

ARMYDAZE

A FEW MEMORIES OF THE *BIG ONE*

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PREFACE

The following narrative of my time spent with the 106th Infantry Division is made possible, in part, as far as dates, places, and times are concerned, by reference to a short history of the 589th Field Artillery Battalion written not long after the end of the war by Francis H. Aspinwall, who was assigned to Headquarters Battery, and either kept a diary and/or had access to records prior to writing his booklet titled "History of the 589th Field Artillery Battalion". I also used part of Frank's text as a reference where other units and events are mentioned that I had no knowledge of at the time. We all were cautioned to not keep a journal of our activities, lest it slip into enemy hands and give them intelligence about our unit. A totally unnecessary precaution

in my opinion, since on our arrival at the front we were welcomed to the war by a radio broadcast direct from Berlin. The Germans probably knew as much about us as they needed to, long before we got there.

I often wished that I had disregarded this order and written a daily account of my activities. I trust that Frank will not begrudge me the use of his historic material for reference. Facts about events at the time that we became involved in the hostilities in Europe were poorly understood at best. Nobody could give an accurate report of what had happened immediately after it happened, so how can anyone do it 50 years later? Historians put together a pretty good story sometimes, but one has to consider, were they there, and did it really happen that way? I do know that the version of the battle at Baraque de Fraiture given by SS-Obersturmfuher Horst Gresiak, the German in command of a company of tanks and infantry that made the final assault, is pure BULL when it comes to his description of what he was up against. If we had what he SAID we had in the way of armor and fire-power, he would still be trying to take the crossroads. Period. There's an old Chinese saying, that, if you tell a lie and stick with it, it has the truth beat by a mile. Horst got a medal. He must have written his own commendation. I was there.

DRAFTED

I passed my 18th birthday on 11 August 1942. The war in Europe was in full swing with the Nazi armies taking victories everywhere they went. The U.S. had officially declared war on the Axis powers after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor 7 December 1941. The world was having big troubles. All American "boys" between the ages of 18 and

45 were ordered by an Act of Congress to register for the draft. There were few shirkers. It became a matter of pride to be "in" some branch of the service. Some of my classmates quit school in their senior year to enlist.

February, 1943, I graduated from high school (Baltimore City College) and immediately became eligible for the call. On 7 March 1943, at about quarter to seven in the morning, I kissed my Mom goodbye, and with my little suitcase, walked three blocks with my Dad to the street-car line. We had a short conversation about taking care of myself, a quick hug and a brave "so-long." He was going off to work and I walked another three blocks. I reported to my local draft board and was selected to serve. We draftees were then put on a bus, driven to downtown Baltimore and ushered into the Fifth Regiment Armory to be subjected to all kinds of physical and psychological examination. As I recall, we were stripped down to our socks and a doctor probed, poked and squeezed all sorts of places. Then we were asked all kinds of questions to find out if our head was on straight.

The only one that I remember was, "Do you like girls?" Of course, I said, "Yes." That was it. I was in. Then somebody asked me what branch of the service I preferred. I said, "Navy." (Some of my friends had gone in the Navy and that was the only reason that I requested Navy.) He said, "No, we have too many in the Navy." I said, "How about the Air Corps?" He said, "No, you need to wear glasses. I have to put you in the Army." Then he took my papers and stamped them with "LIMITED SERVICE", (whatever that meant.) When all of that business was finally over, we were "sworn in." We were then read "The Articles of War" (by a PFC) and made to realize that any disobedience from then on would incur punishment that nobody could possibly recover from. As I recall, the penalty for any and every infraction was, "DEATH or WORSE." We boarded a bus, and were driven to Fort G.G. Meade, Maryland.

At Fort Meade, the Army placed us in groups, assigned us to a bunk in a barracks building and proceeded to try to make us look like soldiers. We were issued uniforms and dog tags, given shots for every disease known to man, and told how to stand, walk, sit, and never refuse an order from somebody with one more rank than what you had. They even tried to teach us Close Order Drill. We had a lot to learn just to survive, and that guy back in the Armory *did* stamp my papers with "LIMITED SERVICE". I wondered just what that was going to mean. A few days later I would find out. Nothing!

My civilian clothes were packed in the little suitcase and sent home, courtesy of the Army.

The 106th INFANTRY DIVISION

(The 106th Infantry Division was activated 15 March 1943 at Fort Jackson, S.C.)

I, along with a whole train load of 18 year old draftees, joined the 106th Infantry Division at Ft. Jackson, S.C. in March 1943. I was assigned to "A" Battery, 589th Field Artillery Battalion and placed in the "Instrument" section under S/Sgt. Clyde Kirkman. My particular job was "Scout", MOS 761. This was probably the "luck of the draw". There were too many names beginning with "S" in our section. I doubt that much effort was put into the initial placement of personnel, especially in an infantry division. The names that I remember are too many to list here but in Kirkman's section I was privileged to count among my close friends Bob Stoll, Walt Snyder and Henry Thurner. It required two men to pool their equipment to create a pup-tent. This fact alone fostered friendships that would not have come about otherwise. Early on, most of us in the "Detail" platoon did not have

jobs requiring a close working relationship with the howitzer crews, so it took a while for the entire battery personnel to become acquainted.

BASIC TRAINING at FORT JACKSON, SOUTH CAROLINA

The primary responsibility of our section was to support the battery commander and forward observers in the field and conduct topographical surveys of targets and gun positions for carrying out unobserved fire missions. A great deal of emphasis was put on this survey activity while in training, but once the unit went into action in Europe the box containing the equipment was never even opened. Registration fire was 'observed' in all situations and concentrations of multiple batteries and unobserved fire at night was coordinated through Fire Direction Centers from measurements directly on maps or air photos. The communication was via telephone and/or radio between the observer and the firing batteries. (In retrospect, I can see no reason for the topographical survey for the artillery, since the time required implies a static situation and a battle can only be won when the enemy is being attacked and pursued.)

We accomplished our basic training and practiced division scale maneuvers at Fort Jackson, S.C. during the remainder of 1943. Although, when I arrived at Ft. Jackson early in March and the weather was wet and cold, it soon turned hot and dry. The camp was swept with a dry breeze frequently and the fine dust got into everything. As I recall that first morning at Fort Jackson, the sergeant came into the barracks with a lot of noise, telling us to get up and get going and how to dress. It was still dark, cold, and raining hard and the wind was blowing the rain in sheets against the barracks as we were awakened. My thoughts were, "Well, with the weather like it is, I guess we will have to stay inside today." Was I ever mistaken, the first order we had was, "EVERYBODY OUT FOR ROLL CALL !!" So, steel helmets and raincoats, we all lined up in the rain, out in the battery street and sounded off as the sergeant called our names. As I stood there with the rain beating on my helmet and running down the back of my neck, I thought that it sounded like an attic with a tin roof. We soon learned to disregard the weather, whatever we were doing, it was never a deciding factor. We were in the Army now.

Our division was referred to as motorized but we walked everywhere. When we finally began to use the vehicles, dust respirators and goggles had to be issued. The dry dirt roads throughout the maneuvering area sent up clouds of dust that infiltrated everything and made it impossible to breath or see ahead. At the end of the day we were mud balls from the dust and the sweat. All of that summer and fall the division was active in the field practicing those skills required to defeat the enemy.

We had been issued the Carbine M-1 and taught everything about it. How to take it apart, and keep it clean, and to love it, and never be without it. It was to become a living part of us. When the day finally came to actually load it with live ammunition, we were as excited as being on a first date with a real live girl. The temperature at the firing range must have been at least 100 F. The targets were placed across a bare, sandy field at 100, 200 and 300 yards. As we tried to zero in on our targets, the hot air shimmering off the sand made the "bull's eye" seem to perform like a belly dancer. Nobody qualified, so the firing for record was postponed for another day. When the time came, I made "Expert" with the carbine. On occasion, in later days, I have heard disparaging remarks made about this weapon, but I never had any problems with mine, then or later. *And*, it was made by the Rockola Juke Box Company. Wurlitzer made them and some were even stamped as

being made by the Singer Sewing Machine Company. In those times some very unlikely industries were put to work manufacturing the tools of war.

One day the battalion was in the field conducting "war games" and our survey team was measuring a base leg for plotting the targets and gun positions for unobserved fire. Two men had a 100 foot long tape, which is used by having the front man shove a steel pin, that has an "eye", in the ground, threading the tape through the eye, and proceeding another 100 feet. When the man bringing up the rear approaches the pin, he shouts out to the front man to stop and the front man marks another 100 feet and threads another pin. It is also the responsibility of the man at the rear to collect the pins before proceeding toward the next pin marking another 100 feet. This day, when the lead tape-man had exhausted his supply of pins, he called out, "Hey Milt, bring me the pins!". Milt replied, "What pins?" The result was that they had to retrace 1000 feet of their work to recover the pins. Sergeant Kirkman took a dim view of the whole operation.

We were learning to live in the field and there was much practice in placing the howitzers in combat situations. "A" Battery became very proficient and there was much unit spirit among the men. We knew that we were the best. At one point in the training we were subjected to the "infiltration course." Everyone was expected to advance across rugged ground on their belly, with dynamite charges exploding next to and all around them, and with machine guns firing live ammunition just inches over their heads. Barbed wire was also strung across the ground making progress all the more difficult.

There were very few interruptions to our training schedule, but whenever one came along, I was ready. There was to be a concert given in Columbia that summer featuring operatic soprano Gladys Swarthout, Gregor Piatigorsky, Eleanor Steber, and Julius Huehn, all well known artists. The director of the program apparently asked the post commander to supply him with a number of G.I.s to make up a "Soldiers Chorus". The word went out for volunteer singers to fill the request. This sounded pretty good to me so, although I couldn't carry a tune in a bucket, I volunteered. As it turned out, all we needed was to have a clean uniform and we qualified. When the day came around, a hundred or so of us were transported to Columbia and the theater. We rehearsed some military songs of the day and some back-up sounds for a couple of other numbers, and at show time that evening, we were ready. Of course there were rave revues. Oh, I almost forgot, Gladys received a mention too.

On another occasion I was called into the First Sergeant's office and told that I was to be assigned to travel to Nashville to bring back one of our men who had "overstayed his leave." He had been tracked down and arrested by the MP's and was being held for return to the unit for disciplinary action. I was given an "MP" arm brassard, a loaded .45, white MP leggings, official orders and travel arrangements. I was very apprehensive about the whole thing, but I put on a "stiff upper lip" and took off for my prisoner. As it turned out, he was very docile and gave me no problem at all. When I returned him to the Battery HQ and released him to the Battery Commander that was the last that I ever saw of him.

We were given short passes to leave the post occasionally. There were busses to take you into Columbia or other nearby, smaller towns, but when you arrived there you would find everything closed after five o'clock, and "the sidewalks rolled up". As I remember it, there was one movie in Columbia, and a couple of fraternal service clubs that offered some very quiet recreation. I did manage to come home once on a seven day furlough while we were at Ft. Jackson. When passes were issued, I frequently teamed with Bob Stoll to get away from the post to seek out some diversion. We would hop on a bus

and visit a town within traveling distance and, if lucky, even meet local folks to spend time with. The two of us got a week-end pass once and Bob said that he knew some folks who had a summer home at Cedar Mountain, N.C. and asked if I would like to go visit them. Sure, why not?

We departed Jackson on a Friday evening for Columbia. From Columbia we caught a bus to Greensboro, N.C. Now comes the hard part. We are still a long way from our destination and there is no public transportation for the rest of the way. The time is getting away from us, but we have passed the point of no return. The only way now is to use the good old thumb. In those days a man in uniform usually had no trouble hitch-hiking, not like today. We were picked up several times for short distances and not making very good time. Finally we got a lift with a young fellow who was to report for induction on Monday and was out celebrating his last weekend of freedom. He insisted that he knew where we were going and would eventually get us there if we would only stick with him. The problem was, he wanted a drink in every bar and honky-tonk in that end of the state before getting us where we wanted to go. So, it was up and around the mountain with a driver getting more drunk by the minute. By now, we didn't have any idea where we were. At last, very late at night, we entered a "joint" where some folks knew this fellow. We explained to them about the fix we were in, so one of them offered to accommodate us with a ride. When we finally arrived at Cedar Mountain, the sun was rising in the sky. Bob and I had a bit of breakfast with his friends and then we got a few hours sleep. The only thing that I remember doing at Cedar Mountain was watching a baptism in a cold mountain stream and being glad that it wasn't me being baptized. That day, Sunday, one of the folks there drove us back to Greensboro and we caught a bus back to Columbia and then another to Jackson, arriving back on the post with no time remaining on our pass.

TENNESSEE MANEUVER AREA

(The Division moved 24 January 1944 to the Tennessee Maneuver Area.)

After New Year's holiday, the division then moved from the comparatively comfortable Fort Jackson to the Tennessee Maneuver Area for the period of January, February and March, 1944 where we became accustomed to living in the "field".

The division made it to Fort Knox to spend that first night on the road and the next day continued on to "somewhere in Tennessee." We later found out that it was somewhere near Murphreesboro. We pitched our pup-tents out in the woods where ever it was that we were stopped. It was raining.

The cold and wet weather during those three months was extremely difficult, with some 30 inches of rain, setting a record of some kind for the area. We spent a great deal of time just extricating the howitzers and vehicles from the mud. Everybody was wet and cold most of the time. We learned to exist with these conditions and I can't recall that anyone even caught a cold. I remember waking and coming out of the pup-tent with uncontrollable trembling and chattering of teeth which never subsided until I could get a canteen cup full of steaming coffee at the mess truck. Breakfast consisted of scrambled (powdered) eggs & bread and butter or oatmeal with lots of sugar. I needed lots of sugar in the coffee also. I never drank coffee before entering the Army, but it sure was good to have on those cold mornings in the field.

On one particular day we were occupying a farmer's pasture that was about eight inches in snow when one of his cows gave birth to a calf. That was a "first" for most of us "city guys" on the scene. When the maneuvers were finally over we were confident that

we could handle anything. Before the division had completed this phase of our training we heard of quite a few casualties. During a crossing attempt of the Cumberland River at flood stage, a raft loaded with a truck and a group of infantry G.I.'s upset in mid-stream. We heard (unconfirmed) that there were no survivors. One night, in our battery area, a man was run over by a 2 1/2 ton GMC, backing to hitch on to a howitzer. We heard later that he recovered, but he never re-joined the outfit.

CAMP ATTERBURY, INDIANA

On 28 March 1944, the division moved again, from Tennessee to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, near Indianapolis. We traveled in the division vehicles across the mountainous areas of Tennessee using the unimproved back roads. In some places on the switch-back curves it was necessary to un-hitch the howitzers from the trucks in order to make it around the bend. The howitzers were then man-handled by their crews who struggled to get the piece hooked up again so they could proceed. The division made it to Camp Oglethorpe to spend that night. As we dismounted the vehicles and were assigned barracks for the night, the officers informed us that this post was the WAC training facility and anyone found outside our restricted area was subject to be hung or worse. In spite of the warning there was a certain officer (Lt. Graham Cassibry) in "A" Battery who, with several of his EM'S made a trip into town. (Details of this adventure are in a story told by Cpl. John Gatens.)

The next morning was clear and cold when we loaded up to continue the move to Camp Atterbury. After hearing all the songs written about Indiana, I expected the weather to be balmy. Not so. When we arrived on the post the temperature was freezing and the wind was enough to blow your mustache off.

The civilians in Indiana treated the G.I.'s with open arms whenever we were on pass. The hospitality was unlimited, even invitations to private homes for Sunday dinner, if you could get a pass into town. Invitations were posted in the service clubs for anyone desiring to take advantage of them. Henry Thurner and I had girl friends in Indianapolis and we frequently double-dated. These girls were next door neighbors and if we were there on Sunday it was often for a mid-day dinner at the Stewart's house. We would take in a movie or go to the "Indiana Roof" for dancing. I was never a good dancer, but I liked to hold the girls while they did. It was often in the wee hours of the morning when we caught the bus back to Camp Atterbury. If you were lucky enough to be one of the first ones to board the bus you could swing up into the overhead luggage rack and grab a nap on the way home. No problem for somebody six feet tall and only about a hundred and forty five pounds. This is the way that I remember Indianapolis, Indiana. It was what we called a "G.I.'s town".

On one occasion at Camp Atterbury the battalion was performing maneuvers in the field, and I was assigned with another G.I. to take a message from one place to another. This was summer time and the weather was hot and dry. We were driving along a dirt road, just inside the military reservation, when we passed an old decrepit farm house not 40 feet from the roadside. As we went by I glanced to the side, and there, at the side of the house, was a woman standing in a galvanized wash tub, taking a bath, right out there in the bright sun in front of God and everybody. Of course, she wasn't expecting us, and I suppose God didn't count. My driver stood on the brakes and turned our Jeep around in a cloud of dust and we went back for another peek, but, there was only an empty tub there by that time.

Another time, during a field exercise at Atterbury, I was assigned to man an observation post with a radio operator. Just the two of us, until recalled. When we arrived at the location given on the map we found ourselves in the midst of a peach orchard, with the fruit at its peak. All day long we ate peaches and when we couldn't eat any more, we picked, and loaded the jeep until they ran out on the ground. On returning to the bivouac area that evening we distributed peaches to everybody in the battery and the mess sergeant got what was left. What a shame it was, to see all that fruit wasted, but when the U.S. Government needed land on which to train the troops I'm sure that was not a consideration.

We were toughened to the task ahead, training was becoming routine, and everybody just wanted to get at whatever lay before us. At this time the 106th was considered to be one of the best trained divisions in the Army. There was a great deal of pride and "esprit de corps" among the men. In the parlance of the day, we were a "Crack Outfit."

During May and June a large number of 106th Division men were transferred to overseas units and were replaced by men from Replacement Centers at Ft. Bragg N.C. and Camp Roberts, Cal. Training had to start all over again. These new men were mostly from units no longer considered necessary to the war effort; ASTP programs, pilot training, anti-aircraft and coast artillery, etc. The need now was for Infantry. Casualty numbers in Europe and the Pacific were climbing and it still required the Infantry to take and occupy territory.

The time and place eludes me but the circumstances of the weather does not. The battalion was on a field exercise and it was very cold. I was positioned alone at the edge of a pine forest and told to stay there until picked up later. I asked the jeep driver to please fetch my bedroll if I was to stay after dark. I was to be manning some sort of outpost guard, but was not provided with any communication, wire or radio. And I had no idea of where I was or where the battery was in place, and of course, no map or compass. Just orders to stay put. So, it was becoming late, the jeep driver never came back with my bedroll (or any food), and here I am out in the middle of nowhere. The later it got, the colder it got. I figured that I would be there for a while, so to keep busy (and warm) I began to gather pine needles. If I had to stay all night, I was going to try to keep from freezing to death. By the time it was too dark to do anything else I had a huge pile of white pine needles underneath the low branches of one of the older trees. When I gave up on being relieved I got into the mound of pine needles and just took it easy. This gave me enough insulation to stay warm and I actually had a pretty good nights sleep. When morning came the jeep driver finally came for me and delivered me back to the battery area. He had no excuse for not relieving me the night before and I have always remembered his name. It was "unprintable."

Just prior to leaving Camp Atterbury, our battery C.O., Captain Elliott Goldstein, was promoted and transferred to Bn. HQ, and we were assigned a new battery commander. I will not elaborate, but I will say that this new officer did not have my respect as a leader. So much so, that I, with some of the other guys in our section, went over the chain of command and requested a transfer to the 82nd AB Division to escape the intolerable situation that we were working with. Trying to effect a transfer without going through proper channels is a big "no-no" in the military and the Battalion C.O., Lt.Col. Kelly, even got into the act. He found it necessary to have me demoted to buck private and transferred to Battery "B" and my good buddy Bob Stoll (who was with me 100%)

busted also and transferred to Battery "C". This made all of us happy. I wasn't pleased to be separated from Bob, but at least my situation with Captain M. was relieved.

So, it was with Battery "B" 589 FABn that I went into action in Europe. Captain Arthur C. Brown was the C.O. and a leader who was easy to follow, an officer and a gentleman "par excellence."

CAMP MYLES STANDISH , MASSACHUSETTS

The division was alerted for movement overseas in September 1944 and moved by train to Camp Miles Standish, Mass. on 9 and 10 October. The following month was spent awaiting for transportation during which time the equipment was packed and training was continued. I was bored stiff at this place, and one day when a request for a volunteer who could read blueprints was made, I responded. What the hell, didn't I have a course in mechanical drawing in high school? Seems a construction crew was erecting a Quonset building and the engineer didn't show up on that day. When I reported to the job and was put in charge, I quickly let the men know that I had no idea what they were doing and simply stayed out of their way so they could get on with it.

On one of the days at Standish just about everyone in the camp came down with a case of the "G.I.s." There was a line-up at every latrine that day and another line at the dispensary to get something for relief. We were in bad shape for any duty that day, except maybe laundering underwear. Later on word got around that a bar of G.I. soap was found in a coffee urn at the mess hall. The camp was staffed with Italian and German POW's so we all suspected one of them. Who knows?

While we were at Standish I received short passes to visit Taunton, Mass. and also went as far as Providence, R.I. The area had U.S.O. clubs that we took advantage of and I even learned to dance in G.I. boots while there. There were a lot of sweet things there, including the native maple sugar candy.

AT SEA

November 10 the Battalion moved to the Port of Embarkation at Boston on special trains from Camp Miles Standish. It rained hard most of the day and the troops were soaking wet by the time they boarded the train. You know how it is with the Army, hurry up and wait. After a short ride we de-trained directly on a covered pier and were served hot coffee and stale donuts by the Red Cross. Couldn't have tasted better. Everyone was kept moving, leading immediately onto the troop transport USCGSS Wakefield, the former luxury liner SS Manhattan, sister ship to the SS Washington and one of the largest ships ever built in America. The battalion occupied D and E decks forward, sharing the ship with the 590th, 591st, 592nd Field Artillery Battalions, Headquarters Battery, Division Artillery, and the division Special Troops. The ship was crowded, there being 5 canvas bunks on pipe racks between the deck and the ceiling with precious little space left for passageways. We kept our packs and duffel bags in the bunk with us. Very few men were on deck at about 1630 hours when the ship slipped out of the harbor in the fog and driving rain.

11, 12, 13, 14 & 15 November - The North Atlantic was violently rough and few of us (including me) escaped becoming sea-sick. Two meals a day were served to those able to eat. To get the meals necessitated standing in an hour long chow line that started in the compartment, wound up the stairs to the next deck and ran along about half the length of the ship to the "mess hall". There was nothing else to do anyway, so it was a welcome

break in the monotony and it got us away from the bunk area for a while. And, it didn't smell very good down there either. Chow was served on a stainless steel tray without regard for any niceties. You could have your ice cream on top the mashed potatoes or if you preferred, in the beans. As one received his food, he would proceed to the "stand-up-height" steel tables to eat. You had to hang on to both the tray and the table to eat. The ship was rolling, so that if you didn't hold on to something you could end up in your neighbors chow tray. Nobody could go out on deck in this weather.

About the third day out the weather became better and the seas smoothed out some. It was now possible to get outside for a breath of fresh air once in a while without being swept overboard. Our course must have carried us farther south. The ship moved along fast and alone. The possibility of an encounter with a German sub was on everyone's mind, but nobody dwelled upon it. The ship was considerably faster than any German sub, I don't know about German torpedoes. Nothing but the cold winter ocean was in sight for about six days.

On the afternoon of 16 Nov. another transport was sighted as we were nearing the British Isles. A destroyer escort also appeared to guide the ships through the mine fields at the entrance to The St. George's Channel and protect against possible sub attack. The water became extremely rough again and the destroyer escorting us completely disappeared in the troughs as it made way off the beam. This actually was a comfort since it made a torpedo attack highly unlikely. Our ship literally plowed through the giant waves that crashed over the deck. The sailors on the "can" must have been taking a real beating. We must have been getting close to England because K-Rations were issued that day for our first meal on shore.

ENGLAND

November 17th found us traveling St. George's Channel with the mountainous green coast of Wales on the right and in the far distant left, the east coast of Ireland. Plenty of traffic was passed that morning in the channel and the troops on deck were straining to get their first glimpse of England. The haze and fog pretty much prevented any sightseeing on this leg of the trip. In the afternoon our ship proceeded north up St. George's Channel for Liverpool. The weather was deteriorating as the day grew late and the ship, being in the channel with heavy traffic both ways, had to proceed slowly. When we were approaching the harbor at Liverpool the visibility was down to zero. I don't know how the pilot ever found a place to tie up. We docked at about 1600 hours. It was already dark and a drizzling rain and fog enveloped everything at the blacked out city. The 589th was the first outfit off the ship at about 2000 hours. As we left the ship it was to the music of a band on the pier. Music or not, we were all happy to be on land, even if it wasn't dry. The troops came off the ship marching in a file of two's, with full packs and toting a duffel bag on the shoulder, from the dock area to the rail station, maybe three blocks away, and the scene was like something straight out of a Sherlock Holmes movie. Fog, wet cobblestones, the city blacked out and quiet except for the sound of the troops walking uphill through the narrow streets. No talking much, nobody out on the street to watch as we marched by, just apprehension as to what was coming next. We made it to the rail station after the short march and after another Red Cross coffee and donut welcome, boarded the train. When the train was fully loaded, the doors slammed and with a shrill whistle, we were off to Gloucester.

The battalion arrived at Gloucester at 0400 on the morning of the 18th and, after departing the train, was met by the "advance party" which had left Atterbury about three

weeks ahead of us. We were led to the camp situated at the edge of the town. It was small, and had previously housed the British Gloucestershire Regiment. The battalion was housed in individual barracks of about 20 men each. The double-decked bunks were equipped with straw stuffed mattress covers and we had to displace all of the mouse families that had taken up residence there in the straw since the last group occupied the place. There was one small pot bellied stove, burning soft coal, to ward off the chill, and the "ablutions" were in a separate building at the end of a concrete walkway about 150 feet away. At night, in fog and blackout conditions, you could not see your hand in front of your nose. No exaggeration, it really was that dark. To get to the "ablutions", one had to inch along the walkway until he bumped into the door of the other building. It was best to take care of business while there was still some daylight. One large mess hall was shared by the 589th and 590th Field Artillery Battalions.

The period from the 18th to 30th November was spent in re-equipping the division with all of the necessary implements of war. Vehicles, weapons, ammunition, rations, clothing, and what ever else was necessary, was drawn from depots all over the area. Some limited training was carried on and a few "short time" passes were issued, (and some guys went "over the fence"), but there was really no place for us to go except into Gloucester, a "one movie town." The town was blacked out and all businesses were closed by 2000. We began to appreciate the difficulties of living in a war zone.

On 1 December we loaded our equipment onto the vehicles and departed the Gloucestershire Barracks in convoy about 0530. We drove to what was known as a casual camp, which was just outside Weymouth (Portland Harbor), and arrived at about dusk. C-rations were issued for supper that night and we were given cots to sleep on in some temporary barracks on the site. This was the last time for a long while that we would be afforded this kind of comfort.

The ENGLISH CHANNEL

At dawn the next morning, 2 Dec., we loaded up again, and in convoy, moved down to the harbor where we were issued donuts, coffee and seasick pills for breakfast. Life preservers were passed out for good measure. They were a rubber tube that belted around the waist and could be inflated using two small Co2 bottles, (or by blowing into a tube.) I can't imagine that they would have done much good should we have to go into that cold sea. That morning the battalion loaded onto two LST's and spent the day at anchor in the harbor. Accommodations on these ships were far better than those on the transport. There weren't enough bunks to go around but the men slept in shifts and some made "beds" in the trucks. I recall hanging around the ship's galley and "bumming" a piece of sheet-cake or whatever else the "chef" was willing to hand out. Again, I avoided becoming seasick.

On 3 December, the LST 521 left Portland Harbor and crossing the English Channel, arrived at the mouth of the Seine River in the evening. The water was very rough but only a few of the men became seasick this time. Anxiety was taking over. The ship would ride up on the huge waves and then come crashing down, throwing the cold salty spray everywhere. If one would stand at one end of the "tank deck" and watch the overhead, you could see the ship bend and twist with the force of the beating that the sea was giving it. The ship anchored about five or so miles off Le Harve and tossed violently in the rough water all night.

Next day, the 4th, we cruised back and forth off the mouth of the Seine River all day waiting to merge into an endless column of LST's, Liberty ships and merchantmen waiting their turn to enter the river. We started up the Seine in late afternoon, one ship following another, in an endless column reminding me of circus elephants walking along, each holding the tail of the one in front. Sometime after dark we anchored upstream for the night. By this time in the war, the Allied Air Forces had rendered the Luftwaffe ineffective, otherwise an operation like this would be in extreme jeopardy. On the way, we saw for the first time, some of the destruction that the war had brought to France. Destroyed harbor facilities, bomb pocked concrete gun emplacements, sunken ships, etc. I couldn't help but think, "What was I getting into?" It wasn't over yet.

The EUROPEAN CONTINENT

6th December, we arrived in the area of Ruoen and waited our turn to beach the ship and unload. At about 1500 we drove off the ship directly onto the muddy beach and proceeded to a bivouac area in the field a few miles from town. The weather was cold and not at all pleasant. I was driving a jeep with no side curtains and a manual windshield wiper. The driver had to employ the wiper by twisting a handle on the inside end of the wiper where the shaft was installed at the top of the windshield. A minor inconvenience. That night I bundled up and slept at the wheel of the jeep. It was not the first time that I had done that. Nor would it be the last.

On the 6th, Headquarters, A and B Batteries waited in the bivouac area all day while the remainder of the battalion (on another LST) unloaded at Rouen and joined us in the afternoon. The remainder of the 422nd Combat Team lined up in the prescribed order of march, on the road ahead and behind us, to spend the night.

We broke camp early on the morning of 7 December and proceeded to a bivouac area near Roselle, Belgium, arriving late in the evening. The route was via Amiens, Cambrai and Maubeuge. There were many bomb craters and much wrecked German war material along the route, evidence of a difficult retreat from France the previous summer. Driving the jeep was numbing cold. At times I couldn't feel my feet and would have to push down on my knees to operate the accelerator and clutch. No, the jeeps didn't come with heaters either, or even side curtains on this one.

The 8th of December we marched (drove) from Rosee to St.Vith, Belgium arriving early in the afternoon. Parked on a hill, just east of town, we ate lunch and soon got orders to move into a bivouac area near Wallerode. It seemed to be very peaceful with only the occasional sound of an artillery round exploding somewhere way off in the distance. It was very cold and the snow was quite deep.

Our initial task was to relieve the 2nd Div. on the Schnee Eifel, a "quiet" front about 27 miles wide. Pretty thin for one division, but then, nothing was happening here, (they told us). It was to be easy to trade places with the 2nd Division units.

GERMANY

9 December 1944, the battalion moved into the line east of the town of Laudesfeld and about one and a half miles west of Auw, Germany. The 589th FABn took over the positions of the 15th FABn. The Battalion command post was set up in the kitchen of a substantial German house. The firing batteries took over the dugouts and log huts vacated by the men of the 15th FABn. The howitzers were put into the same emplacements dug by

the 15th and in some cases they were simply swapped since it was easier than trying to extricate the pieces already in place. "A" battery was placed on the south side of the road to Auw and "B" and "C" batteries on the north side. There was much snow here and the drivers were having big problems once they left the hard road. Service Battery was sent into a position a few miles to the rear, about four miles south of Schoenberg, Belgium. The veterans of the 2nd Division assured their successors that they were in a very quiet sector where nothing ever happened. They hated to leave and when the 589th men saw what relatively comfortable quarters the 2nd's men were leaving they could understand that. We had been prepared to pitch pup tents. I shared a dugout that was roofed over with heavy logs and had a jerry-can stove. Just like up-town. Things were looking up. By 1630 registration was completed by "A" Battery and the battalion fired harassing fire that night. We were feeling rather secure. After all, our infantry was between us and the Germans. It sounded good to me.

December 10 to 15 - The 422nd Infantry Regiment, which the 589th FABn was supporting, was occupying the first belt of pillboxes of The Siegfried Line, which had been cracked at this point the previous fall. The Germans were well dug in opposite the 422nd in pillboxes and held other defensive positions in the area of the Schnee-Eifel, a wooded ridge about 3 miles to the front. The enemy communications center for this area was Prum, which was at maximum range (12,000 yards) for "A" Battery.

During this period there was little activity other than a few patrol actions. Few observed missions were fired due to the poor visibility. The battalion did, however, have a substantial unobserved, harassing program that was fired every night. The forward observer adjusted by sound, using high angle fire, which made it necessary to re-dig the gun pits. Alternate positions were selected and surveyed by the survey officer and his party. There were some reports of enemy activity but nothing, apparently, more than routine truck and troop movements. Headquarters Battery crews reported being fired upon on the 15th and that night an enemy recon plane circled the area for an hour or more. Numerous flares were seen to the flanks of the battalion and an enemy patrol was reported to be in the area. During this period most of my time was spent at various outposts near the battery position. There was nothing to report. At night, watching across the snow covered fields, one's eyes tend to play tricks. On more than one occasion an outpost guard would fire away at some movement out in front of him, only to find out in the morning that he had "killed" a tree stump or boulder.

Early in the morning, before dawn, at 0605, on 16 Dec. our position came under a barrage of German artillery fire. I was on guard at one of our outposts, and though I did not realize it at the time, was probably better off there than with the rest of the battery. We had a dug-in .50 Cal. Mg. so, it being somewhat protected, I got down in the lowest possible place and "crawled into my helmet." Trying to get down as far as possible, I found my buttons to be in the way. During the shelling, many rounds exploded real close and showered dirt and tree limbs about, but also there were quite a few duds that only smacked into the ground. Those were the "good" ones as far as I was concerned. After about 30 minutes the shelling ceased and before any of the enemy came into sight I was summoned to return to the battery position. We apparently did not suffer any casualties, even with all the shells that fell around the battery position. I did not have the foggiest notion what was going on except that we were under attack and things were becoming serious. (Frank Aspinwall reported in his book that from an inspection of the fragments, somebody determined that the enemy was using 88mm, 105mm and 155mm guns. I can't imagine that anyone was actually concerned about that bit of trivia at the time.) Wire

crews were sent out to repair the phone lines that were out. At about 0800 the battery positions again came under heavy artillery fire, and again no casualties were reported.

At about 0900 communication was again established with Division and with the 422 Infantry Regiment. However the lines were soon shot out again by the enemy artillery and after 1300, the battalion was, for all practical purposes, isolated from its supported regiment.

The Battalion Communications Officer and his assistant Comm. O. went forward to the Infantry Regimental C.P. after 0900 and while returning were fired upon and the Comm. O. was wounded. He was brought in and later evacuated.

At 0915 a report was received of enemy patrols in Auw. An observer from "C" Battery went forward to a position commanding a view of Auw and from there directed effective fire on the town until he was pinned down by small arms fire. "C" Battery was unable to bring guns to bear on Auw due to a high mask of trees between it and the target.

At about 1030 a patrol was sent out, as additional security, to man defensive positions along the road from Auw. Since it was now apparent that the enemy held Auw, an attack from that direction was expected. This patrol soon reported small arms fire from enemy infantry moving out of Auw. An O.P. was set up in the attic of a building being used as quarters for part of Headquarters Battery. At about 1500 three enemy tanks were seen coming along the road from Auw toward the battalion command post. At about 400 yards range the lead tank opened fire on one of our outposts damaging three machine guns. Small arms fire was directed against the tank, but it just "buttoned up" and kept coming. When it came within range of our bazookas, they fired, and one hit and immobilized the lead tank. It was immediately hit again by an "A" Battery 105 howitzer and burst into flames. The enemy crew bailed out and was killed by small arms fire. The second and third tanks also took hits but were able to withdraw to defiladed positions. One of the tanks kept up harassing fire from a hull down position but counter fire was directed at it, and it is believed that it too was knocked out. The effective work of this patrol and our firing batteries kept the whole battalion position from being overrun that afternoon.

The 2nd Battalion of the 423rd Regiment, in division reserve, was ordered to hold positions in front of the 589th while it withdrew to the rear. ("Strategic Withdrawal" they call it.) Meanwhile, the 589th held on in the face of heavy small arms and machine gun fire until the infantry was able to move into position shortly after midnight.

Anticipating a move, a recon party had been sent to select positions for a relocation about 3 miles south of Schoenberg, near Service Battery's position on the Belgian-German border.

About 0400, on the morning of the 17th, the battalion was ordered to move out for the new position. By now the enemy was astride the only exit from the "C" Battery position so that it was unable to move. The Battalion C.O., Lt.Col. Kelly, and his Survey Officer, stayed behind and tried to get infantry support to help extricate this battery but they were not successful. The infantry had plenty of their own problems. "C" Battery never was able to move and was subsequently surrounded and all were taken prisoner, including the Battalion C.O., Col. Kelly, and the Survey O.

While all this was happening, I was given orders by Captain Brown to take a bazooka and six rounds, and with Corporal Montinari, go to the road and dig in and wait for the enemy to attack from "that" direction. This we did, and were there for some time waiting for a target to appear where the road crested. We could hear the action taking place just out of sight, but the battery was moving out before our services with the bazooka were required. As the trucks came up out of the gun position we were given the sign to come on, so Montinari and I abandoned our hole, and bringing our bazooka and six rounds, climbed on one of the outbound trucks. I did not know it at the time, but my transfer from "A" Battery to "B" Battery was a lucky break for me. (Since Captain Menke, "A" battery C.O., got himself captured right off the bat, and I probably would have been with him.)

"A" and "B" Batteries moved into the new position with four (4) howitzers each, the fourth gun in "A" battery not arriving until about 0730. Lt. Wood, with the section, struggled to extricate the howitzer with the enemy practically breathing on them. Bn. HQ. commenced to set up it's C.P. in a farmhouse almost on the Belgium-Germany border, having arrived just before daylight. At about 0715 a call was received from Service Battery saying that they were under attack from enemy tanks and infantry and were surrounded. Shortly after that, the lines went out. Immediately after that a truck came up the road from the south and the driver reported enemy tanks not far behind. All communications went dead so a messenger was dispatched to tell "A and "B" Batteries to displace to St.Vith.

The batteries were notified and "A" Battery, with considerable difficulty got three sections on the road and started for St.Vith. The fourth piece, however, again was badly stuck and while attempting to free the piece, the men came under enemy fire. The gun was finally gotten onto the road and proceeded toward Schoenberg. Some time had elapsed before this crew was moving.

Battery "B" then came under enemy fire and it's bogged down howitzers were ordered abandoned and the personnel of the battery left the position in whatever vehicles could be gotten out. I had dived head first out of the 3/4 ton that I was in when we were fired on and stuck my carbine in the snow, muzzle first. In training we were told that any obstruction of the barrel would cause the weapon to blow up in your face if you tried to fire it. Well, I can tell you that it ain't necessarily so. At a time like that, I figured that I could take the chance. I just held the carbine at arm's length, aimed it toward the enemy, closed my eyes and squeezed. The first round cleaned the barrel and didn't damage anything except what ever it might have hit. As the truck started moving toward the road, I scrambled into the back over the tailgate and we got the hell out of there.

Headquarters loaded into its vehicles and got out, as enemy tanks were detected in the woods about 100 yards from the battalion command post. Enemy infantry were already closing on the area.

The column was disorganized, however, the vehicles got through Schoenberg and continued toward St.Vith. The last vehicles in the main column were fired on by small arms and tanks as they withdrew through the town.

As the vehicles were passing through Schoenberg on the west side, the enemy, with a tank force supported by infantry, was entering the town from the northeast. Before all the vehicles could get through they came under direct enemy fire. The "A" Battery Exec., Lt. Eric Wood, with the last section of the battery, almost made it through,

however, his vehicle, towing the howitzer, was hit by tank fire and he and the gun crew bailed out. Some were hit by small arms fire. Sgt. Scannipico tried to take on the tank with a bazooka and was killed in the attempt. The driver, Knoll, was also killed there. The rest of the crew was taken prisoner, but Lt. Wood made good his escape (and that's another story). Several other of the vehicles came down the road, loaded with battalion personnel and were fired on before they entered the town. These people abandoned the vehicles and took to the woods and with few exceptions were eventually captured.

RETURN TO BELGIUM

The remainder of the battalion assembled again west of St.Vith where they were joined by Service Battery of the 590th FA Bn. They were ordered into position north of St.Vith to establish a road block to protect the town. Later, that night, they were withdrawn to a bivouac area in the vicinity of St.Vith.

[Italics indicate data from After Action Reports from National Archives]

18 Dec 44:

0100: Arrived at bivouac vicinity of Poteau

0730: Left bivouac and proceeded northwest until halted by enemy attack.

0800: Set up road block.

1000: Withdrew to south through Beho.

1600: Column divided, firing battery going to Cortil and remainder going west on road to Salm Chateau (sic) and LaRoche.

1700: Closed at Cortil and prepared for indirect fire.

2100: Withdrew to RJ west of Bovigny and set up road block.

December 18 - After this halt, orders were received from the Division Artillery Commander, General McMahon, to proceed to the west and be prepared to take up positions in the vicinity of Recht. Seeing him on the road that day, I spoke to him personally and he assured me that he didn't know any more about our situation than I did. The battalion was halted at 0100 and remained on the road until 0700 when it began moving forward again. At about 0800 the column was halted again and word passed down that enemy tanks and infantry had attacked HQ Battery, 106th Div. Arty. on the same road to the west. The column was turned and pulled off the road into a clearing. A perimeter defense was organized and a road block set up with two guns covering the approach from the north. A noon meal was served. Orders were next received to withdraw to the vicinity of Bovigny. What was left of the battalion loaded up and proceeded to the designated place in good order.

The preceding night the Germans had dropped parachute troops into the area near St.Vith. They were not in great strength but they did a lot of shooting and spread confusion along the communications routes west of St.Vith.

At Bovigny the C.O. of the 174th Field Artillery Group requested that the three howitzers remaining with the battalion and the personnel be sent to positions near Charan. This was agreed to and the battalion was split into two groups: Group A composed of the three 105 howitzer sections, Fire Direction Center people, most of the officers, and part of our meager ammunition supply. I was with this group. Group B was composed of the remainder of the battalion plus some men from the 590th Service Battery.

Group A departed for Cortil, went into position and laid the guns to fire on Charan. The town was reconnoitered and no enemy was found so the group was withdrawn to Bovigny for the rest of the night. Observers were sent out with the outposts and preparations made to fire on any enemy coming on the scene. Group B left Bovigny and traveled west through Salmchateau and bivouacked for the night on a side road near Joubieval.

BARAQUE de FRAITURE, BELGIUM

[Italics indicate data from After Action Reports from National Archives]

19 Dec 44:

0700: Returned to Cortil and prepared to fire on Charan.

1100: Withdrew to Salm Chateau.

1500: Left Salm Chateau for Baraque de Fraiture

1600: Closed 500 yards west of Baraque de Fraiture and went into position for indirect fire on enemy personnel and an enemy road block. Supplies were received from Vielsalm.

On 19 Dec 1944, At 1100 the battaalion moved to Salmchateau and was ordered to bivouac for reorganization. While the bivouac was being reconnoitered tanks were reported near Baraque de Fraiture (Parker's Crossroads) and the unit was moved there to repel the attack.

In the afternoon, what was remaining of the 589th FABn arrived at the crossroads at Baraque de Fraiture to establish some kind of blocking force against the German advance. Whether or not there was any intelligent planning involved in this move I really don't know. I had the feeling that nobody knew anything, and that we would resist here in this place as long as possible and hope to get help before we were blown away. There were approximately 100 men and three 105mm howitzers to set up the defense at this time.

The weather was cold, wet and foggy with some snow already on the ground. Visibility was variable, clearing from maybe fifty yards to two or three hundred on occasion.

I didn't even know who was in charge of the rag-tag group that I was with until I saw Major Elliott Goldstein out in the open, verbally bombasting the enemy (where ever they were) with all the curse words he could think of, and at the top of his booming voice. I thought at the moment that he won't be around too long if there are any Germans out there to hear him. Apparently there were none, he drew no fire. I was taking cover behind the rear wheel of one of our trucks at the time and felt rather naked.

The three howitzers were ordered into position to defend the crossroads and I was told to go out "there" and dig in and look for an attack from "that" direction, still having no idea of the situation. Most of the night was spent in the foxhole. All was quiet on the front line. When I was relieved during the night to get some rest, I tried to find a dry place in the stone barn to lay down. The floor was deep in muck, but the hay rack on the wall was full of dry hay so I accepted that as a good place to sleep. Pushing the cows aside, I climbed into the hay. I guess that the cows just didn't understand, because they kept pulling the hay out from under me until I became the next course on their menu. Anyway, it wasn't long until I was outside in another hole in the ground.

In the meantime at Vielsalm on the 19th Service Battery returned to the Division. After having been surrounded, they used their bazookas, machine guns and carbines to kill or wound the bulk of the enemy forces opposing them. They succeeded, after a four hour battle, in clearing the enemy from the road in front of their CP, and driving the few that remained into the hills surrounding their position. Using white phosphorous grenades for a smoke screen they were able to move all of their personnel and equipment from the position with the exception of a few men. Finding the road to Schoenberg blocked they took to the woods where they were joined by personnel from other outfits. By moving at night they passed through the German lines and joined the 9th Armored Division. Then they returned to the Division at Vielsalm. They immediately went from there to join the elements of the battalion at Baraque de Fraiture. They provided the kind of support that can only be given by determined men who have proven themselves in battle.

Group B withdrew from Joubieval to the vicinity of Phillipeville via LaRoche and Dinant. Camp that night was on a road in front of a French style chateau owned by a Belgian Count. It was a refuge from the war for about 100 orphaned Belgian children and operated by the Count and his wife with a Belgian Army Chaplain as spital adviser. The Count and the Chaplain were very friendly and allowed many of the men to get cleaned up and listen to their radio to get some news. (It was disquieting to hear a report of German paratroopers in the immediate area. The report proved to be false later.) Part of the night was spent in the chateau and part in the vehicles, with a double guard on the column.

[Italics indicate data from After Action Reports from National Archives]

20 Dec 44:

1600: Returned to Baraque de Fraiture and went into position to form a road block against attack from the south or west. Joined by elements of the 203rd AAA and 87th Reconnaissance.

2400: German patrol reported in front of minefield to the south. Fired on with our .50 machine gun.

Group A: Next morning, 20 December, at the crossroads, the weather remained miserable, cold, wet and foggy with a little more snow for good measure. If the enemy was around, he was keeping it a secret. The day went very slowly. (This kind of time is usually spent getting your hole just a bit deeper, you never know how deep is going to be deep enough.) Now and then one of our guys would pop off a few rounds at something, real or imagined.

The Battalion, on order from the CG, DivArty, was to prepare to move closer to Vielsalm to draw equipment and supplies but that never happened. Some nem and supplies were sent to us from Vielsalm. The enemy was reported in Samree by an observer and firing data was computed using a 1:50,000 scale map and a safety pin for measuring aa firing plot. Two rounds were fired for adjustment and then two volleys fired for effect. The observer reported "mission accomplished."

We were joined by some people of the 203rd AAA, 7th Armored Division equipped with three M-16 half-tracks mounted with a brace of four .50 caliber machine guns and a M8 Scout Car with a 37mm cannon. I thought at the time, I'd hate to be in front of that quad-50 when it went off. Little did I know at the time that I would be. This weapon was positioned to fire directly down the road to Houffalize. We were also joined by a platoon of the 87th Recon Squadron. Plans were made for coordination of fire from all weapons,

outposts were manned and telephone communications installed.

Group B: Established contact with Division CP at Vielsalm and was ordered to return there which was done via Dinant and Marche. They arrived at Vielsalm in a complete blackout. This group spent the night in a very warm shower room in one of the Belgian Army barracks.

Group A; Later in the evening, Captain Brown sent me, with another "B" Battery G.I., Ken Sewell, to a foxhole in the ditch at the side of the road to Houffalize, about a couple hundred yards out from the crossroads (hard to remember the distance exactly). We were the outpost and had a field telephone hookup to Captain A.C. Brown's CP. Captain Brown told us to just sit tight and report any movement we observed. There was a "daisy chain" of mines strung across the road a few yards ahead of our position to stop any vehicles. The darkness was made even deeper by the thick fog that night, with a silence to match. Now and then a pine tree would drop some snow or make a noise. I think my eyelids and ears were set on "Full Open".

So, here we sat in this hole in the ground, just waiting and watching, until about midnight, when we could hear strange noises in the fog. It was very dark and our visibility was extremely limited, but, we were able to discern what was making the strange noise as about a dozen German soldiers riding on bicycles came into view. They stopped in the road when they came on the mines. Being unaware of our presence, not 10 yards away, they stood there in front of us, in the middle of the road, probably talking over what to do next. We could hear the language was not English and they were wearing "square" helmets. Sewell and I were in big trouble. This was a first for us, to be this close to the enemy. Thinking that there was too many for us to take on with a carbine, I took the telephone and whispered our situation to Captain Brown. His orders were to, "Keep your head down and when you hear me fire my .45 the first time we will sweep the road with the AAA quad 50's. When that stops, I'll fire my .45 again and then we will hold fire while you two come out of your hole and return to the CP. Make it quick!" And that's the way it happened. That German patrol never knew what hit them. On hearing the .45 the second time, Ken and I left our hole, and keeping low, ran back toward our perimeter. I was running so hard that my helmet bounced off my head and went rolling out into the darkness. I thought, "to hell with it", and never slowed down to retrieve it. I lost sight of Ken and honestly don't remember ever seeing him again. (I heard many years later that he was captured along with Bernard Strohmier, John Gatens and others after the Germans took the crossroads.)

By calling out the password "Coleman," I got safely past our perimeter defense and was then shot at (and missed) by somebody at the howitzer position as I approached it. After a blast of good old American obscenities they allowed me through and I reported to Captain Brown. (The official book says that there was an eighty man patrol from the 560th Volks Grenadier Division and the 2nd Panzer Division out there that night. Maybe the rest of them were back in the fog somewhere.)

[Italics indicate data from After Action Reports from National Archives]

21 Dec 44:

0530: Attack on position by German troops on foot. Attack repulsed with no casualties. Enemy abandoned six dead. Fourteen prisoners were taken.

1200: Bn Comdr informed he would withdraw to Bras that afternoon, leaving the 87th Reconnaissance to hold position. German attack anticipated.

1700: Germans attacked in fog. Set up road block. Attack repulsed with many casualties

2100: Squad from the 504th Parachute Infantry arrived and was sent out on patrol

The next morning, 21 Dec., the Germans attacked again. They were repulsed after about four hours of fighting. Six German dead were left on the field and fourteen prisoners were taken, six of them wounded. Other Germans withdrew taking some wounded with them. Interrogation revealed that there was an 80 man patrol from a Volksgrenadier Division led by an officer of the 2nd SS Panzer Division. Their mission was to "feel out our defenses." Although tanks had been heard during the night none participated in the attack. At noon a message was received from CG DivArty to withdraw to the vicinity of Bra for reorganization. However the battalion could not withdraw until additional troops had come in to reinforce the few that would be left.

Prisoners were evacuated to Vielsalm and preparations were made to bury the dead when the Germans attacked again about 1530 from the east and approached to about 300 yards before being detected. At the same time the Germans set up a roadblock of wrecked American vehicles about 800 yards to the east.

I was sent forward to have a look around in the edge of the woods and found several dead German soldiers in the snow. I was not at all comfortable with that, and was happy to have not found any live ones. The enemy had apparently pulled back after we had cut down their advance group the night before.

All that day was spent digging and improving our defensive perimeter. We were given some "warming time", off and on, inside the stone building being used as a CP. At one point, I was detailed to guard two German prisoners that were brought in. I never learned the circumstances of their capture. One, an officer, spoke good English and warned us that the German Army was coming through us and would kill anyone in the way and push the rest into the English Channel, so, we could save everybody a lot of trouble by surrendering to him right then and there. Right.

Another attack was repulsed about 1700 by the timely arrival of Sherman tanks from the 3rd Armored Division. Late in the afternoon several tanks were heard approaching our position. Thankfully, they were ours. They rolled out in the open and fired their big guns into the German positions and I thought, no problem now, with all this help the day is saved. It got quiet again. And then the tanks left. Looked like we would be hung out to dry, but it did stop the enemy attack for a while. Thanks, tankers. Too bad you couldn't stay for dinner.

There were some American stragglers in and out during the day. A few stayed, some left. I really didn't know what was going on, or who they were. I was mostly out of touch, occupying a foxhole. Apparently, there was still one of the roads open to our forces to the west. At one point a Sherman tank came along and was set up in front of our CP and fired a few rounds across the field and into the forest at some distant soldiers running from tree to tree for cover. I supposed that they were enemy, too far off to see for sure. I doubt that any were hit at that distance in any case.

It was expected that the Germans would attack about 0530. A preparation of artillery and machine gun fire laid down by us was to simulate a counter-attack by our troops. Unfortunately a company of the 325 GIR, 82ndAB Division sent to reinforce us was scared off by the noise and did not arrive before noon. They were sent to dig in with our men to reinforce the line. They were met by a barrage of mortar fire and driven back. About 15 casualties were evacuated. The 589th was to withdraw but instead stayed in position. Additional enemy was moving closer but due to poor visibility was unable to effect any gains.

That night, after the initial attack, I recall being in my foxhole, waiting for the Germans to come at us again. The realization came to me that I was involved in a real risky business. The area was lighted by the flames of a store of fuel drums burning throughout most of the rest of the night and reflecting eerily on the snow covered ground. The only sounds were that of the fire and the crying for help from the wounded enemy who were laying out there just out of view. I stayed in the foxhole all night and never did discover what finally happened to them, apparently their people abandoned them. Later, I heard that one of our medics went out and checked on them and did what he could. Over the years I continue to feel some responsibility for their fate, since it was me who called for the fire on them when they first approached the crossroads. Responsible, yes; sorry, no. It was them or me.

A lot of things go through your mind when you think that it is your time to die and I can clearly remember, laying in that cold hole in the ground that could shortly be my grave, thinking that I had not even experienced being "in love" yet. I definitely did not want to die in this strange place. I prayed to God, Jesus, and every other deity that I could think of, for help. In later years I heard the expression that, "there were no atheists in foxholes". You can believe that.

[Italics indicate data from After Action Reports from National Archives]

22 Dec 44:

0530: Barrage fired to discourage expected enemy attack. This fire heard by approaching relief column which deployed.

1230: Company from the 325th Glider Infantry arrived as reinforcements and were sent out to dig in. Met by heavy mortar fire and were driven back. Casualties were evacuated and 589th took over while the 325th reorganized.

1400: Scout Sgt., Btry "A", 54th FABn reported his unit was in support of our outposts.

1630: Major Parker, 589th, injured by mortar fire and evacuated. Major Goldstein assumed command. German infiltration into woods to the north.

Very early, in the dark, the next morning (22nd Dec.), the Germans attacked again and we were subjected to small arms and mortar fire off and on all day. At one point, mortar rounds were landing real close to my hole and, I was feeling very exposed with no helmet to crawl into. I could hear the mortar fragments and bullets smacking into the ground around my foxhole. Most of the mortar rounds were falling farther in toward the buildings. I saw one hit the roof of Captain Brown's CP. It must have been during this time that Major Parker was wounded by a fragment. I'm not sure about that since I didn't actually witness it. Major Goldstein then assumed command of the defense of the crossroads.

There was a G.I. in a foxhole next to mine who would not fire his weapon. When I called to him to fire, he just looked at me. I didn't know him and don't know his fate either, I could not understand why he was not willing to help himself (and the rest of us). I have read since that this is not an unusual occurrence. There are always a certain number who will not squeeze that trigger, even when their life is threatened.

After dark, I was moved in closer to the CP and dug another hole along with a G.I. named Randy Pierson. One of our guys made a run from hole to hole tossing everybody something to eat. I caught a box of "wet-or-dry" cereal and ate it dry. (It is the only thing that I recall eating the whole time we were in this place except for one chocolate "D" bar.) The two of us spent the night in the hole. One of us would sleep an hour and the other keep watch and then we would alternate. This was the only kind of rest that anybody got. We had dug our hole reasonable deep and then further fortified it with some fence rails that we criss-crossed in front of it. I was sure that we would be attacked that night. I had 30 rounds of carbine ammunition remaining and a knife that I placed on the ground where I could reach it. I prayed that it would not be necessary. It got very cold that night and the enemy did not attack. It was another very long night.

Once in a great while I get asked, "How do you take care of your (personal) business when you get the urge at a time like this?" Well, to answer that, I can tell you, that you pick a time like this, when everything is quiet and dark, get out of the foxhole and let it go, as quickly and quietly as possible where ever you think the enemy might step in it. If you are under fire, you just do it in the foxhole and then throw it out (in the direction of the enemy, of course).

At the time, the weather was our worst enemy, but then in the morning things changed and weather took second place.

[Italics indicate data from After Action Reports from National Archives]

23 Dec 44:

0430: SS troops attack from the southeast, east and north. Attack repulsed and an SS Lt. And Sgt. Were taken prisoner. Two SS divisions reported approaching from the south. Platoon of TDs from the 43rd TD Bn arrived during the night.

0900: TDs are surrounded and surrender.

1000: Company from the 509th Parachute Inf. Bn. Moved in from the north, recaptured the tank destroyers and prepared to attack to the west. German artillery and mortar fire was heavy and all wire was out so new wire was laid to all command posts.

Throughout the engagement Captain A. C. Brown was in command of the howitzer crews and the defenses around the house at the southeast of the crossroads. He was assisted by Captain George Huxel, Asst. S-3 and 1st Lt. Thomas J. Wright. Since there was no telephone communications to the howitzer crews and .50 cal. Machine guns, when an attack was started these officers would go to the guns and direct their fire. On the morning of the 23rd of December Captain Huxel was injured by a mortar fragment but refused to be evacuated. That morning Captain Brown and Lt. Wright in turn went out in full view of the Germans and adjusted battery A of the 54th Armored FAB on German infantry attempting to infiltrate around their position.

Orders were given by Major Goldstein to all elements to move out to the east and south in order to permit the armored vehicles to maneuver. The TD's were ordered by

Major Goldstein inside the perimeter and plans were made to repel an attack which, according to the prisoners, was planned for that night. Since the radio no longer functioned, the battalion commander, Major Goldstein, moved north towards Manhay to report on the situation to Col. Richardson, 3rd Armored Division and to attempt to get reinforcements. Shortly after he left an artillery barrage commenced which lasted for about twenty minutes, after which German Tiger tanks and SS troops attacked.

1300: Bn Comdr (Ed. Major Goldstein) left position to attempt to get reinforcements and to report critical situation.

1520: Enemy artillery barrage starts, lasts for twenty minutes, followed by attack by tanks and SS troops from south, east and west. Our armor was knocked out.

1700: Position overrun by enemy

The Battalion Commander, Major Goldstein, was unsuccessful in getting reinforcements from Col. Richardson prior to the attack. After the attack the forces at the crossroads were completely encircled and reinforcements were unable to get in. A new line was set up south of Manhay.

23rd Dec. It seems that the Germans had come closer each time our perimeter got smaller, and were ready to end it. The sequence of events on this day I cannot accurately recall but I was in and out of foxholes and, on occasion, running into the shelter of the stone building for a warm-up (or thaw-out). The fog would roll in and out giving us limited visibility. I would fire at anything I saw moving around in range of my hole. This weather was tough on us, but I think it was to our advantage from a defensive point of view. I'm sure our enemy was not able to determine exactly what he had to overcome to take the crossroads. Whenever he came into view we would drive him back into the fog. Our ammunition was running out. I had one clip of carbine rounds and could find no more. Word had come around that, when the ammo ran out and the Germans came, it would be every man for himself, escape if you could, otherwise a surrender was prudent. I never heard this as an order directly from an officer but it did not take a genius to assess our situation. We were apparently surrounded, but the Germans were taking the easiest route, the hard surface roads. That left the fields open.

Late afternoon, probably after 1600, the final assault came. Mortars, small arms, and fire from tanks. I was in the stone building, sitting on the floor with my back to the wall. Harold Kuizema was with me. This room must have been a kitchen at one time because I recall a wood burning cook stove and a G.I., who I didn't know, trying to heat something at it. Something big hit that wall behind us and exploded it right over our heads into the room. It must have hit high or it would have gotten the both of us. As it was, it filled the room with debris and dust. That was all the motivation we needed to leave there. To wait for another one never crossed my mind. We (Harold and me) went to the front door. They were coming and we were going. It was that simple. Surrendering never crossed my mind. Some of our people were going to the cellar. I didn't like that idea. So, once outside, I crawled to the road and the ditch. There were some cattle milling about on the road, and much smoke, so I got up and ran through the cattle to the ditch on the far side and once again dropped down to avoid the German fire. On this side of the road was a snow covered field, very open, but it was "away" from the attack, so that's the direction that I took.

Not far into the field there was an explosion and Harold went down. As I got to him, I saw two G.I.'s approaching from the other direction. It was apparent that Harold was not going any farther on his own so between the three of us we moved him the remaining distance

to the shelter of the woods and into the company of a patrol of infantrymen from the 82nd AB Div. When we reached the shelter of the woods and I looked back at the crossroads, the whole sky seemed to be lighted by the flames from the burning building and vehicles. Harold, having rather severe wounds, was evacuated and I received permission to tag along with these 82nd AB Div G.I.'s, which I did until late sometime the next day (24th) when I was able to locate some 106th Division people. There were some vehicles from the 589th with this group that were not with us at Parker's Crossroads and one was loaded with duffel bags - mine was with them. Another miracle, clean underwear and socks. (I still have that same duffel bag.)

[Italics indicate data from After Action Reports from National Archives]
24 Dec 44: Battalion reassembled at Eronheid.

The remnants of the battalion were assembled in the vicinity of Eronheid, moved to Hoyment on the 25th, Dolembreux on the 26th, and were told they would be reorganized. After drawing equipment, in preparation for the reorganization, the battalion was moved to Xhos on the 27th and was notified that it would be disbanded. On the 1st of January 1945 the majority of the personnel remaining were transferred to the 591st FABn and the 592nd FABn.

For the action at Baraque de Fraiture, so briefly described above, the 589th FABn received the following citation:

**Award of Croix de Guerre With Silver Gilt Star
Decision No. 247
589th Field Artillery Battalion (105 How)**

**The President of the Provisional Government of the French Republic cites to the Order of Army:
CITATION**

A remarkable battalion whose brilliant conduct was greatly valued during the battles of St.Vith and Manhay on 16 to 23 December 1944. Attacked by an enemy operating in force but filled with the desire to conquer at any cost, it remained in position and, with direct and accurate fire, kept the attackers from access to vital communications south of Manhay. Short of food, water and pharmaceutical products, the 589th Field Artillery Battalion endured three attacks without flinching, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy and forced him to

*retire.
1946*

PARIS, 15 July

Signed, BIDAULT

*General of the Army JUIN
Chief of Staff of National Defense*

During this next period of time, while the 589th was missing from the division, the units severely under strength were officially deactivated, the 589th and 590th FABn's and the 422nd and 423rd Infantry Regiments in particular.

On January 22, 1945, the Baltimore, "The Sun", newspaper published a report headlined, "ONLY 300 ESCAPED FROM 2 REGIMENTS." It goes on to detail how the 106th

Infantry Division caught the full force of the German offensive and suffered 8,663 casualties, including 416 killed, 1,246 wounded and 7,001 missing in action. I can not imagine the anguish felt by those families, having sons involved in the action there, as they read that report. I came through relatively unscathed and have always wished, over the years, that there could have been some way to let my parents know that I was O.K. I wrote and mailed letters when possible, but there was considerable time before they arrived home. About that time there were many other articles in the newspapers referring to the "Battle of the Bulge" and the many casualties suffered by the American units involved in the fighting.

WITH THE 592nd FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

Since there was no more 589th FABn, I received an assignment with the 592nd FABn, 106th Div, and was detailed to their Fire Direction Center as a fire controller for one of the batteries of 155mm howitzers. My job was like being a "middle-man". I received fire missions from the forward observer, computed the range and direction from guns to target, and relayed this data to the firing battery. At times, the fire missions were requested as "T-O-T" (Time on Target). For this, every battery within range of the target was given the fire mission. The individual controller would determine the shell's time in flight for his battery and give the command to fire so as to have shells from all guns fall on the target at the same time. There were usually more guns participating than one would want to count and the shells of every caliber flying overhead on the way sounded like nothing else you have ever heard. Whatever was on the receiving end was always obliterated. We were working on the northern flank of the "bulge" near Stavelot and Hunningen during the final drive that broke through the Siegfried Line the second time.

This duty was a "piece of cake", compared with what I had already experienced, and I was employed with this unit for the remainder of time we were in action moving eastward. Occasionally I would have to operate with the forward observer, but not too often. That was risky business.

One day I received a letter from Mrs. Veda Stoll, Bob Stoll's mother. She had not heard from Bob for some time and, since she knew that we were buddies, wrote to me asking if I had any knowledge of his whereabouts. By this time the U.S. newspapers had run stories detailing the "annihilation" of the 106th Infantry Division. Also, I knew that almost nobody from C Battery escaped from our first positions facing Auw, Germany. She must have been frantic for news. I wrote to her and tried to give her encouragement that Bob had been made a prisoner and was now "out" of the war and much better off than she imagined. The first part of that statement was true, but our guys had no picnic as prisoners. Many died before they could be liberated. Eventually, she did find that her son was a POW and he was of course liberated near the end of hostilities.

The date and place has been long forgotten, but it had to be somewhere in the Eastern part of Belgium, probably in later January or February. The time finally came to get a bath and change into clean underwear and socks. I was picked, along with about a truckload of G.I.s from our unit, to make a trip to Spa, Belgium for the cleanup. I can only presume that we were selected because we were the ones who were the dirtiest at the time. I had always taken any opportunity that I could to wash out underwear and socks. It wasn't that often, but I believe that it kept my foot problems to a minimum. I kept a sock in each back pocket to dry and whenever I had the chance, I changed and put the dry ones on and the ones I was wearing went into the pockets.

We could not have been very far from Spa, as the trip did not take too long. Spa had been a popular health resort prior to the war and was equipped with lavish Roman style baths, fed by the local mineral springs. Our truck stopped in front of a building that reminded me of a Roman temple, marble columns in front and all. We lined up at the door and, as someone came out, another would go in. When my turn came, a woman dressed in a white outfit, like a hospital worker, took me by the hand and led me down a marble corridor lined on both sides by marble bathrooms. These rooms were huge by the bathroom standards that I was used to. She led me into a vacant one having a large bathtub in the center, elevated on a marble base. She then went to the tub and started both taps running to fill the tub and then left the room. Since there had been no conversation between us, I presumed that I was on my own now.

The tub was about half full when I stripped down to my birthday suit and prepared to get in. About then, my attendant came back into the room, stuck her hand into the water, and said, "NO, NO, Too Hot!!" So I just stood around and waited for her to adjust the water temperature until she finally judged it to be OK for me to use. I sure could have used her to wash my back, but I guess she had other duties to perform. I had to dress into my cruddy old uniform when I finished but at least I was clean underneath for a while. And it was a big moral booster. On a few other occasions we had a chance to bath in the "engineer's showers". This was a setup where the Engineer unit built a maze of water pipes with shower heads spaced a few feet apart near the river bank. Water was pumped from the river, through a filter, and then into a heater for the showers. The whole thing was usually screened by a tarp stretched around it. This setup could handle a lot of guys at one time. Army efficiency was at its best.

On another occasion, maybe near the end of February or into March, our unit moved into the remains of a village to take up our positions to provide artillery support for the advancing infantry. Of course, the first item of business is to find the most comfortable "accommodations" that we could. While inspecting one of the remaining houses still standing, I heard one of the guys, Briggs Hoffman, call out from a room upstairs to come up and take a look at what he discovered. He was checking around for booby-traps when he discovered a storage space in the wall, hidden by the bed. On putting a flashlight in there we discovered it to be holding about thirty or so bottles and several pieces of cured meats. It was a very likely set up for a booby-trap. Being cautious about such things, the next thing to do was to see if it really was a booby-trap, so we proceeded to carefully tie strings around the necks of the bottles and the pieces of meat. From a safe distance, we then tugged at the newfound treasures with enough commotion to set off any infernal device the Germans may have left us. Nothing happened. On examination we concluded that we had rescued some very fine brandies and cognac, and cured hams similar to the kind we get in the states known as "Smithfield." That night we fried up some cured ham in brandy. Not bad, and a welcome break from "C" rations. The booze was "divvied up" with the guys in the squad, each one storing several in his bedroll. Some of it survived until V-E Day, but not after.

During these times we did not stay in one place long. The forward momentum of the American Army was carrying us further east every day. My feet, as was most everybody's, were suffering from being cold and wet too often. I did not realize it at the time, but I had all the effects of frostbite. It was apparently from those days in the wet foxholes around Baraque de Fraiture. I was changing to my dry socks whenever possible but it was not enough. I had developed large, water filled, blisters that made it difficult to get my combat boots on over, but once they were on I could manage pretty well. When

we had a chance to sleep I took off the boots and kept them in the bedroll with me to dry out as much as possible. Also, I would puncture the blisters and place my feet through the bottom of the bed roll so they could get air. When my feet warmed up they itched as if I had a bad case of poison ivy. I used a good bit of G.I. foot powder on them and that seemed to help.

Again the date and place eludes my memory, but not the incident. I was detailed to accompany the Lt. and a radio operator to the observation post of the day. It turned out to be the attic of a farmhouse located where we had a view of the front and were able to direct artillery fire when requested. During a quiet time, the Lt. told us that he was going outside to take care of "personal business." He was equipped with a new weapon that I had not seen close up before. It was a .45 caliber M3 sub-machine gun that was known as a "grease gun", because that is what it looked like. He left it with us when he went outside. That was a mistake. Curiosity got the best of me so I picked it up for a closer examination. It had a small crank handle on the side that must have been put there for a purpose, but what? I cradled the gun in my left hand and pulled the handle back with my right hand. It was spring loaded and when I let it go, the gun said, "BANG!!!!" and a bullet went out the window. SURPRISE!!!! There were no Germans in sight, so when the Lt. came back he said, "What are you guys shooting at anyway? You want to give away our position?" We gave him some lame excuse and it all went away when we got a fire mission. I believe that it was in this same house that I found a sewing machine and made myself a sleeping bag using two GI blankets and a shelter-half for a cover.

RE-BUILDING THE 106th INFANTRY DIVISION

On 16 March 1945, the 106th Division, greatly reduced in numbers, was withdrawn to St. Quentin, France for rest and reorganization. On 1 April the division left St. Quentin for Rennes where it arrived on 2 April. Pyramidal tents were issued and the unit set up housekeeping on an airfield that was no longer in regular use. A decision had been made to restore all of the organic units to book strength with replacements and to return all of the original members to their own units to function as a cadre. I was assigned back to "A" Battery, 589th FABn, my original unit. Good to be "home." 1Lt. Ted Kiendl, having recovered from his wounds of December 16th, was to be our Battery Commander.

About 15 or 16 April a big ceremony and review was held on the main runway. The men surviving from the "old outfits" were in formation on one side of the fields while the replacement group was in formation on the opposite side. Guidons and unit flags were ceremoniously exchanged to the music of the division band and the new men officially became a part of the 106th Infantry Division.

While here, we had some free time to scout around to see what kind of mischief we could get into. There were water filled bomb craters here and there on the airfield and we just happened to discover a supply of large magnesium flares of the kind dropped from planes at night to light up a battle area. These flares were equipped with a long lanyard that pulled the parachute and ignited the flare. The whole device was packed in a tube about three or four feet long and three or four inches in diameter. One of us would hold the lanyard and the other would pitch the flare into the water filled crater. It would ignite and swim around, blowing huge bubbles and emitting a cloud of smoke and steam. Just something to do until some officer discovered us. On another occasion the battery was lined up for chow next to a deep ditch. Somebody, I wouldn't know who, dumped the powder charge out of a "pineapple" hand-grenade, and with just the fuse and primer,

tossed the grenade into the ditch near the chow line. It's a good thing nobody found out who did that.

At Rennes there were large P.O.W. camps and every day truckloads of German P.O.W.'s were delivered to perform some of the "base housekeeping" jobs. They dug latrine trenches, garbage pits, landscaped the scenery, etc. They didn't work themselves to death though. We obtained passes into Rennes and explored the town, saw a movie, drank a little vin blanc, and just roamed around. It was a welcome change of scenery and the natives were friendly. A small scale range for practice in conducting fire was built which worked well enough to give the new people something to do.

About 25 April, part of the division, including the 424th Infantry, 591st & 592nd FABn's, and some attached outfits, moved out to Mannheim, Germany, to take over an occupation job. The units being re-organized, 589th, 590th, 422nd & 423rd, remained at St. Jacques de la Lande (airfield) to continue training. These units were attached to the 66th Infantry Division which was then working together with the French besieging Lorient and St. Nazaire, not far away.

On 21 April it was decided to move to Coetquidon, both to be nearer the base of supplies (for the 66th Div) and to have the artillery range available. The battalion moved on the 22nd to a high knoll just east of Beignon, a small village, to have a convenient location for artillery practice. The guns could occupy a position right next to the camp itself for firing into the practice impact area. While here, the battalion participated in live firing of all of the weapons, including small arms, bazookas and grenades. The firing batteries were tested on their RSOP proficiency, (Recon, Select and Occupy Position).

LORIENT, FRANCE

According to official records the 589th FA, 590th FA, 422 Inf, 423 Inf, and 106th Recon Troop were moved to the command of the 66th Infantry Division for the period of 15 April 1945 to 15 May 1945.

On 7 May the battalion was moved to the "Lorient Pocket" to reinforce the 870th FABn. At both Lorient and St. Nazaire, the enemy held the cities and about 100 square miles of adjacent territory. There were elaborate mine fields and defense installations guarding the approaches to the submarine pens. The positions assigned were in an area 4 or 5 miles west of Quimper. The battalion arrived about 1200 and was setting up to fire when orders were received to stand by, but no firing, until ordered by the 870th FABn. I recall having an observation post in a huge tree from where I could see (with field glasses) into the area occupied by the Germans. Targets were easy to select from my perch in the tree and there was not much concern that the Germans had anything to fire back at me. Negotiations had begun for the surrender of the German garrison occupying the position, so the battalion remained at the ready until 1600, 9 May when it was announced that the surrender had been completed.

"V-E Day was celebrated 9 May, but it was rather subdued in most cases." (Preceding sentence is Frank Aspinwall's, all I can say is, "Where were you, Frank?") "A" battery all got roaring drunk with the exception of Lt. Kiendl, B.C., and one NCO. All that happened that day is best not put into print. None of us wanted to be the last one killed in the war. If we didn't make it back home now, then it would only be our own fault.

The battalion was assigned sections of Lorient to occupy during the collection of prisoners and weapons, but only "C" Battery actually moved in. The next day I was assigned to ride "shotgun" with a 2&1/2 truck driver to help in the collection of the prisoners. As our convoy entered the area of the sub pens where we were to make our pickup I was impressed by the filth of the place. It was apparent to me that military discipline had broken down completely. There was not only trash and other debris scattered about, but also feces everywhere. Worse than a pig pen. The stench was overpowering.

We had one G.I. to ride in the rear of the truck as a guard for all the Germans we could load, standing only. As the convoy of prisoners drove out of the sub pens area and through the town, the road was lined with hundreds of French people on both sides. The trucks were uncovered and as we passed through, it was like running the gauntlet. Everything that was available to throw was thrown at the German prisoners. It was very apparent that the Germans had not earned the favor of the French people in this area. It's probably a good thing that the traffic did not have to stop along this route.

On 12 May the battalion moved again, back to the camp at the airport near Rennes. More replacements joined us and preparations were made to move back into Germany for occupation duties. Training schedules were established again and the men were kept reasonably busy.

OCCUPATION OF GERMANY

24 May - The battalion left Rennes to rejoin the Division near Mayen, Germany. The first night was spent in the woods near Neufchateau. Next morning the battalion drove through Paris, escorted by MP's. Maybe they thought somebody would "jump ship". That night 25th - 26th was spent at Soissons. Next day we moved via Rheims and Stenay to an airfield near Luxembourg and pitched pup-tents. On the way through Rheims we went past the famous cathedral. There was no way to get a good look, but it was still standing and didn't appear (from a distance) to be severely damaged. The morning of the 27th the 589th passed through the badly bombed city of Trier and on down the bank of the Moselle River, meeting the 66th Division on their way out of Germany.

The Moselle Valley lies between two steep mountain ranges rising to 1000 feet or more on either side. The river runs swiftly along the valley floor with vineyards hanging on the almost vertical sides of the mountain. To harvest the grapes, they need to have the footing of a mountain goat. Some of the natives seem quite friendly, others, especially the teen-age boys are openly hostile. There was a non-fraternization order so it didn't make much difference to any one of us either way.

At Cochen, the column turned north to Monreal and went into bivouac in a woods about 1/2 mile south of Nachtsheim, Germany, about 25 miles west of Coblenz. There the battalion began again the familiar pattern of "cannoneer's hop," battery tests, and the ever present Battalion Tests 1, 2, and 3.

27 May to 20 June - Shortly after arrival at Nachtsheim the battalion received orders to take down all Pyramidal tents except those being used for administrative purposes. All personnel set up pup tents. As time went on these shelters were improved, until at the time of departure, most men were comfortably housed in shacks made from lumber, tarps and pup tents. This work on the housing project was accomplished during a lapse in training for the AGF tests. It was during this housekeeping task that Don

Humphrey was injured by an electric shock while wiring lights to a tent. Don's hand was severely burned, requiring hospital treatment. Also, it was from here that I mailed a box home containing "souvenirs la guerre". It contained a Mauser '98 German Infantry rifle with several different size bayonets, a field cleaning kit for the rifle and three sections of cleaning rod, a German Army rabbit fur jacket, an American bayonet, miscellaneous German uniform insignia and other trivia.

Emphasis was placed on the new program of education and a few key men were sent to Paris to attend the I & E Staff School at Cite Universitaire. A liberal pass quota was authorized and most men were given leaves to Paris, Eupen, Namur, The Riviera, Brussels and other places. I had a three day pass to Paris and a two day pass to Brussels during this period. During the Paris trip, I, quite by accident, met another Govans boy, Duncan Miller, while waiting in a chow line at a service club. We chatted for a while, spoke about meeting after we returned home, and I never saw him again. Later I heard that he married a German girl and brought her to the States. He was a fast worker.

A few high point enlisted men left the unit for home and discharge from here. Some were fortunate enough to get air transportation.

Practice for battery and battalion tests were held regularly at a range near Kempnich, about 10 miles north of Camp Jones. The range was in heavily rolling country which provided many good O.P.'s as well as battery positions and much progress was made with the training during this period. On one day, when our unit was not involved in an exercise, I was ordered to go to the motor pool, requisition a 2 & 1/2 ton truck and driver, go to a POW pen, check out a truck load of German POW's and deliver them to the artillery range to perform whatever menial tasks the commander there had for them. I was given a hand drawn map to use for directions. When I got the truck and driver, I handed the driver the map and asked him if he knew how to find the place. He replied in the affirmative, so we got started. We found the POW pen and loaded the back of the truck with Germans and a G.I. guard and started up the road. I was already lost. The driver eventually said, "this is the place", and turned off onto an unimproved road that led us up through deserted villages into the hills. Next he turned into a logging road, shifted into low gear and started up the hill through the woods. I figured that we were getting close because the sounds of artillery fire were very plain to the ear.

No sooner than I thought about how close we were, when about four rounds came crashing down through the trees to explode not 200 feet away. We were there all right, but on the wrong end of the range. The driver slammed down on the brakes, shifted into reverse, backed into the brush, swung the wheel around, and said, "LET'S GET THE HELL OUTTA HEAH!!! Down the hill we came, on that trail, as fast as he dared drive, around a curve to the right at full speed and that truck was NOT going to stay on the road. We struck the end of a loosely piled stone wall head on. Rocks flew everywhere. The truck came to rest, on the wall, still upright, all ten wheels off the ground, still full of very scared German POW's and our one G.I. guard. We all dismounted, and after sizing up our situation, I had the POW's tear down the rest of the wall and get busy chocking rocks under the wheels. We were apparently out of the line of fire by this time so we took our time getting the truck back on the road. It seemed none the worse for wear. All that iron was still in running order. It's a good thing that those rocks were not mortared together, could have bent the bumper on that truck. I decided that I had enough excitement for one day, so we drove back to the POW pen, returned the prisoners, drove to the motor pool, returned the truck, I went back to the battery area and reported, "Mission accomplished, sir". It was about chow-time and I never heard another word about the big fiasco. I would

like to meet up with one of those German prisoners some time to see how he remembers that day.

I was able to attend a USO show while at "Camp Jones." They were set up in a "bowl" about 1/2 mile from our bivouac area. Jack Benny appeared with his whole radio retinue and was well received by everybody. We were starved for stateside entertainment.

June 20,21 & 22 Battery tests 1,2 & 3 were performed and "A" Battery was proven the best, with scores in all categories, better than in "B" & "C" Batteries.

A Division Review was held on 23 June and, as usual, the 589th was well represented at the presentation of awards. Silver Stars, Bronze Stars, Purple Hearts and an Oak Leaf Cluster to the Air Medal were presented to members of the battalion.

24 June to 8 July - Most of the period was spent keeping the troops busy on the range in preparation for the Infantry Battalion and Artillery Battalion firing tests 1, 2 & 3. With each successive day everyone seemed to sense our improving efficiency, and the moral at the end of the period was higher than at any previous time during the training period.

I was issued a pass to visit Paris, 26 to 29 June 1945. We, the lucky ones, loaded onto G.I. trucks, made the trip in record time and were turned loose on the city for three days. I saw and did a lot in those three days (and took some pictures to prove it).

9 - 11 July - An RSOP for the infantry battalion firing tests was completed. Three days of firing over the heads of the infantrymen added excitement and kept the battalion on it's toes. We came out of these tests with added confidence and the knowledge that we were now ready again for a combat mission.

On 12 July the battalion left the rendezvous area at 1330 for reconnaissance of position for Battalion Test #1. The test was passed easily with a paper score of 81.6. The outfit was short on its T/O of officers, which added to the difficulties. Each battery was reduced to 2 officers and the battalion staff had only 4.

Battalion Test #2 was performed on 13 July. There was a misunderstanding among the umpires in the identification of targets and as a result the final score dropped off to 76. We did have the satisfaction however of scoring a direct hit on one of the few targets that had been mis-identified.

14 & 15 July - Battalion Test #3 is a night problem and the afternoon was used for the selection of positions and survey of the area. Scoring was done by short base triangulation of the flash of the exploding shell in the target area. For this purpose aiming circles were set up and oriented at the O.P.'s during the daylight hours. The night was a busy one and, when circle readings were finally computed and plotted, the results left little to be desired. The umpires, who were very hard to please, awarded us a very credible score of 82.4. The battalion's final score for all AGF tests averaged 80.4.

16 July to 6 August - The division moved to a bivouac area in the vicinity of Mingolsheim, Germany, about 25 miles south of Mannheim. The new area was in the woods near an abandoned German ammunition dump. Several of the buildings were cleaned up and put to use by the G.I.'s. An officers club and an NCO club were opened in Mingolsheim and passes to various R & R centers were issued to the troops. Some time

during this period I was issued a 48 hour pass to Brussels. I remember that we had a good time sightseeing and that I made a few photos and bought a couple of small souvenirs to send home.

On 21 July the battalion was engaged in a 7th Army "Tally- Ho" operation. The 589th was assigned the town of Kronau and at 0400 began systematically searching all buildings in the town. Doors were pounded on and civilians were ushered out of bed and into the street while armed G.I.'s entered the houses and rummaged through closets and drawers searching for anything that resembled a weapon or Nazi paraphernalia. The job took about 16 hours and the town was relieved of very few items, mostly German uniform parts and war decorations that the G.I.'s confiscated for souvenirs. There was not too much sympathy among the troops for the Germans at this time. I'm sure that the Nazis were much more thorough with the "purgings" that they participated in with their "enemies of the state."

HEADING WEST

On 7 Aug 1944, I received orders transferring me to "B" Battery, 385th Field Artillery Battalion of the 104th Infantry Division that was at Camp San Luis Obispo, California, training for the assault on Japan. 11 August, 1944, on my 21st birthday, I departed the 106th Division with a large group of men assigned to be a part of the 104th Division. Toting our duffel bags and riding in straw-lined, "40 & 8" boxcars, and living on "K" rations, we began our journey westward. I slept through the night and woke about 0715 on the morning of the 12th at Serve. The train stopped at Lutzelbourg from 0755 to 0925. We all got out and stretched our legs and had a K-Ration breakfast.

There was another stop at Sarrebourg at 1040 where we stayed until 0100 before proceeding on. There was a signpost on the platform with many of the major cities in the U.S. on name-boards and the distances to each. From there, it was 3,924 miles to Washington, D.C. That afternoon, the 13th, we crossed the Seine River while passing through Paris. As much as I enjoyed the threeday pass in Paris, I didn't want to jump from the train at this time. The closer to home that I got, the better I liked it. When the train approached the vicinity of Le Harve, I noticed that the ditches on either side of the railroad were filled to overflowing with empty "K" and "C" ration containers. Obviously, this was not the first load of G.I.'s to take this luxurious ride. We off loaded from the train at Camp Twenty Grand. All of the transient camps at Le Harve were given names of cigarette brands; Lucky Strike, Chesterfield, etc.

The big thrill came next day, on the 14th. As we stood in line for chow, a liaison plane, a Piper L-4, flew over the camp and dropped leaflets to the G.I.'s on the ground. There were only two really significant words on the sheets of paper floating down: **"JAPAN KAPUT"**. I still get chills when I think of it. This was one happy day in the life of a G.I. heading west. There's no way to guess how many Americans would have died during an invasion of the Japanese Islands.

On 17 August, our group boarded an LST and traveled to Southampton, England. We stayed near the town of Tidworth and while there I was issued a pass to visit London from 1500, 21 Aug until 2000, 22 Aug. This was another busy 29 hours. I roamed around London with some of the guys, made a few photos of the antiquities, and returned to the camp on schedule. On the 25th of August we boarded a train to Southampton, rode onto the dock and transferred to the liner Queen Elizabeth. Before boarding the ship, an inspection of our personal equipment was held. We were ordered to lay out the contents of

our duffel bag on a blanket. We were then told to put anything that we DID NOT want the inspecting officer to see *under* the blanket. At this point I was convinced that the war was over.

The ocean on the way home was unbelievably calm, not a ripple. We were packed in like sardines, with 20 men and our duffel bags in a small inside room filled with pipe rack canvas bunks from floor to ceiling. Since the weather was so delightful, some of us staked out a space on the deck for sleeping and to avoid the stuffy stateroom. The giant ship steamed along steadily without having to deviate for anything. I doubt that anyone had even a touch of seasickness. There was no organized activity of course, but there were craps and chuck-a-luck games going on anywhere they could find a space big enough to throw the dice. I had none of that, my Momma didn't raise me to be a gambler.

Escorted by fireboats, cabin cruisers, tugs alongside and a Navy blimp overhead, the Queen arrived in New York harbor on 31 August, 1945 with 14,860 troops on board. As the ship eased up to the Cunard Line pier, we could hear the sounds of Cab Calloway's orchestra, below us, playing a welcome home tune. Except for that, the city appeared to be "business as usual".

We transferred to trains at Fort Dix, N.J. and were processed through, for furloughs, to report back to Fort Meade, Md. at the end of thirty days. At the end of the thirty days, we were given another fifteen days leave. When all of the leave time was spent I reported to Fort Meade for transportation to my assignment with the 104th Division, along with the hundreds of other guys. The Army loaded us aboard a G.I. regulation Troop Train. The bench type seats were convertible to double-decker bunks for sleeping and the train carried it's own mess cars. Fairly comfortable, from what we were accustomed to. We traveled to Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis then took the southern route to California, through Tucson, El Paso, Los Angeles and north to San Luis Obispo. I found out just how large this great country is when traveling coast to coast.

On arrival at Camp San Luis Obispo we were assigned to our units, living in pyramidal tents. There were no duties except to check the bulletin board every day for your appointment for discharge. While there, we were instructed to take advantage of the Army medical teams for check-ups and dental work prior to leaving the Army. I had become acquainted with a fellow from Virginia named Jimmy Dail, so the two of us "palled around" together and managed to take in some of the local scenery, even including a trip to San Francisco, courtesy of one of the Army dentists who lived at Berkeley. He drove us there and back one weekend when he went home. Jimmy and I parted ways when we were discharged and I never saw him again.

I went through the discharge routine on 30 November 1945 and during the process received my back pay, travel allowance of five cents a mile, and was issued a brand new uniform from cap to shoes and socks, underwear to overcoat, AND my discharge papers. There was an officer there who gave us all a pitch about signing up with the Reserves, Regular Army, or National Guard. I believe that he was totally ignored, to a man.

Next morning I was on the way home by train, by way of Los Angeles. My Uncle Robert Rogers had friends in Los Angeles, Elmer Gore and family, and gave me an introduction by mail and asked me to stop and see them. When I got there they insisted that I spend the weekend with them, which I did, and they showed me some of the attractions of the big city; Hollywood, Grauman's Chinese Theater, the Masonic Temple, Griffith Observatory, etc., etc. They were very gracious and we corresponded for a long

time until their deaths some years later. On leaving Los Angeles, I found myself sitting up in a dilapidated coach on the A,T & SF RR, all the way to Chicago. I'm not saying that this was an OLD coach, but "BBC" was carved on one of the armrests, and that stands for "Buffalo Bill Cody". I'm sure that he could have traveled on this coach. At Chicago I transferred to another train on the B & O line and came the rest of the way. I can still hear that conductor coming through the train announcing, "Baltimoreooore!, next stop!". It was a great ride.

JOHN R. SCHAFFNER

Revised 11 Sept 2004

Note: The 106th Infantry Division officially returned to the U.S., arriving in New York on 1 October 1945 and was deactivated at Camp Shanks, N.Y. on 2 October 1945.

EPILOG

If one should believe, that since it is sixty-plus years later, the people of Belgium and Luxembourg have forgotten the sacrifice made by the Americans on their behalf, one should think again. In those small countries that were subjected to the worst conditions that a war can bring, there are constant reminders everywhere. Monuments that mark sites of the conflict between the two armies have been erected at many, many locations. Military Cemeteries, containing many thousands of graves of fallen American soldiers, sailors, and airmen, are meticulously kept. On holidays the local people will place flowers at the monuments and decorate the graves of the G.I.'s that they have "adopted." And, they have all been adopted. They will not forget.

From: "John Kline" jpk@mm.com To: "!!!!106th Inf Div Assoc. Members"
106th.inf.div@mm.com Subject: Order of Battle, 106th Inf Div, WWII
Date: Fri, 9 Mar 2001 11:04:53 -0600

Credits to: Shelby L. Stanton, Captain U.S. Army, Retired
Author of Vietnam Order of Battle World War II - Order of Battle
U.S. Army ground force units from battalion through division, 1939-1946
Galahad Books, New York Library of Congress Catalog Number: 84-8299
ISBN: 0-88365-775-9 106th Infantry Division

15 Mar 43 activated at Ft Jackson S.C. and moved 24 Jan 44 to Second Army No.5 Tennessee Maneuvers; transferred to Camp Atterbury Ind. 28 Mar 44; staged at Camp Myles Standish Mass 0 Oct 44 until departed Boston P/E 10 Nov 44; arrived England 17 Nov 44 and landed in France 6 Dec 44; crossed into Belgium 10 Dec 44 and returned to France 16 Mar 45; entered Germany 25 Apr 45; arrived New York P/E I Oct 45 and inactivated at Cp Shanks N.Y. 2 Oct 45.

Campaigns: Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe
Aug 45 Loc: Bad Ems Germany
Typical Organization (1944):
422nd Infantry Regiment*
81st Engineer Combat Bn
423rd Infantry Regiment*
331st Medical Battalion
424th Infantry Regiment
106th Cntr Intel Corps Det
HHB Division Artillery

Headquarters, Special Troops
589th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)
Hqs Company, 106th Inf. Div.
590th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)
Military Police Platoon
591st Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)
806th Ord. Light Maint. Co.
592nd Field Artillery Battalion (155mm)
106th Quartermaster Company
106th Reconnaissance Troop, Mecz
106th Signal Company
820th Tank Destroyer Battalion (attached 8 Dec 44-4 Jan 45)
440th AAA Auto-Wpns Battalion (attached 17 Dec 44-25 Dec 44)
563rd AAA Auto-Wpns Battalion (attached 9 Dec 44-18 Dec 44)
634th AAA Auto-Wpns Battalion (attached 8 Dec 44-18 Dec 44)
*Destroyed in Schnee Eifel salient 19 Dec 44 near Schonberg; rebuilt in France but did not rejoin division until 16 May 45.

Typical Organization (1945):

3rd Infantry Regiment*
81st Engineer Combat Bn
159th Infantry Regiment*
331st Medical Battalion
424th Infantry Regiment
106th Cntr Intel Corps Det
HHB Division Artillery
Headquarters, Special Troops
589th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)
Hqs Company, 106th Inf.Div.
590th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)
Military Police Platoon
591st Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)
806th Ord Light Maint. Co.
592nd Field Artillery Battalion (155mm)
106th Quartermaster Company
106th Reconnaissance Troop, Mecz
106th Signal Company

*Attached to division 16 Mar 45-past 9 May 45 to replace 422nd, 423rd Inf Regts.

Overseas Wartime Assignments:

VIII Corps - 29 Nov 44 Fifteenth Army - 10 Mar 45
XVIII (A/B) Corps - 20 Dec 44 Advanced Section, Communications Zone
V Corps - 6 Feb 45 (attached) - 15 Apr 45
Commanders: MG Alan W. Jones: Mar 43
BG Herbert T. Perrin: Dec 44
MG Donald A. Stroh: Feb 45

Killed in Action: 417 Wounded in Action: 1,278 Died of Wounds: 53 Prisoners: 6,697**

***6,500 eventually returned to military control after being captured in the German Ardennes Counteroffensive.**

106th Infantry Division Combat Narrative

The division landed in France on 6 Dec 44 and replaced the 2nd Inf Div in the Schnee Eifel sector of Belgium on 11 Dec 44. The German Ardennes Counteroffensive struck the division on 16 Dec 44, the 424th Inf being at Winterspelt and the 422nd and 423rd Inf Regts being in the Schnee Eifel salient.

Both 422nd and 423rd Inf surrendered on 19 Dec 44 after being encircled in their area near Schonberg the previous day. The 424th Inf was pushed back across the Our River, losing most of its equipment, and joined other divisional remnants to hold St Vith 20-21 Dec 44, being reinforced by the 112th Inf of 28th Inf Div 19-23 Dec 44.

From 24 to 30 Dec 44 the 424th Inf was attached to the 7th Armd Div and participated in heavy combat around Manhay, and then was withdrawn to Anthisnes Belgium. The 424th Inf took over defense of the Wanne-Wanneranval region 9 Jan 45 and the division had a second regiment attached, the separate 517th Prcht Inf, 11-17 Jan 45. On 15 Jan 45 the division consolidated and cleared Ennal. It then assembled at Stavelot on 18 Jan 45 and the 424th Inf was again attached to the 7th Armd Div 23-28 Jan 45 where it fought at Meyerode and around St Vith.

The division moved to Hunnigen 7 Feb 45 and the 424th Inf was attached to the 99th Inf Div 5-9 Feb 45. The 424th Inf then advanced along the high ground between the Berk and Simmer River until it reached Olds on 7 Mar 45. It was then sent for rehabilitation and the division given a security mission along the Rhine River until 15 Mar 45, when the division was withdrawn to St Quentin to be rebuilt.

The division was reconstituted 16 Mar 45 when the 3rd Inf and 159th Inf were attached to replace its surrendered regiments. It then moved back into Germany 25 Apr 45, but was relegated to duty processing prisoners and performing military occupation of secure areas. The 422nd and 423rd Inf were newly formed in France from replacements and attached to the 66th Inf Div for training purposes 15 Apr 45, and were still in this capacity when hostilities were declared ended on 7 May 45.

From: "John Kline"

To: "106th Inf Div Assoc. Members"

Date: Fri, 9 Mar 2001 12:05:45 -0600

My understanding is that even though we wore the "Golden Lion" patch, it had not been officially authorized. One example is: There were distinctive metal "Regimental" crest pins that had been designed, ready for production, but did not get "officially recognized" because the war ended. Take your choice - an insignia that would be officially recognized, and the war continue. OR one that was not officially authorized, and the war ENDED. I Opt for the later.

John Kline

ffdf

yrtr

Battle of Bulge Veteran Recalls Baptism of Fire



World War II Veteran John Schaffner holds a portrait of himself as a young infantry soldier more than 50 years ago.

by Adele Evaris

The ceiling in John Schaffner's garage is covered with model airplanes dating from the Wright brothers. It's his life-long passion that may have been kindled one day in 1944.

That was Christmas Day when the fog lifted over Belgium and American planes covered the skies, dropping supplies, ammunition and reinforcements — turning the tide in the Battle of the Bulge so the Allies could beat back the infamous German attack.

It doesn't take memorials, medals (of which he has many) or television shows to remind Schaffner of the grim desperation he felt more than 50 years ago. He vividly recalls crawling through the Belgian fields during December of 1944 and January of 1945, trying to stay so low that "even his buttons got in the way." Even the innocuous woods across the road from his Hunt Valley home spark memories of the less peaceful woods he tried to hide in to avoid being shot.

Though the reminders are everywhere, Schaffner hasn't talked much about his experiences during Hitler's last devastating stand in World War II and one of the largest battles in modern history.

"I've tried to put it Out of my mind for 40 years," he said.

This month's 50th anniversary of V-E day may make it difficult not to think about something that should never be forgotten.

'Baptism of fire'

"He was home two years, we married, and we had three children, but he never talked about it," said Lillian Schaffner, John's wife of 46 years. "It wasn't until [the veterans'] 40th reunion that he talked about it. I think being with all the others helped. They all opened up. It was the best thing that ever happened to him—"

After receiving one of the highest French honors, the Croix de Guerre, for his service, and revisiting the battle fields in September and in 1992, Schaffner says he has come to terms with the events. He has written two books of memoirs — one of the war itself and the other recounting his visit to Europe last September. Parts of his memoirs also are recorded in a new French book, "L'Offensive Des Ardennes." He was a featured guest on a recent ABC "Turning Point" documentary.

"It was a baptism of fire," Schaffner said about his war experience. "There was no easing into it."

A quiet sector

In November of 1944, he had completed training with the army and sailed to England with the 106th Infantry Division. He was 20. Soon it was onto France and up into Belgium, where an initial task was to relieve the Second Division on the Schnee Eifel, a "quiet front" about 27 miles wide.

These days Schaffner concentrates on his 175-plus model plane collection.

"The veterans of the Second Division assured their successors that they were in a very quiet sector where nothing ever happened," Schaffner wrote in his memoirs.

The next thing he knew, he was manning an outpost just before daybreak, December 16, when German shelling began, launching one of the bloodiest surprise attacks Americans had ever experienced.

"It hit me then. I was in the war. I remember I was on the ground with my gun," he said. "By some miracle, nobody got hit in our unit." At least not that time.

"I got down in the lowest possible place and crawled into my helmet," he wrote.

The weather was as formidable as the enemy. It became cold, wet, and worst of all, foggy — crippling any air relief efforts.

"The day went very slowly (this kind of time is usually spent getting your hole just a bit deeper, you never know how deep is going to be deep enough). Now and then one of our

guys would pop off a few rounds at something real or imagined," he wrote of the morning of December 20.

'You gain faith'

Over the grueling weeks, the 106th suffered 8,663 casualties: 416 killed; 1,246 wounded and 7,001 missing in action. Miraculously, Schaffner wasn't among those statistics. He can only shake his head.

"A lot of things go through your mind when you think that it is your time to die, and I can clearly remember laying in that cold hole in the ground that could shortly be my grave thinking that I had not even experienced being in love yet. I definitely did not want to die in this strange place. I prayed to God, Jesus, and every other deity that I could think of for help," he wrote.

As bad as things got, Schaffner says he always felt a degree of hope, sometimes "only a shred," but enough to get him through the hours.

"They say there are no atheists in foxholes. You pray a lot," he said "You gain faith, not lose it. You need help. You can't do it by yourself."

The fog wouldn't lift

John's photo albums reflect the effects the war had on the soldiers. Early pages show his friends clowning around during basic training. Later pages show those same men in Europe — older, haggard, cigarettes hanging from their tight lips. Many of those men would up captured or dead.

"Now it's just peaceful fields with cows."

December 23 was one of the bleakest points in the battle. Ammo was scarce and the fog just wouldn't lift, John remembers a senior officer telling them to run for it if they could.

"Our ammunition was running out. I had one clip of carbine rounds and could find no more," he wrote. "Word had come around that when the ammo ran out and the Germans came, it would be every man for himself, escape if you could."

Rumor had it that anything was better than being captured by the Germans. John and his friends had heard that some American POWs had been marched into German fields and simply mowed down by machine guns.

But it didn't come to that. Somehow they hung on. Finally, Americans were able to regain their original lines by the end of January.

Even with the suffering, John has no regrets and firmly believes beating Hitler was critical enough to warrant the sacrifice.

"I feel proud of what I did," he said. "I'm quite sure it was worth it. All you have to do is talk to a Belgian and you know it."

Awarded French honor

Although the memories aren't easy to live with, Schaffner admits that the war enabled him to approach life differently.

"I don't worry about hangnails," he said. "I just let it go."

After the Americans won the battle, John remained in Europe, mostly supporting other divisions, reorganizing, scouting and training. His worries were not over, however, even on V-E Day. John knew what his training was for. His next stop would be Japan.

Luckily, the war in the Pacific ended before he had to go — and he sailed home on the Queen Elizabeth with 14,859 other "sardines." He was discharged and eventually went to work for AAI Corp. in Timonium as a computer analyst and programmer.

Despite today's anti-military, nonukes, burn-your-draft-card, Columbus-was-a-monster, pressure to be politically correct, John believes Americans could unite, sacrifice and prevail again if the cause was on the scale of World War II.

"We were talking about Hitler and Japan taking the world by force," he said. "That's pretty worrisome. Everyone was behind the effort. A lot of boys quit school to join. People thought, 'Let's get it done.'"

Recently, after bureaucratic holdups in France, Schaffner and the rest of his battalion were awarded the prestigious French honor — the Croix de Guerre — for their service in the battle. That adds to his collection, including the Good Conduct medal, America Victory medal, European African Middle Eastern Campaign medal and two other French commemoratives.

Concentrates on his models



Schaffner and his fellow veterans revisited the battle fields in September, accompanied by a crew from "Turning Point," which filmed it as a documentary. Monuments were dedicated and he feels the trip was "weird," but absolutely worthwhile.

"Now it's just peaceful fields with cows," he said, again shaking his head in disbelief.

On the trip Schaffner and his wife were able to meet old friends, reminisce and reflect. He knows one other Battle of the Bulge veteran who lives in Dundalk and another who lives somewhere in Maryland but never showed up to reunions. Many of the men would still rather not recall it, he said.

These days Schaffner prefers to concentrate on adding to his 175-plus model planes, and, not surprisingly, a great deal of them are war models. His favorite is a 1942 Mustang, but there are jet fighters, B-52s, B-17s, Wright Brothers models, space shuttles, Pipers and reams of others. He's even kept balsa wood models he made as a child before he could afford the kits. He hooked his son, who also makes and flies models.

On his most recent European trip, Schaffner met the curator of a Luxembourg World War II museum. Today, Schaffner's models of a "Long Tom" 155 mm cannon, 105 Howitzer and a military truck are featured in that museum.

Schaffner also flew as a private pilot until a couple of years ago — including flying for the Civil Air Patrol for 20 years. He's a member of the Westminster Aero Modelers Club and often spends his weekends flying his radio-controlled models in a field in Carroll County.

"It's just fun," he said.

"We're very, very proud of him," said his wife. "He's always been a wonderful person, husband, father and grandfather."

Adele Evans is a Phoenix-based freelance writer

