers slid down the hill to remove Wilmer's body. Another twosome evacuated Korus. One of them told me, "The doctor says for you to come back with us."

At the aid station Andy was loaded into an ambulance. His war was over. (Fifty-five years later I learned Korus was alive, albeit with a balky left knee. We

exchanged letters. Andy said he never knew the circumstances of being hit. So I filled him in.)

The field doctor pinned a “combat fatigue” tag on my jacket and said to join a group of walking wounded. We soon were in an ambulance, bumping over rough roads, headed for a small German hospital, taken over by U.S. Medical personnel. It was probably a dozen or so miles from Bundenthal.

You may remember my Christmas 1944 story which ran in the Ocala Star-Banner. It recounted this experience. Midnight Mass in the hospital chapel with about 75 GIs attending. The magic moment when from the choir loft there was a burst of feminine voices, singing “Silent Night” – in German. It turned out they were nuns who made up the hospital’s regular nursing staff.

My story ended Christmas morning when Red Cross ladies passed out tiny gifts to patients. A cake of soap, a razor, some shaving cream. Each was gaily wrapped in Yule paper.

When a gift-giver arrived at my bed she said softly, “I’m sorry, soldier, you arrived after we made our head count. So there isn’t a present for you.”

“That’s OK,” I smiled broadly, “I’ve already received the best gift of all – my life.”

THREE BITTER DAYS AT REIPERTSWILLER

About 50 years after the war ended I learned details of our battle near this town in France. It took place in late January, 1945. And I was there.

What we didn’t know then, a rested, well-supplied German SS mountain division, had swung down from Norway to the quiet southern front, for one final all-out German assault. The combat-weary, undermanned 157th Infantry was in the midst of being relieved by green troops. That spelled disaster.

German 88 guns pounded American positions for three days. When the artillery lifted, Germans effectively infiltrated our strung-out forward positions, killing and capturing dozens of our men.

The third day proved the most intense for Company G mortar guys. Firing our guns almost continuously, we seemed to play tit for tat with German mortarmen on the other side of the hill. “We’d let go a dozen rounds. Before the third or fourth hit their lines, German incoming had us diving into bunkers.

First Sergeant Lou Wims led Company G's battered defensive force of maybe 40 riflemen atop the hill. He told us over our direct-wire telephone hookup to pour out everything we had onto the attacking Germans.

That led us to break the first commandment of firing a mortar: Only the gunner shall drop a round down the tube. But the hellish German counter battery that third day at Reipertswiller forced us into a forbidden technique.

We would spread a GI blanket next to our bunker. Onto to it we placed about a dozen 60mm rounds. We tore off three of the four power bags (since our range was about 300 yards) and pulled each firing pin.

Two guys would drag the blanket over the frozen ground to a mortar. Laying flat on each side of the gun, the pair took turns dropping rounds down the tube. When the blanket was empty, the pair scrambled for cover.

On one such turn, a tail fin from my buddy's round, then exiting the tube, lightly sliced across a fingernail on the hand I held a shell about to be dropped in. Yes, that scared the hell out of me. If my hand had been a millimeter closer we could have been the only crew in the ETO (European Theater of Operations) to self destruct firing our guns.

Four years ago, Chan Rogers who later joined G Company called me about a reunion of the 157th in Myrtle Beach, SC. In the conversation Chan told me about a military historian was writing a book about the infamy of Reipertswiller. I contacted author Hugh Foster, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Vietnam era, to ask for data on those devastating days.

Hugh sent me copies of his detailed research on the entire operation. From this I learned the gruesome facts. Most depressive were the statistics: the 157th Infantry suffered 158 killed, 426 captured and 600 wounded. Five companies, including G were completely gutted.

Another author, Flint Whitlock, who wrote a history of the 45th Division, entitled Rock of Anzio, reported, "The battle of Reipertswiller was the most devastating single loss in the history of the 157th Regiment."

When we remnants of Company G were pulled back, I counted 13 men.

WWII EXPERIENCES OF TECHNICAL SERGEANT RALPH W. FINK



Ralph Fink was sworn into military service at Allentown, PA on 3 March 1943. Left home on 10 March 1943 by train for New Cumberland, PA Induction Center. After several days there, entrained for Camp Wolters, TX for thirteen weeks of basic training. He then took a troop train to Camp Shenango, PA. This was a stop-over, waiting for overseas shipment. After about two weeks, shipped to Camp Shanks, NY and then boarded USS Alexander for shipment to Oran, Africa. After two weeks on the high seas and several replacement camps, he was assigned to Company "D", 157th Regiment, 45th Infantry Division at Benevento, Italy, approximately 10 October 1943. Remained with Company "D" for the remainder of the war.

Ralph participated in the fighting up the Volturno River Valley. Took part in the Winter Line, high in the mountains in the vicinity of Venafro, Italy. He then spent four months on Anzio Beachhead and participated in the fall of Rome. Next on the agenda was the invasion of southern France and fighting many battles into the Alsace Lorraine area. Crossed the Rhine River in the vicinity of Worms, Germany and proceeded through the Siegfried Line. The battles at Aschaffenberg and Bamberg followed only to be confronted with the liberation of Dachau on 29 April 1945. A few days later, entered Munich, Germany where the war ended on 8 May 1945.

After the war, Ralph was transferred to the 103rd Division for occupation duty in Huben, Austria and Pfaffenhausen, Germany. Shortly thereafter, he entrained for Camp Lucky Strike for shipment home. Sailed on a small ship, northern route, for Boston. He then boarded a train to Fort Indiantown Gap, PA for discharge. After a 45 day furlough, he was discharged late October 1945.

Ralph Fink was the recipient of many awards:

1. **Combat Infantryman's Badge**
2. **Bronze Star Medal for heroic achievement in action on 17 August 1944 near Lorgues, France. When his motorized patrol suddenly encountered a strong enemy roadblock, Corporal Fink immediately opened fire from his truck. Drawing heavy return fire, he remained in his exposed and vulnerable position to deliver accurate fire enabling the leading vehicle to dash through the roadblock with valuable information for his battalion.**
3. **Second award of the Bronze Star Medal was received by Technical Sergeant Ralph W. Fink (then Staff Sergeant) for heroic achievement in action on 27 April 1945 near Marxheim, Germany. In charge of four machine guns, attached to an infantry battalion, which was forcing the crossing of the Danube River, Sergeant Fink placed the guns in four widely separated positions to give maximum support to the attacking forces. As time did not permit a communication system to be established and although the area was subjected to intense enemy rocket, artillery, and mortar fire, Sergeant Fink moved from one position to another, effectively directing fire of his guns upon enemy positions across the river. His leadership contributed greatly to the success of the operation.**
4. **Third Bronze Star Medal – This award was authorized after WWII to men having earned the Combat Infantry Badge and at least one Purple Heart.**
5. **The first Purple Heart awarded was for wounds of the right knee from mortar shrapnel on 12 September 1944 near Epinal, France.**
6. **The second Purple Heart was awarded for wound of the left forearm by artillery shrapnel on 27 December 1944 near Leinbach, Germany.**
7. **European – African – Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with seven campaign stars and one Arrowhead. Campaigns were Naples-Foggia, Anzio, Rome-Arno, Southern France, Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland, and Central Europe. Arrowhead represents invasion of southern France.**
8. **Army of Occupation Medal issued for the participation in occupation duties in Huben, Austria and Pfaffenhausen, Germany after WWII.**
9. **WWII Victory Medal to all personnel who participated in any way in the Epic Struggle of WWII.**
10. **Good Conduct Medal – Awarded to all military personnel free of any reprimands.**
11. **Award of Expert Badge with machine gun and carbine.**
12. **Military Discharge Button (Ruptured Duck) – Awarded to all military personnel at time of discharge.**

Since the end of WWII, Ralph W. Fink has made many contributions to society and has been very active in numerous veteran organizations. He was an outstanding combat infantryman during the WWII and still volunteers his time to worthy causes. He is a very generous and compassionate person.

SANFORD KEITH BOWEN



Born 8/13/1918 - West Salem, OH. KIA 1/20/1945 - Reipertswiller, France

Above is a picture of Sanford Keith Bowen with some of his buddies of the 1st Platoon, Company "I", 157th Regiment, 45th Infantry Division. This picture was taken December 16, 1944. He is in the front row, wearing glasses. Even at this late date, we are hoping that someone will recognize Keith and contact us.

In the June 15, 1989 157th Infantry Association Newsletter, General Sparks related the following:

"In early January of 1945, the German Army launched an attack towards the Alsatian Plains with the objective of breaking through to disrupt the Allied attack. This left the 45th Division, then already in Germany, in an exposed position, and the division was ordered to withdraw. The regiment withdrew to positions around Reipertswiller to counter the German penetration, known as the Bitche salient.

Compounding the situation at the time, was the fact that the 45th Division had been in almost continuous combat for the preceeding 5 months. The fighting in the heavily forested Vosges Mountains and the subsequent penetration across the German border had been bitter and costly. Rain, snow, and mud made life miserable and supply difficult. Along with heavy battle casualties, sickness, and frozen feet resulted in severely depleted company strengths. There was probably not a rifle company in the division which could muster more than two-thirds of its full compliment of the men. Because of the Battle of the Bulge then nearing its conclusion, the Seventh United States Army, of which the 45th Division was a part, had been stripped of both replacements and units.

The failure of their Ardennes offensive, known as the Battle of the Bulge, left the Germans desperate for a victory. In such desperation, a plan was conceived to drive Allied forces from the Vosges Mountains of Northern France. Fresh German

troops were brought in, and the offensive against the thinly held Allied lines began. Standing squarely in the path of the German drive was the 45th Infantry Division and the 70th Infantry Division, newly arrived from the States, along with supporting troops. And such was the situation in which the exhausted troops of the 45th Division found themselves in early January of 1945, along with bone-chilling snowstorms.

On the morning of January 14, 1945, the regiment, along with other elements of the division, launched a counterattack against the penetrating German forces. The ensuing battle lasted until the evening of January 20. While the German penetration was stopped, the regimental casualties were the heaviest of any single battle of the war. Companies C, G, I, K, L, and M were almost completely wiped out. Other units of the regiment also incurred heavy losses."

Sanford (Sandy) Reed Bowen, son of Keith is currently writing, "The Biography of my father, Sanford Keith Bowen, a citizen soldier of WWII." Sandy and I have emailed each other for nearly two years and have met personally at our last two reunions. I am certain Keith would be very proud of his son. A great guy and a true gentleman.

DONUT DOLLIES CAPTURE A "JERRY" By Sarah Ann "Sally" Stauffer



One morning Donut Dollies Monica (Woods) and Jo (Betty Jones) took a jeep loaded with doughnuts for a run to a company just pulled back into a 2nd position. Near to the company, the girls rode into a forest and suddenly a "German Soldier" jumped out holding his hands up. Fortunately they put the "Jerry" on the radiator and drove into the company area with their capture. You can imagine what happened—that two Donut Dollies could capture a "POW."

The above photograph of Monica and Jo standing by their prisoner on the radiator proves that the Donut Dollies helped our men in the 45th Division during World War II. (Editor's Note: The current "Donut Dolly" display within the 45th

Infantry Division Museum has been updated with additional clothing and insignia items furnished by Sally Stauffer).



Before her demise, 1/20/96, Sally Stauffer donated all her Red Cross WWII memorabilia to the 45th Infantry Division Museum located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. While visiting the museum, I was able to snap a picture of Sally's Red Cross uniform being displayed on a mannequin. In a frame standing beside the mannequin is this description: "This Red Cross uniform was worn by Ms. Sally Stauffer who as a "Donut Dolly" served the 45th Infantry Division during most of its 511 days of combat during WWII".

Sally was part of our group when we visited Europe in 1989. On part of the trip she wore her Red Cross uniform and like a true "Donut Dolly" she distributed literature and other goodies in towns where our bus stopped. A dedicated "Donut Dolly" to the very end. Sally was a very charitable person and a gal I will never forget.

By Al Panebianco



LTC Hugh F. Foster III (Ret.) taken 9/88 at the
157th Infantry Regiment Reunion, Denver, Colorado

The following articles were written by LTC Hugh F. Foster III (Ret.). Hugh is writing a book on the Reipertswiller encounter.

FORWARD (Outline)

There is a hierarchy in an army in peace and in war, and each layer has its special function. For some, the conditions don't change whether it be peace or war. Others live a more spartan existence by moving into tents. At the lower end of the hierarchy however, there is a most fundamental change in wartime: people are physically and psychologically maimed, and many die.

Most soldiers in a wartime army will never hear a shot fired in anger. However, is a time-honored, and much used army expression as true today as it was when coined. Shit flows down hill. In war, nowhere is the expression more apt than in describing the infantry, for the greatest burden of the killing and the dying rests with those soldiers. At this level, shots in anger are heard -- and felt.

Fear, love, grief, and sacrifice defy adequate definition. Yet, these are the adjectives that best describe an infantryman's life in combat. Fear is the common thread; it binds all infantrymen together. It is a constant companion, sometimes close and clawing, sometimes lurking just below the surface of consciousness. It is usually controlled by force of will but it possesses every infantry soldier at one time or another. For an infantryman every step, every movement, each bend in the road, each house could be his last.

The infantryman of WWII worked day and night. For those who lived there were infrequent and very brief respites that came without notice -- a brief spell in "reserve", a slight wound. The nights passed with four one-hour spells of restless sleep at best, many times with no sleep at all. Every day someone around him, someone looked upon as a family member, was killed, wounded or just disappeared. He performed his duty outdoors, among the elements, in the rain and in the snow regardless of the heat or cold. He rarely tasted hot food; for days or weeks he ate only cold food from cans. A change of clothes, an opportunity to wash his body were even more rare than hot food. Maybe, every month or so he got clean clothes and a shower. He lived like this, suffered this misery until he was killed, badly wounded, captured, or the war ended; for most infantrymen, these were the only ways out of the line. It was an utterly miserable experience, seemingly without end.

As bleak as this sounds, the description is not adequate. The reality is that an infantryman's life in combat is much more terrible than words can convey. Just as the experience of childbirth cannot be adequately explained to one who has not been through it; the reality of infantry combat defies adequate description.

Most battles, including the fight north of Reipertswiller, are strategically not decisive, and are ignored by historians, who concentrate on the big picture. This approach is a grave injustice to the vast majority of infantry soldiers, those who suffer, serve, and die for obscure objectives, for a nameless hill or a patch of trees. What follows is more than the story of the 157th Infantry at Reipertswiller; it is a story of ordinary riflemen in WWII, for there are many thousands who shared similar experiences and who have not been recognized by history -- or by their families or neighbors.

What follows is not a story of a critical battle; the fate of a campaign did not hinge on a couple of hilltops north of Reipertswiller. Strategic eyes had never seen the name. But men suffered and men died there, for a piece of ground that meant nothing in the big picture. Few operations are strategically important; it is the whole that matters in war, the sum of thousands of small battles. It is the infantryman's lot to suffer and to die so that cumulative efforts, never perceived at his level, succeed. This is a story of infantry men, ordinary men who served their country in extraordinary ways. This is a story of heroes.

Overview: The 157th Infantry at Reipertswiller, January '45

By the end of December, 1944, the 157th Infantry Regiment had seen more than 365 days of combat. The Regiment had deployed to North Africa with its parent division, the 45th Infantry Division, where it trained for and then conducted the assault on Sicily. After Sicily, the regiment participated in the Italian Campaign, including the landings at Salerno and Anzio, and the brutal mountain fighting on the way to Rome. Next, the Regiment landed in Southern France with the VII Army invasion forces. Late in December, 1944, the Regiment crossed the German border, but was ordered to hold up, and then to withdraw as VII Army spread out and shifted forces north in reaction to the German Ardennes Offensive, better known as the Battle of the Bulge. As the American units withdrew from exposed positions in Germany to a shorter, more defensible line along the border, the 157th Infantry Regiment found itself falling back to occupy fortifications in the French Maginot Line, vicinity Niederbronn.

A German offensive against VII Army, intended to relieve the American pressure on the Bulge, was launched on 1 January, 1945. This offensive, known as Operation Northwind, drove deeply into the Lower Vosges Mountains, at the juncture of the American XV and VI Corps. However, the weak American forces fought stubbornly and after a few days the German salient was definitely contained. The point of the German salient rested just north of the Alsacian town of Reipertswiller.

Once the German attack was halted American efforts were directed to reducing the salient north of Reipertswiller. The 157th Infantry Regiment, viewed as a relatively rested unit since the majority of the fighting had focused to the west of Niederbronn, was selected to push back the nose of the salient.

10 January:

The regiment occupied its defensive sector with 1st and 3rd Battalions and 1st Battalion, 315th Infantry Regiment (attached) on line. Second Battalion was in reserve. Active patrolling and sporadic firefights characterized regimental operations.

While the German attack had been stopped, bitter fighting still ensued along the whole periphery of the salient as the enemy vainly attempted to regain the initiative. Late in the afternoon 1st Battalion, 314th Infantry (attached to 45th Division) was thrown back from positions on Hill 388, just north of Reipertswiller. In response, 2nd Battalion, 157th Infantry (Companies E, F, G, H) was ordered after dark to move by truck to Reipertswiller, and attack immediately to retake Hill 388. Movement began after dark, and the battalion was not assembled in Reipertswiller for several hours. The night attack was launched just before midnight, and the men moved up the slippery, forested slopes of a hill they had never seen in daylight.

11 January:

Second Battalion occupied the hilltop positions early in the morning without meeting any resistance. This situation changed dramatically with first light. For the rest of the day the Germans attacked the battalion, infiltrated the lines, and engaged the American troops with deadly accurate sniper fire. The fighting was close, bitter, and continuous, but the battalion managed to hang onto the objective.

12 January:

Second Battalion continued defensive fighting near Hill 388 throughout the day. Late in the night the battalion was alerted to prepare to turn over positions to the 314th Infantry, which had reorganized, and then to assemble in Reipertswiller.

13 January:

Relief of 2nd Battalion began just after midnight and the companies were assembled in Reipertswiller at dawn. The battalion was ordered to move immediately to occupy defensive positions vicinity Hill 415, northeast of Reipertswiller. Lieutenant Colonel Brown, the Battalion Commander, was told the rest of the Regiment would arrive later in the day and would attack the next morning -- 2nd Battalion would be in reserve during the attack.

G Company moved to the top of Hill 415, proper; F Company took positions to the left (west) of G Company; and E Company occupied a reserve position generally behind F Company. There was heavy shelling all day as the battalion relieved elements of the 276th Infantry (attached to 45th Division).

First Battalion, 157th Infantry, moved late in the afternoon to occupy positions to the right (east) of 2nd Battalion. A Company moved to a position to the right front of G Company, on the forward slope of Hill 415. B Company went into position to the right rear of A Company, on the edge of a draw -- no American unit could be found to the right of B Company; the area was open all the way to Rehbach. C Company occupied a reserve position to the rear of Hill 403.

Third Battalion moved into an assembly area about 3 kilometers behind the line.

During the night, small groups of the 276th Infantry were located in the woods, where they had been abandoned during the frenetic withdrawal of their unit.

14 January:

Just after sun-up 1st and 3rd Battalions kicked off the attack. C Company leading the 1st Battalion attack, intended to attack from the east side of Hill 415 and follow across the east side of Hill 363 to its objective, the Hill 390 ridge. However, navigation in the snowy forest was very difficult; the company missed a trail fork, moved behind Hill 415, and passed through F Company, on the west side of Hill 415. The company commander realized his error, but there was nothing to do except notify battalion and keep going. Just past the front line, C Company hit stiff resistance and was driven to ground just short of RJ 328. The whole column was halted and subjected to heavy artillery fire.

Third Battalion, moving in column, passed through F Company and ran into the rear of C Company. C, I, K, L, and F Companies, clustered together in a small area, were subjected to heavy shelling. After awhile, 3rd Battalion moved off to the left (west) and as they got out of the shelling, the companies peeled off the march column to resume a northerly route toward Hills 400 and 420. The battalion halted for the night about halfway to those hills: I Company halted for the night in the Fliess Draw, just to the west of Hill 363; L Company halted on the forward slope of Hill 341; and K Company halted in the Spielbuchel Draw along the trail between Hills 341 and 401.

Unbeknownst to Lieutenant Colonel Sparks, 3rd Battalion Commander, the 1st Battalion, 315th Infantry, had moved into the area immediately north of Reipertswiller early that morning and had also attacked to the north. C Company/315th took Hill 401 by the end of the day. B Company/315th and K and L Companies/157th had criss-crossed each other's trails during the day; at dark, B/315th had established itself between K and L Companies.

Second Battalion remained in place during the day, under heavy shelling.

15 January:

First Battalion/315th remained in place during the day, and was alerted to withdraw the next morning.

Third Battalion moved out again at daylight and brushed through relatively light resistance from remnants of the 476 Grenadier Regiment, 256 Volksgrenadier Division. L Company was the first of the 3rd Battalion units to move onto the hill mass. Just before noon the company came through the saddle between Hills 420 and 400 and moved east onto Hill 400, taking several prisoners and establishing a line running along the northern slope of the crest and hooking back to the south at the right flank. There was no contact with anyone to the right or to the rear, or with I Company which occupied the saddle later in the afternoon.

Just after L Company got onto Hill 400, K Company climbed onto Hill 420, having come through the saddle between Hills 400 and 420, and occupied the hill with the main line of the company facing generally to the west .

However, 1st Battalion, attacking on the right, was held up by determined resistance centering around RJ 328 and was unable to progress beyond this point. C Company could make no headway against Hill 363. B Company conducted an attack across the Brambach Valley to seize the ridge extending northeast from Hill 415, but was repulsed after gaining the ridge.

At about 1600 hours, I Company also moved through the saddle. Two platoons occupied positions on the northern side and the remaining platoon defended the south side of the saddle. I and K Companies were physically tied together, but neither had contact with L Company.

Occupation of the hills by 3d Battalion constituted a penetration of the German Main Defense Line, and in response, the German Corps Commander ordered the uncommitted 11th Regiment (Reinhard Heydrich), 6th SS Mountain Division (Nord) to retake the critical terrain. Almost as soon as I Company arrived on the saddle, the hills were subjected to two or three violent German counterattacks -- some Germans managed to get behind the battalion. SS troops participated in some, if not all, of these attacks. By the end of the day, I Company -- which had arrived on the hill with 100 men -- was down to 91 GIs. L Company was down to 95 of the 106 men who had gained the hill, and K Company had 79 men left out of the 99 who had moved onto the hill.

In response to the attacks against 3rd Battalion, E Company was ordered to move from its reserve position to Hill 341 to block against any German breakthrough of 3rd Battalion's positions. This move was accomplished without problem and E Company dug in on the northern nose of the hill, where L Company had spent the night of 14-15 January.

16 January:

C Company was ordered to bypass the German resistance on Hill 363, and to join 3rd Battalion; this the company managed to do and by about noon it had moved to Hill 420 and occupied positions to the rear of L Company. The company was to have continued the attack by moving down the ridge line to the east, but this attack never materialized. German infiltrators were slipping around the flanks of the hills, and when the C Company supply sergeant attempted to bring three jeeps of supplies to the company later that afternoon the convoy was ambushed and all but two of the men were killed or captured, and the jeeps and their supplies were lost to the Germans.

After C Company linked with L Company on Hill 420, B Company was ordered to move along the same route, again bypassing the German defenses on Hill 363. As B Company moved down the slope of Hill 415, mortar fire wounded several men, including Captain Stough, the Commander. The only other officer in the company, Lieutenant Castro, assumed command and continued the movement. However, the company was stopped at the base of Hill 341 by intense German fire from new positions behind L and C Companies, and was driven to ground.

Since B Company's effort to link with 3rd Battalion on the right flank had been stymied, Regiment decided to try to link with the forward troops by attacking toward the left rear of K Company. G and E Companies were ordered to move to Hill 401, relieve elements of the 315th Infantry (attached to 45th Division) and to attack down the ridgeline to link with K Company on Hill 400. Both companies conducted the move to Hill 401, and late in the afternoon began to move down the ridgeline in column, with G Company in the lead. Germans cut the column after dark, separating G Company, one platoon (2nd) of E Company and some H Company machine gunners from the rest of the column. Efforts were made to fight through this German resistance, but to no avail. Those elements north of the break in the column joined with K Company well after dark and occupied positions facing the ridgeline along which they had just come. This group totalled 68 men (31 from G Company, 18 each from E and H Companies, and one F Company officer attached to E Company). The remainder of E Company withdrew to Hill 401.

During the day Regiment created a Composite Company from members of the Regimental Headquarters Company and the Regimental Antitank Company. This company was ordered to block the Spielbuchel Draw between Hills 335 and 350; it moved into position late in the afternoon.

Resupply efforts through the valley were successful during the day and night, and these operations funnelled through a trail leading up the rear of the saddle. Two light tanks and two M-8 Scout Cars managed to reach the forward area, although they did not have sufficient traction on the steep, slippery trail to get over the saddle. The Tanks were ordered to remain to bolster the rear defenses of I Company, but the Scout Cars were to return. The two light tanks took positions in the I Company line, facing to the rear in the saddle between Hills 400 and 420.

Although some of the wounded were evacuated, there were 16 litter cases who could not be carried on the scout cars.

By midnight, 16 January, the Germans had succeeded in surrounding the hills, which were well forward of the general US line. From this point on, there would be no reinforcement or withdrawal of the surrounded 3d Battalion and the other men who had managed to break through to the hills. Although the two other battalions of the 157th Regiment, two additional battalions attached to the regiment in the next few days, a regimental composite company, and a platoon of medium tanks continually attacked to break in to the surrounded troops, no future efforts would succeed in breaking the German ring.

When the Germans closed the ring around the men on these hills during the night of 16-17 January 465 American soldiers found themselves surrounded.

17 January:

Third Battalion and attached units defending Hills 400, 420, and the saddle between them continued to fight off German attacks and to suffer heavy shelling. That portion of E Company not cut off on the hills tried to attack down the ridgeline, but was not successful.

During the night the Composite Company was ordered to link up with B Company on Hill 341. The company set out in two groups: one group, accompanied by two tanks moved up the Spielbuchel Draw; the other group, with the company commander, headed cross-country. Both groups encountered heavy resistance and were driven back. The company commander was killed.

Late at night, Lieutenant Talkington, 3rd Battalion Ammunition & Pioneer Platoon Leader, guided a light tank with a trailer of supplies to the forward area. These were the last supplies received by the surrounded men.

18 January:

Shortly after midnight, LT Talkington tried to return to the rear with the light tank and trailer. Not far from the hills, the tank was ambushed at close range. Talkington, lightly wounded, escaped in the forest and regained the lines. The three tank crewmen were all wounded and captured. German infiltrators, in strength, had finally closed all supply avenues through the valley -- the hills were well and truly cut off.

Just at dawn the Germans launched a violent counterattack against the G and E Company positions. The attack was so sudden and was initiated at such close range that there was hardly time to react. Some survivors reported that the Germans used flame throwers in this attack. The E and G Company men were thrown from their positions. Many men were killed or captured and all machine

guns (possibly as many as four) were lost as the survivors dashed back into the K Company line. Only 18 men from G Company made it to the K Company line, and it is possible that all the E Company men were lost, for there is no further mention of this platoon in the journals and reports.

Desperate to break in to the surrounded troops, Regiment ordered all battalions to renew their attacks with all available men. None of these attacks succeeded. Third Battalion's Antitank Platoon attacked across Hill 350, but almost immediately ran into Germans, were driven to ground and pinned down. A squad leader escaped at great risk, made his way to the battalion forward command post, and informed Lt. Col. Sparks of the platoon's plight.

Sparks commandeered two medium tanks and took them forward on a rescue mission. After firing several thousand rounds of machine gun ammunition into the trees, Sparks dismounted under fire, rescued some wounded men, and led the others to safety.

G Company, 179th Infantry, was attached to the Regiment and went into position in the Fliess Draw, facing Hill 363. The remainder of the battalion was alerted for attachment to the 157th the following day. Upon moving into the area in the morning G Company, 179th Infantry, and a section of medium tanks moved up the trail and attacked Hill 363 from starting positions just to the east of Hill 341. The tanks remained on the road and fired over the heads of the attacking troops. The attack failed. G Company, 179th Infantry, assumed defensive positions and fought off German patrols attempting to infiltrate into the draw around both its flanks. In the evening the tanks withdrew.

In the evening the remainder of the Composite Company was once again ordered to link up with B Company on Hill 341. This mission was accomplished, and the 20 or so remaining Composite Company men joined the equal number of B Company men who remained on the hill.

19 January:

While the soldiers trapped on the hills continued to resist German attacks and heavy shelling, Companies E, and F, 179th Infantry, arrived during the day and were ordered to attack up the Spielbuchel Draw to break in to the surrounded companies. The two companies were able to progress to a position on line with B Company/Composite Company on Hill 341 before they were stopped by German fire. Subsequent attacks, even with direct tank support, were repulsed by the Germans.

A and F Companies and G/179th renewed attacks against Hill 363, again without success. G Company, 179th Infantry, and a section of medium tanks attempted to reach C Company and Hill 400 by attacking directly up the trail from a starting point near Hill 341. The attack failed, and the troops and tanks withdrew.

The remnants of E Company, bolstered by cooks and headquarters personnel, renewed attacks down the ridge leading to Hill 400, also without success.

Late in the day, 2nd Battalion, 411th Infantry, was attached to the 157th. The battalion established an assembly area and prepared to attack the next morning to take Hill 363.

20 January:

Early in the morning 2/411th attacked over Hill 415, heading for Hill 363. It conducted three unsuccessful, costly attacks.

In the afternoon an attempt was made at aerial resupply of the surrounded troops. No supplies got to the men due to weather. The men could hear the planes, but all supplies fell into German hands.

Also in the afternoon the Germans sent a party under a white flag to give a message to the American commander of the surrounded troops: Further resistance is futile; surrender by five o'clock or suffer the consequences. When Regiment was notified of the ultimatum, the surrounded troops were ordered to break out by attacking down the ridge toward Hill 401.

The leaders rushed to inform the men that at the precise time the German ultimatum ran out, the men would try to attack to the rear. An artillery preparation was laid on to blast clear a path along the ridge and then to follow the men off the hill. Non-ambulatory wounded were told they would have to remain in their holes and place their fate in the hands of their German captors -- if they survived the American artillery barrage.

It took a long time to pass the word about the attack and there was a delay in assembling the men. It was snowing heavily, and just as most of the men were out of their holes and trying to get formed up, the American artillery barrage came in -- right on top of the GIs. Many were killed and wounded. There was much confusion and, although some groups tried to proceed with the attack, there was little cohesion and the German troops swarmed upon the shocked men.

The last words Regiment heard from the group came over the K Company radio: "Stop the artillery. We're surrendering." Late that night the US corps withdrew, leaving the survivors to their fate. Only three soldiers (two from I Company and one from K Company) returned to the US lines.

Four hundred and six American soldiers were captured -- according to German records, most of them were wounded, Fifty-six American soldiers lay dead or dying on the hills. In the fighting to gain the hills, and then to break in to the surrounded troops another 88 American soldiers were killed and more than 350 were wounded and evacuated, and another 300 were evacuated for illness or

injury. In the five-day fight for these hills, losses to the US forces totalled over one thousand men. To this day twenty of the 144 soldiers killed in this fight remain listed MISSING IN ACTION.



This article written by Dan Dougherty who is publisher of the quarterly newsletter, Second Platoon, Co. "C", 157th Regiment, 45th Infantry Division.

GETTING RELIGION

When the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) folded in March of 1944, my unit at St. Louis University was sent (kicking and screaming all the way) to the 44th Division on maneuvers along the Sabine River that joins Louisiana and Texas. All of the ASTP guys were privates and had no infantry equipment and most had no infantry training but the maneuvers did not halt one second while hundreds of us were integrated into rifle and weapons companies. I'd had a seventeen week infantry basic training prior to ASTP but for the guys who had given up cushy jobs and rank so they could go to college in the Army, a really bad dream had come true.

After a week or so of slogging around in the muck, the maneuvers recessed on Thursday of Easter week for a two day break. The next day - Good Friday - the division was marched to a large hillside where we sat on our helmets. After the inevitable Army wait, a jeep drove up at the bottom of the hill and an altar was set up complete with loud speakers. Then a Catholic mass was said for the entire division. Some of us closed our eyes and plugged our ears in silent protest. The next day the maneuvers resumed. The Army in its infinite wisdom had decided that since no one would be able to celebrate Easter that year, the entire division -

Catholic, Protestant, Jew and agnostic alike - would observe Good Friday together. I'm sure many families and Congressmen heard that week about the U.S. Army's version of the separation of church and state.

Some months later, Leonard S. "Pinky" Popuch (ASTP at the University of Minnesota) and I were a rifleman and BAR gunner respectively in K Co of the 324th Infantry Regiment fighting in Alsace with the Seventh Army. The 44th had started fighting in October when it relieved the 79th Division and in the big push which began November 13 we helped take Strasbourg ten days later and our regiment was the first U.S. Army unit to reach the Rhine. Then one morning - now late January 1945 - Pinky and I were abruptly promoted from Pfc to S/Sgt and sent to the 45th Division. It was the only time in my military career that a jeep was waiting for me and we weren't even given time to say goodbye to guys we'd been with for almost a year. That afternoon we found ourselves squad leaders in different platoons of C Co of the 157th and learned we were one of six companies being reformed after the wipeout at Reipertswiller (1). Hundreds of replacements arrived from the depots and non-coms came from all Seventh Army divisions including Ben Ewig from the 103rd. Officers were scrounged from everywhere including Ft. Benning. We trained for one week and went back to the line. Instant infantry.

Now, there must be an Army manual somewhere that says that one week after joining a new unit, the G.I.'s are to have a mandatory session with the Chaplain because, sure enough, after supper on the final day before we were to leave for the front, we were herded into a French school house to have a session with Father Barry, the First Battalion Chaplain. I prepared once again to close my eyes and plug my ears but this time it was different. The room was dimly lit and I could hardly see but the voice was loud and clear. The Chaplain's message was brief, fifteen minutes at most. There was no religious service and no prayer. Instead, in some very direct language Father Barry told us why we shouldn't desert! The G.I.'s of C Company had gotten religion - Thunderbird style!

The following biography of Father Barry is from Dachau - The Hour of the Avenger (2) by Howard A. Buechner: Capt. Joseph D. Barry - Chaplain. Father Barry of Syracuse, New York was awarded the Silver and Bronze Star Medals for assisting in the evacuation and comfort of wounded and dying soldiers on Anzio, under extremely Hazardous conditions. He was born in 1903 and died in 1985. For many years he was associated with Notre Dame University and was Chaplain of the Notre Dame football team during the coaching era of Frank Leahy. Father Barry joined the 157th Infantry Regiment at Camp Barkeley, Texas, in 1943, and "went all the way" to war's end in Munich, Germany. He was a man of unflinching good humor and outstanding courage and was one of the most beloved clergyman of the 45th Division.

It is easy for me to picture Father Barry in the locker room at halftime with the Irish down by ten points. He'd be light on theology and heavy on "Don't quit fighting!"

(1) See Monograph #9 on Operations near Reipertswiller by Felix Sparks available from 45th Division Assn, 2145 N.E. 36th St. Oklahoma City OK 73111, \$2 plus \$3.25 S&H per order.

(2) Available from Thunderbird Press, 300 Cuddihy Drive, Metairie, LA 70005. \$14.95.

The following article appeared in the Second Platoon, which is a quarterly newsletter written and published by Dan P. Dougherty. Dan served as a Squad Leader and then Platoon Guide in the Second Platoon of "C" Company, 157th Regiment, 45th Infantry Division.

SNEAKING INTO A PRISON CAMP

by Daniel A. Ficco



Daniel A. Ficco
Petaluma, CA, 3/99

Editor's note: Dan Ficco went overseas with C Co and participated in amphibious landings at Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, and Southern France. He was subsequently captured in Reipertswiller in Alsace on January 17, 1945. Despite the fact he has a serious health problem, Dan has at my request made the time and effort to write up some of his experiences which I'm pleased to share with readers. You'll see he too "served" in C Company in the post-Reipertswiller era! Dan is now eighty years of age and resides in Petaluma, California.

I was Ed Speairs' 1st Sergeant, Company Clerk, Supply Sergeant and anything else we needed. He was a very good company commander and he and Felix Sparks were two of the best officers I have known. I can tell you my experience of

escaping the prison camp at Mooseberg, Germany near Nuremburg. It is about 30 kilometers north of Munich.

In a POW camp there were always rumors about what was happening. They said 1st Battalion, 157 Infantry was in Munich. I crawled through a hole I made in a fence just before dark and got into Mooseberg. A friend of D Co came with me. We crossed a street and saw a box of cigars in a store window. There were many German soldiers in town and to cause a diversion I threw a rock through a window while my friend grabbed the cigars. The German soldiers came running to the store and we ran down a ditch.

It took us a few days to get through the German lines and across the American lines. When I found C Company, I didn't know many men - just the cooks and a few others who had been there before. All my personal belongings were gone - pictures, a camera and several pistols I had picked up. The first thing I wanted was food. I ate too much and was sick for a couple of days because my stomach couldn't handle the solid food. My normal weight was 175 pounds and I now weighed on 90.

I never thought I would sneak into a prison camp. Father Barry was our 1st Battalion chaplain and another of the best. We'd had a lot of experiences together. He came to C Company and told me to go back in the prison camp! It had been liberated and we would be flown to a RAMP Camp (Reclaimed American Military Personnel). Father Barry couldn't take us back in the camp so he took us near there and we crawled back in through the same hole!

A TRIBUTE TO PFC FRANCIS HENRY (BUD) DOHERTY



PFC Francis Henry (Bud) Doherty

**Company L, 157th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division, 7th Army
KIA 29 March, 1945
Aschaffenburg, Germany**

FRANCIS HENRY DOHERTY was born on June 22, 1915, in Malone, Franklin County, New York. He was the eighth of nine children of John Henry Doherty and Caroline McCaffrey Doherty, and the great grandson of early nineteenth century northern New York settlers and Irish immigrants Hugh Doherty and Bridget Meighan Doherty.

Bud, as he was nicknamed, attended Franklin Academy in Malone, and subsequently pursued a Depression-era career as a meat cutter, working in local food stores, and in his older brother Edward's business. He later became affiliated with the Grand Union Tea Company. In 1937, he married Edith Tupper, and on June 1, 1938, became the proud father of his first and only child, Edward.

He reported for his Selective Service physical examination on December 3, 1943, was ordered to report for induction on January 18, 1944, and reported for active duty on February 8, 1944. After training at Camp Blanding, Florida, and a short furlough home, he shipped out to the European Theater of War on July 23, 1944; arriving in Italy and then proceeding to Marseilles, France in November, 1944.

Other details of his service record were destroyed in the National Personnel Records Center fire on July 12, 1973. However, family records indicate that he was in a military hospital in the United Kingdom (Wales) with a serious bout of pleurisy in early 1945. He rejoined his unit in France, was wounded and received the Purple Heart in February, 1945, and was then killed in action on March 29,

1945.

On May 25, 1945, Captain Leland L. Loy, Chaplain, 3rd Bn. 157th Inf. wrote: "... We were attacking the town of Schweinheim, which is close to Aschaffenburg, Germany. There was a lot of opposition, as you no doubt read in your newspaper. The Germans were dug in and were fighting for every house and street. There was a lot of artillery, mortar and sniper fire. This last was especially bad when going into the town. The civilians and soldiers alike were shooting. He was hit by one of these snipers with several bullets, one after another. The aid men were able to get to him, but he was mortally wounded and died within thirty minutes ... He died fighting with one of the finest units in the Army, facing the enemy like a soldier, that we, God willing, could build a better world."

Francis H. Doherty is authorized the following awards: Purple Heart, World War II Victory Medal, World War II Lapel Button, Combat Infantry Badge, Bronze Star Medal, and European-African Middle Eastern Medal with 1 Bronze Service Star. In Loving Memory,

-- Edward J. Doherty --

THE STORY OF ASCHAFFENBERG

My good friend Bob LeMense was going through some of his World War II memorabilia and found a pamphlet entitled, "The Story of Aschaffenberg". This pamphlet is a condensation of the newspapers and radio coverage of the siege of Aschaffenberg. It was prepared by the Public Relations Office, 45th Division, for the troops of the 157th Infantry Regiment who reduced the city to rubble and forced its capitulation after six days of bitter assault. In it are copies of press releases that were filed with the major newspapers and syndicates of the United States. From the pamphlet, I selected the article that appears on the next few pages.

I might add, that Bob LeMense was a platoon leader, 3rd platoon, in company L, 157th Regiment. It was Co. "L" that took the town of Dachau which adjoins Camp Dachau. Bob was one of the editors who helped to put the 157th Regimental Book together. Many thanks for your support and encouragement.

Talk about history repeating itself. Aschaffenberg was taken by the 45th Division, April, 1945. Exactly 54 years later, even to the months, we have a similar situation in Kosovo. As I was reading and typing the Aschaffenberg story, I was amazed at their similarity.

The following pictures show the barracks that housed Major Lambert's future German officers and convalescents. It was on a grassy incline, as shown in a few

**pictures, that many of our bazooka men were picked off by snipers from behind.
After the war, American troops occupied the barracks for a number of years.**



The Story of Aschaffenberg

WITH THE 45TH DIVISION IN ASCHAFFENBERG (April 4, 1945)-- This is the story of the amazing climax of the siege of ASCHAFFENBERG. Here is what happened behind the shattered and scarred walls of the city, known to grim-humored infantrymen of the 45th Division as !Cassino-on-the-Main!. This is not the story of the endless bombing and shelling of a fortress town. It is the record of one man's fanaticism and of his ultimate capitulation.

Used as a replacement and convalescent center by the Wehrmacht, ASCHAFFENBERG was a quiet town whose peaceful serenity was broken only occasionally by the screams of some poor tortured soul in the Gestapo headquarters. German troops, returned from hospitals awaiting shipment to their parent units, strolled through the town and admired the Bavarian countryside. At night, the steady drone of American planes reminded the townspeople that there was a war being fought somewhere far to the west on the other side of the glorious defenses of the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River.

On March 15th, the 4th Division penetrated the Siegfried Line. Three days later veteran Thunderbird troops were through the line. March 26th the division crossed the Rhine River and sped across the fertile valley of the Rhine. The war came to ASCHAFFENBERG on the 27th of March.

There were two men in the town who were responsible for the execution of der Fuehrer's orders to defend the Reich. One was a short, bespectacled HEIMUTH WOHLGEMUTH, Kreisleiter (Nazi Party Leader for the County); the other was close-cropped, Prussian-backed Major of the Wehrmacht, Lambert, military commander of the garrison.

Rumors of the Americans' advance preceded the troops with alarming frequency. Major Lambert and the Kreisleiter conferred. When the 45th Division's tanks rolled across thirty miles of the Rhine valley and headed for ASCHAFFENBERG, the two leaders of the town knew that their hour had come. Here was the chance to show their love for the Fatherland. Here was the chance to place themselves at the right hand of the Fuehrer.

There were more than three thousand troops and many officers with rank as high as colonel among the casual convalescents in the replacement battalions of ASCHAFFENBERG. Major Lambert ordered all troops to report immediately for active duty, all officers to assume active duty of the troops. !These orders will be carried out immediately,! He proclaimed.

Then the Kreisleiter issued an order to the civilians. He designated Wednesday and Thursday (March 28, 29) as days on which the civilians who wished to

evacuate the town could leave. All others he said, would be used in the armed defense of the town.

The ASCHAFFENBERG training area was dotted with concrete and steel pillboxes that had been used for training purposes. These casements were linked by a trench system and the hills around the town made an excellent defense. Lambert manned the physical defenses and sat back to wait. But one officer had not reported for duty.

Word came to the Castle which was being used as a joint Gestapo and military headquarters that LT. FRIEDL HEILMANN was still in town and had not assumed his new command. Lambert, fired by the frenzy of his fanaticism, ordered Heilmann brought before him. There was no trial, no court martial. Wednesday morning, Heilmann was hanged from a buttress of the castle. His body swung in full sight as a visible reminder of what would happen to deserters, until an American artillery shell cut it down.

The siege had begun. All day long, planes swooped over the town as heavy demolition and fragmentation bombs mushroomed below. Great artillery pieces pounded the town. Rubble and debris showered into the air. Houses crumbled and the factory's steel beams were twisted with the concussion.

For four days the town was contorted in a convulsion of explosions. Some of the troops, unable to take the continued pressure, attempted to slip through the lines of our forces. On command of Lambert, they were machine-gunned and killed. Civilians who had managed to save themselves by hiding in the cellars of the city tried to get out. Again, Major Lambert ordered his machine guns to fire on them. They were killed.

In the garrison, officers who ranked the major attempted to persuade him to surrender the garrison. One colonel who later was captured by the Thunderbird troops, said that he had pleaded with the major to surrender the garrison, but the major had told him to go back to his post or be shot.

Yesterday, fifth day of siege, prisoners reported that Lambert had brought in 50 SS troops. These troops were ordered to shoot and kill anyone who did not resist to the end. Again, Lambert issued an order. The garrison of ASCHAFFENBERG would fight to the last man.

Still the bombing and shelling continued. One lieutenant, taken prisoner, estimated that more than 1500 dead lay in the town. But the resistance in the town, fired by the threat of death at the hands of the SS went on. Thunderbird troops, forced a wedge into the southern tip of the town. From room to room they fought into the town. It wasn't a case of cleaning one room and having the rest of the house surrender. Each room had to be cleared in a separate operation.

As the 45th Division troops inched ahead, German snipers infiltrated through the heaps of debris and harassed the doughboys from every possible vantage point. In some cases, civilians sniped at our troops.

A Luftwaffe captain, almost isolated in a house, attempted to surrender his little group. SS men fought through to him, hauled him back to Lambert and again, without trial, on arbitrary order from the commandant, he was shot. Late yesterday morning, Lambert called in his senior officers. "I am going to see if we can reinforce the garrison," he said, "I will be gone tonight, but I will be back. I order you to remain here and fight to the last man. When I come back, you'd better be here. The garrison, under threat of ultimatum, continued its resistance.

On the night of April 2nd, COL WALTER P. O'BRIEN, commander of the 157th Infantry that had besieged the town, reshuffled his battalions. He sent LT COL. RALPH M. KRIEGER (Craig, Colorado) to take his battalion, the First, into the northeast end of town. In the south and southwest, O'BRIEN sent the third battalion under LT. COL. FELIX L. SPARKS of Miami, Arizona. And the regimental commander completed his ring of steel around the fortress city with his second battalion, commanded by MAJ. GUS H. HEILMAN (University of Virginia). The squeeze was on.

Throughout the night of the 2nd and the morning of April 3rd, the squeeze tightened as the 45th Division troops converged on the town. All avenues of escape were cut. All hope of reinforcing or supplying the garrison were ended. By nine o'clock of the night of the second, eleven hundred prisoners had been taken out of the town. But those who remained fought bitterly or died in place.

In the meantime, during the previous three days of the siege, Lambert ordered the execution of four more men who attempted to leave the city. On one grisly product of his fanaticism, Lambert hung a sign "I tried to run away." The ghastly warning swung from a telephone pole until after the surrender of the town.. Lambert never left the fortress. Hemmed in on all sides and with the iron jaw of the 157th's vice closing in on him, he found it impossible to leave the city.

As the total of dead mounted in the fortress and bombardment increased in its intensity throughout the night of the 2nd, Lambert began to think of capitulation. At 0700 this morning, he ordered an American soldier who had been captured last Sunday, to be brought before him. Then he designated a captain of his staff to go with the G.I. to negotiate for a surrender. He gave the captain a note to the American commander.

At COL. O'BRIEN'S C.P.. the captain delivered his message. COL. O'BRIEN was in no mood for bargaining. "Tell Lambert, he said, "That he doesn't wave white flags from the castle as a sign of unconditional surrender, I'll level the place to the ground!" A few moments after the captain returned to the garrison the white flags

from the castle fluttered out of the highest windows. The siege of ASCHAFFENBERG has ended.

At 0900, Major Lambert, dressed in high polished boots and a long green overcoat with a peaked cap of the Officers Corps of the Wehrmacht, strode out of the besieged town accompanied by his staff. Formal surrender was made to COL. O'BRIEN, but the 45th Division commander was not content merely to accept the capitulation. He ordered Lambert to return to the garrison, with an escort of men from G Company. Riding in the first jeep of the convoy, Lambert called out to the remaining men of the garrison to lay down their arms and give up. The long procession that leads to the PW cage was on its way. Awaiting evacuation, Lambert looked once at the still-smoldering ruins of the town which his fanatic threats had brought to shambles. Then Major Lambert, former commandant of the garrison, turned his back on ASCHAFFENBERG.

SECRETARY STIMSON SPEAKS

WASHINGTON, April 7 (ans)—The German people were warned by Secretary of War Henry L. Simpson yesterday that they have only a choice between immediate unconditional surrender or the same form of capitulation "a little later after much more of the Reich has been destroyed city by city."

World War II Experiences of Clarence B. Schmitt

This is a story told by Clarence B. Schmitt who was a member of Co. "M", 157th Regiment, 45th Infantry Division

When the war started, there were five in my family drafted but the sixth brother John, they would not take as he was older and was involved in war work. When we wrote to our father, my brother John would save all the letters. I was drafted and sent to Camp Lee, Virginia. After a short stay at Camp Lee, I was transferred to Camp Wolters, Texas for basic training. Attached is a copy of the first letter I sent home dated 3/5/43. Also, a copy of the first letter from Camp Wolters dated 3/21/43. After thirteen weeks of basic training at Camp Wolters, we shipped out to the Port of Embarkation located in Shenango, PA. See letter dated 7/11/43. We were then sent to Camp Shanks, NY to board ships headed for Oran, North Africa. After a few in Oran, we were put on a train and went across North Africa to Bizerte. A couple of days later, we boarded an LCI and headed for the beaches of Salerno. I was assigned to Co. "M", 157th Regiment, 45th Infantry Division. We left the beach of Salerno and moved up a hill overlooking the Volturno River. The Germans knew we were there and they shelled us all day long with their 88's. The next day they moved out and we crossed the Volturno River and setup in a grape orchard. It was harvest time and the Italians had picked their grapes. We watched them dump the grapes into a high vat and the girls took off their shoes, got up

into the vat and stomped down on the grapes. That night we slept in the orchard and ate grapes. I fought all the way up the mountains above Venafro and stayed there for two months. Venafro is about twenty miles below Cassino.

Christmas 1943, we were sent to the rear for a rest and I stopped at the Regimental medical tent. Before I knew it, I was sent to Naples. After a few days, I was transferred to Oran to the 45th General Hospital and remained there for a few weeks. It was determined that I be placed on temporary limited service due to bad feet. I then attended radio school from 4/10/44 to 5/20/44. Received a certificate of completion. Latter part of June, 1944, reclassified and returned to Co, "M", 157th. On 8/15/44, made the invasion of southern France. October, 1944, I was admitted to the hospital for the second time near Grenoble, France. After a few weeks of hospitalization, I was reclassified and assigned to the 788 Engineer Petroleum Distribution Company located in Boone, Belgium. Our job was to lay gas pipe lines and build pumping stations to Wesel, Germany. I remained with the engineers until discharge.

Webmaster's comments: Clarence Schmitt wrote frequently to his father and every letter and V mail was saved by his family. His letters date from 3/3/43 to 12/3/45.

Dear Pop:
Camp Lee Va. 2/1/44
We all got here yesterday about 9:30 C. clock,
The trip was a little tough, but we stay at intervals
to stretch out. We got out quarters then we went and
eaten. afterwards we all went and took an I.C.
test for about 3 hours, then we had to take a shower
and go to bed.
We got up at 6:30 o'clock A.M. It was a little
hard. We were issued new uniforms today. Pants
didn't fit, so I have to have them altered. We had
a shot put in our arms, mine and many body else.
is still sore from it. We have been having
plenty tea and a right good of everything had for
all alright so far hope my folks alright.
Love, Clarence

WARD

March 21, 1911

Dear Ma,

I am finally settled for about 15 weeks plus
I say just as in the Infantry instead of the
Corp, but I think every thing will be alright. You
know plenty of chance for advance here.

I am stationed here at Camp Walter, day
in the heart of Texas. It is about 40 miles from
Fort Worth, Texas, and it is situated near
a town called Mineral Wells, which is about 40
miles from here. The camp is an permanent camp,
it has been here since the last war, but every
thing is built over. It is a new camp, every thing
is larger, the camp is
I have been thinking about coming home finally
after all this many years. I say thank you very
much and more about the army. People tell you
not to get in the Infantry because you do a lot
of marching but still get you learn a lot of the
best of it. I am sure you will like it. The last night
I was in the camp I had a dream of the
army and I was in the camp and I was called

Went up early morning at 10 o'clock
have later than at camp. We have had good
food here, plenty to eat, every meal and every thing
good.

We had a hard trip from camp. We had
it gave us an idea of what the South looked
like. We passed through Virginia, North & South
Carolina, Georgia. We stopped in Atlanta for about
2 hours. Then we started through Alabama,
Mississippi and then Louisiana. I saw the business
of the river. It was low water, but you could see
where it was before for miles back. We came into
Texas that night. I haven't seen any streets yet,
but every thing is low and rough. We had a
special train and we got good food every meal, except
where we stopped and got off the train. As I had
seen part of the country so far, it looks a little
different than from the north. The place is nice
and green and the rest of place is rough and brown
& every thing is alright so far, hope you see
the same.

Love
Clarence



Clarence B. Schmitt Bernie Kaezowski

This picture was taken 9/28/98 at the 45th Infantry Division Reunion. Clarence was with Company "M" and Bernie Company "A"



These pictures, taken in Naples, Italy, 1943. In the left picture, Clarence B. Schmitt is in the center, in the right picture Clarence is on the left.

MEMORIES OF OUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME THE LUXURIOUS FOXHOLES ON ANZIO BEACHHEAD

During the stalemate on Anzio, from the latter part of February to May 23rd, 1944, the first order of the day was to dig a foxhole that was as safe and shell-proof as possible. Almost all foxholes had roofs covered with tree branches and dirt. It wasn't too long before the boys were competing as to who had the safest and most luxurious foxhole. Some included shelves for storing K rations, cigarettes, pictures, etc. Since no one knew how long we were going to remain in this position, most of the fellows made every effort to add some of the comforts of home. With each new day, you could see new additions and modifications.

The following memories are from two men who lived in foxholes on Anzio during the three month stalemate:

First recollection is from Albert R. Panebianco, Webmaster.

One of the many things I recall on Anzio is that we had our 60 MM Mortar in a ravine in front of our rifle company. It was the only suitable spot to setup. So, for three months, that was our position. On push-off day, I recall looking up on the banks and seeing many of our boys from "K" Company, who were killed in the advance. The only thing that separated us from the enemy was barbed wire. Talk about your imagination running away, we thought we heard and saw everything conceivable at night when we pulled guard duty, two hours on and two off. We

were using water from the stream in the ravine, with a help of halazone tablets. On push-off day we discovered there were a few dead Germans laying in the creek. I can say, we had the best foxhole on the beachhead. My partner and I dug into the embankment on our bellies and to the right. To get into the hole, you had to crawl on your stomach and turn to the right. The only exposure was the opening of the hole where our feet were. We never gave a thought as to what would have happened if a shell had come in and hit on the top of our foxhole. Probably we would have been buried alive. One of my memories of Anzio.

A memory from Brigadier General Russ Weiskircher.

Al, your memories of the underground mansions of Anzio hit home for me. My buddy and I had a similarly constructed underground home away from home. We went up to the lines for a few days, usually rotated with counterparts in the 179th or the 180th, then came back to our ratholes. I remember using shell casings to let in air and light, and protecting the entrance from the possibility of a grenade or mortar shell falling into the entrance. I remember it rained and rained and rained and everything we owned was soaked. When the sun came out we stripped and scrubbed and shaved our heads and boiled everything we ever wore - the wool shrunk and had to be stretched and stretched. We made washing machines out of the big kitchen issue coffee cans - square jobs, held 25 pounds. We mixed hot water, GI soap, and gasoline and used the folded entrenching tool for an agitator. We boiled, scrubbed, washed - then four people would combine to stretch the OD's into some sort of shape and suitable size. What a life. I remember when we shoved off to leave that hell hole. We used to argue as to who's foxhole was best.

I am reminded that Americans will be Americans under any and all circumstances. We brag about our women, our cars, our jobs, our friends, our hobbies ---- you name it. And there we were on Anzio, sandwiched between the mountains and the sea --- denied any real concealment --- lacking cover, except for dirty canals --- no place to go without a major battle. Moving mostly at night, using darkness to hide our resupply efforts. And what did we do? We built underground mansions. I was a rifleman in "L" Company, 157th Infantry. My buddy and I dug into that sandy, reclaimed, swamp-land that was Mussolini's pride and joy for his collective farms, and did we dig! Our home away from home was deep, deep, deep. It had to be so that we could cut branches and stack them to get above the ground water level. I traded favors and whatever to get my hands on every available blanket. Ordinarily I had one in my full-field pack, but I had about 6 in my foxhole. Of course, they got stinking damp and miserably chilly at night. We had a porthole type of skylight, fashioned by digging a well-light tunnel to daylight, and inserting an ammo case from the nearest artillery. We covered this skylight at night and burned candles or lamps by burning gasoline in ration cans, using anything for a wick. We kept rotating between front lines and the rear area, usually moving up and back and trading with the same units, foxhole for foxhole. We offset the entrance to prevent stray shrapnel or mortar fragments

from intruding. We light-proofed the burrows and we bragged about our accomplishments. Remember, I also remember one time when we were up front, with only a few yards between us and the enemy, on flat open terrain. We moved in at night, stayed hidden during the day. We got tired of that routine so we got some flamethrowers and one night we crawled out and spread napalm all along the front, as close to German lines as we dared. Then we got back to safety and lobbed white phosphorous grenades into the napalm after making a lot of noise and faking an attack. The enemy poured out to stop us and ran into the wall of flames ---- from then on we could walk erect even in daylight. That was typical of the guys I was privileged to serve with ---- they refused to cower and live in fear.

My friend, LTC Kenneth Meade M.D., wrote the following article about Anzio Beachhead.

Introduction

On January 22, 1944, Allied forces under the command of General John Lucas landed at Anzio, Italy with minimal losses, thus beginning one of the more controversial battles of World War II. The enemy German army under the direction of Field Marshal Albrecht Kesselring had stopped the Fifth Army at Monte Cassino some 100 miles south of Rome and the Allied High Command had already established the time line for the Normandy coast invasion. The Prime Minister of England, Sir Winston Churchill, wanted badly to capture Rome and General Mark W. Clark wanted to be a part of this historic event. The battle that followed transformed a pleasant sea coast resort town into one of the hardest battlefield challenges for the Allied soldier and shows us today why political goals should not replace sound military doctrine.

Excellent sources for the analysis of this battle are readily available. All of this battle's principle leaders have written about the event and there have been several books written on the topic. All of the major histories of World War II have commentary on Anzio, official histories of the involved units are easy to find and General Mailand Wilson's "Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff" is in the AMEDDC&S library. What I intend on discussing in this paper is how Mr. Churchill's disregard of sound military doctrine and his strong desire to achieve the political goal of capturing Rome resulted in failure.

The Prime Ministers persistence and ambition resulted in placing a force of insufficient mass in a vulnerable location with a poorly stated objective where it could not maneuver, exert initiative or guarantee its own security. The outcome was a near disaster that was averted by the superior battlefield operating systems of the allied forces.

The Strategic Setting

The rapid progress of the Mediterranean campaign ended in October 1943 when General Mark Clark's Vth army encountered firm enemy resistance near Cassino where the Germans had formed the "Gustav Line". Winston Churchill was frustrated because he thought the defeat of the German armies was to be attained through the "soft underbelly of Europe".

The Allied victories and the surrender of Italy on September 3rd had led to a degree of uncharacteristic disorganization in the German Army. They were temporarily disjointed and confused following the multiple emergencies resulting from the Allied Italian invasion but their soldiers were experienced and battle tested. They believed that they were fighting for the security of their homeland and were well unified by the strong German sense of honor and commitment to duty. Germany was still a strong industrial power and was able to supply these soldiers with the best available military equipment. The air force and navy were weakened, but the German fighting force was still a strong and viable opponent that was not going to surrender willingly. The Allied forces were younger and less experienced but held a strong belief that they were doing what was "right". Their logistics were provided by the richest country of the world and they had control of both the sea and the air. It is important to note that the Allied strategic planners were divided in their appraisal of enemy strength. The British intelligence community thought that the Germans were tired of fighting and that they would continue to retreat, the American intelligence officers were more realistic.

Hitler and Rommel's strategy was to retreat slowly up the boot of Italy and then establish a strong defense at the Alps. This operation was led by the capable and resourceful Field Marshall Albrecht Kesselring who organized the retreat into a series of effective defenses that took advantage of the mountainous terrain and made the progress of Clark's Fifth army a costly and slow process. This success in checking the Allies had such a profound effect on Hitler that he changed the German plan. On November 6th, he appointed Kesselring as the supreme commander of the Italian forces and transferred Rommel to France. Kesselring now had the authority and resources to proceed with his "fortification-in-depth programme" at the Gustav Line that would force the Allies to consider a flanking amphibious attack.

The planning of the attack at Anzio was the work of the Allied Command strategic conferences held in North Africa during the fall and winter of 1943. These leaders had previously committed to the Invasion of Normandy which was scheduled for May 1, 1944 (Operation OVERLORD). This plan was sacrosanct and nothing was to interfere with its execution. There existed, however, continuing differences in strategic thought between the Americans and English on the importance of the Mediterranean. They had all formally agreed that the Normandy invasion was first priority but Winston Churchill and the English still held to their belief that the capture of Rome was a major strategic goal.

The Allied Command met at Carthage on November 10th and the invasion at Anzio was proposed but then later cancelled on December 10 when it became apparent that the Cassino defenses could not be broken. This disappointed Winston Churchill tremendously who felt that failure to take Rome would be a "crushing defeat".

In December, General Maitland Wilson was chosen to replace Eisenhower as the Commander of the Mediterranean Command. Because of the differences in the British command system, this meant that Winston Churchill now had executive control of the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS). On Christmas Day 1943, Churchill met with the now predominately British command staff and this time was able to convince them to proceed with his plan. Eisenhower stated at the conference that this "not only would be a risky affair but that the attack would not by itself compel the withdrawal of the German front". He wrote later "the Prime Minister was nonetheless determined to carry out the proposed operation". Churchill felt that Eisenhower's "new appointment of the command of 'OVERLORD' now gave him a different sense of values and a new horizon". Eisenhower's remarks were ignored, the command officially passed to General Wilson on January 8 and subsequent detailed plans for the invasion were then drawn up by the British General Alexander and General Clark.

Tactical Situation

Mission:

The mission given to General Lucas was to secure and capture the beachhead and then move "on" the Alban Hills. There was a disadvantage given to him in these orders because of an ambiguity about whether he was to advance "toward" the hills or to "seize" the hills. On January 12th, General Brann visited Lucas with the final order and a clarification from Clark that the primary interest was the capture of the beachhead. As Lucas directed VI Corps' efforts on securing the beachhead, the enemy seized the surrounding key terrain features as they rapidly assembled in the area.

Equipment

The Allied forces had a superior number of the tanks but this provided little advantage because of the terrain. The Germans had established secure artillery positions in the surrounding hills which was neutralized somewhat by both naval artillery and the 4:1 airpower advantage that the Allied forces enjoyed. The limited number of landing craft and the obligation to return them for OVERLORD limited the size and strength of the Anzio landing force.

Terrain

To the south were the Mussolini Canal and the Pontine Marshes, which provided some security for friendly forces by creating a natural line of defense. The nearby Alban Hills and Lipini Mountains provided safe havens for enemy artillery. The steep ravines to the northwest hindered armor movement. There were few roads in the area of operations; this created several key points of terrain that became the focus of significant fighting: 1) Campoleone, a small town on the main north/south road; 2) Cisterna, a small town on the road that connected to Highway 6; 3) the "Factory", a settlement directly south of Campoleone; and 4) the "bowling alley", a road that ran diagonally across the area of operations which was one of the few places where tanks could freely move. (Figure 2).

Troops Available

The advantage here began with the enemy. They were able to quickly deploy superior numbers of experienced units that effectively controlled and contained the invading force. As the battle progressed, the advantage shifted to the Allied side since they were able to replace their losses with fresh troops of high caliber as the enemy began to rely more and more on troops that were of lesser quality.

Time

The issue of whom had the advantage of time shifted as the battle progressed. At the onset, the time lost by Lucas in seizing key objects (Campoleone and Cisterna) created advantage for the enemy by allowing him to establish control of critical areas of interest. As the battle continued, the greater logistic resources and manpower resources of the Allies gave them the advantage.

Description of the Action

The landing of troops at the Anzio beachhead on January 22 was remarkably uneventful. Despite the prediction of heavy casualties, losses were light (13 killed, 97 wounded and 44 missing). During the first twenty-four hours 36,000 men were on shore and the troop count had increased to 68,886 men by the end of the first week. This initial phase of battle was followed by intense preparation of defenses for the anticipated enemy counter attack. The beachhead was expanded rapidly and preparation was made for an offense that was to secure control of the surrounding key areas of Campoleone (20 km to the north) and Cisterna (20 km to the northeast). On January 28, friendly forces were within 5 km of both of these objects. (Refer Figure 2)

The enemy response to this attack was much swifter and better organized than expected. Field-Marshal Albrecht Kesselring had anticipated such an attack and had prepositioned mobile forces in northern Italy that were prepared to deploy immediately. Upon hearing of the attack, he contacted Hitler who then authorized additional reinforcements. By sundown of January 22nd he had moved two divisions the area and brought in 34,000 men by the end of the fourth day. Most

importantly, he had recognized that this move was a coordinated attempt at inducing him to withdraw troops from the Gustav Line.

The VI Corps plan called for an advance of the British 1st Division and the U.S. 45th Division directly north towards Campolione along the Alban Road. Simultaneously the U.S. 3rd Division was to head northeast towards Cisterna with Col. Williams Darby's Rangers leading as an infiltration force. Both of these efforts failed. Two battalions of Darby's Rangers were trapped behind enemy lines and only six of the 676 men returned. The British 1st met with slightly better success and reached Campoleone where they were able to penetrate the German main line of resistance. Enemy reinforcements soon stopped this progress after establishing firm defensive positions in strongly constructed stone Italian farmhouses. The Allied armor was unable to capitalize on its superior strength because of the soggy terrain and deep, rough stream gullies. On February 2nd, the Allied offense ended when General Mark Clark radioed Gen. Lucas and gave instructions to consolidate the beachhead and prepare for defense.

Hitler wanted Anzio to become another Dunkirk; such a victory would provide his effort with a badly needed boost in morale. He referred to the Allied forces as an "abscess" that needed to be removed, whatever the cost. He became personally involved with battlefield decisions and sent some of the best available troops to participate in this action. The enemy counter-offensive had three phases: 1) a pinch off the British salient at Campoleone and recapture the "factory" at Aprilia, 2) a drive through to the sea along the Albano road and 3) an attack along the Cisterna front and move towards the Allied defense line along the Mussolini Canal. This operation began on February 3 and nearly resulted in the loss of the British 1st Division. The next nine days of fierce fighting resulted in the loss of the key terrain objects the "Factory" and the "Bowling Alley".

The major German offensive began February 16th when the enemy force was 120,000 soldiers strong and outnumbered the 100,000 VI Corps significantly. This phase culminated in the defense at an overpass along the Alban Road where the enemy came very close to breaking through our lines and dividing our forces. During this five-day attack, the enemy suffered at least 5,389 battle casualties and 609 prisoners were taken. Allied casualties totaled 3,496 dead, wounded and missing. The outcome of this action was attributed to effective use of air power, artillery and the inability of the enemy to employ his tanks in masses. The stubborn resistance of the Allied troops holding the beachhead ultimately led to the breakdown of enemy morale that occurred when their offensive bogged down.

On February 22, General Lucian Truscott was brought in to replace General Lucas as the commander of the VI Corps. At this point the Germans recognized that a direct attack down the Albano Road was not going to succeed and changed their focus to the northeast and tested the strengths of the Allied defenses along this line. Continued heavy attacks occurred along this area until March 3 when counterattacks launched by the 3rd Division marked the end of the enemy's third

and last major assault against the Anzio beachhead. This was a costly failure for the Germans. Their losses were heavy in both personnel and equipment. From February 29 to March 4, they suffered more than 3,500 battle casualties and at least 30 of their tanks were destroyed. On March 1, Field Marshal Kesselring sent a message to General Mackensen ordering that the assault against the 3rd Division be halted.

Once the Germans had ceased to be on the offensive, the nature of the battle changed markedly. The living conditions began to strongly resemble the quiet periods of trench warfare that had been noted on the Western Front during World War I. The beachhead itself remained a very vulnerable site that was subject to continuous long-range artillery fire. SFC Panebianco describes the life living in the trenches and tunnels that made them "feel like we were rats". He describes the small enemy reconnaissance airplane that would fly by nightly that no one dared shoot since well directed enemy artillery fire was guaranteed to immediately follow. Historian William Breuer describes individual soldiers being pursued by accurately directed artillery fire that was used almost like sniper fire. The soldiers adapted to this very dangerous style of living with an air of nonchalance that surprised outside observers. It remained a dangerous place to live with the frequent shelling and the frequent vicious nocturnal guerrilla raids that both sides conducted.

The plight of Anzio was tied inextricably to the situation in Cassino at the Gustav Line. Unsuccessful attempts at breaking the German defenses had been conducted at great costs in January and March but on May 19th, the Gustav Line was finally broken. The Allies could now advance up Highway 6 through the Liri Valley and the German XIVth and Xth armies were forced to withdraw. It was obvious that the Allies would breakout of Anzio soon but the enemy did not know either when or where that this would occur.

Plan BUFFALO (Figure 4) was adopted on May 5 to govern the Anzio offensive. This operation projected a breakthrough on the road to Cisterna, which was to be followed by continued attack to the north until Highway 6 was reached at Valmontone. From here, the German supply lines would be cut and the German Xth Army would be trapped between the VI Corps and British VIIIth army.

Two factors aided the breakout effort: Kesselring had anticipated a second seaborne landing and had withdrawn three divisions, Mackensen had also thought that the breakout would be occurring along the Albano Road and positioned his stronger divisions along this road. The Allies instead chose to take the road to Cisterna where once they broke through the minefields and the initial line of resistance, there was no opposition. The attack began on the 23rd of May and progressed well. By the 25th they had captured Cisterna and captured nearly a thousand prisoners. The price was high, in the first five days of battle, combat casualties exceeded 4,000. On May 26th, one of the most controversial actions of the campaign occurred when General Clark issued orders to VI Corps which

shifted the mass of the troops toward the Alban Hills and Highway 7 and left only one division to attempt the cutoff of Highway 6 which was then held by the Hermann Goering Panzer Division and resulted in the escape of the German Xth Army.

The last significant action of the battle occurred on May 30th when American troops were able to neutralize the defense that was being directed from Velletri (a strongly defended town at the base of the Alban Hills) by capturing the undefended Mount Artissimo that overlooked this down. This action led to Makensen's relief of command by Kesselring. On the morning of June 4, American troops had reached the outskirts of Rome and entered the city without resistance.

Significance of the Battle

Short Term Effects

The amphibious landing at Anzio Beach failed its immediate objective of flanking the and breaking the Gustav Line. The VI Corps was quickly pinned down by enemy forces and was incapable of conducting any major offensive action for four months; the battle soon had broken down to a long, costly campaign of attrition that resembled the Western Front of World War I. The deadlock ultimately was resolved when Allied troops were able to break through the Gustav Line near Monte Cassino, which forced the withdrawal of enough elements of the German XIV army, that a breakout from the beachhead was possible.

Some analysts feel that Anzio was a gamble and the fact that the Allied VI Corps survived the ordeal and averted destruction was the most significant result of the action. Once the deadlock ended, the roads to Rome were open and the ancient city could be captured. This last phase of the battle of Anzio was flawed by the escape of both the German Xth and XIVth armies to the north where they would fight again.

The casualties were high, 4,400 men died, 55,000 were injured and 6,800 were captured or missing. Nonetheless sufficient fighting strength of the VI Corps was retained and their constituent elements were able to continue to contribute to the war effort.

Long-term Effects

The outcome of the attack at Anzio is considered to have been a failure as judged by the usual standards applied to warfare and battle, nonetheless most historians feel that the defeat of Hitler and the winning of the war were hastened by the final results of this campaign. Two crucial elements leading to the victory in World War II were the successful invasions at Normandy and southern France. Most analysts agree that the outcome of these battles was due in part to the fact that Germany

could not ignore the Allied elements at Anzio and had to keep 18% of their fighting force in Italy in order to secure the theatre in Italy. The previous year this percentage had only been nine, the benefit that this provided the troops landing at Normandy is unmeasurable. Nonetheless, many historians and critics have questioned whether the losses sustained at this battle were worth these gains.

Lessons Learned

The attack at Anzio is and will remain controversial as long as we continue to study the topic of World War II. SFC Albert Panebianco was a soldier during this conflict and served bravely and willingly during this battle but now voices the same sentiment shared by many military historians. He states that, "Anzio was a mistake." I agree with this and believe that this mistake was the result of substituting sound military principle with political goals. The Anzio operation began with the promise of an opportunity to break the stalemate that had developed at Monte Cassino, but ultimately ended in a stalemate of its own and placed more than 100,000 Allied troops at great risk for capture or destruction.

Tenants of Army Operations

The Anzio Landing Operation lacked depth and deprived its participants of both agility and versatility. Superficial analysis would suggest that the attack demonstrated initiative but a more careful examination reveals that this critical element of battlefield success was absent.

To strike first and maintain control of the action is fundamental to winning. At the onset, the planning of Anzio appeared to fulfill these criteria, it was after all, an offensive operation that caught the enemy by surprise and was followed immediately by the securing of enemy territory with minimal losses. Field Marshall Albrecht Kesslering has stated about Anzio that the "the landing force was initially weak and without infantry armor. It was a half-way measure as an offensive." This landing force found itself soon trapped by Kesselring and without any means of asserting itself in an offensive action. Properly executed military initiative never allows the enemy to recover. The Anzio area was surrounded by a larger number of troops within four days. The enemy's resources had been underestimated; friendly forces were unable to seize the critical highground at Campoleone or Cisterna and initiative was lost. The lack of a cohesive plan after landing provided opportunity for the well-prepared enemy to take advantage. From the onset the resources and planning of the Anzio landing had been limited by the higher priority of the impending invasion at Normandy; now the II Corps only viable choice was to prepare for the inevitable counter attack. They were without the necessary resources to maintain battle initiative and were unable to either advance to or seize the Alban Hills.

Depth of operation is the ability of a military force to extend its operations in time and space throughout the depth of the battlefield. The limited strength of the landing forces at Anzio denied them any depth of operation from the onset. Attempts of the British 1st Division to penetrate towards Campoleone were limited and created a dangerous salient; the enemy nearly destroyed this unit a few days later with their counterattack. The attempt to control the road to Cisterna met disaster when two of Col. Darby's Ranger battalions were trapped behind enemy lines.

Agility is a prerequisite to seizing and holding the initiative and achieving victory. Here again the Allied forces failed. Anzio was chosen because of its vicinity to Rome, there was an appropriate beach and the major highways to Rome were close. It was an excellent place to land a mobile and strong force that was capable advancing to other areas. The terrain that the VI Corps occupied was marsh on one side and multiple steep ravines in the other side. There was only one road suitable for lateral tank movement and this was controlled by the Germans for much of the battle. The Allied superior tank force could never exert itself in this field of operations and many of the tanks became stationary artillery elements that were positioned in partially destroyed houses that were not used effectively through much of the battle.

Principles of War

When one analyzes the action at Anzio according to the principles of war, the Allied deficiencies become even more evident. There were significant problems related to objective, offensive, mass, maneuver and simplicity. Every military operation must be directed at a clearly defined, decisive and attainable objective. There was ambiguity present in the stated objective of the mission. As stated elsewhere in this paper, Lucas was to seize the beachhead but there was uncertainty about exactly what was meant by "advancing to" the Alban Hills. This uncertainty appears to be a reflection of General Clark's uncertainty about whether Lucas had enough strength to accomplish this task. Seizure of the Alban Hills made good sense in context of the Army tenants as discussed above, but both of the American generals seemed to doubt that the VI Corps had the strength to accomplish the mission. It appeared that from the onset that the ensuing stalemate was inevitable.

The principle of offensive action that states that one must seize, retain and exploit the initiative was a lacking element in the Anzio Campaign. This was lost early and not reestablished until four months later when the Germans began to withdraw following the breakthrough at the Gustav Line. Mass is the synchronization of all the elements of combat power where they will have a decisive effect on an enemy force in a short period of time. Because of the constraints placed on the operation by the impending Normandy Invasion, the Allies did not have the necessary resources to provide this type of blow to the enemy.

The principle of maneuver states that one must place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power. Because of the lack of agility and adequate force, it was impossible for the Allies to set the terms of battle. They were as mentioned, confined in a limited space with little mobility under the direct fire of the German artillery. The principle of security was a problem from the onset, the Allies never established security from enemy artillery or attack until the "breakout".

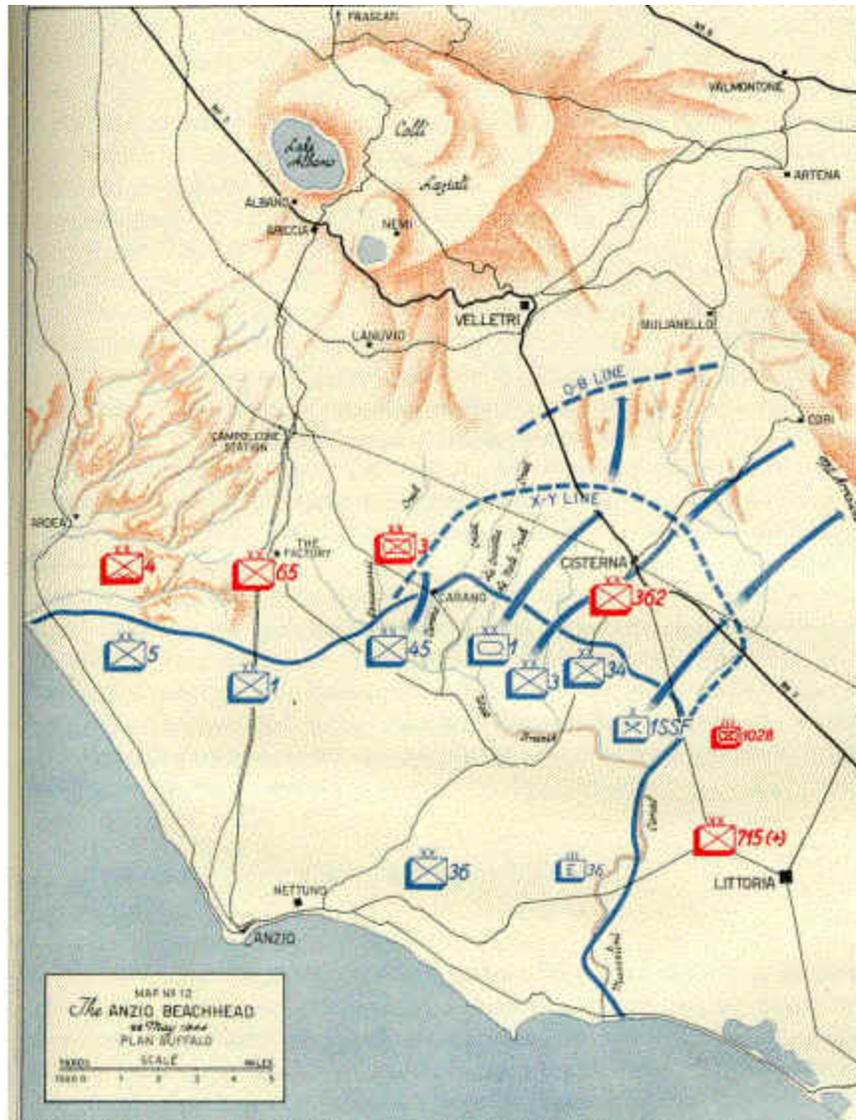
Unity of command was not a major issue relative to the battle itself but was an underlying factor from the planning until the last phases of the Anzio action. The upper echelons did not agree; Eisenhower was the originator of the Anzio concept but had changed his mind by December 10th. Churchill never seemed to take him seriously and felt that this change was the result of Eisenhower's new role as the commander of the Normandy Invasion. Churchill was persistent with his plan and revived the operation after the Allied Command Staff had once rejected it.

The most significant result of poor command unity was the failure of operation BUFFALO to accomplish the objective of preventing the escape of the retreating German Xth army. During the "Breakout" phase of the operation General Clark revised operation BUFFALO and only sent one division north to Valmontone and Highway 6. Churchill states in his memoirs that this was a great mistake that allowed the German Panzer Divisions to keep fighting. Many other historians have agreed and feel that this error led to the death of many soldiers in the later battles in northern Italy. Clark subsequently has stated that the move was "essential to maintain flexibility of movement".

Battlefield Operating Systems

The reader might question at this point, how did the Allies ultimately succeed at Anzio. I believe that answer lies not in adherence to either the tenants of army operations or the principles of war but rather in the superiority of operating systems and resources. Allied intelligence was superior; the German ULTRA code had been broken and control of the air provided information on enemy troop movement. The Allies controlled the sea and had superior logistics, which provided tremendous advantage. While the Germans experienced progressively greater difficulties obtaining supplies, Anzio had become the 4th largest port in the world.

The most important lesson learned at the battle, however, is probably the importance of "survivability". The Allied soldiers who were pinned down in this small area learned how to survive in this difficult environment. General Harmon states that he never has seen a group so tightly knit with such an incredible strong desire to survive and finish the job; it was probably this desire that prevented the enemy from making Anzio the complete disaster that it could have become.



JAMES R. SAFRIT - 179TH REGIMENT, 45TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The following exciting and interesting memoirs taken from a diary written by James R. Safrit.

Introduction

James R. Safrit, Jr. was born on September 5, 1920 in Rowan County. His parents were James R. Safrit, Sr. and Sally Grace Foster Safrit. He was the great-grandson of Confederate Veteran Peter A. Safrit, who had served with the 4th N. C Infantry Regiment, a part of Robert E. Lee's famous Army of Northern Virginia during the Civil War. Peter Safrit had been twice wounded and twice captured. He spent the last year of the conflict in a US hospital and prisoner of war camp and

was finally paroled when the war ended. Peter A. Safrit was 5'8" tall and had blue eyes and weighed about 160 pounds. Ironically, so did James R. Safrit.

James Safrit was a resident of China Grove and attended China Grove Schools through 7th grade, but had to drop out and go to work to support his family during the Depression. Fortunately, Cannon Mills continued to run throughout the Depression and he was able to keep a job. The death of his Father when he was nine years old made his going to work an absolute necessity. He had also lost an older sister, Irene, to tuberculosis. She was seventeen. Safrit's Mother never remarried, so James Safrit had to become a major breadwinner for the family, which consisted of younger brother, J.W. and younger sister, Lula.

Safrit was a very good athlete and was playing semi-pro baseball with adult teams by the time he was in his mid-teens. The fact that he was no longer in school during his teen years did not prevent him from playing football at the Farm Life School in China Grove. At that time, eligibility rules were very lax and he was able to take advantage of that laxness and play some football at the school.

The United States created the first peacetime draft in American History in 1940 in order to begin getting ready "just in case" we got drug into the war in Europe. James Safrit volunteered through the Selective Service System and entered the US Army on January 22, 1941. He received basic training and participated in major maneuvers or war games in Tennessee and in the Carolinas during 1941, and then was transferred to the inactive enlisted reserve corps on November 4, 1941. His inactive status didn't last long. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked the US Naval Base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The United States was suddenly at war in the Pacific and in Europe. Safrit was soon called back to active duty.

In January 1943, Safrit found himself in North Africa preparing for combat. That is where he apparently began a journal that detailed his combat experiences in North Africa, and Italy during 1943-44 as an infantryman in the 45th "Thunderbird" Division. He also served in the Sicily campaign, but makes no mention of it in his journal. Although Safrit had a limited education, he had a flair for writing. He takes the reader into the foxhole with him and lets you see the action through his eyes. He also has no qualms about letting the reader inside his head and heart, so he makes clear what he is thinking and how he feels about the things he experiences. He never has any problem letting you know that he is afraid and would rather be someplace else, preferably safely at home in his Mother's arms. But he also explains why he does what he has to do regardless of the fear. James R. Safrit was part of "The Greatest Generation" as described in the book by Tom Brokaw. When his country called and death stared him in the face, he did what he had to do with a prayer on his lips, just like millions of his comrades. This is a story you won't soon forget.

North Africa

I joined the 41st Armored Infantry, Co. E, 2nd Armored Division on January 23, 1943. We were deep in the "Cork Forest", northeast of Rabat, Morocco, where we began intensive training for combat.

On February 6, we were part of a naval convoy heading toward Casablanca. Our convoy continued on with little gray destroyers darting here and there dropping countless depth charges. During the night, we were again attacked by subs. We lay breathless below decks waiting for suspense filled hours for those slim little pencils of death, the torpedoes, to blow our ship to hell. Finally, they were away and the all clear was sounded.

On February 9, we sailed into the harbor of Casablanca. We wove our way through mine fields and sunken hulks of French naval ships, sunk by our navy in the initial assault on North Africa. We passed within a few yards of the mightiest battleship of the French fleet, the Jean Bart, sunk by navy planes and the powerful guns of our battleship Massachusetts.

Later in February, we moved from Casablanca, North Africa to Oran, French Morocco by French type 40 + 8 boxcars, which were designed to carry 40 men or 8 horses. There were 43 men plus full field packs jammed into that small space.

My buddy and I managed to get the space at the door, which provided us with free movement, and we could dangle our feet over the side and enjoy the scenery. That was just swell until night fell and we started looking for a place to sleep. The only way was to sit up straight and try to sleep, hopefully without falling out the door.

Sometime during the night, I must have just tumbled out, because, about a week later, I came to in the 52nd Station Hospital with a fractured skull, broken jaw, dislocated shoulder, and was bruised and skinned from head to foot.

The nurse told me that an Arab had brought me to the MP station draped across a donkey. They figured I was going to cash in because they had me in the emergency ward all by myself. The Doc said I had retrograde amnesia, or temporary loss of memory. I just can't figure out what happened after I fell out of the train until I came around in the hospital. All I know is that I kept dreaming about being bounced up and down, and a strange, weird chant kept humming in my brain, which must have been the Arab singing some Moslem or Mohammedan Death Chant. I just thank God that he didn't leave me in the desert. I would have been buzzard bait in no time at all. I hope Allah was good to that Arab, because I certainly owed my life to him.

Salerno

Salerno Beachhead: September, 1943

The first few days of this operation became a nightmare of exploding shells, of moving here and digging in, then suddenly up and moving again, and doing that over and over again.

They say we were surrounded for 8 or 9 days and that one time they had started to load us back on the boats and evacuate us, but after a while, things became partly normal, if there is such a thing in combat.

Anyway, we began to chase the “Jerries” into the hills a little at a time. They certainly weren’t in a hurry. When we attacked and took a stinking little Italian town, after fighting from house to house, the Germans would counterattack and run us out again. Then we would have to do it all over again.

Later in September:

Last night, or early this morning, I was sent on patrol for the first time. It was a recon job to report the effect of a particularly vicious artillery barrage the 160th Field Artillery had thrown on a group of Germans they had caught in the open. There were 5 or 6 of us with a lieutenant in charge. We crossed a small stream to a farmhouse and stayed until daybreak. We had noticed a terrible odor for some time, and, when daylight came, we found out what it was. About a hundred yards from the house, there was a sickening jumble of what had once been men. But now, there was nothing but blasted bits of flesh. Arms and legs were everywhere. One lower torso of a German soldier was sitting on the ground, and the upper half, what was left, had been blown crazily to one side, still attached to a slender thread of flesh. If I live to be a hundred, I’ll never see anything to match such ghastly horror.

The lieutenant, with his face as white as a sheet, obediently went around counting arms and legs until he could report how many casualties the Germans had suffered. Apparently, the “Divarty” guys had caught a platoon in marching formation and just brought their fire down in the middle of them. They never knew what hit them. Divarty must have continued to fire into the corpses.

When we got back to the regimental command post (CP), the lieutenant told the colonel he had counted 28 dead and arms and legs enough for ten and a half more. My first patrol was certainly one I’ll never forget.

That same day, Francis Burns, nicknamed “Buddy”, joined us as a replacement. He was assigned to our squad as a 2nd scout. Since I was 1st scout, I tried to trade places with him, but “No dice”, he said. His mother taught him to be polite and never walk in front of other people. This character was quite a kidder. As time went by, we became inseparable. We went everywhere together; dug our holes together; and when things got hot, we prayed together. He never failed to amaze me by being so cool, calm, and collected. After every murderous artillery barrage the Germans threw at us, he seemed to shake off the terror, fear, and

wonder that possesses a soldier after he has undergone such a horrible ordeal and finds that he is still alive. It never seemed to affect him like it did me. It left a feeling of foreboding doom in me. I lived under a constant cloud of fear and anxiety. I became nervous and jumpy, and the slightest sound made me alert. Perhaps my fear gave me a sort of sixth sense. It made my mind sharp and clear to every lurking danger. On more than one occasion, it probably saved my life.

One day, while advancing up a hill toward Venafro, and just before I reached the crest, I turned and signaled the squad to halt until I could reconnoiter. I had just turned to move when the bump on my head, which I had gotten when I fell out of the train in North Africa, began to pound like a trip hammer. The next thing I knew, I had hit the ground and started to roll like crazy. Even as I hit the ground, I heard the splitting snarl of bullets whine all around, and while I tried to roll behind a stone wall, that machine-gun began to traverse and track me to the wall I finally rolled behind. When my senses cleared, I found that I was sweating like a horse. I must have been as white as a sheet, because I sure was scared stiff.

The rest of the squad closed in and somebody threw a grenade into the German bunker. That took care of that. There were three of them. One was wounded and two were what we considered to be very good Germans—the dead kind. Strange that I had not seen that bunker, but somehow I had sensed it.

The wounded one came out yelling, “Komerade, no shoot poor Polock!” A lot of Polish soldiers were being forced to fight by the Germans, and many would give up the first chance that they got, but this particular one was obviously no “Polock.” He was a real typical Nazi. Blond, with an arrogant half sneer on his lips, he was just using that “poor Polock” routine to save his own skin. One of our guys had been cut to pieces by a burst from this bastard’s machine-gun and he expected mercy.

The lieutenant came up and slapped the hell out of the prisoner. Then he ordered a Polish refugee that we had in our squad to come up. He had lost his mother and father when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, and he hated them with a soul consuming passion. The lieutenant said to him, “Take this ‘squarehead’ back to Battalion HQ, and be back here in 15 minutes.” The Pole knew what he meant. We all knew what he meant. It would take him at least an hour and a half to get to HQ, and back, down the tortuous mountain trail which was under mortar and artillery fire. He just jabbed the Kraut with his bayonet and said something to him in German, and they moved off down the trail. About 5 minutes later, a shot rang out and pretty soon “Jag” came back with the funniest look in his eyes I have ever seen. It was just as if I had gazed into the eyes of Satan himself. The lieutenant just said, “What took you so long, Jaggy?” I have wondered how anyone could feel such hatred as I saw in Jaggy’s eyes. But I suppose if my parents had been killed like his were, I would feel the same way.

Burns told me why he doesn't let this war get him down like it does the other guys and me. Believe it or not, he had the almost childlike conviction that his grandmother was psychic, or able to tell the future. He named many instances where she had proved uncannily correct in her predictions. Darned if he hasn't got me believing it. She told him that he would go through the war without a scratch, and he firmly believed it. He was just as scared as anyone else while the shells, bullets, and bombs were raining down. But the minute it was over, he would start wisecracking in that screwball Donald Duck falsetto voice of his, and so help me, he could even make me or anybody else laugh. He would kid me about looking so grim. After a particularly heavy barrage was over, I would start feeling myself all over to see if I was hit, and he would say, "Hell, Rebel, quit dreaming about getting a 'blighty.'" You're going to spend 10 more years in Italy dodging those 88's." A "blighty" is what a "limy" calls a wound that's not too bad, but still bad enough to get you sent home.

Burns and I could say anything to each other and not get sore. He had a button nose like Bob Hope. I used to tell him I would give my right arm if I could wake up some morning and find out that he was a beautiful woman instead of a homely Yankee bastard, and he would start talking like a dame. Burns could imitate anybody. He kept us entertained with his imitations of movie stars. He was one regular guy.

We are beginning to hit Hitler's Winter Line, and it rains every day. The ground is a sea of mud and the mountains are getting steeper all the time—and the Krauts are getting tougher. We measure our gains by yards, and every inch is fought for with "blood, sweat, and tears."

We are bombed and strafed by Fock Wulf 190s, ME-109s, and 111s often, mostly at night. They drop flares and buzz around all night dropping "butterfly" bombs and strafing. The sky is filled with tracer bullets and he muffled "whoomp" of the "ack-ack" shells. There's no sleeping here. Now and then we see a ball of fire gliding earthward and we have the satisfaction of knowing that our ack-ack doesn't always miss.

Sometimes I think the worst part of combat is the endless waiting, waiting—just thinking about home, hoping we'll get relieved, yet knowing darned well we won't. We spend waiting time listening to the endless rumors that the fellows make up just to relieve the monotony. Sometimes we start rumors of our own. If a guy could turn his mind off and on like a light bulb, war wouldn't be quite so bad, or if he could just force his brain to think of the past, of pleasant things, and never think of what may happen when the next attack comes, it still wouldn't be so bad.

Those 88s and "screaming meemies" come in as if they were ordered up on schedule, which they are. I have begun to believe that the bastard who

invented the 88s designed it especially to torment our souls, which there is no doubt of. Man, they are wicked!

We hear that old “Schicklgruber” has ordered the Krauts to hold this Winter Line, as they call it, all winter, and they certainly intend to do it. Every pillbox is a veritable fortress, dug deep into the ground and covered with steel bars or thick logs that only a direct hit by a 150 mm shell will knock out.

We captured some that had everything in them, including women’s slips, dresses, stockings, and panties, as well as all sorts of delicious food and plenty of “Schnapps”, or German whiskey. We especially enjoyed liberating that.

The only way we can advance is for the artillery to pound the hell out of the Germans, then we move up as close as possible. When the barrage lifts, we move in and quickly toss grenades into the gun slits. Each one of those pillboxes is covered by the machine-guns of others. Man, I’ve learned to crawl like a snake! I have had plenty of spent bullets and shrapnel to slap into me. I would welcome a small wound just to get back to a hospital and take a bath. I don’t feel sorry for anybody who gets hit, no matter how bad; at least they are out of it. That’s more than I can say. Gee, you should see the relief on the faces of those who are heading to the hospitals.

An ordinary civilian could never understand how a man feels who has been through hell, beaten down, knowing fear in his heart countless times; a man who has forced himself to do a task while his mind and soul are screaming for him to turn around and run, and never stop running until he is safe at home in his mother’s arms, like he did when he was a child. But a man with any self-respect can’t do that and still live with himself, so he just keeps plugging along.

Many times I imagined how it might happen—how I might get out of this hell: Suddenly, unexpectedly, there’s this ripping burst of machine-gun fire, or an explosion that comes out of nowhere, then a searing, burning pain. A feeling of panic and shock hits your brain, and you realize that what you have secretly hoped for has happened. You have been wounded, how bad doesn’t matter. All you care is that you have been honorably relieved from this hell on earth. Nobody can keep you here any longer. A fierce pride floods through you, and calmly, you wait for the medic to take you away. Other guys pass you moving up. They envy you and you can feel it....At least that is the way I would feel.

We have crossed the Volturno River, taken Venafro, Pozzilli, and Piedmonte De Alife. Every inch has been paid for in blood. Our casualties have been heavy. Men come and go so fast, I never even learn their names. An old friend I met in North Africa, Carl Smithers, turned up as a replacement. We had a lot of fun recalling the times we had in Casablanca.

We were in battalion reserve at the time we met again, and we were detailed that same night to unload some mules that were used to carry supplies up the mountains to the front-line troops. The mountain trails were so rugged that the mules go only as far as they can, and we lug the supplies the rest of the way. There were 14 of us, including Smithers, detailed to carry K-rations, mortar shells in clover cases, grenades, etc. We had just reached "G" Company CP when the krauts threw a terrific mortar barrage into the CP area. When it was over, we found two dead and four wounded. Smithers was hit bad, a big hole in his stomach and blood oozed from his chest.

The rest of us were assigned the unpleasant task of carrying the wounded down the mountain to the Battalion Aid Station. I helped to carry Smithers. He was conscious and asked for a cigarette, so I threw a raincoat over us and lit one. He took a deep drag into his tortured lungs. I knew he was dying and, for the life of me, I couldn't refuse his last request.

By then, the Germans were dropping mortar shells along the trail, so we were forced to set the stretchers down many times and hug the ground. By the time we reached the base of the mountain, Smithers had begun to rattle horribly in his chest. Just before we reached the aid station, he gave a long, tortured sigh and never uttered another sound. Another good guy "gone West. He had traveled 4,000 miles to die on a muddy stinking hill on his very first day of combat with no one to comfort him or really care, but such is war. You just can't dwell on a friend getting killed. If you do, it will drive you stark raving mad. Death was nothing new to me by then, but seeing a buddy go like that with only a few hours of combat behind him made me realize even more how close and how quickly the "Grim Reaper" could snuff out your life. One minute full of vibrant healthy life, and the next, a misshapen lifeless hulk that seems to shrink after life has fled from the body.

Burns has gone to Naples to the rest center. A few out of each platoon go every week for 6 days. I just hope I don't get knocked off before my 6 days of rest come up.

The sergeant gave me a new man to team up with. Now I know why the old timers are leery of rookies. Hell, this guy could get me killed! He won't listen to the little advice I can offer. Guess he will have to learn the hard way. He wants to be a hero and win this war all by himself. I'm no damn hero. I just want to stay alive. We are going to make a push at dawn, so we'll see how brave this cocky fella is.

We sleep two hours and stand guard two hours. This jerk ran the watch up and I got cheated out of most of my sleeping time. I didn't know it until I checked with the sergeant. I found my new foxhole mate and run the watch up an hour and ten minutes. I went back to the hole and snatched him out and knocked the hell out of him. How can you trust a guy like that with your life?

After the attack pushed off, our objective was another lousy, bald headed, rocky hill with a number I can't remember. We gained the crest after a hell of a battle through shells, bullets, and S Mines, or "Bouncing Betty" mines. When you unwittingly step on them, they bounce about four feet and explode, showering little balls everywhere. All the approaches to the German positions are zeroed in with artillery, mortars, and machine-guns. The narrow trails are sewn with concealed mines attached to thin, hard to see, trip wires. God, you have to be careful! One misstep can be your last, and to add to the difficulty of detecting those fiendish mines, those square-headed bastards are trying to kill us with everything else they can lay their hands on.

This particular hill had only a small rear guard to oppose us, with the main enemy force pulling back to new positions. After we had mopped up, and our dead and wounded were carried away, we dug in to await the usual counter attack that always followed one of ours. My new second scout finally showed up. I hadn't seen him since the attack pushed off. He said the lieutenant had made a runner out of him. I'm wondering....

That night, we sat huddled in our slit trench with the rain beating down on us in torrents. About 0300, it suddenly let up. Everything across the way in Hun land was as quiet as a tomb. We knew from past experience that when the Krauts were still, something was brewing—that Hell was ready to spew over.

We didn't have long to wait. About 0500, from out of the fog shrouded half light of dawn came the flashing flame of those dreaded 88s, and heavier artillery zeroed in on our line of holes dug in along an old Roman stone wall. The buzzing, ripping sound of flying shrapnel mingled with the screaming and wailing of 88s and Nebelwerfer mortars. The ripping "whoomp" of aerial bursts added to the maelstrom. A thousand years later, it seemed, in reality, only minutes, the barrage lifted and a flight of Focke Wulfs roared in and bombed and strafed our suffering little plot of Hell. All the while, the two of us lay huddled in our shallow little hole and prayed with every breath. I finally realized that we both were screaming like madmen to release the pent up fear and emotion inside our terrified souls.

Suddenly, there was a terrific explosion and it seemed as if a giant hand had grabbed me by the neck and jerked me out of the hole and shook me like a rag doll. My ears rang like a doorbell, and blood ran into my mouth from my nose. In my stunned mind, I thought, "This is it. I've finally gotten the direct hit I've been expecting for so long."

A million things flashed through my mind. I suddenly felt panic stricken. I kept hearing myself saying over and over, "Oh God, Mom! Mom!" I tried to say something else, but I couldn't get my brain off those four words. I felt like a helpless child seeking comfort and shelter from my mother's arms, but she wasn't there, and in my stunned condition, I couldn't grasp that fact. I just kept

calling her. I know it is silly, but I just couldn't help it. I kept thinking how lonely it would be to die so far from home.

Finally, my head cleared and I calmed down. I started talking to the kid beside me, but he didn't answer. I shook him and turned him over and eyes gazed at me with an empty, glassy stare. His mouth hung open as if he had started to speak and it had frozen. Then I knew he was dead. I screamed for a medic, but there was none around. Even if there had been, he couldn't have helped him.

By now, the Germans were sweeping across the narrow valley floor heading for our hill. They were too close for our artillery to be used effectively, but our 60 and 80 mms were beginning to find the range and, together with the stutter of the machine-guns, the line of Krauts began to falter, but, as fast as they fell, another wave would take their place.

The Kraut medics would carry supposedly wounded men as close to our positions as possible, hoping we would not fire on them. Suddenly, those "patients" would spring off the stretchers and come charging toward us with a burp gun spitting in their hands. The Polish guy in the next hole was sprawled across a boulder squeezing off shots as unconcernedly as if he was at a shooting gallery back in the states.

By this time, the Krauts were all over the place. Sergeant Kronie came charging up with a squad of guys I'd never seen before. I found out later that they were strays from other companies in the Battalion he had gotten together. He was roaring, "All right, you guys, fix bayonets! We are going to run those Kraut-eating bastards clear back to Berlin."

Most of us figured it was better to chase Germans than to have that crazy Indian put us on his "s--- list", so we rammed our bayonets on and took off. That shiny cold steel must have been too much for the "Square heads" to stomach, for it wasn't long until they were running like hell back where they came from. One tripped on his long overcoat, or maybe a rock, and fell headlong in front of me. He rolled over and started to pull himself up. In one hand, he held a trench knife. But he was just too damned slow. My bayonet went clear through his guts. When it came out, it squished. After it was all over, and I had time to think about it, I got knots in my stomach and I felt like throwing up.

We kept going until we hit a minefield, and then the Germans started a counterattack with artillery and mortars, so we had to pull back to our previous positions.

A few days later, I and a couple of other guys were sent to Naples for a long awaited six-day rest. Gee, it was just like heaven, being clean again, nothing to worry about but eat, sleep, and go to town. We took in all the spots along the Via

Roma, Naples's main drag, that weren't off limits, and a lot that were. Those Italian gals leave nothing to be desired.

Six days in paradise went by all too quickly. Burns is with me again, and I feel better with him around. We went on a daylight patrol to find out where the main German line was located. We moved out in a skirmish line. Burns and I were out as scouts. Off to our left was a little knoll covered with brush and a couple of trees. It was a swell spot for snipers or machine-gun positions, so Burns swung around in back just in case. I kept moving cautiously forward. As I moved up, I had the queerest sensation. I felt as if I was naked and unwanted eyes were watching me. My head had that nervous twitch, too. To be honest, I was just plain scared. I could almost feel hot slugs from a sniper's rifle rip into me.

I was so keyed up that, if I heard the slightest sound, I would throw myself to the ground. I had crept half way up the gently sloping knoll, when suddenly, not 20 feet in front of me, a little fat guy, wearing thick lensed glasses and an overcoat that hung down to his shoe tops, sprang up. When he did, his steel helmet went flying off his head, hit a rock, and rolled crazily down toward my feet. I was so startled that I was paralyzed. I couldn't move. The Kraut was yelling, "No shoot! No shoot! Me good Polock! Me good Polock!" He was pointing at an ugly looking machine pistol that was set up and camouflaged so cleverly that I never would have seen it in a million years. That was what was making me feel so strange when I was advancing toward that spot.

When I snapped out of my shocked trance, I realized that he was pointing the gun and saying, "Me no shoot you." He wanted to give himself up. By this time, Burns appeared and sized up the situation. He walked over and kicked the Schmeisser machine pistol down into the hole the enemy soldier had been crouching in a few minutes before. Burns said, "It's a damn good thing this guy was born a Polock, cause if he had been an SS trooper, you and me would have been ganging on the Pearly Gates by now." I certainly agreed. All he would have had to do was just squeeze of a burst from that burp gun and we would never have known what hit us. I murmured a prayer of thanks to God for letting him be an unwilling Pole instead of a German.

After the squad came up, "Jag" started questioning him in Polish. He said that the Germans had pulled back to new positions and had left him and two others as a rear guard just to slow us down. He said he had been wanting to surrender for a long time, but had never had a chance until the other two guys skipped out. Holy Hannah!! No wonder scouts turn gray headed so young and so quick. I wish I could get a promotion to the rear ranks. Gray hair doesn't look good on me.

Our regiment finally took Hill 769, a rocky, barren, treeless, shell blasted, saddle backed, ridge lined mountain with the little suffering towns of Filignano and Lagone nestling at the base of it. Our first platoon is dug in on the shoulder

of the hill. We are the anchors of the company's perimeter. My squad has the dubious duty of commanding the pass that runs between our Hill 769 and Hill 759 to the left of us. This pass is the route the Krauts take to pass behind our lines on their nightly patrols.

When night falls, a curtain of dense fog envelops the pass, making it impossible to see two feet in front of us. So, when it gets dark, a squad goes into the pass and lies in wait for the Germans to come through. Then we try to bushwhack them or get a prisoner.

Many weird and eerie things have happened in this fog-shrouded basin. One night, Jag was mumbling to himself in Polish, as he often did, while he sat around waiting for something to happen. Suddenly, all hell broke loose. He let out a shriek that echoed and reechoed all around the mountain. His rifle started barking. We could tell it was his because the Kraut's karabiner doesn't sound like ours. Then a burst from a machine pistol splattered against the rocks. Immediately, we heard sounds of running feet and the guttural sounds of German voices fade away toward enemy lines.

Jaggy told us later that he was talking to himself when a hand touched him on the shoulder and a voice whispered to him in German. That is when we heard that startled yell and the shots. Both were so startled that their shots went wild. Apparently, the German patrol was sneaking through and a Kraut heard him speaking Polish and mistook him for one of theirs. That's one time I'm sure he was glad he didn't talk to himself in English. If he had, his throat would have been cut from ear to ear.

There was another night when we had been on patrol and, on our way back, we took a break in the basin before climbing up the hill to our positions. When the Sarge gave the word to take a break, we flopped down in our tracks dead tired. When I sat down, my hands touched something hard and rigid and it felt like a rough cloth or canvas. A queer tingle raced up and down my spine. I began to explore the thing with my hands. As my fingertips slid along, I felt something sticky and revolting and jerked my hand away. But my morbid curiosity got the best of me, so I began to explore downward until I found a wire drawn tight around this thing. Finally, I felt the leather boots and I realized I had sat down on the corpse of a German soldier. The sticky mess I had touched was where his head should have been, and as soon as I realized that, I let out a yelp of sheer horror.

The rest of the guys wanted to know what in hell was wrong. I was trying to rub the nasty feeling off my hands in the dirt, and for months afterward, I washed my hands every chance I got. Yet, I couldn't get them clean again.

It was too dark to see, but we could tell that it was a Kraut wrapped in canvas and tied up with telephone wire that the Germans used. Everyone

surmised that an enemy patrol had been caught in an artillery barrage and this guy had his head blown off. His buddies wrapped him up in a shelter-half and were dragging him back to their lines to bury him when something prevented them from finishing their grisly task. Perhaps, if we had looked around, there might have been more bodies, but this one was quite enough.

It is beginning to snow on Hill 769 now. We are dug in behind a Roman stone wall. The holes are shallow since the ground is too hard and rocky to dig deep, and we can't put shelter halves up to protect us from the biting wind that whistles through the pass, as the Jerries would spot them and drop mortar shells right in our laps. My feet are so cold I can't even feel them. I take my boots off every chance I get and rub my feet. Maybe that's why I haven't gotten a real bad case of trench feet like a guy a few holes away. Last night, he crawled down the mountain to the battalion aid station only to be sent back up again. The poor kid is sobbing in frustrated anger, cursing the medics for being so heartless. He feels that he should be in the hospital, and no doubt he should, but they can't send us all to the hospital, so they won't send him until they absolutely have to.

We lay there day after day sweating out the artillery barrages that come so regularly that we know exactly when one is due. The company dwindles down more and more every day. There are only about 42 men in the whole company when there should be around 200.

A few nights ago, a guy in the CP jumped in his hole when a shell came in and he dislodged the pin in a grenade laying in the bottom of his hole. They could have picked him up in a five-gallon bucket.

There are times when relieving oneself proves to be a major problem. If the call of nature should come at a time when the Krauts are throwing a barrage in, you throw modesty to the winds. You just tell your foxhole mate to turn over while you use a K-ration box for a commode. It's rather unpleasant, but it's better than getting your head blown off. I've never heard of anyone complaining while the other one is doing it. Perhaps he's too worried about the falling shells to be concerned about something like that.

There are nights when the sky is cold and clear and the moon is full and bright and you can see for miles. From my hole, I can turn my head and look down into the cemetery far down the mountain. The little white crosses stand out in the moon light like ghostly fingers beckoning to me. There is a morbid fascination about them. I keep wondering, as all of us do, if perhaps one of those crosses might not mark my own grave before another night comes around.

Usually, we don't have to lay and contemplate our fate at night. There's always the inevitable patrols sent out to prowl in "no man's land." The Jerries are always uneasy, attested to by the fact that they are constantly firing flares that light up everything as bright as day. I've learned that when a flare catches you

standing up you must freeze until it dies out, because the slightest movement will attract a watchful eye and a swarm of hot slugs. But if you stand perfectly still, those same eyes may look straight at you and never see you. It's funny, but it's true.

We were sent into a village held by the Germans one night with orders to fire a green flare if the village was occupied by a large force. I think the high brass had planned to attack through the village if it was lightly held. Anyway, when we reached the outskirts of the town, some Kraut outpost challenged us. When we didn't answer, of course, they opened fire and flares began going up all along the German front lines—bright yellow flares that turned night into day.

The lieutenant led us up a hill overlooking the town and he fired a green flare. Almost immediately, Germans started pouring out of houses all around and yelling like crazy. The green flare was also a signal to our artillery, which threw a tremendous barrage into those howling, screaming enemy troops. Needless to say, we got the hell out fast, back to our lines. When the attack swept through the next morning, it looked like a deadly cyclone had ripped through it. German bodies were everywhere.

There's a rumor floating around that we are being relieved today. No one believes it. Yet, about 1400, an order comes down that each squad is to pull back at short intervals to avoid bunching up, and to assemble 1000 yards behind the lines. We are too tired and too cynical to register the relief and joy that we all feel deep inside.

Anzio - Hell's Little Acre January 22, 1944

After a few days in a rest center at Piedmonte de Alife, we boarded LSTs and set sail for Anzio in a so-called leap frog operation, around 60 miles behind enemy lines. We moved in toward the harbor without any trouble. The Jerries seemed to be taken completely by surprise. We figured, "Hell, maybe we're finally getting a break." An invasion without any opposition; that would really be something for the old 45th, but we should have known better, because from out of the sun came a flight of FW-190s. Those big bombs straddled our LST with near misses. The next thing I knew, I was bobbing up and down in my "Mae West" swallowing gobs of salt water. One bomb landed on one side of the boat and another on the other side and it rocked violently like a cork, and a few of us on deck went flying into the water. There were three Kraut planes, but luckily for us, they made only one pass at our convoy and sped back to their lines.

Almost immediately, a torpedo boat fished us out of the water, scared, but unhurt. As far as I know, we didn't lose a man. We moved along the Mussolini Canal and dug in. The Germans brought in reinforcements and things started getting rough. It was just about the time that Col. Bill Darby and his 1st and 4th

Ranger Battalions of around 900 men were literally wiped out. Only a handful managed to escape the trap the Krauts sprang on them. After Col. Darby's Rangers were annihilated, he was given command of our regiment, the 179th Infantry. He was a fine soldier and loved and respected by all of us.

The Germans shelled the beachhead continuously with a 210-mm railroad gun. Those giant shells dropped on hospitals, ships in the harbor—there wasn't a spot on this six-mile deep perimeter that didn't feel the effects of this giant weapon that we dubbed "Whistling Willie." It was a bastard.

During the daylight hours, we enjoyed air superiority, but at night the Jerries came over all night dropping "butterfly" bombs that floated down and exploded a few feet off the ground, showering everything underneath them with shrapnel.

The enemy were very alert to our patrols, and only a few times were we able to return from one without losing men. One of those combat patrols stands out in my mind. There were 18 or 20 of us who were sent out to determine just how strong an enemy position was, and to pick up prisoners, if possible, for questioning.

The terrain we had to move over was as flat as a pool table and we had to crawl most of the way on our bellies. After what seemed like a very long time, we heard the sound of digging and we saw a large group of figures moving around. We opened fire on them. Some of them returned the fire, but our surprise attack caused a lot of confusion among them and they took off. We moved into their positions and I suddenly stumbled into a foxhole, right on top of a "Squarehead" sergeant who was huddled face down like an ostrich. Frankly, it scared me as much as it did him. He started yelling, "Komerade! Komerade!" I stuck the barrel of my rifle in his ear, and he climbed out very meekly, with his hands on his head.

By this time, the German lines opened up all along the front, so we regrouped and started back the way we had come. The prisoner began to scream, "Nein! Nein!", so one of our guys who spoke German asked him what the hell was wrong. He answered that we had crawled through one of their minefields. That was what they were doing when we opened fire on them. They were a mine laying detail. How fifteen GIs (we had dropped off four or five on the way up to act as a listening post to guard our return route so the Germans wouldn't cut us off) could have crawled through those mines without setting off at least one will always be a mystery to me. Only the "Good Guy Upstairs" could have guided us through without mishap. Believe me, we were thankful.

Just as we expected, the enemy tried to swing around and cut us off, but our listening post prevented them from doing so. All in all, we were lucky. We lost one man. A burst of machine pistol slugs killed him. Two others were wounded, none of them seriously. We brought all of them back with us. We had no

stretchers, so we carried them on our backs, and with a two-man hand carry, the dead GI, too.

The manner that we used to carry the dead soldier—two of us held hands and the corpse sat on our hands. To keep the body upright, so that he would not fall off, we were forced to lay his arms around our necks. His head hung limply forward on his chest. After a while, his arms became stiff and rigid. We took turns carrying him. It was an ordeal I'll never forget.

We relieved the 504th paratroops along the Mussolini canal. It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. As we approached the road running parallel to the canal, we saw this trooper riding a "liberated" horse, which a local farmer owned, up and down the road. Strangely enough, the Krauts never fired at him even once. Yet their artillery was firing steadily at a crossroads only a half-mile down the road. They must have enjoyed the trooper's antics with the horse. But when he got off that horse to leave with his unit, the Germans threw everything they had at that trooper, his unit, and at us. What a war!

Today, the Germans sprang their secret weapon at us. It was a "Doodle Bug" tank; a small, unmanned tank filled with high explosives which was guided electronically. We spotted the damn things and opened fire with everything we had. The explosions were terrific when they blew up. Scratch one secret weapon. We didn't see any more of those things.

On January 29, 1944, Ruben Burns and I were detailed to stay at Platoon CP to act as runners. Our job was to carry messages back and forth to Company CP. There were many messages that we didn't dare send over the radio or telephone, because the Krauts would cut in on our lines and listen in on our conversations. Each night, around 6 PM, we were sent to pick up the password and countersign for the night. Usually, when we got to CP, they would be gathered around the radio listening to "Berlin Sally", and everyone would be amazed to hear the bitch say sweetly, "Don't forget your pass word, boys." Then she would tell us what it was, so help me. Their spy system was pretty good. We had to be alert when we challenged someone at night, because we never knew if it was a GI or a Kraut who gave us the right password or countersign. We had to ask questions like how many homers Babe Ruth hit, or something like that. Strangely enough, we could tell a Kraut right off as soon as he opened his mouth, even though they spoke better English than we did. Perhaps they spoke too good. Anyway, they fooled very, very few of our guys.

Burns and I liked to float around, sort of freelance like. It was better than staying put in one place, like in a slit trench on the line. But it got pretty hot when we had to go out during a barrage to carry a message to Company CP.

February 1, 1944

Last night, a Kraut patrol slipped into our 1st Platoon positions. An arrogant voice demanded to know where the CP was and ordered the occupant of the first slit trench to call the Platoon leader. Luckily, the guy he collared was no greenhorn. He caught on at once and ran like hell across the Mussolini Canal yelling, "Krauts! Krauts!" He ran right past the Platoon CP, where we grabbed him. By that time, firing had broken out and a couple of grenades had been thrown. But when Burns, the lieutenant, radioman, and I got there, the Jerries had slipped back into the fog and disappeared. We had two wounded and we found a dead Kraut in the morning.

We lost our jobs as runners and went back to the squad on line because of those brazen bastards. After that, we were a little more alert.

About 0530, we caught a terrific artillery barrage on our line and clear back to Company CP 200 yards back. It was so accurate that we figured they had to have an observer right inside our lines. They blew the roof off the house the CP was in and wounded some GIs.

One of the guys in our squad was buried in a dugout he had built in the bank of the canal. When we dug him out, he was dead, poor devil. He worked like a slave to build it and it killed him. Perhaps if he had stayed in his slit trench, it would not have happened. But, hell, who knows? His number just came up.

After daylight, things were pretty quiet. They sent us a new sniper rifle and an improved scope. The lieutenant was trying it out on a haystack about 300 yards away located on a knoll that overlooked our lines. He fired a few tracers into it and they bounced off, which was rather odd, since bullets don't just bounce off haystacks. So the lieutenant called "Divarty", and pretty soon shells started exploding around the "stack". Almost immediately, it started moving back toward enemy lines. We then finally realized that the haystack was a Mark IV Panther tank camouflaged to look like a haystack. The shells followed it all the way out of sight, but never did hit it. At any rate, we knew how they had been able to hit us with such pin point accuracy. They had been looking down our throats from that knoll all the time. Those Krautheads were pretty smart.

February 3, 1944

We had been in our new positions in front of the "factory" in the town of Aprilia, a real German stronghold.

The British First Division had been practically wiped out here earlier in January about the same time Col. Darby's Rangers had been destroyed.

Anyway, we had been penned in our holes all day. We couldn't move because "Jerry" could see every move we made, and if we raised our heads, a sniper's slug would "part our wigs." We were pretty miserable. The holes filled

with water. About two feet deep was about as far as we could dig. So we lay there and shivered from our cold and the storm of shells that came in regularly.

When darkness came, we posted guards. One man slept, or tried to, while his buddy pulled guard duty—two hours on and two hours off. I had drifted off to sleep when Burns shook me and whispered, “Wake up. Krauts!” All he had to say was “Krauts” and I was wide awake. We sat in our hole trying to see in the pitch-dark night.

We heard German voices singing at the tops of their lungs. As they came closer, we could tell they were as drunk as skunks. By this time, the whole platoon was listening and waiting. Those crazy bastards were really living it up. We were almost ashamed to do what we did when they came in front of our holes. We opened fire and the singing became a rattle. Then everything was quiet. Eventually, after we were sure there were no more coming, the medics came up and carried them off to Graves Registration.

After we kicked it around the platoon a while, we came to the conclusion that they had drunkenly taken the wrong direction and staggered into our lines instead of their own, where they had no doubt intended to go. But, as some guy cracked, “That was high priced Schnapps they were drinking.”

We didn’t look at the bodies, so I don’t know what they looked like—if they were old or young. We were relieved that we couldn’t see them because of the dark. We felt bad enough just knowing what had happened, much less having to see what we had done, because no one, no matter how hard or cruel likes to see death. Strange things like this have happened to many different infantrymen throughout the war on many different fronts. Weird things happen in combat.

We were ordered to move to another sector of the front a couple of days later. Burns and I were digging our slit trench into the creek bank. We had just finished it and we were arranging our gear in the bottom. Turner Brown had come over and was “shooting the breeze.” He sat on top of the bank far enough down that his head didn’t show over the edge. There was the ever-present rumble of artillery, but there was none falling anywhere near us and we were feeling pretty good. We were fairly sure that we would be in this defensive position for a couple of days and we hoped to get a little rest.

Brown was there twirling a piece of rope watching us work when suddenly a stack of mortar shells landed right on top of us. One shell landed squarely in our hole (we later found 6 holes where the shells hit from a Nebelwerfer multi-barreled mortar.) The shell seemed to send the whole spray of shrapnel in a direct line with Burn’s body. The shrapnel missed me completely, but the deafening explosions knocked me silly.

After I shook off the shock, I realized that Burns was trying to tell me something, but blood kept gushing up into his throat. He kept desperately trying to speak. He slumped into my arms and rattled horribly. I was drenched with his blood by now. I was screaming for the medics, but even I could see that no one could help him now. He was dead. I knew from that moment that I would never be the same again. He was a friend like I would never have again. We had been through so much—suffered through the cold and mud of the mountains, and now the hell of Anzio. I sat there huddled in the hole with his limp body in my arms and I just broke down and cried like a baby. Finally, the stretcher-bearers came and carried him away.

All the guys came over and expressed their amazement that all three of us had not been killed. How I was spared, I'll never know. I was only a few inches from Burns. Yet, I wasn't even scratched. And Brown was sitting no more than a couple of feet away from us and in a direct line of the shell, only Burn's body had blocked the flying steel from hitting him. The rope that he had been aimlessly twirling was clipped off neatly close to his fingertips, but he wasn't scratched.

One thing that this convinced me of was that there had to be a God that could cause such a miracle on our part. Brown and I realized that it just wasn't our time to go. Unfortunately for Brown, his time was not long in coming. He was killed in action about a month later at Anzio from a direct hit from a Mark VI tank firing point blank into his foxhole.

We just found out that we have been fighting Hitler's crack Commando Regiment that had been sent to break through our lines. They were special troops trained for special missions. Their orders were to wipe out the 45th Division and seize the beachhead. We had already sampled some of their grisly tactics. A few nights earlier, two men in the Second Platoon were in a slit trench—one was on guard and the other was asleep. The next morning, the sleeping soldier awoke and found his partner with his throat cut. Those Krauts had slipped in and murdered one man and left the other to find him—a very demoralizing tactic.

After that, we were forced to pull the pin on a grenade and sit up and hold the handle down. I guarantee no one went to sleep holding those grenades.

Those Kraut bastards were real cute. But after the big attack they launched on February 19, we nearly wiped them out. What was left of them was sent back to Germany in disgrace.

The rain came down in torrents as our squad moved into a farmhouse with the barn built into the house, as many were in Italy. We settled down to get a little rest, since we were exhausted from several days of constant combat. NO one bothered to check upstairs, as the stairs were blown out and a big hole was in the roof from a shell blast. The Sarge put two of us on guard duty while the rest tried to get some sleep. I was sitting in a beat up old rocking chair trying my best to

stay awake. The other guy on guard duty with me was sitting in the blown out windowsill at the other end of the room. Suddenly, I heard something hit the floor where the stairs used to be and I saw this figure climbing down a rope. I saw this long overcoat with boots dangling from it and knew it had to be a Kraut. I grabbed my rifle and started firing, but I was so excited that I missed him, naturally; but he was yelling, “Komerade! Komerade! Please no shoot!” The rest of the squad jumped up and grabbed him.

It seems that the Germans had occupied this house as an artillery observation point. They had been busy directing their artillery fire on our troops and were not aware that we had moved into the ground floor. Such are the strange things that happen in combat. Incidentally, there were two more Krauts upstairs sound asleep. We sent the prisoner up to get his buddies, who came down very quietly.

February 20, 1944

We relieved the 1st Battalion tonight about 2100. A light rain was falling and a thick fog closed in along the creek that was to become known as “Bloody Creek.” Our 3rd Squad was lucky to have the protection of the deep banks, because the rest of the 1st Platoon was stretched out across the open fields known as “Campo del Mort” or “Field of Death.” That is exactly what it became for hundreds of Krauts and Americans before the next three days were over.

About 200 yards to the right of my squad, the CO put up his command post in a house because we were due to attack the town of Aprilia, or the “factory” early the next morning. Needless to say, the same old feeling of fear and dread was beginning to close in around us.

My new partner, Brock, and I had just bailed the water out of our slit trench and had tried to settle down for the rest of the night as best we could. We had put our grenade booby trap out in front of our hole to warn us if “Jerry” tried to crawl in on us. It consisted of grenades wired with piano wire stretched between grenades pinned to rocks. When anyone tripped the wire, it would pull the pins and—boom!! Strangely, of all the traps I set, only one was ever set off, and, apparently, they carried what was left of him away, because we found no bodies.

Brock drew the first watch and I had just dozed off, when a runner shook me awake and told me Lieutenant “D” said for me to report to him. I growled and cursed all the way to the command post. Naturally, I shut up when I got there.

When I got into the blacked out command post—lighted only by a couple of candles—I noticed there was a dud German shell lying across the giant rafters in the ceiling. It was an armor piercing shell that had slammed through a wall and smashed a hole in the ceiling, coming to rest across the rafters. Everyone was ignoring it as if it wasn’t there, so I tried to, too.

I soon found out that I had “volunteered” to go on patrol with five other guys. It seems that a lot of activity had been noticed across the field, so we were to go over and find out what it was. The captain told us to avoid contact with the enemy if at all possible, and to just listen and observe and be able to describe everything we saw, and especially to note the sound of tank motors. So off we went, following the creek as near Aprilia as possible.

The sergeant stopped us still in the creek about 100 yards from the square. He told us to just lay still. We had started around a Jerry strong point. It sounded like it might be a machine-gun crew by the sound of their voices. We didn't drop in to count them.

We could see far in the fog, but it sounded like the whole Panzer army was moving in. There was a solid roar of tank and SP gun motors. There was no doubt that something big was in the wind.

I don't know how long we lay there, but suddenly our artillery started throwing harassing fire into the town, and by the flashing light of exploding shells, we could see what looked to us like hordes of German infantry running helter skelter trying to find cover from the shelling. We suddenly realized that if our “Divarty” guys hadn't fired a mission when they did, we would have been over run by the Krauts before we had known what happened. The Sarge said, “Let's get the hell out of our here!” The machine-gun crew picked us up and raked the darkness with slugs that cracked past our heads like someone was ripping coarse cloth. We were down in the creek and the bullets passed over us harmlessly. After a while, we heard someone yell the password. For a moment, I couldn't remember the countersign and I heard the click of the safety as the sentry got ready to fire on us, but the Sarge wasn't too scared to remember it, so he yelled it out. It would have been a helluva thing to have been plugged by our own guys after getting by the Krauts, but, believe me, that kind of thing happened tragically many times during the Battle of Anzio and all during the war as well.

Many guys were so trigger happy that they started firing and then yelled the password. I remember once when we were in the mountains in the Venafro sector. We were sitting around outside our holes—it was on the military side of the mountain, of course, and the Jerry artillery was quiet. All of a sudden, one of our men jumped up and yelled “Krauts!” and started banging away with his weapon. I looked up and saw this German soldier begin to buckle and fall. The poor bastard's hands were still clawing at the sky. Right behind him was an American GI who was bringing him in as a prisoner. We found out from him, after we had cussed out the guy who had killed his prisoner, that he had been on patrol with some other guys and they captured this Kraut. He had been detailed to bring the prisoner in for questioning.

After this incident was reported to our CO, “Frenchy” Lejeune, the trigger happy GI, was called to the CP and given a chewing out that I'm sure he never

forgot. But he returned to the squad and that is all he got. These things unfortunately happened too many times.

After returning from our patrol, on February 21, 1944, we went to the company command post and reported everything we saw and heard. Then, about 0500, the Krauts' artillery opened up with every gun they had. The din was terrific. We lay in our holes and prayed while the ground trembled and shook. All we could do was lay there and take it. The bombardment must have lasted two hours, at least. The sun was shining brightly when we heard the engineer sergeant, who had been assigned the mission of blowing the bridge behind us in case we had to pull out. He was screaming, "God in Heaven, look at that!"

I raised up and peeped over the edge of my hole and the sight my eyes beheld defied description. The Germans were lined up about 400 yards away sweeping toward us like they were on parade. The uniforms looked clean and fresh, and the belt buckles glinted in the sun, so we knew they must be fresh troops. Our artillery had begun to zero in on them, but they came on, almost disdainful of our fire. We could see them fall, others blown to bits, but on they came.

Our machine-guns raked them unmercifully. They were dying like flies. Mortar shells were exploding all around us as they kept coming down. We heard the sound of tank motors and then, down the road known as the "Bowling Alley," and across the fields, those tanks ground their way toward our positions. Never have I felt so alone, so afraid, but I also knew that if I got up and ran, as I wanted to do, they would have cut me to pieces. My feelings of self-preservation were even stronger than my fear. So I did just like everyone else. I began to fire almost calmly. At the same time, I tried to make peace with my maker. I just knew I was going to die, so I figured, what else could I do?

The Krauts were heading for the creek. They were looking for the only protection found in that flat terrain—the creek we were in. If they could get enough men in that creek, they could cut us in two and wipe us all out. Our mortars were walking up and down along the stream, which was, by now, literally red with blood.

Suddenly, an officer came running up the Creek bed. He stood in the water, talking to us loudly so he could be heard above the noise. He said, "I'm looking for a Kraut-killer squad and you men are elected." He said the Germans were packed in the creek and we had to wipe them out before they could attack. Our artillery had them stunned and we must hit them before they could recover.

Our sergeant had been killed, but the lieutenant from the second platoon came up and told the Lt. Colonel who had just elected us as his Kraut-killing squad that he would take us in. We followed him up the creek until we came upon what looked like a slaughterhouse. Our artillery had literally chewed what looked

like a complete company of Krauts to shreds. There were some who were still alive. When these stunned SS men refused to surrender, we killed every last one of them.

When we returned to our lines, the Lt. Colonel was gone, but learned later who he was. His name was Darby, the famous Ranger commander who had lost two complete battalions in a German trap about three weeks before. He had been placed in command of our regiment, the 179th Infantry.

Our company command post had been placed far forward, as it had been planned for us to attack. But the Germans beat us to it, and now the Panzers were closing in on the battered house that served as a CP. There was a forward artillery observer sending fire orders from the attic who won a Distinguished Service Cross before the day was over.

Krauts were swarming around the house, and I saw our company commander running toward us in the creek. I saw this Kraut raise his machine-pistol to fire on the captain, but quickly, Cpl. Jones, the Captain's orderly, jumped out of a hole, raised his carbine and attempted to shoot the German soldier, only to have his own weapon to jam. So he threw it at the Kraut and knocked him down. Old Jones swarmed all over him. He grabbed his rifle up off the ground and beat and clubbed the SS bastard to death.

A Mark VI Tiger tank was firing at the command post. An armor piercing shell suddenly penetrated the thick cement-like walls and came to rest a few feet from our holes. Five or six GIs near my slit trench made a frantic dive for the nearest hole, which happened to be mine. We were stacked in like sardines, with me on the bottom. I didn't complain a bit. I felt safer with all those bodies on top of me. The shell was so close, we could hear the fuse spitting and smoking, but it did not explode. Finally, I heard some nut laughing like a maniac. I lay there under all those guys, drawn up like a worm, while that nut picked up that sputtering shell and walked down the creek with it cradled in his arms like a baby, all the while chuckling idiotically. We learned later that it was Sergeant Rodell. He went completely out of his mind. After all this time on the line, this thing was his breaking point. No one knows why he did such a thing. He could have been blown to bits. On the other hand, that could have been a high explosive shell as well as an armor piercing shell, and the fuse could have been good instead of defective. In that case, if the shell had stayed where it was and exploded, we would have all been blown sky high. Even though it wasn't done rationally, carrying that shell away was still the most gutsy, unselfish thing I have ever seen or heard of.

Off to my right, about 20 yards away, was one of our machine-guns, a 30 caliber water-cooled job, with a gunner, assistant gunner, and one ammo bearer. The sun had risen as hot as blazes, even though it was February. The smoke and the thick, acrid smell of cordite from the exploding shells was stifling. Brock was in the slit trench with me. Every time a shell exploded, he would cry out, "Oh,

God! Oh God!” and I would echo him. We just laid there and prayed. Then there was a vicious cracking “thunk”, and I saw Brock’s head turn to a mass of blood and shattered bone. I screamed in sheer terror. He just fell over in the corner of the hole, jerked horribly a couple of times, and then lay still.

Almost instantly, I saw a Mark VI tank waddling toward us off to the left. I saw the long snout of the 88 turn toward us and fire a shell that exploded right in the machine-gun nest that was 20 yards away from me. Even before the 88 was fired, I heard those three men in the next scream in terror, because they must have known they were about to die. All three of them must have died instantly in the explosion of that shell.

Things were happening so fast by now that I was in a sort of daze, or perhaps shock, I don’t know which. I was conscious of Kraut infantry moving toward my hole. I saw this giant of a German sergeant yelling and urging his squad to move faster.

Finally, I realized I wasn’t all alone facing the enemy as I had felt I was. I heard several M-1s crack and that big Kraut sergeant jerked and stumbled, but on he came. I could actually see his uniform give off puffs of dust as the slugs hit him, but still he came on doggedly. His machine pistol was firing, but it was aimed at the ground. I realized this man was moving, but only by instinct. Then, as if he had become suddenly very tired, he simply sat down and very gently lay down as if he were retiring for the night. He was retiring all right, but forever. I had just witnessed another act of unusual bravery. He was a “Squarehead”, but he had guts to spare.

I don’t know why or how, but I found myself behind the knocked out machine-gun and I got off one burst with it before it quit cold, jammed. That one burst caught the attention of the crew of a Mark VI tank that was moving parallel to me. A bunch of Krauts were hiding behind it. I watched in horror as it turned slowly toward me, and I must have felt the same way the machine-gun crew had before they were blown away.

I wanted to get up and run like hell, but I knew if I did, they would simply cut me to pieces. I just lay down with the rest of the dead guys and began to pray fervently. I heard the first shell explode behind me. I burrowed my head in my hands. This sounds corny, but I called my Mother over and over again.

The second shell landed a few feet in front of the hole, so I knew they had me bracketed. The next one would be right on target. I never heard it, of if I did, the pain and shock of the shrapnel hitting my leg made me oblivious to the sound of the explosion. At any rate, it felt as if someone had smashed my hip and thigh with a red hot spiked club. I looked down and my pants were shredded and blood began to spurt with every heartbeat. I knew that if I didn’t try to forget my fear and panic and do something quickly, I would bleed to death. All the while, I was

yelling, "Medic! Medic!" I saw one climb over the creek bank heading for me when he caught a slug in the forehead and dropped like a pole-axed steer. This, on top of everything else, sobered me up and I felt like a sniveling yellow dog. I've never felt so rotten in my life. Even though he did no more for me than he had done for dozens of other guys, and he did only what was expected of him, I still felt like I murdered him! God rest his soul.

I had now snapped out of my panic and I actually hated myself for being so afraid. So I calmly took off my belt and tightened it around my thigh and slowed the spurting blood. I began to feel strangely weak and faint and sick to my stomach, like I was floating between consciousness and blackness. I poured the packet of sulfa drugs on the ragged rip in my thigh, but the blood kept washing it off. Finally, the shock began to wear off and I started to crawl back toward the platoon command post and the medics.

I crawled about 20 yards and I came face to face with this wounded Kraut. He was a very young kid. On his tunic collar was the lightning streak insignia of the SS. He had been hit in the gut bad. He had pulled his pants half way down. He must have tried to treat himself for the wound. He lay on his side, his face ashen gray, but when he recognized me as an enemy, his eyes blazed defiantly. He looked like a wounded and cornered animal. I must have looked the same to him.

To this very day, I have searched my soul as to why I did what I did, and I still don't know, but I crawled over to him. He made no motion to go after the rifle next to him. I suppose he was in too much pain to make a violent move to get it. He just lay there with hate in his eyes and groaned through clinched teeth. But I lit a cigarette and stuck it between his blue white lips, and he spat it out back at me. I felt anger flood over me and I pulled my rifle up and started to smash his face in. He was in such bad condition that I just couldn't do it, so I stuck my face into his and, with all the venom I could muster, I spat out, "You son of a bitch!" Then I crawled away.

I think the reason I offered him a smoke in the first place was because I felt that perhaps if I could show compassion and love for my fellow man, an enemy, in this time of ordeal, then perhaps God would see fit to let me survive this thing. Or maybe I just wasn't as hardened to war as that young German was. I just don't know. At any rate, I made up my mind never to show pity for another SS trooper.

I crawled painfully for what seemed an eternity, oblivious to what was going on around me. I kept passing out, coming to, until finally, my lights went out. When I came around again, there were two medics working over me. My rifle was sticking up in the ground and a bottle of blood plasma was hooked to it, and that life-giving fluid was dripping into me through a needle in my arm. I heard the medic say from a long way off, "I think we've brought this one back." I think they had about given up on me. I was just about gone.

After a while, a jeep with stretchers came up and loaded me on board, along with another stretcher case, and off we went toward the clearing station, where we were tagged, checked out, and then sent on toward the evacuation hospital. A couple of miles down the road, we started getting airbursts from an 88. Those shells exploded no more than 50 feet over our jeep. The gunner had us zeroed in almost perfectly.

Our driver pulled over to the side of the road and dove into a ditch. The bastard forgot about us strapped in our stretchers. Fortunately, the shelling stopped and the clown crawled sheepishly out of the ditch and got behind the wheel. We cursed him all the way to the 93rd Evacuation Hospital close to the beach near Anzio-Nettuno. I was out of it for a while.

Other Unusual Experiences

There is one unusual experience that happened at Anzio during the height of the tremendous German attack to drive us off the beachhead. It must have happened a day or two before I was wounded on February 21, 1944.

Turner Brown and I were in a slit trench about 400 yards from Aprilia, a town we were trying to take. We had attacked the town three times in 24 hours and had been driven out each time. We were just marking time until we got the order to try again. We were in the trench dug into the side of Spaccasassi Creek.

Brown and I were so dog-tired that when we heard a voice yell, "Honde Hoche!" in unmistakable German, we were caught completely by surprise. When we finally realized what was happening, there were three Krauts standing behind us in the creek bed yelling for us to put our hands up. This big Kraut was holding a Schmiesser machine pistol just aching to blow us away. Needless to say, we dropped our rifles, because it would have been stupid, and fatal, to try anything else.

Just as we were climbing out of the hole, there was sudden scream and a shell landed in the creek just a few feet below us. The big German with the Schmiesser machine pistol suddenly disappeared as if by magic. The other two were mowed down by shrapnel, and there we were alone again as if nothing happened. There were the remains of three dead Germans lying in the creek, which was running red with their blood. It was just as if God had intervened and set us free. Brown, who was from Richmond, Virginia, was as shocked as I was. He said, "This is so unbelievable that no one will believe this. It dawned on us that we had been prisoners of war for a matter of seconds. These three enemy soldiers had infiltrated behind our lines during the attack and had popped up behind us. The rest of our squad was dug in along the creek bank and were not aware of what had happened, so we decided to keep quiet about being captured and miraculously rescued. We were not at all proud of the way we had been captured, even for such a short time.

God, in his infinite mercy, sure takes care of some of his poor sheep, and he sure has been good to me. We didn't even know whose shell that was when it landed when it did, one of ours or one of theirs. The next day I was wounded and finally out of it for a while. Poor Brown was killed in action at Anzio later by a direct hit from a Mark VI tank firing point blank into his foxhole.

Buddies and Acquaintances in the Army

Sgt. Lloyd White, San Antonio, Texas. Squad leader in my platoon at Ft. Meade, Maryland. Unassuming, easygoing, all around good guy. Played a guitar and sang beautifully.

Cpl. Fred Romeiki, Cornelius, Oregon. Easy going, but with a dogged determination that was really admirable. The only GI I ever saw who never griped. Missing in Action at Anzio during the giant "Jerry" offensive of 16-19 February 1944.

PFC Kenneth Barry, New York City. 30th Inf., 3rd Division. Met him in 21st General Hospital, Naples, Italy. We were both court martialed and fined \$10.00 for being AWOL in the city of Naples from our hospital ward while convalescing from wounds. A sniper plugged him in the right arm. A swell guy.

Cpl. Fred Anderson, Charlotte, NC. A roly-poly ex-football star at UNC. 120th Infantry, Ft. Jackson. Had a comical, congenial personality. The biggest "Rum dummy" alive.

Cpl. Roy "Johnny" Luckadoo, Harlan, Kentucky. Met him at Canestill, North Africa at 1st Replacement Depot. A very nice looking guy with a personality to match. He and I were court martialed for slugging a couple of MPs in Oran, North Africa. Fined \$40.00 and restricted from Oran for 30 days.

Pvt. Mickey Parent, Salem, Massachusetts. Captured at Anzio. A likable, devil-may-care sort of guy.

Pvt. Harold Siwicki, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Killed in action at Anzio. Studious, and a very serious fellow, but with a dry good humor.

Pvt. Charles Spsychali, Wisconsin. Killed by a direct hit from a Kraut Mark VI tank's 88.

S/Sgt. John E. Olson, 37176536, Cornelius, Oregon. Wounded three times in Italy. Saved my life one night during a German night raid. He emptied his Tommy gun into a Kraut that was sneaking up behind me with a trench knife in his fist.

Cpl. Tommy Harris. Killed during a bayonet attack on Hill 769 in the Venafro Sector in Italy. A guy with a quiet but deadly personality.

Pvt. "Pollock" Scizinsky, Brooklyn, NY. Killed while crossing the Volturno River under murderous crossfire from several guns. A fella with a wild, careless, and sometimes unruly personality.

Pvt. Turner Brown, Fredericksburg, Virginia. A guy with a dry, droll, witty personality; very pessimistic at times. He became one of my close friends. Killed in Action from a direct hit from a Mark VI tank.

Pvt. Johnny Rizzo, Brooklyn, NY. Died crossing the Volturno River under fire from German machine-guns.

Cpl. John Gallagher, Denver, Colorado. Killed by shell concussion on Hill 750 near Filignano, Italy.

Pvt. "Frenchy" Lejeune, New Orleans. Killed by a Stuka Dive Bomber at Anzio.

PFC. Johnny Breckenridge, New Jersey. Run over and killed by a German heavy tank during the gigantic offensive launched by Field Marshall Kesselring to drive the Fifth Army off Anzio Beachhead February 16-20. I saw the tank run its treads into his slit trench, then make a grinding turn. Sometimes when I sleep, I can hear that choked, agonizing scream. I also saw the tank blown to hell a minute later by one of our tank destroyers.

Pvt. Eddie Carrant, Little Rock, Arkansas. Killed by shell concussion at Anzio.

Pvt. Willie Carransky, Columbia, SC. Given 20 years by general court martial for deserting in the face of the enemy.

PFC Francis Reuben "Buddy" Burns. My best friend in the army. We served together from September 1943 in Salerno, Italy until he was killed by a mortar shell while in the same foxhole with me on February 5, 1944 at Anzio. He was 2nd Scout and I was 1st Scout. He was an eternal optimist who was convinced he would survive the war without a scratch because his psychic Grandmother told him so. He was the kind of guy who could make anybody laugh and could do impressions of anybody. He kept us entertained with his imitations of movie stars.

Postscript

Jim Safrit returned to the States in late 1944, having recovered from his wound and returned to combat before doing so. He was stationed in Miami, Florida for a while as an M.P. Later, he was sent to Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia, very near the city of Chattanooga, Tennessee. There, he served as an MP and played fast-pitch softball for the Ft. Oglethorpe team.

Jim Safrit was a very good-looking man with an athletic build and a head full of naturally curly blond hair. Many of the W.A.C's stationed at Ft. Oglethorpe apparently showed a lot of interest in him, so he never lacked for dates. One of his dates one night had a friend with her from Lewiston, Maine, Mary Jean Lachance, who showed very little interest in him. Intrigued, he decided to make an effort to win her interest. He succeeded very well, and in 1945, they were married at a Justice of the Peace's office in Chattanooga.

Eventually, they made their home in his hometown of China Grove, North Carolina. In addition to a son, Sammy, from a previous marriage, the Safrit family would consist of Michael Richard Safrit, born on May 9, 1946, and Gina Louann Safrit, born on April 10, 1957. Although neither James Safrit, nor Mary Jane Safrit, ever finished high school, all three of the Safrit Children earned college degrees. Sam Safrit graduated from Wake Forest University after finishing a tour in the 82nd Air Borne Division of the U. S. Army. He then went on to a distinguished career in business, rising to a position of vice-president in charge of research and development. Michael Richard Safrit earned Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from Appalachian State University and spent 30 years as a high school social studies teacher and was head soccer coach at his school for seven years. Gina Safrit earned her bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and then became part owner of a successful video rental business in Kannapolis, NC.

James R. Safrit worked in Cannon Mills in China Grove for many years until he suffered his first heart attack in 1963. After that, he served as a deputized gate guard for Cannon Mills Company in Kannapolis. This job necessitated his moving to Kannapolis after being a life-long resident of China Grove.

James Safrit was well known in local baseball circles because of his talent as a second baseman and clutch hitter. Had he come along twenty or so years later than he did, he probably would have gone much farther in his baseball career than he did. Safrit did not quit playing baseball until after he was 40, and then had a heart attack within a few years after he quit.

Eventually, Safrit had triple by pass heart surgery at Winston-Salem's Baptist hospital in 1977. The surgery seemed to be successful for about six years. The pain returned after the nerve at the back of the heart that surgeons routinely break when they perform the surgery (so that the patient will suffer no heart pain for the six or seven years it takes the nerve to heal) healed. By the time the heart symptoms returned, it was too late to do anything about it. He died on February 28, 1984 at Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem. Basically, he was the victim of one of the great hoaxes of the medical profession—by pass surgery, which makes many doctors rich, but which does not prolong life on the average at all compared to heart patients with similar conditions who are treated without surgery.

Jim Safrit was an honest, hardworking man who provided for his family as best he could after his war experience. He definitely had a positive influence on his family and inspired his children to work hard, be honest in all that they did, and achieve all that their abilities and ambitions could allow them to do. None of his children ever ran afoul of the

law in any way. All of them proved to be productive, honest, successful and law-abiding citizens.

The war experience never left Jim Safrit. He got frequent reminders of what he had gone through in the form of recurring nightmares, a common phenomenon among combat veterans. He also had occasional problems with the piece of shrapnel that stayed in his thigh close to his sciatic nerve for the rest of his life. Surgeons were never willing to perform risky surgery to remove it because of the risk it would pose to that nerve.

James R. Safrit, Jr. is buried in Greenlawn Cemetery near Mt. Zion United Church of Christ in China Grove.