

COMPANY H, 422d INFANTRY

by

2nd Lt. Lewis R. Walker

This is a story of desperate men fighting with fierce valor - a story of sacrifice, of teamwork, of devotion to duty. This issue, which tells of the Company in the opening days of the Battle of the Bulge, will be followed next month with a second installment describing the life and death action on the hillside overlooking Schonberg, Belgium, and later by a third installment about the last two days before the remnants of Co. H were captured on 21 Dec. 1944. The author explains that one of his main purposes in writing the history of his company is to refute the aspersions cast on the 422d Inf. in Robert Merriam's "Dark December".

Our first engagement was about 0500 16 Dec. when a strong enemy combat patrol contacted the Co. G outpost. The squad held off the enemy until reinforcements arrived from company, but not before S/Sgt Arnold W. Almond, H Co's mortar observer, had called for fire on his own outpost. I know that Sgt. Almond called for mortar fire on his own position because I confirmed it with him over the sound power phone, and helped the Instrument corporal compute the fire data. Almond's action retired the enemy but they reappeared later in the morning far stronger in numbers.

At 0700 I took my turn as mortar observer at Co. F outpost. Ten minutes later the OP squad engaged a German patrol - the enemy was forced to withdraw a half hour later, after wounding two men of our outpost squad. At 1000 I was relieved from OP duty, returned to company area, and took over 2d MG Platoon while its regular leader, 1st Lt. Emmitt F. Harman, led a 50-man combat reconnaissance patrol for Col Descheneaux. About 1100, Co. G OP engaged in a serious attack, killing a German officer and several EM, and bringing in a number of prisoners. The enemy patrol was estimated as 200 men. Capt. Kielmeyer of Co. G had eagerly entered the fray and supervised the return of the wounded enemy and prisoners. Curiously, the enemy dead were seen to be wearing light and flimsy clothing, even the officer.

I can throw no light on what happened to the left of the 422d that day, though I knew at the time that there was an 1800 yard unguarded gap to the 14th Cav. Gp.

Exactly at midnight we were routed out, outposts drawn in, battle packs fixed, extra rations handed out and all ammunition that could be found was carried by hand. At 0300 of the 17th we moved toward Schlossenbach. As mortar observer of the 17th for Co. G, I went right to the outskirts of Schlossenbach, where G Co. was protecting 422d Hq. and the regiment's north flank. I have two main memories of that day and night. Everytime I tried to use the little hand radio to contact my mortar section, several rounds of enemy artillery would fire at our location: no one was hurt. That night 1st Lt Robert E. Davis (G's exec) and I tried to sleep in a shelter dug by the Germans and every hour all night we had to ball out the seeping water.

About 1600 the 18th an H Co. runner recalled me to Bn. Hq. to help supervise a move from the Schlossenbach vicinity. Upon return, I learned that 2d Lt. Elmer F. Lange and a Jeep driver had returned to the company's old area, secured some mortar ammunition, all portable food in the kitchen, and some luggage. Up to that time on the 18th the Germans had not occupied the original 2d Bn. area. At that moment, I can recall Lt. Col. William Scales bitterly wishing the battalion had been allowed to fight it out from the old well-dispersed and dug-in positions. We pulled out of Schlossenbach and marched about 6 or 7 miles toward Schonberg.

It was dark when we heard rifle and MG fire ahead in the direction taken by Capt. Stewart and his Co. F along with the 1st MG Plat, of Co. H, I believe toward Radscheid. We never saw those men again. 30 minutes later we learned that all our motor transport, with 18 enemy prisoners, was bogged down somewhere in the mud.

At twilight on the 18th we were surprised and pleased to make contact with Col. Descheneaux and his staff - it had been rumored that we were out of contact with Regt. Hq. We learned that we were to counterattack Schonberg in the morning to free elements of the 331st Med. Bn. and wounded Americans. The regiment moved ahead, pretty much in single file, for several hours in total darkness, my recollection is that 2d Bn. was on the right, 3d Bn. about 800 yards to the left and 1st Bn. to the rear right.

The first realization that I had that we were out of contact with Division was personally hearing Col. Descheneaux ask Lt. Col Scales and his S-3 "where the hell are we?"¹¹ We finally located in a small patch of woods about 2,000 yards northeast of Oberlascheid and were aroused at 0530 19 Dec. My enthusiasm was low due to a painful infection on my leg where the shoe and leggings pinched.

We moved out from the woods at 0615. For the first time, the men openly grumbled about "all the running and no fighting." They, of course, realized we were withdrawing toward St. Vith. The majority of them had a few D rations, although a few had K rations. All had the same ammunition they had brought out with them the 17th.

At 1000 hours, talks were rumored to be mauling the 1st Bn. The 2d Bn. was advancing with E on the left. G on the right, and Hq. Co. as rear guard, with Co. H pretty well in the center prepared to offer heavy weapons support in any direction. We were without Co. F and 1st MG Plat, of H Co., both of which had been lost the night before.

Enemy riflemen or snipers started firing on us as we advanced over turnip and sugar beet fields. One piece of lead ricocheted off the base plate of a mortar I happened to be helping mortar squad SSgt Willis Smythe carry for his squad's relief.

About this time, everyone realized we were well cut off with little hope of immediate supply of ammunition. I am sure that most of us had enough D and K rations to get along several more days without starving. Also about this time the rumor came back to me that E and G Companies did not have forward patrols out and that the Bn. was not maintaining good contact with the 3d and 1st Bns. These rumors have never been confirmed - I have them on hearsay only.

At 1030 the 19th my platoon leader told me that Lt. Col. Scales had said to "throw away" one section of mortars, and my section was selected because it was lowest in strength. I refused to do this, and was advised to see Col Scales myself. He was scarcely 50 yards distant. He agreed that they should be destroyed but had said to "throw away" because that would be noiseless. So

we pulled pins, crushed sights, and buried the base plates, tubes and pods in a stream which would soon corrode them beyond use.

At this point, everyone was milling around. Enemy small arms fire broke up our bunched concentration. T/Sgt. Archer of 2d Bn. Hq was seriously wounded in the right hip, and two exceptionally brave medics carried him to safety up the bare face of a hill. Major Albert A. Ouellette, 2d Bn XO, was wounded freakishly - a bullet glanced off his collar insignia and creased his neck for an inch or so. He carried on effectively and helped Capt. Kielmeyer and Lt. Orton guide Co. G and Hq. Co. over the hill.

SECOND INSTALLMENT

Schonberg was just ahead. Co. E and a platoon of G Co were advancing along a ravine toward the Andler-Schonberg Road. Vehicles were crowded bumper to bumper along this road. We believed them to be 423d vehicles until they opened fire with detonating HE shells. Small arms fire drove us out of the ravine.

Col Scales, Capt Jacobs of Co H, and all other officers had gone on ahead. Lt. Emmitt I. Harman Jr. and I decided to fight it out with what ammunition we had. Harman's machine guns successfully countered small arms to our front, while the remaining four mortars went into action against the self-propelled half-tracks in the valley about 1,900 yards away. All four MG and four mortar crews were without cover or concealment of any kind. They performed heroically. All four MG's and two mortars were put out of action by enemy artillery hits. My mortar observer field glasses were knocked out of my hands by a shell fragment.

T/Sgt Samuel F. Baxter rushed in to man a Jammed MG, and immediate-actioned it, and was killed by a shell fragment, after his MG was blasted from between his legs. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

Lt Harman was killed when aiding seriously wounded S/Sgt Gerald D. Meadows to safety. I can still see Harman standing erect, observing and correcting fire, and then ordering the withdrawal of his men. He also received the Silver Star posthumously.

SSgt^e Raymond F. Jones and Pfc. Carl Aylesworth were reconnoitering a withdrawal route, were killed by small arms fire, and were recommended for the Silver Star. Pfc. Joe D. Benedetto was seriously wounded when he crawled back to his MG to complete its destruction, and was later killed by bombing at Gerolstein on Christmas Eve on the way to POW camp. He too was recommended for the Silver Star.

Sgt Edward Murphy was blinded in one eye by a shell fragment while correcting MG fire. Pfc. Calvin C. Alexander and Lawrence Post completed demolition of Murphy's MG, then carried him to the cover of the brow of a hill some 300 yards away. All three were recommended for the Silver Star.

SSgt Arnold W. Almond set out down a hill to get an enemy machine gun. He

silenced the gun after having tumbled and sprinted downhill for a hundred yards with H3 tracers floating all around him, and miraculously, he was unwounded. This earned him a Silver Star recommended to go with the Bronze Star he had won three days earlier.

2d LT George E. Hammond was killed while observing and correcting fire from a standing position. He received the Bronze Star. T/Sgt. Herbert R. Cassidy calmly took over his duties and supervised the withdrawal of many men over the hill's brow. SSgt. Woodrow W. Moss and SSgt Meadows, along with Cassidy, were recommended for the Silver Star for outstanding bravery and leadership under direct enemy fire. Likewise were SSgt. Lloyd G. Pearsall, SSgt Smythe, and Sgt Hoger B. Martin recommended for decorations for gallant work in this action.

Sgt Charles L. Rizzoli tried to retrieve his squad's MG after TSgt Baxter had been killed, and Rizzoli was killed in the attempt. Tec.5 Hampton, with wild abandon, tried to keep a jammed machine gun going, and checked ammo belts out in the open. Pfc. Perry J. Dupuy and Pfc Ted W. Cathay stuck to their gun until it was shot out from under them. Pupuy, painfully wounded in the leg, helped Cathay demolish the gun and Cathay helped Dupuy over the hill's brow to temporary safety. All were recommended for decorations.

Pfc James L. Meagher, after his weapon was destroyed, flew among the wounded, and although not a medic, was personally responsible for saving the lives of three men. He could have withdrawn to safety, but stayed on the Job until hit by shell fragments. He had turned down a West Point appointment to stay with the 106th. Other men of the 2d MG platoon performed in much the same exemplary way. I mention only those acts of heroism which I personally saw-Like the machine gunners, the mortar men were without cover, on the forward slope of the hill facing Schonberg. Mentioned in the above paragraphs were mortar men Cassidy, Moss, Almond, Pearsall and Smythe. Corporals Edward W. Born, Andres N. Madson, Jr., Irvin K. Brough and Robert I. Snovel, Jr. manned their mortars and scored three hits in eleven rounds at about 2,100 yards, knocking two enemy self-propelled guns out of action and crippling a third.

Each of the above was recommended for the Silver Star, along with the following of their crewmen: Cpl Everett F.

Van Houten, posthumous for Pfc Chrispin L. Miranda, previously awarded the Bronze Star, and killed in the Gerolstein Christmas Eve bombing; Pfc Walter Wowaczyk; Pfc Eugene Paananen; Pfc John H. Niven; Pfc Fred L. Parra; Pfc. Douglas D. Rubnitz; Pfc. Leo Rossin; Pfc Morris Sobel. Others of the 3d Platoon well merited awards for similar courageous acts in that awful half hour that seemed to last an eternity, or was it ten minutes? I was hit twice, in the left arm and left shoulder, while directing mortar fire, but I had time to see that all guns were demolished and all wounded evacuated before being the last man of 2d and 3d platoons to take cover behind the brow of the hill.

The action described above took place about 1100 to 1120 19 Dec. What I found on the other side of the hill was awful. Scores of men were milling

around, many with hands up, others in the act of discarding weapons and ammunition. It became painfully apparent that I was the only officer in the area. Most men crowded around urging surrender, but I couldn't do this and face my own sergeants. A number of E Co. men filtered back to wildly tell about their slaughter and surrender. I had time to notice that we were almost completely encircled by enemy fire.

I led a column of men into a second growth pine woods. Men from the 423d, 81st Engrs., artillery and even AA men began to join my impromptu command when 2d Bn. S-2 1st Lt Hartley and a 2d Lt Wassels of C Co., 422d, appeared. When I felt we had at least eluded the enemy for a short time. Hartley naturally assumed command of the column while I took stock of the men. There were 199 men of 15 different companies and six different basic units. Practically every man had some ammunition for his own weapons. After a couple of hours of movement, we found the 422d Regt. supply base and motor pool and crossed an enemy machine gun field of fire to rejoin it, about 1645 on the evening of the 19th.

Major Ouellette and Major Moon were senior officers. I assumed command of the 96 survivors of Co. H, and took over a sector of the defense. By this time it was dark, I had lost a lot of blood from my minor but free-bleeding wounds, and gladly accepted treatment from 1Lt John D. Shidemantle, M.D., Assistant Bn. Surgeon who was doing magnificent work for the many wounded. TSgt Cassidy, Sgt. Richard L. Russell, and the Co. H Motor sergeant, S/Sgt Richard Thomas, took over for me* Captain Kielmeyer had brought all his officers and 156 EM of Co. G through the hill episode.

The area had been under artillery concentrations, mostly tree bursts. The men dug in as well as they could in the cold oozing mud, and covered their foxholes with branches and earth for protection from cold and from tree bursts. Careful check was made on food. There was enough to deliver two scant but hot meals to all men in the next two days. We were exchanging scattered rifle fire with the enemy in the woods, who were very noisy, probably to try to make us overestimate their numbers. Complete darkness fell. My sergeants came to the log shelter which served as Company CP.

THIRD INSTALLMENT

It was here that I learned of the heroism of S/Sgt. Richard A. Thomas, 39 000 006, in leading patrols that had brought the area a truck and trailer load of food, saved the remnants of the 81st Engr. Company at Auw, scouted out cross-country routes to St. Vith, and attempted to save a captured American officer. For these and later deeds, Sgt. Thomas has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor.

For participation in these actions, Silver Stars were awarded to Tec. 5 Ernest C. Gerry of F Co., and from Co H, Cpl. Herman W. Pace, Cpl. Lawrence J. Doerr, Sgt. Roy J. Jensen, and Cpl. Clyde McDaniel. If I can learn the full name and ASN of Pfc. Potter of Co. H, he too will be a Silver Star wearer.

While In this log shelter, we heard an enemy sound truck open up from a hill across the valley. It demanded our surrender, played popular American songs, and told us how nice it would be to be playing baseball in a prison camp. SSgt. Thomas rounded up a few volunteers, took out a patrol, and one of his men erased the sound truck with a single well-thrown grenade.

All was still well on the morning of the 20th. Increased enemy activity was observed. SSgt. Russell's heavy MG Sec was brought to the top of the hill and crossing fields of fire were set up to command the sky line road which we were astride.

Shortly after noon, Sgt. Thomas went out to a German recon car which approached under a white flag, coming down the Andler-Lauderfeld Road from Schonberg. He brought a German medic and a captured 423d medic to Maj. Ouellette for a meeting. The German non-com requested permission to use the roadnet which we controlled for his ambulances, to evacuate wounded Germans and Americans. Majors Ouellette and Moon decided to send Lt. Houghton, Co. D, 5-22d. along to make sure the enemy didn't use the ambulances (mostly our captured ones) to transfer tactical troops and weapons.

A hold fire order was issued to the men in all sectors of our 1000 yard oval defense until Lt. Houghton returned at 1830. Houghton brought back a German surrender -demand, with an ultimatum of surrender before 2100 hours. He told of artillery trained on our area and of troops poised for instant attack. We heard nothing from Division or higher headquarters during this time, except for radio messages that bad weather made it impossible to fly in food, ammunition or medical supplies.

Maj. Ouellette called a conference of Company Commanders, and recommended surrender because of the uselessness of rifles against tanks and artillery, because of the lack of ammunition reserve and food and medical supplies. Capt. Kielmeyer and I were the only ones who suggested that we continue to resist for another two days in the hopes of planes and help coming to us. The consensus of the meeting was that additional loss of life would be frightfully large and of no help to the general tactical situation.

At 2100 a German officer hostage appeared to extend the hold fire order and to continue dickering. Maj. Ouellette held out to a full surrender at 0800 the 21st, requesting a truck until then. The German argued against this, because he could not guarantee us against attacks from another division bearing down from the north. We took a chance to give our men time to get some sleep, gather what food they could, scrounge extra clothing from all the bags in the area, and for those who felt they could - a chance to escape. Many attempted, as evidenced by small arms fire all night long everywhere but on the east. We were not supposed to damage our weapons, but I think that most were rendered useless, and ammunition was buried in the mud. At 0800 21 Dec 44 several hundred disillusioned men and about four dozen officers assembled in

the gully and were marched to Schonberg through the valley road end woods where the 423d was so badly shot up.

Here Walker's story ends. The editor takes the liberty of quoting from several of Walker's letters, to fill in a few more details. All of the following paragraphs are from Walker, mostly in reply to questions asked by various persons .

Many boys left the motor park that night in the direction of Meyerode. I have no doubts that they are the guerrilla fighters described in "The Incredible Valor of Eric Wood", Saturday Evening Post article of Dec. 20, 1947, by Col R. E. Dupuy.

A Captain Howland of 422d Svc Co took off northeast immediately after the conference. He had fought the Hun in World War I and in North Africa with the 34th Div, We have never heard of him since.

Sgt. Claud E. Brown and Pfc Raymond Obert died of disease and malnutrition in POW Camps. Tec 4 Claud V. Bolding and Pfc. Joe Benedetta and Chrisln L. Miranda died in bombing raids on Christmas Eve while POWs.

Cpl. Thurman Jenkins of Co. H smashed his jeep directly into a German machine gun nest, put the gun out of action, was not wounded, but was captured by the gun's crew. He should be cited for bravery, but I can't find anyone who saw it first hand for affidavits.

Two medics have not been mentioned for their bravery - Pfc. Wayne Mentair, attached to Co. G has been mentioned by many of my men, but I haven't been able to get affidavits from those who saw his feats. Tec 4 Marly Hall, attached to 2d Plat, Co. H, has received the Belgian Croix de Guerre and has been recommended for the Silver Star for heroic acts on the hill on the 19th and for later acts on the long prisoner march. SSgt Richard A. Thomas has also received the palm for the Croix de Guerre, and TSgt. Samuel Baxter also received this coveted decoration, but posthumously.

In closing this stark tale told by Walker, we are inserting two other quotes from a penciled note to Herb Livesey more than a year ago, "Thomas was the real hero of Co. H, though many men of our company do not realize it. But all the men were magnificent.

"No doubt your records show that the writer was awarded the Silver Star for the work his men did for him. I only wish I could have deserved it more."

Headquarters First Army
Fort Bragg, N. C.

19 January 1946
General Orders
Number 9

Award of Silver star----- I
Award of purple Heart----- II
Revocation, Section I, GO 6---- III

I - Award OF SILVER STAR--Under the provisions of AR 600-45, 22 September 1943, as amended, and pursuant to the authority contained in paragraph 3c, Section I, Circular 32, Headquarters European Theater of Operations, United States Army, 20 March 1944, as amended, the Silver Star is awarded to the following officer:
Second Lieutenant Lewis W. Walker, O-1051429, Infantry, 422d Infantry, United States Army. For gallantry in action against the enemy on 19 December 1944, in Belgium. During a desperate enemy counter-attack which caught his men in an exposed position, Second Lieutenant Walker, standing upright in the face of overwhelming odds, delivered fire on the enemy, enabling his men to take covered positions. From his exposed position, he continued to direct accurate fire, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, until the supply of ammunition in his platoon was exhausted. Second Lieutenant Walker, although wounded, then directed an orderly withdrawal and supervised resupply and medical treatment of his men. Only then did he himself submit to medical treatment. The heroic action of Second Lieutenant Walker reflected great credit upon himself and the military service. Entered military service from California.

II – Award of Purple Heart—Under the provisions of AR 600-45, 22 September 1943, as amended, the purple Heart is awarded to the following officer for wounds received as a result of enemy action:

Major Harold O. Prudell, O-26842, Corps of Chaplains, Fifth Infantry Division, United States Army, on 15 July 1944, in France. Entered military service from Wisconsin.

III - REVOCATION, SECTION I, GO 8—So much of Section I, General Orders Number 8, this "Headquarters, dated 18 January 1946, as awards the Distinguished service Cross to Second Lieutenant Lewis W. Walker, O-1051429, Infantry, 422d Infantry, United States Army, is revoked.

By Command of General Hodges:

W. B. Kean
Major General, GSC
Chief of Staff

OFFICIAL:
Raymond Stone, Jr.
Colonel, AGD
Adjutant General

Headquarters First Army
Fort Bragg, N. C.

25 Jan 1946

200.6 Walker, Lewis . (GNMKA)

Subject: Award of Silver Star

To: Second Lieutenant Lewis W. Walker, O-1051429, Infantry, United States Army.

Under the provisions of my Regulations 600-45, as amended, you are awarded a Silver Star for gallantry in action as set forth in the following:

CITATION

Second Lieutenant Lewis W. Walker, O-1051429, Infantry 422d Infantry, United States Army. For gallantry in action against the enemy on 19 December 1944 in Belgium. During a desperate enemy counter-attack which caught his men in an exposed position, Second Lieutenant Walker, standing upright in the face of overwhelming odds, delivered fire on the enemy enabling his men to take covered positions. From his exposed position he continued to direct accurate fire³ inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy, until the supply of ammunition in his platoon was exhausted. Second lieutenant Walker, although wounded, then directed an orderly with-drawal and supervised resupply and medical treatment of his men. Only then did he himself submit to medical treatment. The heroic action of Second Lieutenant Walker reflected great credit upon himself and the military service. Entered military service from California.

Courtney H. Hodges,
General, U. S. Army
Commanding