EIGHT MILES TO ST. VITH

Recollections of the 106th Recons

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the early 1940's we were called to war, 16.2 million of us. We went off to be transformed into soldiers, sailors and marines, and to do a job that had to be done which happened to fall upon our generation. We trained, we fought and many of us died. For many, including myself, it was an extraordinary adventure and a cruel experience all rolled into one. When the war was won most of us who survived returned home to become civilians again. I went off to Dartmouth College at the expense of a grateful nation. We students were almost all veterans and it was an unspoken rule at college that one didn't talk much or deeply about one's war experiences, at least not the bad parts. It was time to move on.

Now, more than fifty years after the war, we veterans of World War II are often referred to as "heroes." Most of us were simply ordinary young men and women who were stirred by feelings of patriotism and who, when called upon, served our country as best we could.

My children have asked me to record my personal story of this experience—one which they have never really heard. The process of this writing has raked up memories and emotions long buried which are both gratifying and painful. Here then is the story. It is not only my story. It is based upon my memories and those of the 26 members of the 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop whom I have been able to reach by telephone in recent months. It is an incomplete mosaic but one which I believe captures the main essentials of the story.

I wish to acknowledge with sincere thanks the tireless efforts of John Kline of the 106th Infantry Division Association and Dick Beltz of the 106th Recons Group in helping members of the 106th keep in touch. I also wish to acknowledge with special thanks the help of Josef Reusch and his family in providing me with maps and photos of Grosslangenfeld. Josef and Mia Reusch and their English-speaking daughters, Margaret and Anita, were born and raised in Grosslangenfeld. Their 250-year-old house lies a few yards west of the "Y". Josef, at age seventeen, served in the 560th Volksgrenadier Division in the Battle of the Bulge. I am grateful to the men of the 106th Recons whose recollections not only contributed greatly to this story but gave me great pleasure in our many conversations. I owe a big debt of gratitude to my wife, Marjorie, for her help and encouragement in what turned out to be a far greater endeavor than I originally anticipated.

INDUCTION

I graduated from high school in June of 1942 one month before my eighteenth birthday. I wanted to enlist upon graduation but in 1942 young men could be drafted when they turned eighteen yet could not voluntarily enlist until age twenty-one unless they obtained parental consent. For several years my mother had stoutly maintained that it would kill her if I were ever sent to war and she refused to give her permission for my enlistment,which might have enabled me to choose my branch of service. My father wouldn't go against her wishes, so I couldn't enlist. Instead, in March of 1943 I received my draft notice and orders to proceed to an army medical facility in Detroit for my physical and induction into the Army. I took a train from Pontiac to Detroit and to a whole new world.

I arrived at the medical examination center at mid-morning and was handed a pair of cardboard slippers and was told to strip completely. I entered a huge warehouse-like room without partitions where several hundred completely naked young men were grouped in lines of ten to twenty at various stations. Separate doctors at each station performed examinations of us from head to toe. After the physical we were directed back to our clothing. We dressed, and in groups of fifty or so, were herded into a side room with an American flag, told to raise our right hands, took the oath of induction and were told, "You're in the Army, men!"

In due course I reported for duty at Camp Custer, Michigan. We were measured for clothing. Soldiers behind counters took from shelves the appropriate olive drab woolen shirts and trousers, khaki shirts and trousers, khaki cotton shorts and undershirts, long johns, socks, khaki handkerchiefs, khaki tie, woolen and cotton caps, and a heavy long woolen overcoat that weighed a ton. In one building we took off our shoes and socks and stood on a measuring board while we lifted a bucket of sand in each hand. A supply sergeant measured our feet, called out the shoe size, and then a supply clerk took two pairs of army shoes from amongst thousands behind the counter and handed them to us. I recall the heavy smell of mothballs in the clothing sheds.

We were given a duffel bag for packing our new clothing and a cardboard box for shipping our civilian clothes home. That day or the next we lined up to enter various buildings for our inoculations. We were greeted by others who had been just ahead of us and had received their shots and were coming out of the building. We were cheered on by cries of, "Watch out for that

needle with the hook on the end!" We received our shots standing up and moved along. Occasionally some guy would pass out. They would bring him to, complete the injection and send him on his way. The toughening process had begun. That night I slept in a two-story barracks with about fifty complete strangers. The windows were open and I can remember being cold in my shoulders. Pajamas were out for the duration; we slept in our shorts.

The next day we were told to dress in our woolen shirts and trousers and were marched over to buildings where we were given tests for intelligence and vocabulary. We were interviewed to determine whether we had any specialized training in civilian life such as fire fighting, police work, radio repair, vehicle repair and such. Also we were given a test where short sets of dots and dashes were played to us on earphones immediately followed by more dots and dashes. We had to indicate whether the second set was the same as the first.

Next morning a large contingent of us boarded a train reserved for us. The cars were old and had wicker seats. The backs could be flipped backward and forward, depending on the direction of the train's movement. Every seat was occupied and we rode in these seats night and day for the next several days. We could open the windows. This let in plenty of air together with grit and smoke from the coal-burning engine. A sergeant was in command and we were accompanied by a couple of cooks who prepared our meals. I don't recall the eating arrangements. The only washing facilities were the single wash basins in the toilet at the end of each of the cars.

The train would stop from time to time, probably to take on coal and water or to change crews or engines but we weren't permitted to get out and have a look around. It started to grow warmer. One time we pulled off the main line and stopped for a couple of hours. Then a slow train moving in the same direction on the main track passed by. It was loaded with cattle. When it had cleared we immediately backed up and onto the main line and started forward again. We saw how valuable to the war effort we really were at that time.

I later read that the Army inducted men before there was enough equipment to get their groups up to fighting strength. President Roosevelt felt it was important for the American people to be sending their men off to the military to give them a greater sense that the country was moving ahead with prosecuting the war even though the military wasn't yet ready to utilize all of them.

FORT JACKSON

Hot, sweaty and gritty we finally arrived at our destination: Fort Jackson, South Carolina. We carried our duffel bags off the train and were formed up and marched to an adjacent parade ground. A sergeant read off our names — his struggle with pronunciation was a massacre — and we were collected into several groups. Most of the men went into three large groupings which I found out later were men headed for the three infantry regiments of the division, the 422nd, 423rd, and 424th. There were a few very tiny groups. I was in one of these. Eventually a GI truck came to pick up our small group. We anxiously asked the driver where we were headed. The driver said we were to be part of the Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop of the 106th Infantry Division, the "Golden Lion" Division.

We drove past hundreds of two-story wooden barracks, all exactly alike, and finally stopped at one barracks group. I don't recall but assume we were sent to showers and told to put on class A summer uniforms. Then we were taken over to the orderly room where we were met by First Sergeant Gabriel Johnson, who had "Old Army" written all over him. He told us we were going to report to the troop commander, Captain Ralph E. Kuzell. He was a West Pointer and we had better do it right.

The drill was as follows: we were to knock at the troop commander's door, wait to be ordered to enter, enter on command, close the door behind us, advance three paces, salute as Sergeant Johnson showed us, hold the salute until the captain returned it, then drop the salute smartly, and say, "Sir, Private So and So reports to the troop commander as ordered." We were not to say, "Reporting for duty." You're not in the movies! At the end of the interview the captain would say, "Do you have any questions ?" or some such thing and when the interview was over we would again salute, hold it until returned, do an about face, leave, and close the door.

If we did not do it right we would be sent out by the captain for further instruction on how to report correctly, and he, Sergeant Johnson, would be extremely unhappy. Each interview would take about ten minutes. We were told the order in which we would be called. We waited outside the building within earshot and since I was towards the end of the list, I went around the corner and kept repeating the procedure. I wanted to be sure to get it right especially because I hoped eventually to get an officer's commission and wanted to make a good initial impression.

In due course Sergeant Johnson came out and said, "O.K., Private Bombar, you're next." With my heart in my throat I knocked, went in, and reported correctly. The captain sat behind a small desk in a small bare room. Seated beside him was a 2nd lieutenant who I found out later was the acting Executive Officer, Lt. Henry Malone. Kuzell was a small, apple-cheeked, blond young man in his mid twenties with a slightly sunburned face. He eyed me carefully as I stood to attention. He didn't smile but he wasn't unfriendly. He opened my folder and examined the papers. In an aside he discussed a few points under his breath with the 2nd lieutenant including the fact that usually the scores on the vocabulary test were close to the level of those of the intelligence test. He said to me that I had scored high on my radio aptitude test and he planned to make me a radio operator. I said, "Fine, Sir," or words to that effect and then added, "Eventually, Sir,"— I hesitated and he said, "Yes?" — " I would like to go to Officer Training School." He said, "Now we call it Officer Candidate School." He looked again at my file and said, "You have the intelligence for it; I'll keep my eye on you. That's all." I saluted, held it for his acknowledging salute, turned about face, left, and closed the door behind me. I was on my way to becoming a soldier.

The army took over our lives. It toughened our bodies and our psychological outlook. Above all the Army taught us to respect our officers and obey orders. As General George C. Marshall testified in Congressional hearings covering President Truman's firing of General Douglas McArthur during the Korean War: the first duty of a soldier is to obey orders; this must be ingrained in a soldier until it is almost like an instinct — be he a private or a five-star general.

We learned "military courtesy". Enlisted men had to salute officers and the salute was to be held until officers returned the salute which they in turn were by courtesy obliged to do. When addressing an officer one had always to say "Sir" or his rank. Officers had to address and salute officers of higher rank in similar fashion.

Everything was shot through with the imperative that we were at all times to show special respect for officers and to act in accordance with their orders. The gulf between commissioned officers and enlisted men was deliberately impressed upon us by every means known to man. Officers were held to a stricter military code of conduct by army regulations. Officers earned more money. Their dress uniforms were different and had more style and distinction than those of enlisted men. Officers lived in separate quarters and

ate at separate messes. On post they sat in separate sections at movies and there were separate officer clubs. Wherever feasible, things were separate and, wherever possible, better for officers. Bill Malden drew a famous sarcastic cartoon illustrating this point.

"Beautiful view. Is there one for the enlisted men?"

Being bright, ambitious, and confident, it's little wonder then that I wanted to become a 2nd lieutenant and felt I could handle the added responsibility that a commission would entail. I came reasonably close to doing so only to be frustrated for reasons I shall describe later.

The 106th Infantry Division was formed in early 1943. Our trainload of raw recruits was one of the first contingents to arrive to begin to fill the enlisted ranks. There was already a key framework of officers and senior non-commissioned officers in place. These were experienced men drawn from other outfits. The troop was soon filled out with a few more officers including 1st Lieutenant John Ball, our Executive Officer, and a few additional non-coms, but mostly with raw recruits.

I was assigned to the 2nd Platoon with 2nd Lt. Henry Malone as Platoon Leader. Staff Sergeant Roy Mechling was my Platoon Sergeant. Mechling was a tall sinewy man, a tough, capable platoon sergeant. All three of our line platoon sergeants were capable and all three went overseas with us. In 1st Platoon, where I eventually ended up, was Staff Sergeant Howard Tucker, a very fine soldier who had been a truck driver in civilian life. In the 3rd Platoon was Staff Sergeant James E. Smith. Each platoon was under the command of a 2nd lieutenant but the platoon sergeants actually handled most of the day-to-day aspects of our training. There was a 4th platoon, called the Headquarters Platoon, with 1st Sergeant Johnson, an orderly room clerk, a Supply Sergeant with clerks, a Mess Sergeant with three or four cooks and kitchen men, and a Motor Sergeant with three or four mechanics, a Communications Sergeant, a couple of armorers and several drivers.

A cavalry reconnaissance troop was an elite group in an infantry division. Its size was somewhat smaller than an infantry company which numbered about 200. We were 6 officers and 149 men. Each man was permanently assigned to a vehicle whereas the infantry normally marched or were transported by trucks not organic to the Division.

Each infantry company was commanded by a captain and was part of an infantry battalion commanded by a lieutenant colonel and each battalion in turn was part of an infantry regiment commanded by a "bird" colonel who reported to the two-star major general commanding the division. Our recon troop was commanded by a captain also, but he reported directly to division headquarters. This gave the commanding officer of a recon troop in an infantry division a unique position of responsibility and authority over his officers and men. His isolated command was much less subject to the close

supervision of those above him and to the reinforcement of his peers in neighboring units. In a certain sense his command authority was more akin to that of an infantry colonel than an infantry company commander.

In our training we didn't work closely with the infantry regiments. Our training was specialized and completely separate. I knew only one guy in the 106th infantry regiments: Johnny Benson. His father owned the biggest lumber yard in Pontiac, Michigan, and Johnny and I went to junior high school and high school together. We were never particularly close but looked each other up a few times in basic training at Fort Jackson. He eventually managed to get a transfer into the Army Air Corps. Shortly after the war I saw him at his father's lumber yard one day; he was on crutches with one leg off at the hip. He had become a member of a bomber crew. They crashed on take off during a training mission and he had contracted gangrene in a leg broken in the crash.

At 6 a.m. our troop bugler, Mike Liskiewicz, woke us with reveille and this was inevitably followed in our barracks by Homer McBride crying out ... "Rise and shine. Drop your cocks and grab your socks." We quickly threw on our clothes without washing and formed up outside for morning roll call. After the platoons were reported as "all present or accounted for" we were dismissed and went back into the barracks to wash. Then we went to the mess hall for breakfast. (Our Mess Sergeant, Al Smitherman, served several barely edible dishes, his morning speciality being green scrambled eggs made from powdered eggs.)

Next we had "police call" when we all lined up and walked slowly across the troop compound side by side with orders to pick up everything larger than a half a match stick. Then our morning training would begin. I seemed often to be among the last to fall out and that sometimes got me in trouble.

One of our first morning lectures was on venereal diseases. First we had a talk from the division chaplain urging us to refrain from non-marital sexual intercourse. This was followed by the division medical officer who also urged us to keep it in our pants but then proceeded to give us instructions on how to use prophylactic kits which contained condoms and other things. For the first few months we were issued these kits whenever we went out on pass.

The medical officer impressed upon us the seriousness of contracting a venereal disease. It was emphasized that not only was this a danger to ourselves but also to the other men in our outfit. Anyone infected would be

restricted to barracks until cured and infected non-coms would be busted to private. Ever vigilant, the army provided that all men except officers and senior non-coms were subject to "short-arm" inspections at irregular intervals every week or two. These "Pecker Parades" occurred in the barracks. We stripped naked, donned our raincoats, lined up and passed before one of our officers or medics. We stood before the examiner and were obliged to strip the skin of the penis back to reveal the head and foreskin interior and then to pinch our penis at the base and milk it down in order to see if any secretion from gonorrhea was present.

To my knowledge no infection was ever found and it was just one of the stupid indignities to which enlisted men were obliged to submit. It was a holdover from the days of the peace time army between the two World Wars when enlisted men were generally social rejects ("From Here to Eternity" and all that). In those days nice girls from middle class families rarely went out with soldiers; they were socially unacceptable. Consequently enlisted men generally wore civilian clothes when going out on pass in order to conceal that they were soldiers. Shortly after the war began all military personnel were required to be in uniform when appearing in public. The only exception was during sports activities where other appropriate clothing was allowed.

In that connection there was a well-publicized case in the British army in the Far East regarding an officer who was apprehended by the military police while running down a hotel lobby after a young woman. Both were totally naked. The Judge Advocate could not bring charges against the officer for unseemly behavior under the British military code, so he was brought up for being out of uniform. However, being an officer and a gentleman, he was completely exonerated: found not guilty because he had been in the appropriate uniform for the sport in which he was engaged.

It was impressed upon us by Captain Kuzell that we were a cavalry reconnaissance troop, and as such we had to have more specialized training and had to maintain a higher standard than the foot soldier in the infantry regiments whose main job was to learn how to march long distances carrying a rifle and pack and be fit to fight. Having less time for physical conditioning due to our heavy schedule of training classes we ran every morning in formation for a half hour instead of marching long distances.

PERSONALITIES

The early days in the Army were certainly a new social experience. We were thrown together with all sorts of people, sleeping side-by-side, using an open row of toilet bowls side-by-side, shaving and brushing teeth at basins side-by-side (although in my case I had no real need to shave more than once a week for the first year or so). We showered together and of course we ate together. For some men showers were a novelty.

We had some noteworthy characters. There was Homer McBride from Danville, West Virginia. He was a nice guy and he claimed he had spent time in the county jail. Homer could recite dirty limericks non-stop for an hour at a time. He also had allegedly spent some time in the army or national guard and had a full brimmed hat from that experience . He wore it on occasion. He had a face that reflected years of childhood poverty. He could grind his yellowed teeth so loudly that it could be heard almost from one end of the barracks to the other and his snoring was so loud we could sometimes hear it outside if the windows were wide open.

Ed Fleming tells of trouble Homer got into with his loud snoring. It was a hot summer afternoon and Homer and Ed were doing preventative maintenance on their vehicles. They were both scout car drivers. Scout cars were the armored open trucks we used before we were issued armored cars which were more like tanks on wheels. Fleming and McBride were in the motor shed which was an open-sided building in the middle of the troop compound. They were underneath their vehicles with clean-up rags and a few wrenches for tightening loosened bolts.

Homer had crooked his arm around part of the under carriage so that from a distance it looked as though he were busy. He had on his broad brimmed hat. Captain Kuzell happened to be walking by in the compound and heard snoring. He approached the two vehicles. Fleming could see a pair of cavalry boots and heard, "Buffalo Bill, come out from under there!" in a deep voice that could only be Kuzell's. Homer, startled, said, "Yes, Sir" and slid out from under the scout car. Kuzell asked, "Where did you get that hat?" Homer replied he had worn it during his earlier stretch in the army. Kuzell said, "Well, you won't wear it in this outfit!... and did I hear your motor running?" Homer said, "Why, no, Sir!" "Well see that I don't!" replied Kuzell and walked away.

There was little Isadore Breenberg, one of my favorites, a tiny Jewish boy from the Bronx who would often describe some seemingly illogical undertaking we were forced to engage in as "shit for the boids." He had done a little recreational boxing and gave me a few lessons. I believe he was shipped out — probably as an overseas replacement — while I was away from the troop going to Communications School.

There was Cal Iezzi, an earthy Italo-American boy who made buck sergeant in our 1st Platoon. He sometimes used to call me "Bombatzz" and laugh like hell. I think it meant something dirty in Neapolitan slang. He would occasionally give me hell for not buttoning every damned button on every damned shirt hanging up behind my bed. I always felt that if the shirt in front was buttoned that was enough. It was, but he was right. The army wanted every button buttoned.

There was a sweet-natured guy named Ken Brown who had worked as a guide in the Maine woods. Once in a while he would sound off at some senseless indignity he was being forced to endure. (The technical word for such indignities was "chicken shit", an expression frequently employed.) Sometimes we would tease him while he was sounding off. Someone in the barracks would sing out the question, "What's the color of horseshit?" and we would in unison roar, "Brown, Brown, Brown!"

There was a jeep driver, J.D. Frazee, whom we used to tease about his romantic pursuits. He was a bit of an imp and Tucker was always on his case. I could see why. For example on maneuvers he was driving Lt. Haines one day and they came to a river they needed to cross. They saw a stack of pontoon bridge sections at the river's edge and a group of combat engineers waiting around for orders. They saw Haines and Frazee pull up nearby. Haines left Frazee and the jeep for a few minutes and Frazee drove down to the waters edge and said to the group, "Lt. Haines says for you to lay that bridge across." The engineers put the bridge across and Captain Kuzell came along and asked the engineers who authorized the bridge. They said it was Lt. Haines of the Recons. Kuzell found Haines and told him he shouldn't have done that, in combat the engineers would have probably taken heavy casualties at that stage of things. Haines never told Kuzell he had not given the order and that it was Frazee who did so without his authorization. Frazee really respected Haines for that. Haines was much liked by the men in his platoon.

There was Roy Kulke, mid-thirties, who had been a fireman. He had a wife and children and was more mature than most of us. He was a practical man and was made a buck sergeant very early. But he lost his stripes for overstaying a home furlough and tried hard to get a discharge because of family responsibilities.

Bill Fritz was a cheerful man who would do an impresario act pretending to hold a hand microphone and with fanfare he would extend his mike hand over into J.D. Frazee's face saying, "Take it away, J.D.!" He kept us smiling.

There was a guy from the border states named Russell Ramsey, a rosy cheeked man who always wore a smile and insisted that his sun-tans be carefully pressed. He also promoted the idea that our sun-tan shirts should be sewn on each side so that they fitted snugly to our bodies. He smoked but never carried any cigarettes and would constantly be dunning his friends for cigarettes. His question was always, "Got a Lucky?" He alleged he never smoked any brand but Lucky Strikes.

There was a Brooklyn barber named Messina in the 2nd Platoon. He would not help with the Friday night barracks cleanup but would set up shop in the washroom and cut some of the guys' hair — and expect to get paid for it. I observed that he ought to do it free of charge or cut hair after the barracks had been cleaned. I didn't like him much. Messina was a malingerer and, finally, when in the autumn of 1944 it was announced that we would be shipping overseas, he put on a big act of wetting his bed and breaking down and crying on the phone in the orderly room to his mommy. We mistakenly thought the Army gave him a "Section 8" (psychological) discharge which was OK with us. Who would want a guy like that next to you when the shooting started. After the war we learned the Army had shipped him overseas with another outfit.

We also had a young man named Bob Fisher. I thought he was the best soldier among the enlisted men in the outfit. He had a natural affinity for soldiering and made buck sergeant rapidly. His father had been (or was) a colonel in the army. I was not at all surprised to learn that eventually he made his career in the Army and ended up as a full colonel.

And there was the mischievous Ed Fleming, who was Mechling's driver. At Fort Jackson he boxed a little for the outfit in the divisional bouts. He won his first bout by a technical knockout. He was a wonderful mimic and could do a great gorilla act by hunching over, shuffling along with his arms hanging

down and his knuckles almost touching the ground. He put on his act as he entered the ring, the length of his arms exaggerated by the boxing gloves. His opponent turned white and declared, "I ain't gonna fight that guy!"

Fleming was a great vocal mimic also. Captain Kuzell had a very deep voice which got especially deep when he was summoning someone for an accounting, officers as well as men. Fleming had it down pat and dropping his voice to a growl, he would regale us with typical Kuzell commentary such as, "You men have got to get on the ball!"

One day, on a break, there were several of us including Fleming relaxing behind our barracks in the shade. It was a hot summer day. The windows were open and we heard Lt. Edward McGee, who lead the 1st Platoon, talking to people inside. Fleming growled in the deep voice of Kuzell, "Lieutenant McGee!" McGee, startled, answered from inside, "Yes, yes, Captain," and tore out of the barracks around to the back. Instead of finding Kuzell he found Fleming looking angelically to the sky while the rest of us were splitting our sides. McGee said, "Fleming, one of these days I'm going to kill you." Eventually Kuzell got wind of the episode and made some humorous reference to it.

Our troop commander, Captain Ralph Kuzell, was a graduate of West Point and a professional officer to his fingertips. He was demanding but fair and he was not without humor. He pushed us hard but on balance I would say he lifted us more than drove us to excel — both his junior officers and the enlisted men.

One morning during the very early stages of our basic training he observed us doing calisthenics, including pushups. He apparently watched me closely doing my pushups. I could do only sixteen. He said to me, "Private Bombar, you'll have to do a lot better than that by the time your basic training is completed. I promised I would. I did them morning, noon and night. I even did them when I was on furlough. When we were tested on physical fitness by Division inspectors three months later at the end of basic training I squeezed out thirty-three which gave me a score of ninety nine percent. As I looked up after doing them there was Kuzell standing over me with a pleased smile on his face.

He told us our troop scored next to highest in physical fitness in the Division, beaten out only by one of the regimental companies which specialized in physical fitness. The regiments, vying with each other for first

place, had each packed one of their companies with the best athletes in that particular regiment. He said that's what we were up against and he was damned proud of us.

He bought the troop a keg of beer which we all had in the mess hall. The officers, including Kuzell, were there seated just around behind a refrigerator. Kuzell was just out of sight. As the beer kept flowing, the guys began egging Fleming on to do his "Kuzell act." Fleming held back for a while but as the beer continued to flow and with the urging of his buddies he growled out, "First Sergeant Johnson, move the men over to the motor shed." He waited anxiously for any adverse reaction. Lt. Malone came by a few minutes later and reported, "The Captain said, 'He does it better than I do!' "

I recall one of the rare occasions when Kuzell and I were walking alone in the troop area. It was very early in basic training. As we walked along he looked at me and said, "Private Bombar, straighten up, pull in your stomach and keep your head higher as you walk." I said, "Yes, Sir, I'll try." He said, "Don't try, do it!"

Early in our Basic Training period, Lt. Joe Haines was Platoon Leader of the 1st Platoon. Joe told me recently that Kuzell called him in one day and said "Lieutenant Haines, tell me the names of the men in your platoon." Joe replied he knew all their faces and most of their names but he couldn't tell him the name of every man. Without blinking an eye, Kuzell said, "You are relieved of command of the 1st Platoon." Kuzell knew that Haines had the right stuff and he later assigned him command of the 2nd Platoon. But he was always striving to get his people to improve their performance. I suspect he was more demanding of his officers than he was of the enlisted men.

We had a big raw-boned, flamboyant 2nd Lieutenant named Joseph F. Johnson who was known to take a drink now and then. He was known as "The Moose." He was a big overgrown college boy and he had a lot of flair. He swaggered when he marched alongside our column in his nonchalant step-in field boots into which his trouser cuffs were tucked. He exuded confidence. He had the opportunity to discipline me mildly on a couple of occasions but I had it coming and liked the guy. I thought he was a good officer and he was fun.

Kuzell must have liked him too. He eventually promoted him to 1st Lieutenant. He almost got into a ringer one time. Joe Haines told me recently that while we were on Tennessee maneuvers Johnson went into

Nashville one Saturday night. Going through a revolving door at the entrance of some establishment Johnson encountered a lethargic officer on the opposite side who was poking along slowing Johnson down slightly. Johnson gave the door a shove that hurried his counterpart along. To Johnson's horror he caught a glimpse of the other officer and saw he had two stars; it was the division commander, Major General Alan W. Jones. Johnson just kept on going through and out the rear door of the establishment and apparently Jones did not recognize him. Johnson had his eye on becoming a captain and figured he would never make it in our troop so he arranged for a transfer.

TRAINING

At a very early stage we were taught our right foot from our left and how to march in formation by Sergeant Richard Beltz. Whenever a group of us moved from one place to another we did it marching in formation. We learned the intricacies of close-order drill. Beltz was our Communications Sergeant and eventually, before we went overseas, he was transferred to work as a radio sergeant in North Africa with the O.S.S. contacting French Resistance groups inside France.

We had almost daily sessions in stripping, cleaning and reassembling weapons. Most of us were armed with carbines. They were smaller than the M-1 Garrand rifles which most infantrymen carried and they were easier to store in our vehicles. But they weren't much use when we were fighting as infantry.

Toward the end of basic training we camped out at the firing range for a week where we learned how to shoot our personal weapons. At the first go I had trouble getting my carbine sighted in well and I missed quite a few targets and had to repeat training a few weeks later. Then I did quite well, earning a marksman medal.

We also learned how to handle and throw fragmentation hand grenades. We were shown how to take one in our hand making sure to keep the releasing spring lever tightly against the body of the grenade with our clenched fist. Our instructor would move around the corner of our trench and give the command to pull the pin that kept the spring lever safely against the grenade. We threw them not like a baseball but overhand like a cricket ball. In mid-air the spring lever flew off thereby igniting the fuse, and in three or four seconds the thing would go off with a bang sending grenade

fragments whizzing overhead sounding like a passing swarm of hornets as we ducked down in our trench. At the beginning of our hand grenade training Sgt. Tucker brought one into the barracks to show some of the men in his platoon. Unknown to the men this was a teaching grenade with no powder. As he explained to the group gathered round him how you pulled the safety pin so that the spring lever would be able to fly off, he pulled the pin and accidentally dropped the grenade on the floor. As the spring lever flew off, it began bouncing around on the floor. It was like a fox in the hen coop with chickens flying in all directions.

In the blazing summer sun creeping and crawling was hot work on the sands of South Carolina. The sand was so hot that we wore heavy long-sleeved coveralls because our elbows would be burned if we touched the sand with our bare skin for long.

We would cradle our weapons in the crooks of our elbows to keep them free from sand as we crawled. It was particularly hard to creep with the firing chamber and barrel of a . 30-caliber "light " machine gun. They were rather heavy and they picked up a lot of heat on the metal too. We learned to set these up in the sand on their separate tripods, load them with ammo carried in metal cartridge boxes, and simulate firing them. It was such hot work that the sweat would pour down my face, and my eyeglasses would often end up covered with a mixture of sweat and sand. Finally, I quit wearing them; I could see about as well without them.

Eventually we went out on the firing range with our machine guns and one man would fire the gun while another would sprawl on his left feeding the ammo belt into the chamber. Our instructors taught us to pre-set the aiming mechanism and to use the ratchet adjustments and to fire in short bursts of three or four. Otherwise the gun would jump around because of the recoil and scatter our fire and sometimes jam if overheated. It was tough, acting as assistant gunner, feeding the ammo into the chamber. Your right ear was several inches away from the firing chamber and each time the gun went off it felt as if you were being hit in the ear with a fist. My right ear had something knocked loose and still rings a little with certain sounds.

We had training in bayonet drill, knife fighting and unarmed hand-to-hand combat. We had sessions on how to detect poison gas and fit gas masks, how to read maps, how to use a compass, how to dig fox holes, how to move on foot patrols keeping to the shadows and avoiding being silhouetted on the skyline while constantly searching for likely enemy positions in the shadows.

We learned to camouflage our positions and vehicles with freshly cut branches. They had to be fresh. We learned to straddle a slit trench latrine. We learned to urinate against a tree at night to avoid making noise and how to stop a sneeze.

Once in a while we drew special duty and couldn't go into town but it wasn't much of a privation while we were at Fort Jackson because nearby Columbia, South Carolina, was knee deep in soldiers from our huge army camp and airmen from an air corps base nearby. It wasn't much of an escape from the army. One evening through the U.S.O. I spent the evening with several other soldiers at the gracious home of a cultured southern dowager who proceeded to tell us what a skunk Abraham Lincoln was.

Malone turned out to be a very poor officer. I believe he got his commission through the ROTC program in college which produced some very good officers but also some poor ones. Kuzell soon grew exasperated with Malone. He was an embarrassing screw-up.

On one notable occasion the troop had a night compass-reading problem. Each platoon had to go on foot from one assigned position to another by compass. Malone managed to misread his compass or his map (or both) and we missed our objective badly. Kuzell was wandering around looking for Malone and the platoon. Finally he found him and in a deep voice that could be heard a mile away by the entire troop he thundered, "Lieutenant Malone, you were due here an hour ago; where in hell have you been?"

Eventually Malone had to be relieved of command of the 2nd Platoon and when we began to go on field exercises he was left behind with a private or two to guard the barracks bags — normally the job for a corporal. Later in the summer at Camp Atterbury he was killed together with John Heil. They were in the open turret of an armored car returning from a field problem along an ordinary dirt road. It veered off the road, flipped over and crushed them both.

We had parade ground inspections every Saturday morning. One Saturday morning as our training was well underway we were told to prepare for a very special weekly inspection. We were to be inspected by the division commander, Major General Alan W. Jones. I remember he passed through the ranks barely looking to right or left. I clearly recall the disappointment I felt as I had a close look at him. He lacked the firm, taut look of a good military man. He seemed to just be going through the motions but with no

interest in binding himself to us as our leader. He was not a very inspiring officer. Under him the division never did develop a particularly high degree of unit pride. In combat he proved to be deficient and was relieved of his command by General Matthew Ridgeway. We Recons had a high sense of pride in ourselves as a troop but that was entirely due to Kuzell.

One morning Kuzell himself gave us a noteworthy lecture. He reviewed for us the various aspects of the training we were going through. And then he asked, "What ultimately am I training you for? I am training you men to become professional murderers! You must prepare for this. We will be sending you out there in battle to kill other men who will try to kill you. Keep that in mind and strive your utmost to profit from your training. You will need it." That really got our attention.

Slowly but inexorably, day by day, week by week we were becoming soldiers with a linguistically coarsened outer shell and a psychologically hard bitten inner core that civilians do not have. It was to accept tasks you didn't always agree with, to endure hardship, to kill other men as a grim necessity, and first, last and always, to obey the orders of your officers — above all, your commanding officer!

At the conclusion of our three months of basic training, Captain Kuzell recommended Dale Sweet, Bob Fisher, Charles Lucas, myself and perhaps a couple of others for Officer Candidate School. I listed Cavalry as my first choice and Infantry as my second. We went before a review board. I passed the board and was waiting for orders to go that never came. It seems the army began to issue so many field commissions to good non-coms in combat that it didn't need any more "ninety-day wonders" from Cavalry or Infantry Officer Candidate Schools so these were shut down. I remained a radio operator with the 106th Recons.

As our advanced training continued it became more tied in to working as mobile units in our vehicles. As a radio operator I was eventually assigned to an M-8 armored car. It was quiet compared to tanks and it was fast. On good roads it could do 50 mph. Its armor was thin compared to tanks but thick enough to protect us from small arms fire. It had a revolving open turret with a 37mm canon and a .30-caliber machine gun mounted side-by-side. Riding in the turret were the vehicle commander and a gunner. Below in front were the driver and radio operator. When we eventually arrived in England we had ring mounts welded on to the turrets and .50 caliber machine

guns mounted on the rings which gave us a great deal of fire power to use against low-flying aircraft, lightly armored vehicles and ground troops.

Our reconnaissance work was simple. Our job was to look for roads and probe for the enemy. We did not have the fire power or armor to get heavily engaged. We were to locate and assess the forward elements of the enemy and back off so infantry or armored units could engage them. Often we would simply hurry up, move out somewhere and then simply wait, often for hours. "Hurry up and wait" was one of the most pervasive features of army life.

We radio operators were trained to use our radios by voice or code. We learned to send and receive messages in morse code. To send we would use telegraph keys that clipped to our leg. Generally voice transmissions were very limited in range and were so full of static and disturbance that we rarely relied on them. It was faster and more reliable in a reconnaissance troop to use code because we were usually communicating miles apart.

In the beginning we were sent to division radio school but the school was very poor and when our field work began we were not adequately trained to do our job. It was embarrassing. But with field practice, we kept improving. My proficiency grew rather quickly and I was given Technician Fifth Grade stripes; they were corporal's stripes with a "T" underneath.

In the autumn Ralph Kuzell was transferred to Division headquarters and eventually became Assistant G-2 (Intelligence) with the rank of Major. First Lieutenant John Ball was made the acting commanding officer of the troop. Although he wasn't as good as Kuzell and could at times be a bit of a nag, essentially he was a good officer and was liked and respected.

I was moved from the 2nd Platoon to the 1st Platoon. Later when Lt. Haines became leader of the 2nd Platoon replacing Malone he wanted me back and Lt. McGee didn't want to let me go. So miracle of miracles — for the army — they asked me which I preferred. I liked McGee but I liked Haines and Mechling too; but I also liked Tucker, so I chose to stay with the 1st Platoon. This was also because every Friday after dinner we had to "GI", i.e., clean, the barracks: sweep and mop the floors, wash the windows (toilet paper worked wonders), clean the toilets and showers, etc. The guys in the 2nd Platoon kept horsing around and never got down to it promptly. The 1st Platoon guys got it done and over within an hour after dinner so that we could go to the movies or to the PX for a beer.

Even in the fall of 1943 we still didn't have our full complement of M-8 armored cars and in most instances we used second-hand scout cars. They had seen plenty of usage and the radios installed in them would often drift off frequency on a motor march. But even so at night some of us could work thirty miles away and still keep in contact with headquarters. We would constantly need to re-tune them. The tubes and connections were pretty loose and if something failed our first line of repair was to jiggle the set. If that failed we would kick it. That often did wonders.

One time the antenna on a strange vehicle I was in was wobbling and the voice signals I was sending and receiving were cutting in and out and driving me nuts. I was being given a bad time by a guy on the other end and I explained on voice transmission that the "half-assed antenna" I had was the cause of the trouble.

Lt. Johnson was commanding my vehicle and he was also the Troop Communications Officer at the time. After the problem was over he called all the radio operators together and discussed army regulations regarding the use of obscene language over the air. He explained that we could on occasion send in code a "4Q" but we were never to say "half-assed." Then he said, "Corporal Bombar, do you hear that!" I assured him my lips were henceforth forever sealed against such filthy utterances.

Gradually, as the months progressed my outlook changed from being an ambitious young soldier hoping for a commission to simply a specialist radio-operator. As a radio operator I was a technician with no line responsibilities, no one to command. I just insured that my platoon had good communications.

Often we would open a radio network using code before we left our central assembly area so I was not a party to the mission briefings. Therefore I was frequently oblivious to the nature of our mission or to the fact that we had actually started to move in cases where radio traffic had already begun. We were in an isolated world of our own. I always copied all communications in the network so that our platoon would know what the others were doing. This radio traffic required intensive concentration. This occasionally caused me some embarrassment.

On one occasion when we had stopped for a hot meal I dug out my messkit, ate, washed it, and hung it by the handle on a tree branch next to my

vehicle to dry. The word was passed to me to quickly get on my radio; we were to open our radio network. Then unexpectedly we moved out of our assembly area and I wasn't even aware of it and was chastised for leaving my messkit behind: A good soldier is not supposed to lose his equipment.

When we were moving, it was not always possible to get to our mess truck for a meal. We generally would have a case or two of C-rations in our scout car. These came in two-can sets. The cans were the size of Campbell soup cans. There were meat and beans, stew, or hash. The companion can held a few round crackers, three or four cigarettes, instant coffee or tea, a couple of sweets, and a few sheets of toilet paper. The stew and hash tended to give one heart-burn but the beans weren't bad, especially if they were hot. Therefore, what we in the scout cars would do when we were halted was to raise the side engine cover, lay a can of beans on the manifold, drop the cover and leave them on the manifold nestled against the engine for ten or fifteen minutes.

One time, while the driver was absent, I put a can on the manifold, started the engine and had to get on my radio while we were still parked in the assembly area. We started rolling and I was oblivious to what was happening outside of my earphones. We rolled for twenty minutes or so and suddenly there was a terrific "BLAM" explosion in the engine compartment. We kept rolling until the column stopped. Charles Timm, the driver, hastened forward, lifted the side cover of the engine and found beans everywhere. We never had been buddies, but after that our relations became downright Gothic. Matter of fact, everyone thought it hilarious except Timm. But it tended to solidify my reputation as being somewhat absent-minded.

TENNESSEE

In mid-February we threw all our personal gear into our barracks bags, turned in our foot lockers, cleaned and closed our barracks and motor-marched through Georgia to Tennessee to begin a winter of divisional field maneuvers. We traveled for two days ending up in the hilly mountainous area around Carthage, Tennessee.

We spent the winter camped out in the open elements. It was miserable. It rained (or on occasion snowed) two out of three days that winter. We carried on doing the same kind of reconnaissance missions we had done during the autumn. Now, however, such missions were part of activities involving our entire division and other large units as well.

Generally we worked problems lasting two or three days. When we halted at night we would pitch our pup tents. Each man had a tent shelter-half, i.e. half a tent. Two men would button the two halves together lengthwise. There were no floors to these tents. We would just spread our blankets or bed rolls on the ground and crawl in.

The terrain was usually hilly. Often we wouldn't pull into a bivouac area to spend the night until well after dark and would not take the time to dig a drainage ditch around the perimeter—especially as we were not allowed to show lights or build fires if a problem were going on. It often rained at night. If it rained, you couldn't touch the inside of the tent after it was wet. If you did, the water would start to seep through at that spot. And, generally, if the rain persisted, we would soon feel the water running downhill and seeping in around the edge of the tent into our bedding. We would just get up and shiver the night away in one of the vehicles under a tarpaulin trying to keep dry. When a problem ended we would build big fires and stretch out our bedding and wet clothes to dry.

One particular mission during maneuvers remains a vivid memory. I was with Sergeant Tucker in our scout car. We probably were accompanied by a couple of jeeps. There were two opposing forces of divisional strength with tank and artillery support, the Reds (us) and the Blues (the enemy). We moved out in the afternoon to locate and report back the location and nature of any enemy force we might encounter in front of our division.

The weather had been dry for the last few days which meant that we could travel cross-country as well as along roads. We moved forward along side roads cautiously for two or three hours and Tucker thought we might well be in an area where the enemy was present. Eventually he directed us to move up onto some wooded high ground where we might find a good vantage point.

We left the dirt road and started driving through the woods as we made our way upwards. By now it was getting dark although the stars were bright enough to give us a little light to see by. Tucker cautioned us to be as quiet as possible. As the woods grew more dense, Tucker went ahead on foot, finding the best way through the trees. In tight spots he would guide the driver to right or left so we wouldn't get wedged between trees. Finally, when our driver couldn't get through the tight spots, Tucker got behind the wheel himself and we kept squeezing along until we came to the edge of a bluff.

Below us we saw a large collection of enemy tanks and other vehicles and artillery pieces. He made a count of them and where some of them were moving and prepared a radio message for me to send.

We were many miles beyond our headquarters and from time to time I had contacted Sergeant Harry Nash, who was on the headquarters set, to make sure I was still on the exact frequency. As night set in, the ionosphere descended and all kinds of radio signals would descend upon us as they bounced off the ionosphere. It took experience to pick the signals from your own net out of the myriad signals that filled the air waves. With distance our signals grew very faint and were barely audible, even with intense concentration. Tucker was worried that we might be discovered by the enemy at any time and asked me to be as brief as possible in transmitting because of the whine of the radio transmitter while I was sending and the sound of our engine which had to run in order to provide power. I raised Nash and started sending Tucker's message.

It was normal procedure for a receiving operator to interrupt the sender if he missed part of the message and to stop the sender in his tracks with eight "dits" (we didn't have "dots" and "dashes;" we had "dits" and "dahs" in our imitations of radio code sounds). We would send the eight "dits" stopping the sender and then when the sender stopped, the receiving operator would send: A A ("dit dah"—"dit dah") for "All After" and then tell the sender the last word he had received clearly and to pick it up from there and continue.

At some point Nash missed something because my signal was so weak and he asked me to stop. But his signal was so weak that I couldn't hear him around the sound of my own signals. So I just kept transmitting and went through the entire message. When I stopped sending instead of a "message received, " Nash told me, "You fathead, why don't you stop transmitting when I interrupt you?" So I told him, "I can't hear your interruptions so just keep copying my code and ask me to fill in the missing parts when I finish. Did you record anything after the interruption?"

He had not, which was wrong on his part. Tucker by this time was getting very anxious and asked me what all the radio chatter was about and I told him I had to re-send the message, which I did. Nash, ever cautious, and realizing the importance of the message, re-transmitted the entire message back to me to make sure of its accuracy. I told him it was O.K. and then I explained more fully to Tucker what had been going on. About forty-five minutes later, Nash sent us a message that the battle exercise was over.

Later we learned that our message brought lots of artillery down onto the enemy's forces we had spotted and so decimated the enemy that Force Red won the battle. Tucker received a division commendation which he fully earned.

Nash was really a very nice guy, but he would fly off the handle. Later he apologized for being unreasonable. He, like Kuhlke, was an older man with a family and also was a little sour about being forced to leave them and go into the Army.

Nash refused to take the job of Troop Communications Sergeant — a job carrying a rank of Buck (3-stripe) Sergeant which was vacated when Dick Beltz had gone off to join the O.S.S. Nash, having been a professional radio man in civilian life, was by far the best qualified for the job but he said he didn't want the extra responsibility when there was no increase in pay. He already was a Sergeant (T). So Vic Boucher, a pleasant smooth-talking older man from Boston was given the job instead. Much to Nash's disgust, shortly after that, the Army raised the job from Sergeant to Staff Sergeant level and of course Boucher received the promotion even though Nash really ran our communications.

All in all the winter of maneuvers in Tennessee was a royal pain. There were almost no passes to go to town because as a rule there was no convenient way to get into any of the cities. I made it to Nashville once. It was crowded with soldiers and airmen and there were no hotel rooms available. I ended up in a hotel service corridor with a bed. I didn't sleep much; it was hot and I wasn't used to sleeping in a bed.

Finally spring came and on March 26, 1944, our division moved up to Camp Atterbury near Indianapolis. Almost immediately I was sent off to the Cavalry Communications School at Fort Riley, Kansas, for the course in radio communication.

FORT RILEY

Fort Riley was an old Army Post where the U.S. Cavalry School was located. In the Administration Building there were a few framed letters on the lobby walls signed by Col. George S. Patton, Commandant, The Cavalry School. At the post center of Fort Riley there were spacious stone buildings, beautiful lawns, hedges and trees. They were carefully tended by handsome

bronzed German POWs many of whom wore their distinctive Afrika Korps caps and worked bare chested in the summer sunshine sometimes flexing their muscles and smiling for the benefit of the American girls walking by.

The communications course was designed to take men with no training in radio use and turn them into skilled vehicle radio operators in three months. It was an excellent course but one I hardly needed. I passed the Morse code top achievement level of 25 words per minute within the first week or two.

I already could take code that fast but had to learn to print fast enough to keep up. In a motor vehicle like an armored car you couldn't print that fast anyway. You needed a table which of course we didn't have in our vehicles. And I already knew how to handle the radios under field conditions so I had an easy time of it.

There were dances somewhere at Fort Riley or its outlying camps almost every night and I met a very nice WAAC, Barbara, who came from Milwaukee. She was a bright, well-educated woman from an upper middle-class family and she was good company. We would often spend our evenings at the NCO Club. She began to diplomatically show me social fine points I had not been brought up with. As we entered the Club it was my habit to smooth my hair with my comb after removing my hat. She gently restrained my hand and said, "You look fine." In other words, it isn't done. And she taught me how to drink socially. So the summer there was pleasant. Then it was back to Camp Atterbury in early July.

CAMP ATTERBURY

When I returned to the troop at Camp Atterbury I was made a T-4 (Sergeant). At Atterbury much had changed. Many privates in the troop had been shipped out, most were probably headed overseas as replacements. For the troop as a whole the greatest change was the assignment of a new Troop Commander, Captain Paul Million. He was not as well liked and respected as Captain Kuzell or Lieutenant Ball. Under his command the inner pride of the troop — what the military call "Esprit de Corps" — which had been built by Kuzell, imperceptibly leaked away, replaced by merely going through the motions of soldiering.

One Saturday evening Captain Million had scheduled us for a "creep and crawl" exercise under machine guns whereby we had to crawl under barbed wire in the dark while machine gun tracer bullets were whizzing close by

overhead. One of our guys, T/5 Ray Grant, lost part of his thumb that night. The exercise was to train us to realize that if we took advantage of the terrain by keeping low we could often move without being hit by enemy gunfire.

My dad had come down from Michigan to spend the weekend with me. It was the first time he had done so. But it was important training and the Saturday night exercise took precedence and I couldn't get a pass into town with Dad. While we were going through the exercise, Dad and a few other people waited in an orderly room by the firing range. Captain Million and a couple of other officers were there. Dad overheard another captain say to Million, "Can't you do a better job of scheduling your activities than to make your men lose their weekend passes in order to do this?"

Soon after I had returned to Atterbury I checked into the Indianapolis U.S.O. to find out where there were activities for enlisted men. The woman behind the desk was sending most of the soldiers to various dances and parties but she asked me to wait off to one side for a few minutes. Then she came over and quietly said there was to be a small party a little outside town I might be interested in. It would be at a large lakeside house where there would be a barbecue and swimming party with about a dozen girls, and about a dozen soldiers were being asked. I was a little hesitant because being out in the country would be inconvenient if the party and the girls were a bust. She said the girls were very nice and attractive and she was sure I would have an enjoyable evening, so I decided to take a chance.

The evening was indeed a lot of fun. The food was good, we were provided with swim suits and the water was fine, and the girls were indeed very nice. I met Lucy, an Indianapolis socialite who was about to turn nineteen. She really knew how to fuss over a man and make him feel special. She invited me to meet her mother and brother at her home — a beautiful apartment in the best part of town. Her younger brother was in the Army and her mother treated me almost as a son. I fell head-over-heels in love with Lucy.

I had never experienced anyone so beautiful and with such a gracious life style as that which she shared with her family. I remember that they shook hands with me and warmly welcomed me each time I arrived. That was a graciousness I'd never been aware of before. I was young and handsome in my uniform and I think they found in me a diamond in the rough. I didn't have their polish but I was bright. Her mother was a kind woman and fond of me, but couldn't help wondering whether with my simple upbringing and

lack of family money I would really be suitable for Lucy. (Several years later Lucy married a man she didn't really love but who had inherited a considerable gasoline fortune.)

I was in a fever of love. The quality of my soldiering fell off because almost every evening I'd go into town and stay at Lucy's until about one o'clock and return to barracks at about two. Reveille came at six and I never got enough sleep. Often I'd just fall into my bunk and sleep with my suntans on and stand morning report in them and change into my fatigues before going down to breakfast.

A couple of times I received some disparaging remarks from Tucker and Iezzi about my rumpled and lipstick-smeared appearance. I didn't much care. We really had completed our essential training and were waiting to move overseas. I was in love, I was no longer bucking for a commission and I knew that when we shipped out I would get back to doing a good job of soldiering. Also, I knew that there was a distinct possibility that I would end up with my head shot off so I might as well enjoy living while I could.

The training we were doing was largely repetitious although we did do some new familiarization training in firing some of the weapons we might be called upon to use in addition to our personal weapons. I fired a couple of 37 mm rounds from the gun in the turret of an armored car, also the .50-caliber machine gun, and last and definitely least, the "grease" gun — a sub-machine gun with a very slow rate of fire. It was a poor substitute for the Thompson sub-machine gun and a joke compared to the machine-pistols that were copiously supplied to German troops.

By early autumn we began packing up to go overseas. We began to get our full complement of equipment. Men who weren't to go overseas with us were culled out. Replacements were brought in to bring our roster up to our Table of Organization. Our new men were mostly privates. But, among others, we got a new Executive Officer, 1st Lt. George Veream, who was a Greek-American. He replaced John Ball who had taken a transfer to the paratroops. As a new kid on the block Veream was perhaps a little defensive which he covered by being a bit cocky. He tried hard to be liked and was a soft touch for a loan until payday. I liked him as an officer. He didn't have all the corners knocked off and was still, so to speak, his own man.

Joe Haines was made a 1st Lieutenant. Our platoon officers were McGee in 1st Platoon, Haines in 2nd, and Johnstone in 3rd. A new 2nd Lieutenant named Leonard Prosnik joined us, to head up the Headquarters Platoon.

In October we received wide rolls of heavy duty wax paper and five-gallon cans of cosmoline — a heavy, waxy, asphalt-like mixture that was like beeswax when cold but which poured like molasses when it was heated. We carefully cleaned and oiled our guns and laid them out on large sheets of this waxed paper, poured hot cosmoline onto them and wrapped the paper around them and folded and sealed the edges with more cosmoline.

Everything that could be dismounted from the vehicles was wrapped and sealed in this manner and stowed in wooden crates. We received new uniforms and field gear. Most of us were issued tanker suits — wonderful wool-lined heavy cotton jackets and matching bib overalls that fitted underneath. These were much better than our heavy woolen overcoats.

Each man had a duffel bag crammed to the brim. We were told to send our cameras home. There would be no photos overseas! Might help the enemy! Also no diaries.

We left Camp Atterbury in early November 1944 with the sarcastic cry of "All right, men, look alive, this is it and some of you guys ain't comin' back." We moved by train to Camp Miles Standish near Boston and waited for a week or so with no assigned duties except to play volley ball. Each evening we were free to go into Boston which was a great liberty town as long as the money held out.

While at Miles Standish, a new man was assigned to the Troop. His name was Bob Long. He was a mortar gunner and he had missed his ship when his outfit shipped out, so we got him.

U.S.S. WAKEFIELD

November 10, 1944 at the South Boston Naval Yard we boarded the troop transport U.S.S. Wakefield. It was the converted luxury liner U.S. Manhattan. She was certainly no luxury liner below decks after they finished the conversion.

I recall our climbing up the loading gangway and then going down, down, down and down several decks lugging our barracks bags over our shoulders. I

ended up on the bottom deck and must have been far below the waterline. I thought to myself, "If we ever get torpedoed we'll never make it out of this thing."

We were packed in like sardines with the bunk tiers about five high. There was nowhere to sit except on the edge of your bunk where you had to lean far out so your head and shoulders could clear the bunk above you. You could sit on the deck if you could find an empty corner. There were men, men, men everywhere and soon the air grew stale as the jerry-built ventilation system was barely adequate unless you were under a blower and then it was cold.

As we got under way and cleared the calm water moving out of the lee of the land, we found the top-heavy overloaded vessel would drop down as it came off the top of a wave and slide to the side in a skewed motion at the bottom before it slowly started to rise onto another swell. It was nauseating — and was especially bad when you were standing and couldn't see the horizon.

There wasn't anything to do to pass the hours except read if you were lucky and drew an interesting pocket-size book which the Army issued to us, and if you could find a light to read under.

We were fed two meals a day. We had to form up with our outfits in a long line that wound the length of the ship at mealtimes. It snaked through the length of the bunk decks, up ladders to the next bunk deck and then to the bunk deck above that. For some strange reason we had to line up at least an hour before each meal. For me and most of the men the prolonged standing was an ordeal because our seasickness was worse when we stood. By the time we reached the mess room we had little appetite. But generally if you didn't eat you felt even more seasick.

The mess room was small, hot and steamy with the overwhelming smell of institutional army food. As you entered you picked up a metal tray and slid it along the steam tables in front of you where food was spooned out.

The room was crowded with a dozen narrow metal eating tables. The tables were fastened about as high as your diaphragm and you stood to eat facing each other with just enough room for your own tray and the tray of the man opposite. You would take your tray to one of the tables, eat as much as

you could — if you could — then tip the generally half-full trays into a couple of large garbage cans and head out for fresh air.

One dinner time I had just arrived at one of the tables, put my tray down, picked up my fork, and the guy opposite me threw up all over my food. No dinner that night!

I found that for me the secret was to eat quickly. Then not far from the mess room there was a door to one of the outer decks. It was November and cold and windy, and the door was seldom used. I would sit down in a corner where the door opened, pry it open a crack, and stretch out my legs for a half hour or so, breathing cool fresh air until I could keep the food down.

All of this was quite a contrast to the three meals a day, seated in a dining room, which the officers topside enjoyed. This discrepancy, while not designed by our own officers, was yet another embellishment of the caste system dividing officers and enlisted men — a valid system but one which at times was overworked!

A few times I went out on deck for fresh air but generally the North Atlantic in winter was too cold and windy to stay there long. The ship traveled fast. It was so fast that we didn't sail in a convoy, although we did zigzag. A couple of days the sun came out for a while and if you could snag a spot out of the wind it was OK on deck and wonderful to have a brief breath of fresh air. It was a pleasant relief when after several days we came into the calm of U.K. waters.

ENGLAND — THE ENGLISH CHANNEL — LE HAVRE

We landed at what turned out to be Liverpool. We docked sometime in the late afternoon and disembarked at nine or ten that evening. Shouldering our barracks bags, we walked along several blocks of dimly lit walkways until eventually we boarded a train that was waiting. Its window curtains were drawn. There were no berths but by that time we could sleep like babies even sitting up. We fell asleep as soon as we started to roll.

It was daylight when we awoke and looked out upon an English countryside of beautiful rolling hills. The train had stopped at a tiny station in the middle of nowhere. An army truck came soon after we descended from the train and we threw our barracks bags onto the back. Then we

formed up and marched along a two-lane asphalt road that wound among the hills.

It was sunny with a gathering of clouds here and there. Once or twice a cloud came over and dropped a little light rain on us even while the sun was shining all around. After an hour we began to see the tile roofs of a town. Its name we learned was Stow on the Wold (which was old English or Saxon for Stone on the Hill.) We were in one of the most beautiful parts of England, the Cotswolds, and Stow on the Wold was renowned for its rustic beauty. I kept thinking this is the old world—and it's terrific.

As we entered the edge of town we were greeted by little boys who came up alongside of us as we marched along politely asking, "Got any goom, choom?"

People waved as we marched through part of the town and then we turned off to the side to where the open country began. There, set back off the road were eight or ten Quonset huts standing under trees in an orchard. We were assigned quarters. I recall that each hut had a pot bellied stove that burned coal and was lit evenings. Our shower facility was a make-shift affair nearby in what looked like a converted car repair garage.

Our first few days were spent getting our barracks scrubbed, the area tidied up, coal brought in, and things like that. At an orientation meeting we were told by our Exec that if we were invited for meals by the locals we were to tell the Mess Sergeant about it and he would prepare a small package of food we were to take to our hostess because their food was rationed.

We, of course, were exhorted to be United States Ambassadors of Good Will, to not flaunt our money and to remember that each pub had a limited quota of bitter and cider for each evening and we weren't to dry up the place by having more than a pint or two. We were to watch out when we stepped into a road of traffic and to look to the right for oncoming cars. And above all else, we were never, never to expect English girls to have sexual intercourse on the "King's ground." Somehow it wasn't fitting and a "knee-trembler" standing in a doorway was the preferred position unless you had a bed.

The duty was light and sometimes afternoons were free. A few days were mild and sunny and I took my sketch pad and drew some of the houses with their slate roofs and stone walls. It was all so unbelievably beautiful.

After a week or two our equipment began to arrive and we began unpacking and assembling our guns and radio equipment. Our armored cars arrived. Our drivers with Lt. Haines took them to a U.S. ordinance depot in Southeast England where ring mounts were welded onto the turrets. New .50-caliber machine guns were then mounted on these rings. Thus mounted they were much quicker and more flexible to use than our .30-caliber machine guns which were fixed along side the 37mm gun in the cowling of the armored car turret and required the entire turret to be swung around.

Ed Fleming was sorry the drivers would be away from the outfit and miss Thanksgiving dinner. However they found the ordinance depot laid on a great Thanksgiving feast. While at the depot he had one sobering experience. There were some shot-up tanks that had been brought back from France for repair. He noticed one with a couple of neat round holes as big as a fist where German high velocity 88mm shells had hit it. Inside there were reminders (letters, etc.) of the men who had been inside. Also, while the armored cars were at the depot extra armor plate was welded onto the underside to give added protection against road mines.

We found time to explore the town. Some of the guys got passes to London. I visited a pub or two with some of the guys a few evenings. The locals were friendly and seemed to like us. It was a bit tricky stepping outside into the blackout. I got lost a few times until I learned the way back to the troop area. Somehow I met a couple of girls and one of them asked me to have supper with her and her family on the following Saturday. Before Saturday arrived we were told to pack up. We were moving out! Within a couple of hours we climbed into our vehicles and were off. I didn't even have an opportunity to tell the English girl I wouldn't be coming to dinner.

We drove for four or five hours along rather busy secondary roads, occasionally stopping along the way. Eventually we could smell the sea and soon the seaport town, Weymouth, lay below us. Slowly we wound our way down to the waters edge. By this time it was dusk.

After the usual delays we backed straight into the open maw of LST 529 (Landing Ship Tank). I believe the bottom of the ship was the main deck. It accommodated all of our vehicles. Eventually the ship's ramp was raised, its vertical clam-shell bow was closed, and we left the harbor. Because these ships were flat on the bottom for reduced draft they did not slice through the water. They bobbed along like a cork. The Channel is often rough even when the weather isn't too bad and our voyage was not a smooth one.

In a few hours we anchored off Le Havre waiting for a berth. The wait went on for a couple days. We were tossed around a bit and the ship lost its anchor and we went back to England for another one. When we were actually in the Channel tossing around I found the best thing to do for seasickness was to go out onto the vehicle deck and stretch out in the cool air on the hood of a half-track and talk, read or sleep.

Eventually after a couple more days of delay at anchor off Le Havre we moved into the harbor area and ran up onto a gravel shore. A caterpillar tractor pushed up gravel level with the ramp and we rolled off. I was surprised at how long a wait we had even for such a primitive unloading facility. But, we were in France. It was December 7, 1944 — three years to the day since the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

ACROSS FRANCE — THE ARDENNES FOREST BIVOUAC

It was turning dark by the time we cleared Le Havre. We began a motor march with headlights on. After about four hours we turned into the large gravel driveway of what looked like a chateau of some kind. We were given a hot meal by some resident army mess outfit and spread our blankets on the floor and slept until early next morning.

In the morning we resumed our motor march immediately after breakfast. The weather was gray and raw. As we progressed we passed a couple of castles perched on rocky promontories overlooking rivers. Bill Tower remembers we passed a downed spitfire in the fields.

Joe Haines recalls that during our travel across France Homer McBride, his driver, entertained the men in his M-8 with a stream of limericks over the vehicle inter-com. He recited such things as the ballad of "Dangerous Dan McGrew," which began:

"There on the floor,
with his asshole tore,
lay Dangerous Dan McGrew."

Homer carried on in such fashion at length, his store of limericks being inexhaustible. Unknown to everyone, the radio voice transmission switch had inadvertently been turned on and the entire performance went out over the air on a 106th Infantry Division radio channel. Haines was later called up to Division Headquarters by the Lt. Colonel who was the division Communication Officer. He reamed out Haines royally, and then, after

fulfilling his official duties, asked Haines, "By the way, what were the last two verses of "Dangerous Dan McGrew again?"

In the meantime, the column was gradually climbing as we reached Belgium and by early darkness snow began to appear on the ground. We began seeing patches of fir trees. We continued climbing. The road and woods were blanketed with snow and big flakes started falling as we rode along in our open vehicles.

In the armored cars our feet were freezing because they rested on the armor plate of the front part of the vehicle which was taking the direct force of the wind as we moved. As a result of this cold and wet in the vehicles and the subsequent wait in the snow and slush of the Ardennes, Homer McBride and Bill Roub and about a dozen others had to be hospitalized at St. Vith for trench foot. They missed the battle.

At a certain point we shut off our headlights and turned onto a secondary road. We soon pulled off and parked our vehicles in clusters among the trees. The area was covered with tall evergreens. There was no evidence of houses or human activity.

We were told — probably by men in the vehicles who guided us into our bivouac area — that the area had been taken by hard fighting a few weeks before and that there might be the odd hold-out German roaming around in the woods. Some of our guys drew guard duty. We ate and settled down for the night. We lay down around our vehicles in the open. I spread out a tarpaulin on the snow — which wasn't very deep — wrapped up in my blankets and pulled half of the tarp over me and tried to sleep which was difficult because it was cold.

We must have spent a couple of days in this bivouac area but I have no recollection of this. I do recall that we were told we would be going up to occupy a village in a quiet part of the front. We were an un-bloodied division and the plan was to expose us gradually to real combat. We were advised not to fire upon small groups of Germans when they left their bunkers because our own people would want to go for food or latrine calls, too, without being shot at.

MOVE TO GROSSLANGENFELD

On December 11, 1944 we had breakfast and waited around in our Ardennes bivouac until ten or eleven when Captain Million ordered our drivers to move their vehicles out of the dispersal area and line up next to the road. The ground wasn't frozen too hard and some of the armored cars started spinning their wheels in the mud and couldn't get traction.

Finally it was necessary to bring up half-tracks and tow out the stranded vehicles to where they could get moving and join the column. This all took and hour or two and in the meantime a large column of vehicles we were to join had arrived on the main road and was held up waiting for us. Soon a Lieutenant Colonel pulled into the area in a jeep and began chewing out Million for holding up his column. Million, red-faced and flustered, began angrily blustering at everyone to hurry things up.

Eventually we joined the column of infantry vehicles and drove down out of the snow-covered forest on a well-surfaced road. It was a sunny day and as we descended we entered rolling farm land interspersed with patches of forest. Within an hour we came to the town of St.Vith, an important road center.

The town's inhabitants didn't wave or smile. We figured we must have hit German territory although I learned much later that we were in fact about four miles inside Belgium. St. Vith had been German until the end of the First World War, so many of the inhabitants had strong German sympathies. As we passed through the town we could see Army vehicles parked on the streets and learned that the 106th Division Headquarters was to be located there.

With a few delays we drove through St. Vith and kept driving for several miles. We left the column by taking a secondary road to our left. After two miles we came to a small farming village of about thirty or forty sturdy stone houses and barns. There was the faint smell of ripe cow manure in the air. We had reached Grosslangenfeld, Germany, where we were to be temporarily attached to the 424th Infantry Regiment. We were to be on its extreme left flank, replacing a rifle company of the 2nd Infantry Division.

The village was somewhat elevated and was surrounded in most areas with barbed wire in front of which was mostly open gently rolling farm country with occasional patches of woods nearby. Across the wide sweeping

valley to our front we could recognize the "Dragons Teeth" of the Siegfried Line a mile or two distant. The teeth were thousands of closely-spaced concrete tank traps — a ribbon which curled as far as the eye could see to left and right. Behind the tank barriers was a network of hidden pillboxes and bunkers. These defenses had been constructed by Hitler along Germany's western frontier before the war began.

Immediately upon our arrival most of our men were guided to the bunkers they were to occupy. Some of us waited in our vehicles for about three quarters of an hour until, with salutes between commanders, the relief was carried out. There were a dozen Gl trucks waiting as the 2nd Division men arrived from the bunkers, mounted up, and started to roll out. There weren't many greetings exchanged. Mostly they just sat in their trucks in a subdued fashion. They had seen a lot of heavy fighting after having landed at Omaha Beach soon after D-Day and they knew that their "vacation" of several weeks at Grosslangenfeld was over and they were probably headed back to more heavy fighting.

As soon as the trucks departed, we dispersed our vehicles out of sight in various barns and outbuildings or behind walls or buildings where they could not be seen from the Siegfried Line. We were supposed to conceal them. Interestingly enough there was no German shelling or shooting during the changeover. This seemed to confirm that this was indeed the quiet sector we were told to expect.

Although the main body of the 106th Recons moved into Grosslangenfeld early in the afternoon of December 11, that was not the way the relief was supposed to proceed. The relief of the 2nd Infantry Division by the 106th was supposed to be secret because the 2nd Division was slated to secretly move north and spearhead an attack on the Roer River dams. Pressure to get the attack going was building because the Roer dams could release flood waters in the north and hold up the allied advance into Germany.

The relief plan did not go according to schedule. The 106th Division was late in arriving in the Ardennes area. When the 422nd, 423rd, and 424th infantry regiments arrived at Le Havre there were no troop transport trucks waiting to take them across France to the Ardennes. The regiments were held up near Le Havre bivouacked in the mud for a few days until their transportation arrived. We 106th Recons were also behind schedule because of our delays in landing at Le Havre.

For secrecy, the relief was supposed to be executed under cover of darkness. While the 106th Recons were still in the Ardennes bivouac, Lt. Haines and others went down to Grosslangenfeld at night to work out the execution of the planned move into the line. It was especially complicated for us to conceal ourselves because we were replacing an infantry rifle company, not a reconnaissance troop. We had thirteen M-8 armored cars, five M-3 armored half-tracks and about two dozen jeeps that had to be hidden.

Haines probably went into Grosslangenfeld with a skeleton force of Recons to smooth the way. Bill Fritz of the 1st Platoon says some 2nd Division soldiers took him up there in a jeep at night and he stayed with them in their bunker a couple of nights learning about the set up in the bunkers. He thinks a fair number of the rifle company had already been pulled out of Grosslangenfeld when we took over.

The relief plan was further complicated by orders to maintain a strict silence of our radios. The radios in a recon troop were far in excess of what a simple rifle company would have and their possible use would have tipped off the Germans that a different unit had moved into Grosslangenfeld. And with typical army overkill it was even decreed that the 106th Recons would not be issued even a single set of Signal Operating Instructions (SOI) which gave radio frequencies, call signs and codes to be used in communicating with other units or with itself — not a single set — not even for the Troop Commander, although other units of the 106th Division received these SOI. In addition the frequency crystals were removed from all the voice radios so they were inoperable. For communications we were obliged to rely exclusively on field telephones which depended on ground wire.

The cover of this elaborate secrecy plan was blown when the 2nd Division apparently ran out of time and pulled out in broad daylight. Grosslangenfeld was clearly under observation from the Seigfried Line. J.D. Frazee of the 1st Platoon says that the day after we arrived they heard loudspeakers from the German side saying, "Welcome, 106th Division!" Moreover, the Germans must have seen that we were an American cavalry reconnaissance unit.

It is unfortunate that the 106th Infantry Division largely squandered the mobile firepower of the 106th Recons by sticking us in the bunkers of Grosslangenfeld. The Division should have assigned a reserve rifle company with some extra .30-caliber machine guns to Grosslangenfeld and placed the Recons back of the line in reserve where its many 37mm and .50-caliber guns

could have been rapidly deployed to deliver vastly more fire-power than a rifle company could provide.

The embargo on showing vehicles or using radios was never lifted. This failure was to have dire consequences for the 106th Recons. With no radios and with our telephone wires to higher command and neighboring units cut just before the German attack on the morning of December 16th, we were isolated and without news except for occasional sounds of battle.

THE DEFENSES AT GROSSLANGENFELD

Our defenses at Grosslangenfeld were primarily a series of log-supported earthen bunkers which were located about a hundred yards beyond the edge of the village and faced the Siegfried Line. At each end, our defenses wrapped around to the north in order to screen the approaches to the village from the east and west.

The approximate location of the sector covered by each platoon is shown on the topographical map attached. Moving clockwise from the northeast part of the village, the 1st Platoon (shown in red) was on the extreme left. Its left-most bunker faced north towards Winterscheid where Troop B of the 18th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was centered. The 1st Platoon bunkers continued around clockwise to cover the Bleialf Road and around further to face the Siegfried Line.

The 2nd Platoon (shown in green) extended from the 1st Platoon to the "Y" where the roads to Winterspelt, Bleialf, and Habschied met in the village. West from the "Y" the 3rd Platoon (shown in orange) probably extended past Josef Reusch's "L" shaped house until it reached or nearly reached the Winterspelt road leading out of the village to the west.

From there Headquarters Platoon (shown in blue) curved north facing mainly west and was in part placed well out in front of the village by several hundred yards in order to take advantage of positions that overlooked steep slopes falling away towards the west. In effect Headquarters Platoon had two interrelated lines of defense: one at the edge of the village itself and one several hundred yards to the front. Except for the handful of men who were at the Troop Command Post (CP) in the center of the village and a few cooks, practically everyone else in the Headquarters Platoon was assigned to the defensive positions.

I believe it is likely that the network of defense positions to the west of the village was put in place by the Germans themselves in early September 1944 as a defensive screen against American forces driving southeast from St. Vith and heading for the Schneifel portion of the Siegfried Line. As part of this defensive network there was a "forty-and-eight" railroad boxcar sunk in the fields by the Germans at the northernmost part of the forward line of defense to the west. It was sunk almost to the rooftop and was used as living quarters for men manning a machine gun bunker nearby which we designated Lenny 8.

A few hundred yards to the south of this was Lenny 7. And a further several hundred yards south there was yet another bunker, Lenny 7-Able. The two latter bunkers overlooked steep slopes which began at the far edge of the open fields extending beyond the fringes of the village. An isolated farm house was used for living quarters to the rear of Lenny 7-Able.

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Platoons each had three or four bunkers, plus various prepared foxholes and firing pits. HQ Platoon had more. The locations I have assigned to the bunkers are a matter of educated guesswork based primarily on the descriptions of terrain and function given me by those men who occupied them. The Platoon Command Posts were located in houses near their platoon bunkers.

We inherited a field telephone system that connected the Troop Command Post to the 424th Infantry Regiment and to each of the platoon CP's. These in turn were connected to their bunkers.

In the 1st Platoon CP Lt. McGee, Sergeant Tucker, myself and one or two others occupied a stone farmhouse. There were no German civilians about the village. The previous outfit had moved them out. They had taken their valuables but had left most of their heavy furniture including tables and chairs and beds with mattresses. They had apparently taken most of their livestock with them — although not all. J.D. Frazee had to compete with a cow in finding room in one of the sheds for "Suzy Q", his jeep.

The men in the bunkers were reasonably comfortable. Although they did not have the amenities that we enjoyed in the houses, they were reasonably warm and dry. These bunkers were set several feet into the hillsides and were constructed of logs from the nearby forests and covered on top and exposed sides with sandbags. The larger ones held five or six men and had

double deck bunks and tables and chairs. Off to the side was a smaller room behind a heavy curtain where there was a gun port with a .30-caliber machine gun and in some a smaller port for a rifleman as well. Access to the bunkers was generally through an entrance in the back or side which could be reached by a slit trench ramp.

Most bunker gun ports had aiming stakes restricting the machine guns' traversing fields of fire in order to coordinate the coverage of each gun with its neighbors. There were also ground cards so the machine guns could be switched to various pre-set positions to lay down a solid curtain of fire even in total darkness. There were trip wires that set off flares in front of some of the bunkers.

Also, according to Abe Freund, there were land mines between the bunkers and the CP's. Mechling guided him through the mine fields in the 2nd Platoon area. (I suspect the mines were primarily between the bunkers themselves in order to prevent their being easily bypassed and attacked from the rear. Mines between the bunkers and the CPs would have been dangerous for our own troops.)

In some instances there were two-man bunkers where the men would draw duty for several hours and then be relieved by others. They slept and kept their personal gear in houses in the village in the vicinity of their bunkers.

GROSSLANGENFELD — PRE-BATTLE

We settled into the routine of life at the front. The men with trench foot were sent to hospital in St. Vith. Earl Liston was in St. Vith, too. His half-track had thrown a bearing coming across France and was in the motor depot for repair. By the time the vehicle was ready, the way back to Grosslangenfeld was blocked by German forces.

The weather was mild. The first day I took off my combat trousers and jacket. The second day I peeled off my woolen shirt and trousers and was down to my cotton fatigues. I'd put on my combat jacket and helmet whenever I went outside to the mess truck or latrine. Inside, the house was warm enough for shirtsleeves. My duties were light. My main job was to man the telephone switchboard at our platoon CP.

Orrie Barr was a radio operator in the 3rd Platoon and had been assigned to one of its bunkers when we moved into the village. He had joined the Recon just before we went on maneuvers in Tennessee.

Late the first afternoon Lt. Johnstone had collected Barr and another man and taken them along a path with steps leading downwards to a small forward outpost bunker. It had two gun ports looking out over the valley. The bunker was small: eight by ten feet across and deep enough to stand up in. It had a dirt floor and sides, and probably had a roof of logs covered with sandbags. It apparently was used only during daylight hours and had no comfort amenities. They had brought along only their carbines. Johnstone gave them a set of binoculars and left. The outpost probably had a field telephone. They were left out there until late that night when they were ordered back to their bunker to eat and get some sleep.

The following morning Barr was ordered to collect his gear and move to the Troop CP where he was to help 1st Sgt. Johnson to man the troop switchboard.

One afternoon I had to go over to a supply shed in the middle of the village to pick up or drop off some radio parts. It was a pleasant walk in the sunshine. I soon started back, enjoying the view over the fields towards the Siegfried Line to my right. A "farmer" with a wagon piled high with hay drawn by two horses was slowly making his way across the bottom of the valley toward a wooden storage shed. Eventually he pulled around to the far side of the shed away from me. Just about then a mortar shell landed fairly near to me — not close enough to hit me but close enough to tell me to hop it. I didn't run but I did hasten my pace back to the Platoon CP.

Nosing around in the 3rd Platoon area, "Red" Braemer decided to climb onto some kind of tower to have a better look at the German positions facing us. He didn't know he was being observed, but soon a German took a shot at him to discourage such activity. A similar thing happened to Lt. McGee and Frazee one day. It was as though the Germans weren't as interested in knocking us off or altering our generally complacent mood as they were in discouraging us from getting too curious.

The Germans were showing curiosity too. Frazee saw a "farmer" using his pitch fork to spread manure from a cart as he gradually worked close to the 1st Platoon area. Kennedy and Frazee took a couple of shots at him, not to hit him, but simply to tell him to buzz off. A similar episode involved a

"farmer" picking up sticks and gradually working closer as he collected them in his cart.

One day a Red Cross mobile with a couple of ladies serving coffee and doughnuts visited us. They were accompanied by a priest with a jeep and driver. I personally didn't see them, it was better for some of the guys putting up with the discomfort of the bunkers to do so. During this period we received mail. I received a letter from one of my aunts telling me my mother had died. She had been in ill health for a number of years.

During this peaceful period of several days Captain Million did not come around to familiarize himself with our defense positions or to see how the men were doing. Lt. Veream came around once, (I recall this and so does Frazee). None of the men I have contacted have any recollection of seeing Captain Million in any of the platoon areas during our stay in Grosslangenfeld. Barr says Million never voluntarily left the confines of the Troop CP as far as he could observe. He generally just stayed secluded in his room.

As far as I can determine Capt. Million made no attempt to orient the troop in general as to where we were in Europe or in relation to the front with the Germans. We could see the Siegfried Line as it wormed up and down the hills but it wasn't much help in our orientation except that Germany was "over there" behind it. Nor apparently had anyone outside of the Troop Command Post any idea of the roads, rivers, bridges or landmarks in our area. It seems that the only maps and sketches available were in the hands of Captain Million.

I don't believe that Lt. McGee had any maps; I would have seen them at the platoon CP. Joe Haines says he had none. Nor were we given any orientation regarding the disposition of our forces in the village itself. The vast majority of the men I have spoken to knew only where their own bunker was and the path to their platoon CP, the mess-truck area and their latrine.

Ed Fleming tells me that very early one morning during our quiet time — he thinks it was December 14 or 15 — Captain Million called Sgt. Mechling and a group of 2nd Platoon men to the Troop CP and asked for three volunteers to go out on patrol in front of the village to look on the other side of a small hill in front of us to see if the Germans were up to anything in that area. Mechling immediately volunteered but Million said, "No, you are too

valuable to risk on anything like that." Sgt. Joe Soulia, Franklin "Red" Wiseman and Ed Fleming volunteered to go. With just enough light to see they moved forward cautiously and went through and under their barbed wire. They found our predecessors had attached fragmentation grenades to the barbed wire in places and tin cans with pebbles inside which rattled when the wires were disturbed. They also found fine wire stretched across ditches with grenades attached.

Once past the wire they decided that Soulia and Wiseman would go on a short distance ahead while Fleming covered them with his grease gun. They had not moved far when Fleming suddenly spotted a German with a machine gun sitting in a hole off to one side. The German was close enough so Fleming could see he was wearing a soft cap rather than a steel helmet and he could see a little decorative insignia on the front of the cap that was a white circle like a Polomint.

In a stage whisper he called to Soulia and Wiseman and signaled them to come on back. If they had gone much further they could have been spotted. They pulled back and reported that the Jerries had established themselves close to our position. Other patrolling of that nature was probably carried out, but very discreetly, so as not to rock the boat. Generally, the feeling was that we should keep the activity in the village to a minimum so as not to excite the Germans.

GROSSLANGENFELD — BACKGROUND TO THE BATTLE

One of the principal German objectives at the beginning of Hitler's surprise Ardennes offensive in December, 1944, — which became known as "The Battle of the Bulge"— was the capture of the road center at St. Vith, Belgium. Control of St. Vith was vital for the movement of German forces in their push to the Meuse River and hence to Antwerp.

The Our River ran a few miles south of St. Vith and was crossed by only two bridges in the area which were capable of carrying motor vehicles. These bridges were at Schonberg and Steinbruck. (See attached map.)

The 106th Infantry Regiments— with the river at their backs — were deployed along a thinly held line in front of St. Vith which faced (and in part occupied) over a fifteen mile stretch of the Siegfried Line.

The 422nd and 423rd Regiments were thinly spread out along the high ridge of a rugged forest area called the Schneifel (Snow Eifel) which formed part of the Siegfried Line. Before dawn on December 16 the 18th Volksgrenadier (VG) Infantry Division— part of the 5th Panzer Army—launched a two-pronged enveloping attack around both ends of the Schneifel with the objective of cutting off and destroying the two regiments and capturing the bridge behind them at Schonberg. The northern pincer of the 18th VG was eventually reinforced by tanks of the elite Fuhrer Begleit Brigade.

Simultaneously a few miles to the south the 62nd Volksgrenadier Infantry Division— also part of the 5th Panzer Army — struck the left flank of the 424th Infantry Regiment at Eigelscheid in a hard drive to the northwest to seize the bridge at Steinbruck. The village of Eigelscheid was defended by Cannon Company of the 424th. (It was without its howitzers and was being used as an infantry rifle company.) This attack was augmented by lesser attacks on the nearby villages of Heckhusscheid to the west of Eigelscheid and on Grosslangenfeld to the east. (See attached map.)

The 62nd VG Division numbered about twelve thousand men and was reinforced with artillery, rocket and assault gun units. The division had been virtually destroyed on the Eastern Front and only recently rebuilt around the remnants of its experienced officers and non-coms. It ranks were filled with recently drafted older German men in their thirties and forties as well as with conscripts from occupied countries such as Poland, Russia, the Ukraine and Czechoslovakia. These foreign conscripts were carefully scattered among the ethnic Germans to discourage pockets of resistance and German NCOs would shoot them if they showed reluctance in doing their duty.

When the attack on Cannon Company commenced the Company called down heavy concentrations of artillery fire on the masses of German infantry moving towards them. Repeated attacks were launched only to be broken by the defenders and especially by the 424th artillery fire and the fire of a few assault guns.

As the morning progressed Cannon Company was gradually forced back by sheer weight of numbers. Later in the morning Eigelscheid also came under attack by forces moving up a minor road from the direction of Grosslangenfeld. It was mistakenly believed by the 424th that the 106th Recons had collapsed and that these forces were moving west through Grosslangenfeld. (The 424th had probably misinterpreted our radio silence to

mean that we had collapsed. It appears that no attempt was made by the 424th to verify our situation.)

By noon the village of Winterspelt, a mile northwest of Eigelscheid and also astride the road to Steinbruck, was also attacked by German troops moving west, supposedly from Grosslangenfeld.

Early in the afternoon during a snow squall the defenders of Eigelscheid made a fighting withdrawal to Winterspelt to join the reserve infantry battalion and a company of engineers which had been brought up to reinforce Cannon Company. The 591st Field Artillery Battalion of the 424th fired over 2,600 rounds in support of Eigelscheid and Winterspelt. The attacking Germans maintained pressure upon Winterspelt during the night. Very early in the morning of December 17 the forces defending Winterspelt were overwhelmed and broken. The Germans started moving north towards Steinbruck.

GROSSLANGENFELD DECEMBER 16 (MORNING TO EARLY EVENING)

At 5:30 a.m. on December 16, 1944, I awoke to the sound of an incoming artillery shell — the opening overture of the Battle of the Bulge. The shell's approach sounded as though the sky were being ripped apart. It landed close and exploded. Artillery and mortar shells started pouring in. I shared a common bed with Howard Tucker. We lay there a couple of minutes expecting the shelling to end. It didn't. Indeed it increased as we were introduced to sounds of German Nebelwerfers which fired waves of short-range rockets fractions of seconds apart and sent a carpet of exploding shells among us. As they approached they sounded as though they had tiny sirens attached which created a moaning scream from the instant they were fired until they landed.

Our hearts started pounding and the bed started shaking. Tucker said with embarrassment, "Damn it, I can't stop my knees from shaking!" Mine weren't shaking but my heart was pounding like hell. Shells were falling all around us. We sensed the entire village was taking artillery, mortar, and rocket fire. We went out to the main room of the platoon CP and were joined by Lt. McGee and one or two others. The shelling continued and we kept away from the windows. It was still dark outside.

Charles Lucas was Mechling's radio operator and had been assigned to a machine gun bunker in the 2nd Platoon area. When the German shelling

began he was asleep upstairs in the 2nd Platoon CP or a house nearby. Abruptly awakened when the first shells hit, he jumped up in the pitch black and banged into one of the walls in the room. Recovering from his confusion he rushed downstairs and across the field to his bunker while the shelling was going on.

John Ulicni and Ed Fleming were in a two-man bunker on the left end of the 2nd Platoon sector when the shelling began. The bunker areas were being hit even more heavily than the houses in the village. Their bunker trembled and seemed to bounce around from the concussion. They were terrified. Ulicni and Fleming were both Catholics. Both dropped to the floor of the bunker and began praying. Ulicni attended mass more regularly than Fleming and knew the Gloria, the Our Father, the Hail Mary and other Catholic prayers better than Fleming. Fleming said, "John, pray out loud so I can pray too!" Fleming tried to keep up with John as he fervently raced through them. He didn't think they were going to survive. A square piece of shrapnel from a near miss came through the gun port slicing the heavy webbing of the machine gun ammo belt completely in half before slamming into the wall. Fleming picked the fragment up, it was still warm. (He told me that he vowed if he got out alive he would go to mass regularly.)

During this time in the 2nd platoon CP, Lt. Joe Haines had just been awakened by the shelling when Roy Mechling burst into his room on the second floor and said, "Lieutenant, we've got to get out of here. The house has been hit and it's on fire!"

Barr awoke when the shelling started. The house shook. He was on the second floor and immediately hurried downstairs. There were a lot of shells landing very close. He noticed that across the Bleialf road where the 2nd Platoon CP was located the roof was on fire, as Mechling had announced to Haines.

As the barrage continued, a shell hit a wall of the Troop CP. It exploded blasting a hole two or three feet wide in the wall. This was three or four feet above Barr's head as he sat at the switchboard in a corner of the main room. The blast blew sizable chunks of debris across the room striking the wall where until a moment before Lt. Veream had been sitting on the edge of a desk. Captain Million was sitting nearby and had been speaking to Veream. Unable to hear clearly what Million was saying because of excited conversation in the room, Veream moved over and squatted down next to

Million to hear what he was saying — which saved him from being hit. Barr and the others in the room were covered with masonry dust from the blast.

At the 1st Platoon we kept checking on our guys in the bunkers by phone. Nobody had been knocked out and no telephone wires to the bunkers had been cut. The shelling continued. We just waited, taking care to stay away from the windows. Nobody thought about breakfast although with all the excitement and tension I was beginning to feel I badly needed a latrine visit.

In thirty or forty minutes the Germans lifted their shelling. We called the guys in the bunkers and told them to keep a sharp lookout even though it was still dark. Often an artillery barrage was followed up by an infantry attack. Soon some of our men over to the right began to hear shouting out in the valley in front of their bunker.

Bob Fisher was in the 1st Platoon bunker farthest to the left. There were 4 or 5 men in his bunker. They didn't hear voices but they heard the rattling of pebbles in tin cans that were tied to the barbed wire strung out front. Using their range cards they thoroughly raked the area in front of them with machine gun fire. The rattling stopped and they waited eagerly for first light. They waited tensely, fingers on triggers.

Finally, through the pale morning light, they could begin to see something. Straining, they saw something on the ground by the edge of the wire. As the light grew stronger they saw a body ..... of a very dead cow! It was the only shooting the guys in that bunker did during the entire battle.

J.D. Frazee and Orville Kiper of the 1st Platoon said the men in their bunker didn't see any enemy from their bunker during the battle. Ed Kawtoski also of the 1st Platoon says German troops moved against his bunker briefly but not heavily: "We didn't use a third of a belt"... of machine gun ammunition.

Lou Cunningham was asleep in the HQ Platoon CP in a house on the northwestern edge of the village when the 5:30 AM barrage began. There was an observation window on the second floor looking to the north, and in the basement, a window looking west had been converted into a .30-caliber machine gun emplacement. It overlooked the Winterspelt road.

After the shelling stopped, Cunningham was unaware of any enemy follow-up activity until he heard the machine gun in the basement begin

firing. The terrain in front of the house consisted mostly of open fields. There were no hedges or paths along which the Germans could advance under partial cover. They just walked forward over the wide open fields in front. As they began to be mowed down their attack broke and they fell back.

Bunker Lenny 8 was the northernmost of the forward bunkers of Headquarters Platoon. It probably covered as far north as the Ihrenbach Creek which ran east-west through a defile behind Grosslangenfeld. From outside their gun emplacement the men in this bunker could see the road to Winterspelt off to the left. The pre-dawn barrage woke Mike Gresh who was sleeping in the Lenny 8 sunken boxcar. He was there together with Al Nazarenus and Bowman. Grabbing his helmet and his M-1 rifle, Gresh wriggled along the bottom of the shallow zigzag trench which connected the boxcar living quarters to their gun emplacement 25 yards away. Shells were exploding all around him. He reached the bunker and found Roy Kuhlke was still on the machine gun and was O.K.

German shells continued landing all around them. A mortar shell landed just outside to the right. The concussion blew in the glass that someone had installed in an opening on the right side of the bunker. (Generally the bunkers did not have glass windows.) Kuhlke and Gresh were not hurt and probably had dropped down as the shell neared. After thirty or forty minutes the shelling of their position stopped. They waited, listening. They heard no voices out front. When dawn broke there were no Germans to be seen. However, they began to hear the sounds of firing to their left.

After dawn the Jerries began an assault on the next bunker over, probably Lenny 7. Mike Liskiewicz was probably in this bunker or one just to the south of this. The attack went on for an hour or so. In the midst of this, the people in Lenny 7 were taking rifle fire from snipers in trees out front to their right. They were having difficulty getting at the snipers because the trees were so far over to the right. They asked if Lenny 8 might have a better shot at them. Lenny 8 was called and Roy Kuhlke obliged by giving the trees to his left a good hosing and sure enough two or three Jerries came tumbling down.

Several hundred yards south of this was Paul Thompson in Lenny 7-Able. He had taken basic training and then was admitted to the ASTP college completion program. When it closed down in the summer of 1944, he was assigned to the 106th Recons at Atterbury. Thompson was a radio specialist in HQ Platoon working with Harry Nash. However, in Grosslangenfeld he had been assigned to a machine gun bunker known as Lenny 7-Able. It was a four

man bunker but only Thompson and Carlton Schiltcher were assigned to it. It perched on the edge of the open fields which ran to the southwest of the village. The land sloped steeply down and Lenny 7-Able dominated this portion of these slopes.

Thompson and Schiltcher were asleep in an isolated farm house a few hundred yards to the rear of the bunker when the pre-dawn shelling began. This particular day Thompson had been scheduled to be awakened at 6:00 a.m. so he could go out just before dawn to a forward observation post in a one-man foxhole. The observation post was occupied only during daylight.

Instead, awakened by the barrage at 5:30 and not stopping to pull on his trousers, Thompson threw on his overcoat, jumped into his shoes, grabbed his glasses and helmet and his M-1 rifle (which he had " borrowed" from one of the men hospitalized with trenchfoot to replace his carbine). He crawled forward in haste through a tunnel to the bunker. (The bunker was not manned at night probably because Headquarters Platoon was short of men.) Thompson reached his machine gun joined by Schiltcher. There were no signs of enemy action and after the shelling ceased they heard no sounds in the darkness out front. They waited for dawn.

In the 2nd Platoon bunker in front of the "Y" road junction, Ted Daehnke, Carl Petrone, Rudy Attima, and Bill Tower took a fierce pounding during the pre-dawn barrage. One fragment came in through an open window on one side, and hit and went through the door at the other end of the bunker. They waited, peering out into the darkness after the barrage lifted. Soon they heard voices shouting out beyond their barbed wire as the Germans started forming up. As the voices grew closer our men opened up with their two machine guns. They repeatedly raked the area with pre-set patterns laid out by the range cards the 2nd Infantry Division had left them.

When it started to turn light in an hour or so Tower and the others could see no signs of advancing troops but at the far end of the field about half a football field away there was a pile of bodies stacked up — a dozen or so beside a small house. In the darkness the Germans had carted off their dead and wounded as the assault force pulled back. One wounded man, still alive, lay out in the field but the Germans did not send out litter bearers to take him back. Later in the morning one of our people came by and shot him. This was the only infantry attack the men at the "Y" sustained that morning. The Germans might have concluded that attacking that bunker was too costly.

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Rishel White, the Troop's Third Cook, and several others of the kitchen crew including Mess Sergeant Henry Wittke, occupied the upstairs floor of a house directly across from the village church. From the attic they could look out across the valley in front and see German bunkers.

When the shelling began, they quickly went downstairs in the dark to see what was going on. The shelling grew intense. They waited inside the house.

While White was leaning back against a wall which faced the valley, a shell – probably a dud 88 – hit just above him sending a shower of stone fragments across the room and covering him with dust. A truck driver went berserk and started to rush outside. A couple of the others grabbed him and held him down so he couldn't do so.

After the shelling subsided and it began to grow light, White and a few others went up to the attic to see what was happening in the valley. They saw a dozen Germans walking across the fields towards them two or three hundred yards away. Crowding against the edge of a window trying not to be seen, White began firing at them with his rifle as they drew closer. He knocked one German down but the man soon got up and continued coming towards them. As White and probably others continued firing, the Germans went to ground and sought cover. White kept watching but didn't catch sight of any further movement. As time wore on with no sign of German activity most of the guys in the attic went downstairs for breakfast while some continued to maintain a watch. But there was no more discernable movement. Eventually they began preparing food for the Troop. (I remember going over to the mess truck at midday for a lunch of heated up C-rations.)

Over in the 3rd Platoon Bob House had left the bunker where he was assigned and spent the night at the platoon CP. He was on guard duty until 2 a.m. and had then slept at the CP until awakened by the 5:30 a.m. barrage. Lt. Myron Johnstone was also there. Bob had been a jeep driver until he ran over a stump on maneuvers and rearranged the features of the undercarriage of his jeep. He was subsequently made a mortar gunner.

When it grew light, Sgt. Art LaCroix and House went out and walked along a lane that ran between our line of defense and a concentration of German forces that was building up some distance away. They saw German troops beginning to wheel up what looked like boxes of ammunition. LaCroix said they had better get back before things began heating up. Obviously an assault was forming.

It is interesting to note that in many instances there was a lengthy delay between the end of the 5:30 a.m. barrage on the bunkers and the beginning of an assault. It shows poor execution on the part of the German infantry and indicates that the various elements of the recently rebuilt 62nd hadn't been fully integrated and trained before being thrown into the Ardennes fight.

The men in the 1st Platoon positions over to the right had heard voices shouting in the pre-dawn darkness: both in German and Polish. As the darkness lifted to give way to the dull, misty dawn, German infantry were soon seen advancing. We in the 1st Platoon CP began to hear small arms firing from the right: the crack of rifles and the stutter of machine guns and eventually the intermittent bursts of burp guns.

One of our Platoon bunkers on the right was manned by Sgt. Calvin Iezzi, Russel Ramsey, Bill Fritz and a couple others. Ramsey opened up with the machine gun at the distant figures advancing and soon the others did also. The fields in front of their bunker were clear for about a hundred yards, beyond which there was a sparse wooded area which had been thinned out. A number of tree stumps remained interspersed among the trees. (Fritz recalls that the first few nights in the bunker were a little scary because the partial shadows of some of the stumps looked like human figures.)

German infantry were advancing through the trees. Occasionally they would drop to the prone position, fire their weapons and get up and continue advancing. Because of the tree stumps it was difficult to know whether they were dropping from our gun fire or in order to fire their own weapons. As they cleared the woods and came out into the open and drew nearer, our gun

fire was more effective and their casualties clearly began to mount. They probably didn't get closer than 50 or 75 yards before breaking off their attack.

In Sgt. Jack Kennedy's bunker, also over on the right, were Bob Ohmes, Johnny Garlick, Roger Anderson and Bob Long. Their bunker had two slots for rifles and a machine gun port. To their front there was a scattering of large and small trees and bushes in the distance. As Kennedy and his people observed the German infantry moving towards them, they opened fire. The Germans moved up onto a low hill and started down the slope towards them. At the bottom of the slope, which was about a hundred yards distant, the ground was clear and would have been suicidal to cross. So they veered off and began advancing diagonally along a fence off to one side where there was considerable cover. They kept up a lively fire as they crawled forward. It was difficult to hit them.

Soon Bob Long was ordered to lay mortar fire on them. Long was in Kennedy's group. Kennedy viewed Long as a disciplinary problem, a "GFU." However, Long was probably the most dedicated and capable mortar gunner in the troop. He had joined the troop and been assigned to the 1st Platoon while we were at Camp Miles Standish. Although somewhat of an in-your-face disciplinary problem as a soldier, he loved his mortar like a baby. Fleming even recalls seeing him polishing his mortar while we were aboard ship. He had probably packed his mortar in his duffel bag and taken it on board — strictly against regulations of course. In the handling of his mortar he was fast and he was accurate. According to Fleming, he was timed at setting up his mortar and getting it "leveled" and ready to fire in 19 seconds.

Long and his assistant took their mortar and some ammo and went behind their bunker to a deep square firing pit that was located a little way back towards the barn which was behind the 1st Platoon CP. He quickly set up his weapon and kept up a concentration of mortar fire until his mortar shells were depleted. The Germans quickly determined the approximate location of Long's mortar and began laying down a mortar barrage of their own on his position.

An urgent request was called in to the Platoon CP for more mortar shells. Lt. McGee ordered me and another man to go to the barn and each pick up a case of mortar shells and take them to Long. We got the shells. (Each shell weighed 7 pounds and a box probably held a dozen shells. So it was rather heavy.) I looked around the side of the barn. There seemed to be a lull in the shelling of the field in front of us.

Yelling, "Let's go!" I grabbed my case of shells and ran forward about forty yards towards Long's foxhole. It was so misty I couldn't immediately see anything in the valley but I could clearly hear the sounds of the firefight in front of me. As I neared Long's firing pit I could see many shallow shell holes in the ground around the area. With no wind the acrid odor of cordite hung heavily in the air.

I handed the case of shells to Long and his assistant, who eagerly took them, and turned quickly to start racing back expecting to see my companion behind me with the second box of shells. He wasn't there. I ran back to the barn and found him around the corner crouched down where I had left him. I yelled at him, "Go on before they start shelling again!" He was frozen; he just stared at me and didn't move. I had no line authority over the guy and Long needed those shells so I grabbed the second box and ran forward with it.

When I returned the guy was still crouched, bug-eyed and speechless. I wanted to kick him in the ass but instead I just walked back into the CP and nodded to Lt. McGee and did not report the man's failure to obey orders. The episode was a good example of why we in the army needed a system of military discipline even though we didn't like it.

In the meantime Long got on his mortar again. Soon the Germans broke off the attack and that was the last attack they made on our sector. They might have concluded it was too costly. They were probing for soft spots. It was between 8 and 9 a.m.

After it grew light Thompson and Schiltcher in their forward machine gun position at Lenny 7-Able began to see signs of lots of enemy starting to crawl up the slope in front of them. Their bunker firing port was wide and deep and was set up so Thompson could swing his gun from left to right almost 180 degrees and easily depress it to cover the slope.

In 1973 Paul Thompson went back to Grosslangenfeld and found where his bunker had been located. He climbed down and looked up at it from where the Germans had been. He said he would have hated to assault a machine gun position from their location. He has great respect for those Germans who repeatedly did so.

The Germans were keeping close to the ground using the concealment offered by the deep grass as they crawled forward. Thompson and Schiltcher

watched intently for any signs of movement; an arm would come up; a helmet would appear; a soldier's back would briefly show itself. As they came closer, Thompson was able even to sometimes spot telltale waving of the grass itself. Whenever he saw something he would fire bursts into it keeping his bursts short so he could tell from the path of the tracers — every fifth or sixth round — where the bullets were going so he could correct his fire as needed. Short bursts were better to keep the gun from bouncing around and scattering his fire. Also it saved ammunition, which eventually became a concern.

The enemy made one concerted attempt to drive up the hill and reach the bunker in the morning. During the attempt they didn't seem to be firing much with their personal weapons probably because the flash and smoke would have revealed their locations. Nevertheless, the bunker walls were being hit by bullets from time to time. There was enemy activity in the woods below and this fire was probably coming from there.

During this time the enemy were dropping a lot of mortar shells on them. One mortar shell exploded just outside the bunker with such a powerful blast that Thompson was unable to focus his eyes. In terror he whipped off his glasses to find that one of the lenses had been blown out. Turning the machine gun over to Schiltcher, he quickly crawled back to the house and grabbed a spare pair of glasses. (Later, during a lull he again returned to the house and retrieved his trousers.) During this morning attack the German infantry never did succeed in getting close enough to lob grenades into the bunker or to begin a ground rush; and finally, after an hour of two they gave up further attempts to take the bunker at that time.

Meanwhile in their 2nd platoon bunker, John Ulicni and Ed Fleming were having a fairly quiet time of it once the early barrage lifted. In the distance Fleming saw a group of soldiers enter a thicket in front of them. He raked the general area with machine gun fire but couldn't be sure of whether he hit anything or not. Also they began to see large numbers of Germans out of firing range moving from right to left in the far distance across their front (probably headed for Bleialf). They ignored Grosslangenfeld.

Fleming was frustrated over one incident. There was a rise on his right and partially concealed by the rise was a German trying to get a heavy machine gun set up. He was about 70 yards away. Fleming swung his machine gun around but with the firing stakes firmly in place he couldn't swing it far enough to the right to shoot at the man. The German was mostly

concealed by the rise but, when he would straighten up, his head and shoulders were visible. Finally in frustration, Fleming took the machine gun off its tripod and went out onto the roof of the bunker where he might have a better shot. Every time the guy would straighten up, Fleming with the gun cradled in one arm would fire a burst at him. The guy would duck down but soon get back to work and Fleming would fire another burst. But he couldn't properly aim the gun without a tripod and he never did hit the guy. He was full of admiration for the German who just kept on working: "He was one hell of a good soldier!"

Generally by 9:30 a.m. the German assaults let up although isolated riflemen, burp gunners, machine gunners, and probably mortar gunners, too, continued to work their way forward along fences, hedgerows, and through thickets — wherever they could find concealment.

We at the 1st platoon CP waited to see what was going to happen next. The shelling of the village moderated. As we waited there was growing concern because we had heard nothing from the 424th Infantry or from Division. Although we could occasionally identify gunfire coming from the direction of Eigelscheid, the Troop had no real news since our telephone ground wire was cut shortly before (or during) the pre-dawn shelling

Unknown to us the 106th Infantry Division Headquarters had received the following message from the Commander, 424th Inf. at 0715 "...106th ID Reconnaissance Troop hit very hard, but I don't have much info on what's happening over there. Commo went out suddenly and I fear they may have been overrun." And, again at 0840: "Most dangerous situation is on my left and I am not certain of the situation with the 106th ID Recon Troop. Their silence is ominous and I am very concerned that Cannon Company could be hit from flank and rear." It is quite apparent that Col. Alexander Reid, the Commander of the 424th Infantry Regiment, was unaware that the Recons had been forbidden to use their radios.

Captain Million sent a two-man patrol in a jeep to contact the 424th Cannon Company on our right. They never returned. At probably about the same time Million ordered McGee to send a mounted patrol with Sgt. Iezzi, Fritz (to handle the machine gun mounted in the jeep) and Foiles (as driver) to see what was happening towards Bleialf to the northeast. They proceeded a mile or so until German troops fired at them from the Bleialf railroad station. They saw what appeared to be one American soldier whom they assumed was

from Troop B of the 18th Cavalry. They then returned to Grosslangenfeld and reported.

As things quieted down I thought to myself: Who knows where all this is going to end. So while I have a moment free I'm going to put on all the winter clothing I had peeled off in the days previous. As things turned out I was glad I did so.

We just kept waiting. A sergeant from another Platoon wandered into the 1st Platoon CP looking anxious. He was muttering to himself and anyone who would listen, "We've got to get out of here! We've got to get out of here! This isn't just a local thing. It's a major attack!'

This man had seen action in North Africa and had been hospitalized for sever concussion and battle fatigue. After treatment in the States the doctors eventually thought he had recovered and stamped him "fit for duty." He was a very good soldier and at Camp Atterbury had been transferred into our outfit where his combat experience was very welcome. We all thought the artillery and excitement had set him off. It had. But also he was the only man in the troop with a sense of what was really going on. Eventually he wandered off. The next morning he had regained his composure and had set up a mortar in the 3rd Platoon sector and was trying to knock off an 88mm assault gun the Germans had set up on the edge of the woods in front of us.

Late in the morning Sgt. Mechling ran over to the bunker occupied by Ulicni and Fleming and relieved them with other 2nd Platoon men. Haines recalls that subsequent to this he and Ulicni and about five other men moved into a large firing pit that was located near a barn beside the 2nd Platoon CP. There were Germans out front who were carrying out a harassing attack and the men in the pit were firing at them whenever they could be seen. The Germans were firing back at them with rifles and burp guns. Haines appeared to be drawing more that a fair share of fire. Ulicni recalls that he reached over and took Joe's helmet saying, "Lieutenant, they're trying to kill you." He scratched away the white bar painted in the middle in the front of the helmet indicating Haines was a 1st Lieutenant and then rubbed some mud over the bare area and handed it back to Joe.

Mechling collected Fleming at about this time and taking Fleming's armored car, they rolled out a little and tried to hit a German with a burp gun who was causing trouble. For some reason they were not successful. They decided to leave the vehicle and try from another location on foot, firing

through holes in a wall. They used M-1 rifles they had borrowed. Fleming said they were doing a duet act. First he would fire a clip of eight rounds. When they heard the ping of the cartridge clip ejecting, Mechling would commence firing while Fleming loaded another clip. When Mechling's clip popped out with a ping, Fleming took over the firing once again. Sometimes the burp gunner would give them a burst. It was hard to know whether they eventually got the guy or he just moved on.

Before noon the Germans recommenced their attacks — especially against the 2nd and 3rd Platoons. We in the 1st Platoon CP could hear the increased gunfire. At about noon Lt. McGee was ordered to pull a few men out of our bunkers all of which were now quiet, and send them over to help out the 3rd Platoon which were hard pressed. McGee was upset that he had to order his men into what sounded to us to be a pretty hot battle. J.D. Frazee, Russell Foiles and the other men selected didn't protest; they just went. But when we were alone McGee said to Tucker and me: "I'm really sorry I took a commission if it's going to mean decisions like this!" Tucker and I just looked at each other rather surprised. After all that's what being an officer was all about.

Frazee remembers walking through the village down a lane with the village church close by on his right. Almost immediately after he arrived at the 3rd platoon area he found that a German burp gunner was firing bursts from a concealed position behind a fence on the edge of a field facing them, forcing them to keep down. This man had been firing repeatedly and was running low on ammunition.

Soon Frazee saw a crouched man running along the fence towards the burp gunner. He was carrying boxes of fresh ammunition. Frazee leaned against one of the building walls and took a shot at the guy with his carbine. He was probably 100 to 150 yards away. The guy went down but didn't stay down. When he started forward again Frazee took another shot at him and again he went down but then he came back up. It happened a third time.

Frazee was a Tennessee man and considered himself a pretty fair shot. He was frustrated. He figured he had hit the guy but at that range the carbine bullets didn't have much punch. Then some German took a shot at Frazee and the bullet hit the wall he had been leaning against stinging the side of his face with bits of stone and cement. He thought it prudent to lie down behind a pile of brick rubble nearby.

Sgt. Art LaCroix came along. He was carrying his M-1 rifle. Frazee asked if he could borrow it and explained why. LaCroix said there was no need for that and joined Frazee behind the pile of rubble. The next time the German rose up and started forward LaCroix shot and wounded him. Soon a couple of stretcher-bearers came running low along the fence to pick him up. LaCroix asked Frazee whether he wanted to let them come. Frazee said: "Let's let them pick him up if they don't try to come forward with the ammunition." The stretcher-bearers loaded the wounded man on a stretcher and went back with him.

German infantry were pressing forward with waves of attacks. Some were heavy and in the 3rd Platoon the men in their bunkers were busy with their machine guns. Suddenly an American artillery spotter plane came over the 3rd Platoon and wiggled its wings. It was probably from the 591st artillery battalion. LaCroix quickly found some orange panels and spread them in front of our position. The spotter plane radioed coordinates back to his artillery battalion and for a little while the 106th Recons got some artillery support from the 106th Division — the only effective support we got from the 106th during the entire battle.

In the woods in front of the 3rd platoon, German troops could be seen. LaCroix obtained a 60mm mortar. He and Frazee set it up in an alley and began dropping shells on them. A German mortar gunner in turn spotted them. He was good. LaCroix and Frazee heard a mortar shell coming down. Frazee jumped to one side around the corner of awall just as the shell exploded. It hit the base plate of the mortar and wrecked it. The concussion caused dust to pop from Frazee's trousers! LaCroix had sprinted away. Frazee thinks LaCroix was hit in the buttocks by fragments from the shell that hit their mortar although he may have been hit by fragments from the shell that wounded Bob House at about the same time. LaCroix's cartridge belt around his waist saved him from more serious injury as it stopped fragments from hitting his mid-section.

House and Spade had set up a mortar in the same immediate area. They had only one explosive round and two flares. They fired off all three, and shortly after that House was hit with several shell fragments. He thinks they were from an 88 shell that hit a brick wall nearby and showered fragments. He was hit in the left side, the knee, between the shoulders (this was discovered later at the aid station in St. Vith), the little toe (the most painful of all) and in the arm where an artery was badly cut. He lost a lot of blood.

There is one incident regarding the 3rd Platoon that has been much talked about. I heard part of it when I was at the Miami Beach reassignment center in the summer of 1945 when memories were fresher than they are now. It is probably too late to find a detailed version from an eye witness.

The story is that during a lull in enemy action against the 3rd Platoon a German officer with a white flag started advancing toward our position. In response Lt. Johnstone came out without advancing. Things quieted down. The German officer shouted something to Johnstone. Johnstone then reportedly yelled something like, "To hell with you, you son-of-a-bitch" and Johnstone in a fury, ran over to his armored car which was apparently concealed just around the corner. He ordered it driven into view and pumped a 37mm shell (or a .50-caliber machine gun burst) into the German officer and the battle recommenced.

I personally doubt that Johnstone would have fired upon an officer with a white flag (who was too far away to be trying to check our positions) unless he found grave provocation to do so. It is possible that the German officer had said we were vastly outnumbered and would soon be overwhelmed and no prisoners would be taken unless we surrendered immediately. This would be consistent with what Al Gommel learned from a German soldier after he and others were captured by the Germans on December 17 , i.e., that the commander of the battle on December 16 intended to kill all prisoners.

Also, it is true that Hitler urged his troops before the battle to strike with fury and without mercy. However such exhortations, while often honored by the German S.S., who were fanatical adherents of Hitler, were not much honored by the German Wehrmacht (regular army). The only widespread exception to honoring the Geneva Convention occurred on the Russian Front where, as the war progressed and became more bitter, little quarter was given by either side, even the Wehrmacht.

(My dear Italian friend, Carlo Squarci, was an officer in the Italian Army and took part in the Battle of Stalingrad. He told me of seeing German guards machine-gunning into columns of marching Russian POW's just to keep them moving along. "And, these weren't S.S.; they were regular Wehrmacht soldiers!" He was sickened by the senseless cruelty.)

Sometimes Wehrmacht soldiers who were transferred to the Western Front from the Eastern Front continued to fight by those rules. Since the 62nd Division had been withdrawn from the Eastern Front and rebuilt before

attacking us it is quite possible that a number of the officers and non-coms may have been inclined to shoot prisoners.

During the morning Bill Selje was near the Headquarters Platoon CP. He could see Germans who had worked their way up fairly close off to one side amidst some grapevines. Our people were receiving fire from that area. Selje and armored car driver Kenny Smith went over to Kenny's vehicle (which was right outside the platoon CP) in order to man the .50-caliber machine gun on the turret and take a shot at the Jerries in the vineyard. I asked why they did so; were they ordered to? Bill said, "Oh no, it just seemed like a good idea."

They went outside and climbed onto the armored car and without bothering to get inside the turret they swung the gun around and started firing. They had barely begun when a burp gunner spotted them and gave them a burst. Bill took hits in the left rib cage under the elbow, the left forearm and the left shoulder. Burp guns had such a high rate of fire that if you were hit you generally got stitched vertically with more than one bullet as the gun climbed from the recoil. Kenny didn't get hit so he and Lou Cunningham helped Bill.

Abe Freund quickly came on the scene and treated Bill and the other wounded. Bill's wounds, though serious, were not life-threatening and he could walk. He, however, spent many months in hospital recovering.

A makeshift ambulance was quickly organized for the three wounded men. One of the half-tracks was brought up. At Freund's insistence the .50-caliber machine gun was taken off the vehicle, all personal weapons were left behind, and a large Red Cross flag was fixed to it and they left to go to St. Vith.

They retraced the same route we had used to get to Grosslangenfeld a few days before. In the vehicle were Selje, LaCroix, and House, plus Freund, who (according to Joe Haines) had to duck through hostile artillery fire to bring extra plasma for the guys who were hurt, the driver, James Guthrie, and two supply men, James Hetrick and Howard Hughes. The latter two men were to report to Major Ralph Kuzell for orders, discard the Red Cross flag, and come back in the half-track with fresh ammunition.

The half-track started off from Grosslangenfeld, its Red Cross flag flying. Frazee could see it as it moved along the road and at some distance it bounced as though it had hit a dip in the road or as though a mortar shell had landed

next to it. He wasn't sure which but it did cause him to think of he and LaCroix letting the stretcher-bearers carry the wounded ammo runner back to their lines.

The battle would ebb in one area and then rise again in another as the Germans probed for weak spots in our line of defense. It snowed briefly. Joe Haines recalls he refrained from jumping into a shell hole when a shell was exploding nearby, because it was partly full of water from the melted snow.

During the morning there were no attacks in the Lenny 8 area. Gresh says they did see some movement in woods in front of them and he took a few shots with his M-1 rifle during this activity, but that was all. Al Nazarenus in the Lenny 8 complex was impatient to get into the fight. He noted that there continued to be activity in the Lenny 7 area. So on his own initiative he took his carbine and walked over to a shed out front in the field to the left of them 25 or 50 yards away. He saw some Germans to the left of that and took a few shots hitting nothing. Disgusted with his carbine he came back and asked Gresh if he could borrow his M-1 rifle. With this he walked back to the shed and picked off a couple of Germans. The assault on their left petered out and the area was quiet for the rest of the day.

Lt. Lenny Proznik made the rounds checking on his Headquarters Platoon men and bringing ammunition, sandwiches, and whatever else they needed. Walking around — especially in the exposed forward areas — was very hazardous. (Paul Thompson says he had some reservations about Proznik at Camp Atterbury but ended up with great admiration for the man.)

Meanwhile, back at the 1st Platoon nothing much was happening. I do recall that late in the morning McGee was ordered to send a couple of men over to a building in the middle of the village with gear for taking .50-calibre machine guns out of cosmoline and getting them in shooting condition. Apparently during our quiet time before the battle no orders were given to clean up and assemble the three .50s which we had shipped in cosmoline from Atterbury. The .50s we picked up at the ordinance depot in England were already cleaned and installed on the armored cars and half-tracks ready to go. It seemed strange to have to take men out of the line during the battle in order to unpack and clean guns that we had packed for shipment prior to embarkation in the States.

When things had quieted down a bit at midday Barr was ordered to take a jeep, get a load of ammunition and take it over to the 3rd Platoon. He loaded

up and with some trepidation because of his load, he took some to the bunker where he had first stayed. He had no orientation as to the whereabouts of the other 3rd Platoon bunkers so he took it to a house in the 3rd Platoon area which might have been the platoon CP. He recalls that while in the house he went up to the second floor and looked out onto the battlefield. There, along a wire fence running diagonally across the field in front of him perhaps a hundred fifty feet away he saw at least 50 dead Germans sprawled out along the fence for about a hundred feet—crumpled where they had fallen, some separately and some in clusters.

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At about noon while Fleming was off somewhere Mechling asked Ulicni to get Fleming's armored car out of a barn and pull it up along the side of a building with a partial view of the battlefield in front of them. Mechling and Ulicni climbed into the turret. Mechling gave Ulicni his binoculars. There was a German machine gun hidden in a hedge that was giving the platoon trouble. They couldn't make out the gunner but they could see short bursts of smoke from the hedge when he fired. When they were set, Ulicni located the spot where the smoke was coming from and Mechling lined up the sights of the 37mm gun. He fired a round while Ulicini watched through the binoculars for the hit. It was short. Mechling corrected and the second shot hit the hedge row and silenced the gun. Mechling was all over the place and was extremely versatile and aggressive in fighting the enemy.

The fire in the roof of the 2nd Platoon CP which began during the initial shelling had soon burned itself out so that Haines and Mechling were able to continue to use this building as their platoon CP. It was located on the east side of the road to Bleialf. The CP itself was on the second floor. The first floor was a storage and farm machinery area and Haines kept his armored car concealed there. There was a door on the right side of the house on the ground level which they usually used when entering or leaving. However, a burp gunner had installed himself in a protected position a little over on the right and had a good shot at anyone entering or leaving by that door.

Mechling suggested to Haines that they go upstairs and see if they could locate the burp gun position and eliminate it. Haines took a grenade launcher for his carbine and they went up. A front window looked out over the battlefield and it too was in plain view of the burp gunner's position. He wasn't firing and they couldn't find his location.

Mechling said to Haines that he would cross in front of the window and try to draw fire so that hopefully Haines could locate the gunner. Mechling

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Stephen Litcher was in a 3rd Platoon bunker together with Bill Randal, Sal Patano, George Comeau and perhaps others. Their bunker had two gun ports for machine guns, none for rifles. One of these guns was a 50 caliber, which was unusual. Litcher said they had not dismounted this weapon from his armored car and taken it into the bunker, so it was probably one of the three 50's that had been unpacked and taken out of cosmoline at the supply shed earlier that day. Since this added much more fire power to their bunker this probably meant that their bunker was in a hot corner of the Recon defense. Their two guns swept two of the main roads leading into the village. These converged in front of them: one from the west and one from the southwest. When heavy attacks were pressed against their area they were kept busy shooting down advancing Germans.

A German burp gunner infiltrated their area and concealed himself in a house in front of them and off to one side. He opened fire on anyone entering or leaving their bunker. Finally Litcher and Comeau took a bazooka outside to see if they could silence him. They found a partially concealed position from which they could take a shot at the guy. Litcher put a shell in the tube and tapped Comeau on the shoulder. Comeau fired but missed, hitting the ground in front of the house. He fired again and this time demolished the house. After that they could move in and out of their bunker without sniper fire from that source.

did so. The burp gunner gave him a burst which missed but Haines saw about where he was and fired a grenade. They waited not sure of the results. Mechling said, " I'll do it again and we'll see if you hit him." He again crossed in front of the window and again drew fire. This time Haines saw precisely where the gunner was and took another shot. Again they waited, not sure of the results. Mechling again volunteered to cross in front of the window and there was no burst of fire. Either they knocked out the gunner or he had moved on. For this action Roy Mechling was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" for valor.

Out at Lenny 7-Able the German infantry launched one concentrated attack in the afternoon and resumed accompanying mortar fire on the bunker. They were methodically working up closer and Paul Thompson began to worry that if they could work themselves much closer someone might be able to lob a grenade into the bunker. One burp gunner was popping up and giving him a quick burst from time to time. And a group was in a small copse down the slope in front , directing small arms fire at them.

During one of Proznik's visits in the afternoon Thompson said, "There are some guys out there I can't reach".... because of the lay of the land. Proznik arranged to send up a mortar gunner. Soon Long showed up with his assistant. Thompson pointed down below to the copse, and Long said he could take care of it. He set up his mortar and dropped his first shot right in the middle. Thompson had no more trouble from that quarter.

Rudy Aittima says that at one stage during a pressing attack in the 2nd Platoon "Y" area Carl Petrone and he took their bazooka onto the roof of their bunker and took a few shots at enemy positions that were difficult to knock off.

During the morning Lt. Joe Haines wondered what the Germans were up to. His 2nd Platoon hadn't been hit very hard since the Germans tried their pre-dawn attempt over on his right at the "Y". There were a couple of probes in the center but they were half-hearted.

Then at about mid-day they began a determined assault. Lines of German skirmishers came walking up the rolling meadows towards the middle of his platoon sector. There were a few lanes but no woods for concealment for these advancing forces.

Charles Lucas in his bunker also saw them advancing. He opened fire with his machine gun. Initially he couldn't be sure how effective his bullets were. In some places where he had been directing his fire he began to see gaps in their ranks but at first he couldn't be sure whether the gaps were from their being hidden by dips in the landscape or from being hit by his fire. As the German infantry moved closer he began to see them stumble and fall as he fired.

Haines also saw these troops. They were advancing in waves and continuing to come on even as they were taking casualties from our fire. From his vantage point Haines noted that there were a couple of farm buildings out front 200 or 300 yards away. As the German troops began moving past the buildings some of them slipped inside. Haines was concerned they might set up protected machine gun and sniper positions. He wasn't certain the small arms fire of his men could deal with that.

He decided it was time to bring the 37mm gun on his armored car into play. Going into the garage underneath his platoon CP, he swung the doors wide open. They opened directly onto the battlefield. Then, climbing into his vehicle, he began to direct armor-piercing shell fire at the buildings. These shells had a tracer element and he could see where they were landing. This was helpful because the gun had never been bore-sighted. He corrected the gun sights as he kept shooting.

Haines also found that the gun had never been cleaned of its cosmoline and the action of the breech-block was sluggish and would not automatically slip back into battery ready to receive the next shell. After each shot he had to sit up on top of the .50-caliber machine gun ring mount and push the breech-block home with his feet. Eventually, as repeated firing heated up the gun, it began to operate normally. The cosmoline began to melt and dripped down into the interior of the vehicle.

After Haines shot off the armor-piercing shells he had in the turret racks, he switched to high explosive shells—some of which he used on the buildings and some on the advancing troops. The waves of German infantry kept coming. They were pressing the attack very hard. As the enemy grew closer, he switched to canister shells which shot hundreds of scattered small balls like shot gun blasts. These shells were deadly against infantry at close range. He cut down many of the German troops as they kept coming. Their attack faltered and broke and they fell back leaving the field strewn with their

dead and wounded. They did not do much in that sector during the rest of the day.

Over in the 3rd Platoon, Frazee was looking for further ways to help out. He walked west along a lane and then down to a bunker on the extreme right. He went in and found Bill Randall alone on a machine gun occasionally firing bursts. The bunker had taken quite a beating and there was a little blood coming from a corner of Randall's mouth. Frazee asked him if he could take over for a while. Randall said no, he was fine.

At 2 or 3 p.m. Bill Tower saw an 88mm assault gun being wheeled up out of the woods. It took a few shots at them at the "Y" area. The shells went over them hitting the village. Joe Haines said that among other things it put a dud through one side of a building and out the other. The 88mm gun may have been there in case we tried to move out with our armored cars. Fleming recalls seeing an armored car wheel spinning through the air. Perhaps it occurred at this time. (Josef Reusch has told me that their assault gun ammunition was closely rationed and I do not believe they used much against Grosslangenfeld.)

Sometime during the afternoon Fleming saw Bob Long walking along in the 2nd platoon area with his mortar. There was a German sniper who was firing from a protected position making trouble. They couldn't knock him out with ordinary fire. So word had gone out requesting Long's help. The sniper's position was pointed out to Long. He set up his mortar, fired one ranging shot, and dropped the next one directly on the guy. Fleming saw his booted legs flop up in the air from the blast.

Lou Cunningham recalls a couple of Germans casually walking up the middle of the Winterspelt Road in the afternoon as if there were no war on. They could have been drunk or have mistakenly assumed that the town was held by Germans. Unfortunately we shot them instead of letting them move close to the village and capturing them for interrogation.

Things seemed to quiet down and Frazee decided to head back to the 1st Platoon. On his way back he saw an M-8 armored car in an alley starting to roll slowly forward with its 37mm gun facing a corner of our front. It didn't go far beyond the buildings. He saw someone in the turret with a white flag. The armored car was not more than a hundred feet from a German or Germans who had stood up near a fence for the meeting. While a brief

discussion was going on, one of our mortar gunners was lining up his weapon on the Germans as they stood talking.

When the meeting broke up the driver quickly moved the armored car straight back in reverse. When he pulled back, the order was given to use the mortar and we dropped a mortar shell on the group left behind, throwing one of the Germans up so he came down hanging over the fence. Frazee never got the whole story as to why the meeting took place but he saw the man hanging on the fence as he was walking back to our Platoon. He was still hanging there when Frazee got his jeep for the pullout the next day.

The Germans were methodically moving up into concealed positions from which to fire upon people moving around in the village. Joe Haines walked over to the Troop Command Post. On his way over a burp gunner took a shot at him from behind. Joe started to run. His helmet started bobbing around and fell off. He abruptly stooped to reach back for it when another burst from the burp gun went by where he would have been. He would have been stitched up the back judging from where the bullets hit beyond him. Then he really ran.

By mid-afternoon things had pretty well quieted down. Harry Nash came into our platoon CP. He was grumbling that he always got all the shitty jobs. He had been ordered to run the phone wires and make repairs where shell fire had cut them. Even though shell fire had lightened, it was still going on and he never knew when a mortar gunner or burp gunner might spot him.

J.D. Frazee and Russell Foiles and others arrived back at the 1st Platoon CP late in the afternoon. I asked Foiles, "Well, Russell, did you get any Krauts?" He said, "I think I got one—at least one for sure. I drew a bead on the guy, pulled the trigger and he went down!"

Corporal Oscar Willi came into our CP with a wounded shoulder. He had been out back by a wood pile near a barn in the 1st Platoon area and a mortar shell landed. Bill Fritz and "Red" Braemer were nearby but were behind the wood pile when the shell exploded. A fragment hit Willi in the shoulder. I had a close look at him in the Platoon CP. His color was good and he wasn't in pain and he wasn't losing blood and could move his arm. He looked OK to me but Williams, our medic, looked at it and said he couldn't be sure there wasn't a fragment inside and he sent him back to St. Vith.

After dark at about quarter to seven, Capt. Million sent out Sgt. Jack Kennedy of the 1st Platoon with a couple of men in a jeep to reconnoiter the road to Bleialf and Troop B of the 18th Cavalry. He was to report back within a certain time. Starting down the Bleialf road, Kennedy proceeded a quarter of a mile, stopped the jeep and turned off the motor in order to listen and sent a scout, "Red" Braemer, ahead a short distance. When Braemer found nothing and returned, Kennedy moved to the limit of his advance, stopped and sent Braemer ahead again. He kept a man on the machine gun. He did this several times. Finally Braemer didn't return. Kennedy waited a while and then had to return to the troop to report to Million.

Years later Red came to visit Jack Kennedy at his home while on a business trip in the area. He told Jack he had run into Germans and had been captured.

Taking stock as night settled upon Grosslangenfeld, our people at the various CPs could conclude that we had done a pretty good job of defending the village. Fortunately no tanks had been used against us. Our defensive positions had taken a considerable pounding from artillery, mortar and rocket fire and in places we had been subjected to heavy but not overwhelming infantry attacks. Our bunkers had served us well. None had been overrun, our losses were few, we had ammunition and morale was good.

However, numerous pockets of Germans had established themselves in the approaches to our positions and further encroachment under cover of darkness could be expected. There was therefore serious concern as to whether infantry assaults might overwhelm us the following day. The bunkers which enabled us to mete out much death and destruction to the enemy could turn into death traps if the tables were turned and we were not skillfully withdrawn at the opportune time. Tomorrow we might possibly get help from Division or other American elements although in view of the day's events that didn't seem very likely.

Orrie Barr was in the Troop CP at the switchboard that evening. He heard a discussion which ensued between Captain Million and two or three of his officers. He clearly recalls that Lt. Veream and Lt. Johnstone were there and perhaps one or two others. In addition 1st Sgt. Johnson was present together with some of the other senior non-coms. They reviewed the events of the day and what course of action we should adopt in view of the situation the troop faced. There was considerable discussion about the dangerous position we were in and the complications we might encounter in surrendering if the

Germans overwhelmed us. Captain Million observed that if indeed eventually we had to surrender he wanted to be as far away from the village as possible because we had killed a lot of Germans and there might be reprisals. None of the officers or senior non-coms felt that we should consider surrender at that point but some did propose that the troop withdraw under cover of darkness that night.

This proposed course of action must have been heavily endorsed at this point in the meeting because word leaked out and the men in the 2nd Platoon bunker at the "Y" were told we were pulling out. According to Bill Tower, they were ordered to withdraw from their bunker to a house in the village behind their position and to wait in a darkened room in the house for further orders. After a couple of hours the order was rescinded and they returned to their bunker. Tower was relieved to find that the Germans had not occupied the bunker in their absence.

Some at the Troop CP meeting were concerned about the confusion we would encounter in the dark in withdrawing from our positions and in finding the roads we would have to follow. They suggested we should withdraw at first light the following morning.

With so much uncertainty at the meeting about the best course of action to follow, some urged Million to use the radios to learn what was going on. He steadfastly refused to do so. Million was in a very conflicted position. With all the talk about surrendering it is obvious that the outlook at the Troop CP was very grim. Yet Million was afraid he would be court-marshaled for withdrawing or surrendering without authorization. What he desperately needed was to be able to contact Col. Reid of the 424th Infantry or someone at Division to describe our situation and obtain orders to fight to the last or to withdraw in time to save the troop. But to do so by radio would require the radio frequencies, call signs and secret codes set out in an SOI. Just operating the radio randomly was not likely to accomplish anything decisive and would expose Million to disciplinary action for not maintaining radio silence. Barr draws a blank on the SOI question. To me it seems obvious that Million would have used the radios as the lesser of two evils if he had had an SOI.

According to Barr the meeting simply broke up with the decision to stay put and wait for further developments.

GROSSLANGENFELD — NIGHT DECEMBER 16/17

At the 1st Platoon things were quiet after dark. There was still light shelling but no discernable enemy infantry activity. I was assigned guard duty at the 1st Platoon CP until about midnight. It was an overcast night and pitch black at the entrance to our CP. At intervals squad leaders brought up men from the bunkers for food and other needs. I asked our guys to give the password as they approached but no one would do so. I held my fire and hoped for the best knowing that there could be some German patrols around in the village. At midnight I was relieved and turned in.

Looking out onto the village there were a couple of small fires burning from shell hits. I don't recall much gunfire although there might have been an occasional shell burst. Otherwise all seemed quiet. I fell asleep but was awakened suddenly at about 2 a.m. A few houses away towards the center of the village a building was on fire and ammunition began popping off in all directions. Barr also saw and heard the ammunition going up in the burning house. It was across the street from the Troop CP. It looked and sounded like the Fourth of July. The explosions continued for almost an hour. Then I went back to sleep.

Meanwhile Paul Thompson in Lenny 7-Able was wide awake, pumped up with adrenalin. He had been manning his machine gun most of the day since the shelling began before dawn the previous morning. Although the night sky was overcast, the area in front of his bunker was dimly lit by frequent flares fired by the forces battling for Winterspelt close by. During the intervals when the flares died away and left the area in total darkness he worried that someone might get close enough to toss in a grenade. He was straining to detect any sound or movement on the slopes in front of him. Although a burp gunner occasionally gave him a burst, there were no attacks launched.

As he waited and listened he could hear the sounds of the attack on the Cannon Company group gradually move north and around to his right and behind. He could plainly distinguish the sound of American machine guns from the sound of German machine guns which had a more rapid rate of fire and, of course, there was the brrrrp of German burp guns. (The Germans may well have broadened the front of their attack trying to swing around the flanks of the American defenders. The right flank of the Germans may have reached around to the northeast of Winterspelt as far north as the Ihrenbach Creek, giving Thompson the impression the battle was extending even a little

behind him, especially if the orientation of his bunker was not straight west but somewhat towards the southwest.)

GROSSLANGENFELD– DECEMBER 17

The morning of December 17 was cloudy. As soon as it was light and men began moving around outside, we heard the burst of a burp gun nearby. The gunner had infiltrated into the heart of the village and was hidden somewhere in the rubble of a damaged building. There were so many places of concealment we couldn't spot him. We soon learned that the popping off during the night was all of our reserve ammunition blowing up.

Out in the bunkers things were quiet in the 1st Platoon sector although Jack Kennedy saw lots of German infantry going down the valley past us. "They didn't seem to see our bunkers." The men in Kennedy's bunker took a few odd shots at them but they were out of range. (These may have been units of the 18th Volksgrenadier Infantry Division heading towards Bleialf in an effort to close the southern pincer around the 422nd and 423rd Infantry.)

As the morning progressed, the Germans poured many more troops into their infantry attacks against the 3rd Platoon and Headquarters Platoon. With Cannon Company and its reinforcement driven out of Winterspelt, the Germans probably were prompted to move more troops eastward against us along the road from Winterspelt in order to clean up their right flank. Knowing we had the fire power and mobility of an American cavalry recon troop, they probably wanted to make sure that we couldn't break out along the road towards them shooting up their infantry and supply columns as they moved northwest towards Steinbruck and thence to St. Vith.

Lenny 8 was hit heavily according to Mike Gresh. Just to the south the Germans hadn't hit Mike Liskiewicz's bunker very hard on the first day of the battle but they began pushing heavily next morning. The attacking infantry were partially concealed by the deep grass and the brow of a rise, but he could see the smoke and fire from lots of riflemen shooting as they moved forward. Jim Goff of the 3rd Platoon says, "The whole hill was full of Germans.... swarming up towards us.... They were massed down in the gully marching towards us."

Paul Thompson says the Germans launched one attack in the morning. He spotted a man to his far left crawling up through the grass with a large sand-colored tank on his back. He probably had a flame thrower and Paul

gave him a lot of special attention although it was difficult because the man was so far to the left. Other people in bunkers on Paul's left also saw him and poured fire into him. He didn't get far.

A meeting of all officers was called by Captain Million at about 11:30 in the morning of the 17th. At this meeting orders were given to promptly pull our troop out of the village and head northeast along the Bleialf road. The order of march would be 1st Platoon, the Headquarters Command group (Capt. Million, 1st Lt. Veream, 1st Sgt. Johnson, and associated men), 2nd Platoon, 3rd Platoon, and Headquarters Platoon.

At a given signal drivers were to move to their vehicles and get them started and warmed up ready to move onto the road. Then the men, in a phased withdrawal by platoon, were to leave their bunkers taking personal weapons plus machine guns, mortars and whatever ammunition remained. We were not to take barracks bags. We were to move quickly to our vehicles, mount up and leave.

Lt. Johnstone arrived at the meeting late after the route to be taken was specified. As the meeting was hurriedly breaking up he asked for details about the road we were going to take. Because time was pressing he was merely told to follow the 2nd Platoon. He left the meeting assuming — incorrectly — that we would leave along the same route we used to enter, i.e., west to Winterspelt and then northwest to Steinbruck and St. Vith.

(The plan failed to organize and utilize the withering firepower of the troop's many .50-caliber machine guns mounted on our armored vehicles to provide covering fire while the hard-pressed Headquarters and 3rd Platoons withdrew through the 2nd and 1st Platoons. It was a recipe for disaster and half the troop was lost.)

Immediately following the meeting, First Sgt. Johnson told Barr to get on the switchboard and call the platoons and instruct them that the troop was going to leave the village promptly. "Tell 'em: 1st Platoon, Headquarters Command, 2nd Platoon, 3rd Platoon, Headquarters Platoon in that order." He spoke so quickly that Barr was not certain he had heard it all correctly and asked Johnson to repeat the order of leaving. Johnson brusquely said, "Just tell 'em to leave!" and walked out the door.

(J.D. Frazee heard that Lt. Veream at some point in the battle gave orders to First Sgt. Johnson to move a half-track. Johnson is alleged to have replied,

"Move it yourself, Lieutenant." The incident may have occurred during the excitement of departure.)

Barr got on the switchboard and relayed the message. Some taking the message at the Platoon CPs protested saying that some of their people couldn't leave immediately; they were pinned down by heavy enemy attacks. Barr could do nothing about that. Their armored car was just outside warmed up and he had to join the others outside. The vehicle had a faulty or missing starter and had been kept running for some time before their departure. Captain Million and Lt. Veream were in the turret. Barr climbed into the radio operator's seat carrying a sub-machine gun he had borrowed. The driver was already in his seat and a carpool mechanic crowded in behind the driver, probably to help keep the vehicle running.

Million waited for signs of vehicles forming up to follow him. After two or three minutes, seeing none, he gave the command to pull out. The driver was ordered to drive out to the main road just ahead and then turn to the left (in order to head out towards Bleialf). Instead of turning left the driver, flustered, turned right. At about this time mortar shells began dropping all around them. Fragments from exploding shells were banging against the sides of their M-8. Barr was worried that a mortar shell might land in the turret. During this flurry of shells landing around them, the driver was jockeying the M-8 back and forth trying to get turned around. Finally he got the vehicle heading toward Bleialf and they pulled in behind the 1st Platoon.

I was in the lead M-8 of the 1st Platoon. As soon as the men from the bunkers arrived, we mounted up and started out. In my armored car the driver and I closed our hatches and could only see through the slits in front.

We held our breath as we drove along, hoping it would take some time before the Germans got their guns turned around onto the road. We drove along a farm lane past a house or two and turned onto the main road, passed several more houses and were clear of the village. Several times we slowed down or halted, presumably waiting for the column to catch up with us. We continued on, stopping for short periods and then starting up again.

The 1st Platoon had a very easy time of it. We were on the northeast edge of the village just off the Bleialf road when the pullout began so we didn't have far to go to clear the village. Additionally we were not under assault, and, as the first unit to begin leaving, we had the benefit of surprise. So we got out without incident. The men in the troop command group with

Captain Million also moved out without difficulty because they didn't have far to go to join the column behind us.

Then things began to fall apart. The 2nd Platoon began to take increasing mortar and small arms fire as the men reached their vehicles and started to move out. Sgt. Mechling led off with his armored car section following the Troop Command group. Lt. Haines' section fell in behind them and they, too, moved out.

By this time German infantry were beginning to arrive on the edges of the scene and were firing with increasing effectiveness as they came closer. Fleming says bullets were banging off his armored car. Without time to install his machine gun on the post mounting in their jeep before they started moving, Ulicni began firing while holding the gun in one arm in the direction of the German small arms fire. ("That gun got really hot!") Lt. Haines got busy with his .50-caliber machine gun at the same time. Firing over and narrowly missing Ulicni's head, Haines shot up an abandoned jeep and trailer as they passed it. Haines was probably also shooting at Germans approaching from the right and rear as the column moved ahead. Lucas was firing the .50-caliber in the turret of Mechling's armored car as they moved out.

Ulicni saw a large chunk of concrete or something hit Haines's turret and Haines didn't even duck so intent was he on laying down machine gun fire. By the time Haines had an opportunity to check on the people behind in the 3rd Armored Car Section of his platoon, he couldn't see any of their vehicles behind him. Mechling must have noticed the same thing at about the same time. John Ulicni said he could see as far back as the "Y" but there were no vehicles to be seen.

Million and Veream looked back and saw there was no one following behind Haines's section. Barr heard one of them ask the other, "Where's the 3rd Platoon?" It wasn't behind following them. Barr heard Million ask Veream, "Do you think I should go back?" His tone indicated reluctance to do so. Veream said to Million, "Captain, you've already lost your command!" They continued on.

When Mechling saw there were no vehicles in sight, he jumped down, ran around to Fleming and said, "Ed, will you take me back to help those guys?" Fleming was scared to death but "...I'd follow that guy anywhere!" and agreed to turn back.

Ulicni who was following Haines in a jeep was also getting ready to turn his jeep around. Captain Million saw them looking behind getting ready to go back and emphatically motioned them to keep moving with the column and they did so. As they proceeded, Ulicni's jeep was hit so they had to abandon it. Ulicni jumped onto the side of Mechling's armored car and hung on until they halted in a quiet zone.

See 77A →

Ted Daehnke, Carl Petrone, Norm Grieninger, Bill Tower, Rudi Aittima and probably others had been in the 2nd Platoon bunker near the "Y" or at nearby positions. I presume Sgt. Cliff Shaw the Commander of the third armored car of the 2nd Platoon was part of this group. These people were on the right flank of the 2nd Platoon sector and the last in the 2nd Platoon scheduled to break from their bunkers and run for their vehicles.

Petrone grabbed a .30-caliber machine gun and was firing it while he ran, holding it in his arms. The men ran in different directions looking for their vehicles. Bill Tower ran towards the Troop CP where he thought his vehicle was to be found but didn't find it. He was running between houses looking for it when Sgt. Jim Smith spotted him and told him to climb into the turret of his armored car. They were ready to pull out but in all the excitement, Smith's driver couldn't get the thing in gear. Just then a German with a burp gun came around a corner and covering them, motioned for them to surrender.

Smith, raising his hands, began climbing out of the vehicle leaving his carbine in the turret. Tower started doing the same thing but was holding onto his carbine. Smith said, "Leave it!" and they climbed out together and were made prisoners.

Rudi Aittima made it to his jeep and they had barely started moving to reach the road when a shower of mortar fire hit their area. A shell hit his jeep and he took a nasty flesh wound high up on the back of one leg. The people around them had hit the dirt as more Germans appeared. He saw someone waving a white handkerchief in an armored car. It was probably Shaw. They hadn't even reached the main road to Bleialf and that is probably why Joe Haines and the others hadn't seen them.

The confusion of the withdrawal was compounded when Lt. Johnstone was organizing his vehicles to get onto the Winterspelt road and head west in order to leave Grosslangenfeld the way we had entered the week before. Also

77A Insert after Paragraph 1 on Page 77

After the meeting of all the officers at Troop Headquarters, Lt. Johnstone hurried back to his platoon. Entering Litcher's bunker, he told them the troop was pulling out of the village immediately. They were to take only the machine guns and their personal weapons and the remaining ammunition. The men questioned why they had to dismount the machine guns which would slow them down. Johnstone insisted and hurriedly left.

They quickly gathered up the guns and ammo boxes and made their way to their armored car and jeep. Both vehicles were parked in a sunken alley fairly close to their bunker. Those in the jeep mounted the 30 caliber machine gun on its pedestal, while those in the armored car loaded their weapons and ammo boxes onto the rear of their vehicle.

The Germans saw this activity from a distance and opened fire with an 88 assault gun. The gun crew could not depress enough and their shells were bouncing off the top of the dirt piled along side of the alley, barely missing the top of the turret of the armored car. For the moment Litcher and the others were stuck in the alley.

German troops were advancing towards them 50 or 100 yards away. The men in the jeep, which was concealed from the 88 , opened fire with their machine gun and the Germans began crawling towards them through the grass. Whenever one of the Germans would rise up they would give him a burst and down he'd go. Litcher figures they accounted for 8 or 9 Germans that way. He said it was like being on the target range back in Fort Jackson.

While this was going on, a German soldier who had carefully worked his way toward the side of the alley, suddenly appeared above the armored car and was about to drop a grenade into the turret. Litcher and the others quickly threw up their hands and surrendered. They were rounded up and collected in a chicken wire enclosure together with other captured Americans. They were held there about two hours and chatted with one of the German or Polish guards who told them he understood that their first commander had intended to shoot all prisoners.

he was waiting for the 1st and 2nd platoons to pass him before he started to pull out. Jim Goff made it to his jeep and moved onto the Winterspelt road but there was a lot of confusion regarding which direction they were supposed to go. Machine gun fire hit the front of his jeep and tore out the radiator and the headlights. He dove for cover.

Lt. Johnstone arrived at his armored car which was in an alley. The tires were damaged on one side, probably from mortar fire. He ran to a nearby half-track and had just opened the passenger side door and ducked down to get in under the machine gun rail when a mortar round hit the rail. Major fragments from the explosion missed him but the blast knocked him down. He took some tiny fragments in the side of his face.

Mike Gresh made it from his HQ Platoon position to his jeep with their machine gun. He set it on its tripod on the hood of his jeep. They made it over to the Winterspelt road and were about third in the column with jeeps in front and various vehicles behind including the mess truck.

Corporal Churchward Davis was in the lead jeep just exiting the village with the group that was heading toward Winterspelt, when his vehicle was hit with a mortar shell. The other vehicles could not go around Davis's jeep because the road on each side was mined. They were stymied and were trying to turn around to find another road.

By this time German troops were closing in. Gresh's jeep was shot full of holes and he and the rest of the men nearby jumped out of their vehicles and hit the dirt. As the bullets kept flying and spattering the ground around them, he and others nearby pulled out their handkerchiefs or anything white and started waving while they continued to hug the ground. The shooting in their area continued for a while because Clarence Woosley, in the back of the mess truck, kept shooting at the Germans with his carbine.

Finally the firing stopped and they were rounded up. Gresh passed Stewart Shockley propped up against a bank, possibly dead. Goff passed Joe Jeka lying in a ditch wounded in one leg, alive but later listed as Missing in Action. Charles Roe was also badly injured.

Paul Thompson recalls receiving an order from someone to leave the bunker immediately because we were pulling out. He smashed the butt of his carbine into the machine gun in an attempt to disable it. (He had too far to run to carry a machine gun.) There was a burp gunner very close to his

position who had been bugging him. Paul had four or five grenades on his belt. He heaved his grenades at him hoping to keep him down and then ran towards the village.

As he was running back someone sprayed shots at him but he wasn't hit. As he reached an armored car bullets were banging on the metal. He dove over the top of the turret and landed in the gunner's seat. He asked, "How do you fire this thing?" They saw the road was blocked by a confusion of vehicles. They had only rolled ten feet when a mortar shell hit a front wheel.

Bullets were continuing to pound their vehicles. Finally somebody nearby yelled that there was someone in an armored car waving a white handkerchief. Thompson looked and saw someone tall in the turret waving a handkerchief. They climbed out of their vehicles and were hastily corralled by German troops who were swarming in. They were gathered in a pig sty nearby. Thompson happened to look down at his trousers. Although he had not been wounded in fleeing his bunker, there were several bullet holes in his trousers from a burp gun.

Lou Cunningham says that during the morning of the second day the Germans launched several attacks which the Headquarters Platoon repulsed. He and Frank Gerardi were busy with their M-1 rifles in one of the houses. They received no word to begin the withdrawal from the village. About mid-day they noticed our vehicles starting to line up on the road to leave. Quickly leaving their position they started moving toward the vehicles. This gave them a better vantage point covering the fields to the west and north. Looking back Lou recalls, "All we could see were Germans moving around our right flank". There were hundreds and hundreds, maybe thousands. They were very close and were soon practically on top of them as they ran back to find their vehicles. They ran into the village, jumped into their armored car and started to join the column heading to Winterspelt. Enemy troops were quickly on them. Two Germans jumped onto the vehicle, grabbed Lou and pulled him out of the turret.

Aittima couldn't walk. Paul Thompson and Roy Kuhlke carried him to an aid station where wounded Germans and Americans were being treated. The German doctors treated Aittima before they treated many of the German wounded, according to Thompson. Gresh and others were detailed by the Germans to take litters and carry the German wounded into a sheltered collection point. They also carried Roe to a barn. He had taken a bullet in the center of his chest near the esophagus and there wasn't much the doctors

Insert towards bottom of Page 79:

White noticed their building was repeatedly being hit with German 88s. He and several others headed out the back door. They didn't go far before bullets began zinging around them. They dropped down and began crawling toward a silo for cover. Soon a half-track came by and stopped for them. White crouched down just behind the driver. They had driven but a short distance when a shell hit the front of the vehicle knocking it on its side, spilling out the occupants. Some were slightly injured. White was not hurt but he was severely stunned and deafened by the explosion which wounded or may have killed the driver. By the time he regained his senses the Germans had rushed in and rounded them up as prisoners.

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could do. Every time he breathed, a little spurt of blood came out. All the Germans could do was put a bandage over the hole.

Thompson was impressed with a German officer who quickly took charge and got the wounded to aid stations, prisoners collected and brought rapid order out of the general chaos. He wore one of the typical officers' long black leather coats and when he spoke, his men jumped.

Thompson noted that most of the German soldiers were older men, and many wore glasses. Many had probably had office jobs until the previous summer when Hitler extended the draft to include men from sixteen to sixty in order to fill the ranks of the twenty-five new Volksgrenadier Divisions he created.

Upon capture many of our men were immediately marched south through the Siegfried Line. Others like Gresh were collected and kept overnight in some kind of barn. He could speak Slovak and learned from one of his guards who spoke Slovak that some of them were not German at all. They were conscripts from places like Czechoslovakia, Russia and Poland. He only spoke to Gresh when no ethnic Germans were around.

Gresh also talked with Al Gommel who was there. Gommel spoke German and one of the German guards told him it was fortunate for us that their commander from the first day of the battle had been replaced. He had intended to shoot prisoners. Later a German non-com came by and said they were going to shoot prisoners but Lt. Proznik overheard this and said he was an American officer and the Geneva Convention forbade the killing of prisoners and he would be held accountable. The non-com left.

Lou Cunningham says that immediately after capture he and a dozen others were lined up in front of a wall and forced to kneel for awhile. He wasn't aware of any intention to shoot them and thought their guards merely wanted to insure they didn't run off.

Charles Roe died during the night. They buried him the next morning on the edge of the village. Using a pocket knife, Gresh carved a small cross for his grave.

Our battle of Grosslangenfeld was over.

Clear of the village we rolled along the road which headed towards Bleialf. We proceeded carefully for a mile or so. Then we left the road and started cross-country to our left over gently rolling farm land. I didn't know it at the time, but we probably did this in order to stay well clear of Bleialf. Soon we halted to put on tire chains. The ground was soft and slippery in places.

We continued to halt occasionally. Orrie Barr recalls that about this time his part of the column began taking hostile fire. John Ulicni also recalls this and thinks it was either mortar or small arms fire. Ulicni had eventually hopped into another jeep after he had been obliged to abandon his own while leaving the village. He and the others in the "rescue" jeep quickly dismounted and took cover on the ground near a cluster of buildings. At the same time Million hurriedly had their armored car back up a considerable distance as they scrambled for cover.

The fire directed at us did not last long. Joe Haines believes it may have been friendly fire from men of the 423rd Infantry in the Bleialf vicinity who may not have recognized that our armored cars were American and not German. This could explain why the firing was discontinued so soon. Apparently no personnel or vehicles were hit and the column resumed its motor march. Barr noted that after this mixup Million's vehicle was the last armored car in the column. During this entire episode, at the head of the column, I was unaware of any "hostile" fire to the rear.

Soon we saw a road running across in front of us. Drawn up along the road was another U.S. Cavalry Recon Troop. We headed for the lead vehicles of this outfit and stopped near them. Barr says Million left his vehicle and walked forward on foot. Eventually he reached and passed our vehicle carrying his map case. He continued on to the other troop where he met the commander. They laid out their maps on the hood of one of the vehicles and had a twenty minute discussion. He then returned and proceeded towards the rear of our column. Barr says he never reached their vehicle.

After ten or fifteen minutes McGee came back to our vehicle with the news that the outfit we had encountered was Troop B of the 18th Cavalry Squadron. He also told us that lots of our people didn't make it out of the village.

Million and the other commander had agreed that the road back to St. Vith via Winterspelt was probably held by German forces and we were going to follow Troop B and go through another town (Schonberg) which might not be held by the Germans.

Troop B began to move out and in due course as the tail end of their column started moving we fell in behind. Troop B was moving very cautiously and it was very slow going. There were frequent brief halts.

Million never did return to his vehicle and soon Veream left the vehicle during a halt and went forward to see what had happened to him. Shortly thereafter when neither Million nor Veream had returned, the mechanic began to be concerned and he, too, bailed out and went forward on foot to the vehicles ahead during one of the halts, leaving only Barr and the driver in their armored car.

Barr figured he had better move up into the turret to check out the .50-caliber in case they might need it. He found it did not traverse smoothly along the ring mount. Apparently no one had checked it out.

We at the head of our column continued on behind Troop B. We passed a farmhouse on the right side of the road. We continued passing through gently rolling farmland and there were forested patches here and there in the near distance.

About a half mile beyond the farmhouse there was a halt that was longer than usual and suddenly we heard bursts of cannon and .50-caliber machine gun firing ahead probably in the vicinity of the head of the column. By this time it was turning dark. (Darkness came early in the winter at about 4:30 p.m.) The gunfire stopped. We waited. Captain Million went ahead to find out what was going on. He returned in about twenty minutes passing by us. We waited.

Word reached us that the Troop B column had run into Germans in the town ahead. It couldn't advance further. The commander of Troop B had said that each unit should see to itself.

We waited, nervous that we might be sitting on the road like ducks in a shooting gallery. Word was passed that we might have to surrender! This came as an unexpected shock. I thought, "What the hell! We train for two

years and then fight for only two days? Surrender? That's nuts!" It was inconceivable.

McGee was off conferring with our Troop Commander. I said to Timm, the driver, next to me, "What the hell, nobody is sticking a gun in our ribs yet. Why can't we break up into small groups and move out on foot?" But then the question came to me, "Where are we? Which way do we head?"

We had no maps, no knowledge of our location or of the towns and roads in the area, or where our lines might be, or any orientation whatsoever. We had no sense of which direction we should head for. All we knew was that back in the village we could see the Seigfried Line and now we didn't even know where that was. Which way was out?

My impression was that McGee didn't know much more than the rest of us. As we sat in the vehicle we hadn't a clue. We were stunned. There was more delay. The word came to move off the road into the woods to our left where at least we might be out of sight for awhile. We ourselves had seen no German troops but in view of the situation, we were concerned that German troops could well be moving in on us. The location of our column was obviously known.

In the meantime Barr's armored car had stalled a hundred feet short of the farmhouse on the right. The driver promptly jumped out and ran down the road trying to catch up with the column ahead. Barr quickly stuffed sticks of sub-machine gun ammunition and food bars in his jacket and left the vehicle. It was about dark as he started forward and after walking a short distance he lay down in a shallow hole he found alongside the road to wait and decide what to do next. While waiting he noticed two buzz bombs going over.

After more delay our column drove off the road and moved across a small field into the woods. By now it was dark. We moved in amongst the trees a short distance and parked haphazardly. Once in the woods it was pitch black. Although there was no sign of immediate enemy activity against us we did all we could to keep the noise down. The dark felt very threatening.

Word came that the Captain wanted us all to assemble over by him. Lt. McGee, Sgt. Tucker and others from our platoon including myself left our vehicles and more by sound than by sight, we found an assembled group. I noted from voices that this group included Captain Million, Lt. Veream and

First Sgt. Johnson. Others including Lt. Haines and Sgt. Mechling found our group in the next several minutes. We were wondering what our next move would be. We were expecting orders from our Troop Commander.

I happened to have ended up in the middle of the command group and heard very clearly every word that was said. Our Captain in a very low tremulous voice said we must decide what to do. The town ahead was held by a strong German force which had shot up the lead column of vehicles. We were completely surrounded and there seemed no way we could fight our way out. The Germans probably knew where we were and could be advancing on us.

In a hushed voice he continued: "We may have to surrender. What do you think, Lieutenant Veream?" Veream said something like, "In view of the situation we're in we may have to surrender, Sir." — "Lieutenant Haines, what do you think?" — "It looks like we'll have to throw in the sponge, Sir." (J.D. Frazee could not hear the others but could clearly hear Haines.) "Lieutenant McGee?" — "It looks like we will have to do that, Captain." — "Sergeant Johnson?" — "We might have to, Sir." — "Sergeant Tucker?" — "I guess so, Sir." — "Sergeant Mechling?" — "I guess so, Sir."

Then Capt. Million said, "Well, then, it looks like we'd better surrender. Someone will have to go to that town ahead with a white flag and tell them there is a body of men here wanting to surrender. Lieutenant Veream, take a white flag and go up there and tell them." Veream without hesitation shot back, "That's your job, Captain." Million said, "Lieutenant McGee, you go!" McGee said, "Not me, Captain, that's for you to do." "But, I might get shot!" Captain Million blurted out. There was no more discussion.

I heard nothing whatsoever as to whether or not we should disable our vehicles or whether we should organize into small groups with compasses and attempt to make our way out on foot. (We learned much later that Captain Fossland of Troop B organized his men into small groups and many of them reached St. Vith, including Fossland himself.)

I believe our junior officers were heavily influenced by the way Captain Million had put the question of surrender and had made no mention of trying to break out in small groups. Put like that they were not likely to propose anything contradictory to his suggested course of action. He was, after all, in command of the troop.

We stood around waiting for orders, not knowing what to do next. No orders were given by anyone. Finally someone in the rear said, "What about going back to that farm house we passed on our right about half a mile back?" Still no orders were given. People started to head for the road. Ed Fleming heard Captain Million say, "It's all the fault of your officers, men!" According to Fleming, an unidentified man next to him, who also heard Million, said, "We ought to shoot that son-of-a-bitch."

Some men were still struggling with the idea of simply surrendering. Bob Fisher was wandering around the area with a few others wondering what to do. He encountered Howard Tucker with a small group doing the same thing. Eventually they decided that under the circumstances there wasn't much they could do but go back to the farmhouse. Barr encountered some of our people on the road and proceeded to the farmhouse with them.

J.D. Frazee and Russell Foiles also resisted the idea of surrendering. More resourceful than I was in considering our situation, J.D. remembered that occasionally the Germans sent buzz bombs over our position in Grosslangenfeld, probably headed for London. He asked Foiles to catch up with Cal Iezzi whom they thought had a compass. With buzz bombs as a general orientation and a compass to guide them, the two of them might make it back to the American lines.

While Foiles was going after Iezzi, J.D. went back to his jeep to get some concentrated food bars. While doing so he neither saw nor heard anyone attempting to disable our vehicles with thermal grenades or by other action. Neither did Ed Fleming nor I. Then J.D. returned to the road and waited for Foiles to rejoin him. Everyone else had presumably gone down the road. He saw someone walk across a field and stumble into a fence on the other side of the road. Knowing German patrols were probably in the area. J.D. dropped into the ditch and challenged, "Who goes there?" The man identified himself as a lieutenant from an engineering company. J.D. asked who the two people coming up behind him were. The lieutenant said they were part of his patrol.

J.D. ordered him to call them up to him and he did. They were about 100 feet from J.D. Cautiously J.D. approached them. He learned they had been throwing grenades at a gun emplacement and they had been raked with machine gun fire. The lieutenant had let a grenade get away from him and it had exploded near his hand. He was not bleeding much but his hand was in bad shape.

One of his men was carrying a grenade in his hand but could not let it go because he had pulled and lost the retaining pin. He didn't want to throw it away because the explosion might alert nearby Germans. He and J.D. laid belly down on the ground and J.D. tied a handkerchief around the grenade while the engineer held the detonator handle down. They crawled away and left it. The engineers moved off. About that time Foiles returned.

J.D. had second thoughts after running into the engineer patrol. So many small groups moving around in the dark in an un-coordinated fashion were as likely to shoot or to be shot by other Americans as by Germans. He felt responsible for Foiles as well as himself and decided he should abide by the decision of the officers and join the troop in the farm house. He later regretted the decision. I personally have always felt conflicted about how things turned out.

SURRENDER

Bob Fisher recalls that the next morning Captain Million sent out the farmer's son to look for a German patrol to whom we could surrender. Soon the boy returned with a squad of Germans. We were awakened and told there was a German patrol outside waiting for us. We dropped our guns at the door. (I remember distinctly that this was a particularly painful moment for Fisher who had so proudly carried his father's Colt 45 pistol given him by his father while we were at Atterbury preparing to go overseas.)

We filed out and were met by a squad of several soldiers. The NCO in charge asked if anyone in our group spoke German. Several of our guys pointed to Rogner who was holding back. It was apparently well known in the German-American community that the Nazis looked upon German-Americans serving in the American Army as traitors to the Fatherland and sometimes dealt with them harshly when captured. Rogner, whose English bore a pronounced German accent, was hoping not to be noticed. Instead he was singled out and obliged to move forward.

The NCO asked Rogner whether he had any family in Deutschland. Rogner said he did not. He then asked who our commander was. Rogner indicated Captain Million. Through Rogner he asked Million what unit we were in. Million gave him his name, rank and serial number. Nothing else. The NCO got very angry and red in the face and through Rogner told Million if he didn't cooperate, he would shoot him. Million said we were cavalry.

"Where are your horses?" asked the NCO. "We're mechanized," replied Million. I didn't fully follow that exchange but Barr who was just a few feet away clearly heard this as Rogner translated. The NCO asked where our vehicles were located. Million said thy were a long way down the road in the woods on the left. The NCO asked Rogner whether we had any gasoline and Rogner said, "Yes, probably a little." By now the NCO had calmed down. He had his men search us.

It was interesting to observe the German soldiers. The NCO was a seasoned soldier in his thirties. But his squad was made up of young boys. These were probably men from the 18th VG Division, not the 62nd which we faced at Grosslangenfeld. Williams had Rogner ask one of the youngsters how old he was and he said he was sixteen. I noticed the way their boots clattered on the stones in the farmer's courtyard. Hobnails I guess.

They searched us for weapons and close up I could detect a certain smell that all the German soldiers I encountered had — not bad, just different. Maybe it was soap, or the oil they used on their belts and boots, but it was definitely different. The young soldier who searched me was polite. No bully-boy stuff. I had some cigarettes in my pocket and he motioned to ask me if he could have them. I motioned, "Be my guest." Barr remembers that they didn't find his wristwatch. He later traded it for a loaf of bread shortly before we were liberated.

After a half hour the Germans began marching us. We began to see groups of German troops along the road and within an hour we came to a small town. I faintly recall a few American vehicles mixed in with German which were parked around the town. I clearly recall seeing a young German soldier pass us having great fun cowboying a jeep down the road. Someone near me cried out, "Hey, there goes J.D.'s jeep!" Kiper says he also saw his own jeep go by.

There were some dead German and American soldiers in the road. J.D. and others were ordered to pull them to one side so vehicles would not crush them. J.D.'s jacket was smeared with the brains of one of the Americans he moved.

We saw no evidence of the Cavalry Troop we had teamed up with the previous day. In Stalag IX A at Ziegenhain I talked with one of the Troop B men who had been in the lead platoon. Instead of finding Schonberg empty it was occupied by Germans. Their first two armored cars were hit. Those men

in the first car were killed or wounded. The men in the second bailed out. They were captured and marched past the destroyed vehicle in front of them. As he came up to it he saw one of his buddies on the ground badly wounded. He started to reach over to the wounded man who cried out for help but the Germans, who were marching him along and were probably fearful of more American action, pushed him along and wouldn't let him stop to help. He said it really was tough to have to just move along and leave his friend lying there.

As we marched along we saw considerable activity in the town. It was obvious that there were a good number of German troops in the area. We waited a while and were joined by a few other captured Americans and a new set of guards took over. We started marching again and more captured Americans periodically were fed into our group as we joined a growing column. We were being marched along the edge of the road in a column of twos.

Lots of German troops and vehicles were slowly moving forward past us in the opposite direction. The road was quite crowded with vehicles. They were often stopped bumper to bumper. The skies were overcast and there was no danger of being strafed by American aircraft.

More than half the German vehicles were horse-drawn. Horses pulled troops, artillery pieces, wagons loaded with supplies, and many field kitchens. The Germans had barrel-sized canisters of food cooking which were drawn by horses. Occasionally a platoon of soldiers would be pulled off to the side and be clustered around one of these mess carts having a meal.

The Germans had great mess kits: heavy-duty rectangular aluminum cans five inches deep with a fitted aluminum cover that was about three inches deep for odds and ends, or coffee. The deep kits were ideal for soups and stews, much better in cold weather than the impractical shallow hinged steel clam shell halves which the American Army provided. In cold weather the American kits chilled hot food stone cold within two minutes.

There were many self-propelled guns, and guns being towed by small trucks or half-tracks with their crews. There were motorcycles with side cars. And once in a while three or four huge Tiger or Panther tanks would slowly rumble on by with deep throaty engines and joking crews in black S.S. uniforms. We often had to halt and move aside as vehicles passed us.

At one spot we passed a couple of abandoned American heavy artillery pieces next to a hill in a clear area adjacent to the road. The gun crews had been picked off by Germans firing from the hill above them. A German soldier was taking the boots off one of the dead Americans lying off to one side and a dead American Major in a combat suit lay on his back spread eagle in the mud near one of the guns. The sight made some of the guys in the column feel nauseated. He was just lying over there, abandoned, sprawled in the middle of this muddy, wide open space.

We were marched along some winding less-frequented secondary roads in rugged forested hills, passing isolated hamlets and an occasional house. As dark fell we were led into some kind of disused damp building where wooden ax handles or gun stocks were roughed out. We were given water but no food and stayed there overnight.

Next day we continued marching. The heavy, gloomy weather matched our mood. We just trudged along past farmhouses, through towns and along fields until at dusk we finally came to a larger town situated in a valley which I believe was Prum. Our column was divided up. My section was led off to a large factory or warehouse building for the night. Again we were given water but no food.

At dawn we began marching again. As we proceeded we were joined by other prisoners and by mid-morning we were a river of captured men, several wide, flowing on a road through the rolling countryside as far as the eye could see. There were many thousands: grim, grubby, unshaven, depressed. (We Recons with Million had surrendered on the morning of December 18th. The 422nd and 423rd Infantry were surrendered on the afternoon of the 19th of December and joined our column on the morning of December 20th.)

The realization hit home that we were in the middle of a major American disaster that was not just some localized spoiling attack. How this could have happened to us, we couldn't imagine.

The succeeding morning we were started forth again. We passed through more towns. In one, our part of the column was having one of the many halts we made to allow German troops to move past us. The road was clogged with soldiers and vehicles everywhere. The Germans were in a pretty good mood although one older non-com who had probably seen plenty of

action shook his head sadly and said the equivalent of "Such a pity!" as a couple of his men came out of a house a few feet away from me carrying a dead young German soldier whose head, arms and legs flopped like a rag doll. They loaded the body onto some kind of a wagon and took it away.

In the afternoon the sky cleared and as we moved through a small city, a Mustang fighter flew down and began strafing. We were moved to the side of the road and halted. The Mustang was strafing parallel to us along the next street over.

Some clean-shaven spiffy-looking local officer in a splendid brown Nazi parade uniform seemed to take charge and moved us over a couple of more streets. A half hour later all was quiet and they began marching us again. Although I can't remember it clearly we crossed a wide river which must have been the Rhine and after another day's march we arrived at what I believe was Limburg. We spent the night in some buildings as before. In the morning we were herded to some warehouse area and were each given some hard tack crackers and tubes of cheese: the first food we'd had.

We were led to the edge of a rail marshalling yard and were milling around for two or three hours waiting. At some point one of the German officers who was translating for the guards controlling us stopped for a chat. He was very pleasant. On the whole the guards were not abusive, just very business-like. There were no black uniforms of the S.S. among our guards.

Finally we were formed up and marched over to various rail lines of forty-and-eight boxcars. These were boxcars used in great numbers by the French Army in WWI. They transported forty soldiers or eight horses. The guards counted us off in groups of 100 or so and directed each group into a boxcar, moving forward with the rest of the column to repeat the process at the next car. The cars had a couple of very narrow small windows near the ceiling which were open and covered with barbed wire. Because of the way the Germans herded us for loading, it was not possible for me to get into a car with any of the guys from my outfit.

As the car filled, the doors were slid shut and latched from the outside. Hours later our cars were shunted around the yard. We waited and waited. Night fell. We were so crowded we couldn't stretch out to sleep. The lucky guys were against one of the sides. At least they could sit and occasionally stretch out their legs while leaning against a wall.

If we had all been from the same outfit there probably would have been control enough to organize shifts, but we were from different groups and nobody had any authority. As time wore on and we had to urinate, all we could do was move over by the door and try to direct our stream at the narrow gap at the bottom of the door. (Later, I think we were provided with a can or bucket.) Nobody needed to defecate that I can recall. (Until the handout that morning none of us had had anything to eat for four or five days so it wasn't much of a problem.)

We just waited locked up in the cars. Periodically a couple of guards opened the door and gave us water and after three or four days the guards came and said we would be getting black bread and molasses and asked for the use of three or four helmets for carrying molasses to spread on the bread.

I let them use my helmet. In due course they arrived with the bread and molasses which they spread on the chunks of black bread and handed out to us. After they had arranged to rinse out the helmets they returned them.

I wasn't close to the door. Helmets were passed back but none reached me. So I asked the group at large for my helmet. Each was marked with part of our serial number inked on the webbing chin strap. No helmet. I moved around looking at helmets, trying to find mine. Finally I came to a group of several nasty looking guys from the same outfit. They all claimed they had their own and got aggressive when I started to reach out to see for myself. I couldn't very well fight several of them so I just had to back off hoping I might rectify the situation later. I never did get it back and found I missed it in captivity.

The skies cleared and on the nights of December 22 and 23; the R.A.F. came over and bombed the yards. I have never experienced such cold, naked primal terror before or since. I believe this terror was especially bad because it was pitch black and we all felt and silently communicated this fear. It was as if the fear was coming out of the pores of our bodies, and indeed, maybe it was. We felt so helpless and could do nothing but wait for the bombs as they came rushing down nearer and nearer. They didn't scream or whistle; they made a shu-shu-shu fluttering sound that grew louder and louder. It sounded as though the bomb surely couldn't miss us. There were hits around us and the shock waves struck and rocked the car. We were afraid we might be hit by fragments or tip over even if none hit us directly. The German guards ran for cover and some of the prisoners including Lucas and Barr got

out. After the bombing ceased they were rounded up and returned to the boxcars.

I learned later that some of the bombs hit not only boxcars but also buildings alongside the rails where Stalag XII A was located. Some of our men were held there instead of in boxcars. A bomb hit a barracks full of American officers. Forty-six were killed including Lt. Lenny Proznik.

The R.A.F. took the night off for Christmas Eve and that was the best Christmas gift I ever had. We sang a few carols and were just thankful. The next morning was overcast and our train started rolling and slowly traveled for a few hours until we arrived at a picturesque snow-covered town in a hilly area called Bad Orb located 40 miles north of Frankfurt..

STALAG IX B – BAD ORB

The guards shouted, "Austeigen!" (climb down) and "Raus!" (hurry up) as they slid the boxcar doors back. We saw that we were in a picture postcard resort town, or spa. We were soon formed up —there were probably two thousand of us — and were marched out of town an hour for our first look at a German Prisoner of War camp.

It turned out to be Stalag IX B. It was ringed by high mean-looking barbed wire fences and entanglements of barbed wire, with roofed wooden gun towers every few hundred yards. We were halted before a grim-looking series of barbed wire gates we were to pass through and were counted. And we were again counted by files and by rows. And we were counted again. And again we were counted as we passed through the gates and the prison commandant took charge of us.

It was a dark dreary day and I was extremely depressed thinking what a hell of a way to spend Christmas. We were guided into several stone barracks — probably 100 or 150 men to a barracks. The buildings had obviously been built for German troops. The Germans wouldn't normally provide such well-built buildings for POWs. There was glass in most of the windows.

In the middle of our barracks there was a stack of large burlap bags and a heap of wooden shavings (excelsior). We were ordered to take a bag and fill it with shavings. There were wooden double-decker bunks with wooden cross slats. The burlap bags were our mattresses. We each got one small threadbare blanket.

Guards came in and explained there would be "coffee" served each morning at seven o'clock. (Actually it was a hot brown drink made of roasted grain.) At noon we were marched to the kitchen for soup and in the late afternoon, bread was brought into the barracks.

Lights were cut off each evening at seven o'clock. We had to close the shutters at dark but once the lights were out we could open them for a little light from outside on clear nights. If we failed to observe the blackout the guards had orders to shoot into the barracks. Lights went back on at ten for an hour but by then most of us were in bed asleep.

Our guards were a mixture of old men and battle veterans who had been disabled by wounds. They were not particularly mean or threatening unless they felt we were mocking them or if we failed to follow orders.

When we were assigned barracks, the officers were separated from the enlisted men. Included in the group of officers were Captain Million, Lt. Veream, Lt. Haines, and Lt. McGee. Amongst the enlisted men were 1st Sgt. Gabe Johnson, Bill Snyder, Charles Lucas, Orrie Barr and myself.

We settled down to the dull, hungry, monotonous lives of prisoners of war. The Jerries gave us forms to fill out showing our name, age, rank and Army serial number, plus forms for the International Red Cross and a POW postcard for our families. They issued us German POW dog tags with their serial number for each of us.

After a week or so the Germans ordered all prisoners who were Jews to identify themselves. Barr recalls that we were lined up and interviewed at tables where Germans were seated. They asked for the last name of our parents and our grandparents. (This might have been part of the initial registration process. I'm not sure.) Barr saw one man taken to one side and bashed about. (He may have insisted on giving only his name, rank, and serial number.) Barr himself was closely questioned regarding the spelling of the last name of one of his grandparents until they were satisfied that it was a non-Jewish spelling. I have no distinct recollection of this questioning and saw no evidence of anyone being beaten. I do recall subsequently speaking with some of the Jewish men. They were being housed in a separate barracks but were receiving the same treatment and food as the rest of us. They were concerned, of course, that things might turn ugly based on reports that Jews in Germany were being kicked around by the Nazis.

Shortly after we non-coms (including Jewish non-coms, I believe) were moved out of Bad Orb in mid-January, a bunch of S.S. troops arrived at Bad Orb looking for more Jews. Beatings, threatened shootings and prolonged standing in snow were used to ferret out those suspected of being Jews. In mid-February about 350 men deemed to be Jewish or found to be uncooperative Jewish sympathizers were moved to work in a mine at Berga (Buchenwald). Many died of overwork and starvation.

At noon the first day at Bad Orb the regular guard for our barracks told us to bring our helmets for soup. Those who didn't have helmets or other suitable receptacles for soup were given empty food cans, about the size of a small American coffee can. We were issued folding fork-spoons. He took us over to the cookhouse where we lined up. The cooks were Russian prisoners.

As we went by the serving window we would hand over our receptacle and one of the cooks would ladle in one measure of soup. The ladle held about as much as a U.S. Army canteen cup. The type of soup would vary a little each day and generally was about half solids and half liquids. There were soups of turnips, carrots, potatoes, cabbage and my favorite, barley. Barley soup was thicker and felt more filling.

Two or three times a week there was a supplement of about a half dozen small potatoes boiled with their skins on. We could sometimes trade for a small sack of salt, which was delicious sprinkled on the potatoes. One day some of the guys asked one of the Russians if there was ever meat in the soup. "Oh, yes, if the cook happens to cut his finger," said the Russian.

In the late afternoon the barracks guard would take a small detail of men to the mess kitchen and bring back the evening ration of bread. This wasn't American-style white bread. This was heavy, dense, sour dark brown rye bread more akin to Danish rye bread we eat at Christmas. Mixed into the dough was a wartime addition of fine sawdust to act as a filler.

We were divided into groups of six to share a loaf and the evening cutting was done very carefully by one of the group under six pairs of very alert eyes. There was a daily revolving roster for first pick of the cut up chunks. The sour bread was difficult for some of the men to stomach and the first evening a few threw it away, which scandalized the guard when he found it on the floor the next morning. Before long, however, they were all loving it as hunger began to settle in as a constant companion.

Earlier in the war American Red Cross packages would be sent each month. These contained concentrated nutrition such as canned cheese, canned meat, fruit bars, chocolate bars, powdered milk, powdered lemon drink (full of vitamin C) and powdered coffee. Although we completed all the Red Cross forms, we never received any of our Red Cross packages except on two occasions when we had to share one package among about ten men.

After two or three weeks we were called out of the barracks and marched over to a building which smelled strongly of sulfur and disinfectant. We entered a large heated room with several long trolleys fitted with gas pipe racks and hooks. We were told to strip completely and place our clothes on hooks and our shoes in boxes on the trolleys. As we did so I began to get a little apprehensive: I had already lost my helmet. We were told the operation was for delousing.

The trolleys bearing our clothes were rolled into adjacent rooms and metal doors were clanged shut behind them. We were directed into rooms with shower heads in the ceiling. (If we had known about the holocaust and the gas chambers, we would have feared this was the end.) We were given strong soap and told to wash thoroughly—especially our hair. The showers had warm water. After we were finished, we went back into the large hall . As we waited to air-dry our bodies, we noticed how much weight we had lost in just three weeks or so. The meager diet was beginning to show.

In about an hour the large iron doors of the fumigating chambers were opened and our clothes, smelling of sulfur, were rolled out on their trolleys. We dressed and were taken back to the barracks. We were probably given new mattress materials and replacement blankets, although I don't recall this.

Life in this Stalag was not all bad at that time. Although the buildings were unheated they were so solidly constructed that the warmth of our body heat made them reasonably comfortable even though there was snow on the ground outside. Most days were sunny.

After a few days I was able to shake off the depression I felt when we arrived at the camp. One of the fellows in the bunk next to me had his toilet article kit with him. He had some razor blades. I asked him what he did with the blades when they became dull. He said he threw them away. I asked him if he would save them for me. So, he gave me a couple and I found a broken

bed slat and began carving very primitive little chessmen. Engrossed with this activity I actually found a certain tranquility.

I seem to recall Lt. McGee paying me a visit. I clearly recall that Capt. Million came over one day to look in on us. He asked how we were getting on. I was pretty disgusted to see him but decided to refrain from telling him what I thought of him; the respect for the rank, if not for the person, was still very strong. I just said I was fine and let it go at that.

By this time we had learned that two of the three regiments of the 106th Division had surrendered. The officers used the same open latrine as the enlisted men and I saw the two colonels who surrendered their regiments and many other officers as well. Some of the guys also pointed out a young officer and told me he was the son of General Jones, the Division Commander. Within a week or so we saw the officers marching by outside and later learned they had been moved out to go to an officers' camp. We began to receive other American soldiers who were added to our ranks.

One morning in mid-January we non-coms were told to gather our belongings; we were leaving. It was a clear cold day. There were several inches of snow on the ground. We were formed up in a field in front of the barracks—probably three or four hundred men in my group. We were sorted into nine or ten files about thirty or forty deep. There were a bunch of German officers, non-coms and guards. They began to count us. They checked each man's German dog tags against their lists. They counted us by files. They counted us by rows. There must have been sick men in the barracks who were rousted out. They counted us again. Their lists didn't seem to agree.

An hour went by. More forays into the barracks. More counting and comparing of lists. After the first hour of standing in the snow we began to acutely feel the effects of the cold — especially our feet. Our bodies had less warmth from nourishment than a normal diet provides. Our socks hadn't been washed or changed in a month, so their insulation was less effective.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Army had issued regulations that in garrison we had to alternate our shoes every week, and for Saturday morning inspection the unused pair had to be seen to be freshly greased with a tallow called "dubbing" in order to waterproof the leather. Apparently it never occurred to the powers that be that most water seeps in through the seams of the sole and not through the leather itself and that with the repeated application of

dubbing the pores of the leather became so clogged that the leather couldn't breathe to let sweat dissipate. At the same time the leather lost its insulation characteristics to help keep cold out. So our shoes were like ice-boxes.

Men began to pass out and collapse in the snow. They just stayed there. We couldn't break ranks to help the people who had fallen; it would make accurate counting more difficult. One man next to me named Spaith finally said, "Hell, I'm going to sit down; if I don't I'm going to fall down anyway." I stayed standing but my feet began to feel numb.

Finally after three hours the Krauts had reconciled their count and we were marched to the train station. We boarded forty-and-eight boxcars and when it turned dark we began to roll. There was straw which kept us warm enough to sleep although our feet were still numb.

STALAG IXA—ZIEGENHAIN

We traveled part of the night and at daylight we awoke at some non-descript station in the middle of what looked like farmland. We were ordered to form up on the platform and were counted and re-counted. The train guards were regular soldiers in regular German field-gray uniforms. We were turned over to a unit composed of a few regular troops plus some local Volksturm.

The Volksturm were civilians in their sixties who had been soldiers in the First World War. They did not have uniforms but wore arm bands to show they were part of an auxiliary force. They carried rifles. The guards formed us up and after some delay they began to march us along the road. There was a thin layer of snow on the ground and a cold wind was blowing across the fields.

Lucas and I had decided to keep together when we were forming up. It's good we did because Lucas was suffering from a bad case of diarrhea and cramps, and was very weak. After we had been marching a while we had one of the inevitable halts. As we waited, Lucas was losing control of his bowels and simply couldn't hold it. He was going to fill his pants. The road was in the middle of an open field and there were no houses around. To help him, I took him to the edge of the road a few feet away and took his pack, but he was so weak and his hands so cold and stiff that he couldn't get his belt and fly loosened to get his pants down to his ankles and squat.

I dropped whatever I was holding and opened and let down Lucas' trousers and shorts to his ankles. He was too weak to squat so I took his arms and lowered him so he could squat without falling over backwards. After he was relieved I got his pants back up and closed, picked up his small bag and he took my arm as the column began moving.

Some of the Volksturm guards were pretty ugly. One of our guys must have had a few cigarettes left. During a halt he asked one of the Volksturm if he had a match. The guard exploded with fury and shouted at him in a threatening way as he unshouldered his rifle, probably saying if he didn't show more discipline and respect for German soldiers he would see that he got some fire — out of the barrel of his gun.

We must have marched several miles until we came to Stalag IX A. We learned this was near the town of Ziegenhain, four or five miles away. (Ziegenhain was located about 50 miles north of Bad Orb.) There was again the inevitable counting and recounting until the receiving officer's count agreed with that of the train guards. Then again, we went through grim barbed wire gates. The camp was surrounded with a double ring of high barbed wire fences with barbed wire in between and guard towers every few hundred yards or so.

We were divided up into three or four barracks. These barracks were of poor quality wooden construction and although they were dry, they were freezing. Even after we had been in them for a while the warmth of the men didn't help much and we were still shivering cold. I kept my combat jacket and trousers on and put my blanket around my shoulders. Also that way you could insure that someone wouldn't steal your stuff.

Generally thieving was not prevalent, but there were exceptions. In one noteworthy instance an American priest we had with us for a while had left his bread ration unattended while he went to do something or other. When he returned his bread was gone. He gathered the men in his barracks (not ours) and said, "Men, if I weren't a priest I'd swear that some son-of-a-bitch has stolen my bread. I hope we don't steal from each other in the future."

I didn't know much about this priest except that he presumably wasn't with us long because the Catholic guys would get together in the afternoons and say the Hail Mary without him. Lucas was a Catholic and joined those sessions. Lucas and I buddied up. It was important to have someone to help you when you were sick and whom you could trust to look after your stuff.

We saw Bill Snyder who was in our barracks but he had buddied up with an infantry mess sergeant's group so we were not very close. Gabriel Johnson approached us a couple of times expecting us to do special favors for him. We told him to take a walk and he grew sullen and distant.

After several weeks our ration of bread was reduced to seven men to a loaf instead of six. Also, the noon soup ladle was wider and more shallow. Helmets could catch it all, but my round tin can was a little too narrow for the ladle and part spilled over the edges of my tin can and fell back into the pot. The cooks at the serving window refused to do any make-up topping.

One of the men in the barracks near Lucas and myself had somehow acquired the bottom portion of a beat-up German mess kit. He had his helmet for food and was using the messkit to pee in at night so he didn't have to navigate in the pitch black down to the little hole-in-the-floor room at the entrance end of the barracks when the barracks shutters were closed for the night. When I spotted his mess kit I saw it was rectangular in shape and big enough to accept the one pouring of the soup ladle. I asked the fellow if he would exchange it for my tin can, explaining why I needed it. He said sure he could pee in my tin can and we made the exchange.

Now, the aluminum mess kit was in a pretty insalubrious state. There was some gummy stuff on the bottom and sides and of course, the smell of urine. The aluminum surface was a bit pebbly from being knocked about. But I figured I could clean it — enough. I found some sand and with cold water scrubbed it with my fingers and also with some wooden excelsior, which was particularly useful under the edge at the top. I scrubbed and scrubbed, rinsed and rinsed (always with ice cold water of course). Then I took some wood ash and scrubbed and scrubbed with that too. The mess kit began to almost shine. Then the guy I got it from wanted it back and I told him no way. I ate out of that mess kit until we were liberated.

Life settled down into a dreary, cold and hungry routine. The thoughts and conversations we had were no longer centered on women and sex — the usual fare of soldiers — but on food. We dreamed up recipes. One of the men with us had worked for the Hershey chocolate factory and he gave us talks about that.

Hunger pangs made it difficult to go to sleep at night. In the first camp I had begun to save a couple of boiled potatoes from lunch for eating at

bedtime and it helped in getting to sleep. At Ziegenhain we didn't get any potatoes.

One day I made the mistake of saving some of my turnip soup to eat before bedtime. It must have spoiled. I came down with a bad case of dysentery, stomach cramps and general debilitation.

We had an outside open latrine for daytime needs but after dark we were confined to the barracks and couldn't use it. Instead at night we used a very small room that was at the end of the barracks next to the entrance. It no longer had a door and in the middle there was a small hole a few inches in diameter over a pit covered with a large concrete slab. This small hole served as the toilet. It was cleaned up each morning, flushed down and then sprinkled with lime. In the pitch black room at night we couldn't see where the hole was.

Lots of men suffered from dysentery and couldn't wait until morning. As the evening wore on and more and more men soiled the area, one would feel the door, turn around, back up, drop ones pants and unload. Before long there would be quite a pool of wet feces as the guys backed up less and less.

I had an extremely urgent need to go when the cramps and diarrhea hit me. When I got to the toilet area I had to wait for three or four men before me. I was feeling quite faint. When my turn came, I felt the door, turned around, dropped my pants and let go, but I started to have zigzags in front of my eyes and passed out.

I came to as I felt a couple of guys taking my arms and pulling me off of the floor out of the wet mess into which I had fallen. They steadied me a few moments; and when I was strong enough so I could walk, I pulled my shorts and trousers partly up over the mess on my back and went back to my bunk. I cleaned myself up as much as I could with some of the excelsior from my mattress. I lived in those clothes until we were liberated. I had no spares and dared not wash them. There was always the danger that the Germans would move us and in winter the danger of hypothermia in wet clothes was too great.

I was sick with abdominal cramps and loss of appetite and great lassitude for a couple of weeks. We had an American medical officer and I went over to see if he could prescribe anything. He looked at me and said rather ruefully, "I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can prescribe for loss of appetite, we

don't get many calls for that around here!" All he could do was to get me barley soup for the next week or so, nothing extra, but the barley soup was easier on the stomach than the vegetable based soups. Over the next several weeks I came down with hepatitis and my guts felt as though I were carrying a cigar box inside and whenever I bent or twisted, it was as though the corners were poking me. I could get around but I was quite weak.

To keep our spirits up an entertainment committee was formed. A few of the guys from one of the other barracks formed a small vocal group and we would have a weekly concert. They would sing while the lights were out. They sang old favorites such as " Life could be so sweet on the sunny side of the street." (Rendered as "Life could be so fine on the other side of the Rhine.") We had a fellow who sang beautifully in Sinatra's style. And we had lectures on different subjects. We had a couple of restaurant chefs who could talk about food preparation. I gave a talk on archery that was a dud. How do you explain archery without a bow and arrows?

Lucas came down with pyorrhea and each morning he would go to the dispensary and have his gums painted with gentian violet. It was a purple stain and looked awful. It was one of the very few medicines the Krauts provided. Pyorrhea was brought on by malnutrition and was highly contagious — the probable reason why the Germans provided something for treatment.

Periodically more Americans would join us. After three or four weeks a recent arrival from another barracks came over and after we had posted lookouts for any approaching German guards he gave us a news report. Somehow, someone had recently brought in a small radio and this guy could clandestinely listen to the BBC and local radio reports in German.

He told us that the mid-December battle we were caught up in had been a giant attack which came to be known as "The Battle of the Bulge." It had completely surprised Eisenhower and Bradley. At the outset it overran the green 106th Division and much of the 28th Infantry Division as well as a number of other units. Parts of the 101st Airborne Division had been rushed to Bastogne and held out until Patton, driving up from the south, relieved them on the day after Christmas. The giant bulge the Germans had made in the line was squeezed closed with great losses to the Germans so by February the line was approximately where it had been before. Now the allies were attacking towards the Rhine.

In the meantime, the Russians were pushing through Poland and approaching the eastern border of Germany. In the Pacific the Americans were moving towards Japan from island to island. All this news was a real ray of sunshine for us.

What we didn't know was that the Russian advances would cause a lot of suffering and death to POW's who were held at places like Stalag VIII A at Gorlitz near the Polish border. Many of the 106th Recons were there. The Germans moved them west towards the interior of Germany to prevent their being liberated by the Russians. This movement was mainly by road marches. It was mid-winter and the suffering from exposure and starvation was appalling.

J.D. Frazee has written of this ordeal and I have attached a portion of his story to my account. Joe Soulia, Joe Lynch and Morris Tickfer died on this march.

Bill Fritz tells me that Edwin Akers was killed in a bombing raid. He was in the same work party with Fritz. On the day he was killed he did not go out with the work party because he was weak with dysentery and stayed behind in a lazarette – a sort of hospital. It was hit by an American bomb. Probably other non-coms and privates perished in unreported deaths and lie in shallow graves.

Many of our privates were forced to work repairing bomb damage in areas subject to frequent air raids. On one occasion Bob Fisher was able to escape from his work detail during a raid but he was recaptured three days later. His work jacket was so filthy the red triangle on the back signifying POW was indistinguishable and the Germans at first thought he was an American paratrooper. His escape did not escape the later attention of the ever vigilant U.S. Army Paymaster's office which eventually docked him three dollars POW work pay — one dollar for each day of liberty when he was not on the job!

Our officers were all held at an officers' POW camp at Hammelberg which was located 40 miles east of Frankfurt. While in the camp Lt. George Veream was shot to death by a camp guard outside his barracks during an air raid. The rule was that all POWs had to be in barracks during a raid.

In late March of 1945 General George Patton sent an armored column to Hammelberg in order to liberate his son-in-law, Lt. Col. John Waters. After

considerable fighting the column reached Hammelberg. Col. Waters was badly wounded while the camp was being liberated and could not be moved. Needing to return to the American lines immediately, the column commander asked for volunteers to join the column as replacements for his dead and wounded for the fight back. Lt. Joe Haines volunteered. On the way back to the American lines the column encountered various road blocks by German forces lying in wait. Haines was wounded in the shoulder by artillery shell fragments as he was moving to man a .50-caliber machine gun on one of the tanks. He and most of the column were captured. He was returned to Hammelberg where he remained until liberated.

Each barracks at Ziegenhain had a so-called headquarters room located in mid-barracks. It had some kind of flimsy framing covered with a hanging blanket for a door. Ours had five men. A Tech-Sergeant had been elected our barracks leader. We also had a Sergeant named Lanski who spoke Yiddish (a Jewish dialect of German) as our translator and a man named Siegel, a very refined frail Jewish man who was a friend of the barracks leader. Somehow Lucas wrangled a place as director of sports, as well. Some British POW's gave us a box of books and we needed a librarian. Lucas recommended me to be the librarian-newsman for our barracks, so I moved in too.

Late each afternoon we newsmen from each barracks would meet in a headquarters room with the man who had access to the radio. He would brief us on the BBC news of the day, using a large paratrooper's silk map of Germany. We would take notes and after our briefing we would go back to our respective barracks and repeat what we had learned. We learned as the weeks went by that the Americans were driving closer and closer to the Rhine and the Russians were driving for the Oder River in Eastern Germany.

Meanwhile we grew weaker. It was more of an effort to walk and I had the impression that my mind was a little clouded. We ceased to have entertainment.

I had an interesting conversation in February or early March with some of the guys who had been in the 28th Infantry Division. Whereas the mid-December battle was the first one for the 106th Division, these men in the 28th Division had seen extensive action as they moved across France and up to the Siegfried Line. So I asked them, "If you had the choice would you rather be in here with what we were going through or up on the line?" They all said they would rather be up on the line taking their chances.

It was obviously Hitler's policy to keep us alive, but just. He wanted us as pawns but at minimal cost to the German economy. We were too weak from starvation to attempt to escape or create other problems of that nature.

On clear days in February and March we would sometimes see wave after wave of American bombers flying in formation high overhead and ten or fifteen minutes after the lead formation had passed and succeeding waves were still going over, we would hear the distant sound of crump, crump, crump as the bombs began striking places like Frankfurt. One day I was on a work party with an old German guard. He was very worried because his family lived near Frankfurt. As the bombers were still passing over us while the crumping of bombs was continuing, he looked up at the sky and sighed dejectedly, "Alles kaput in Deutschland" (All is broken in Germany) as he shook his head.

Our guards were reasonable. They all knew the end was near. In early March forty or fifty British POW' s were brought into the American compound. Ten or twenty were housed in part of one barracks which was the medical area. There were almost no medicines but the men there were given barley soup and extra blankets to help them a little.

These British POWs had been in the Eastern part of Germany and, as the Russians approached, the Germans had moved them out onto the roads and begun marching them westwards to keep them from being liberated. This was in mid-winter and these men had endured a lot of privation from exposure. Sometimes there was some shelter and food at the end of a day's march and sometimes there wasn't. Some of the British boys were in bad shape. Some of them had been POWs since 1940. One of them pointed out to me that the Jerry guards were a lot tougher and more arrogant with POWs in those early years when they were fresh and more confident of ultimate victory.

Always, always there was hunger. On a of couple occasions we were given a small ration of cheese that was in moldy, ruptured tubes. We cleaned off the worst of the mold and made the most of it, mold and all. The tubes of Limburger cheese smelled like rotten socks but tasted delicious. On the two occasions when we received Red Cross packages, which we shared about ten to a package, we divided up the cigarettes and each man received one or two. Those of us who didn't smoke traded ours for bread.

The news of Allied advances continued to be encouraging. Spring came early—in late February I believe. With the warm weather we weren't shivering most of the time but in my case and with some of the other boys, our feet began to burn and to itch and to sweat profusely. Mine continued to do so for a number of years and prolonged standing has always been a special problem. My feet had frozen in the mid-January move during the prisoner count in the snow at Bad Orb and stayed numb until the warm weather set in. This damaged the circulation. Some of my friends in the 106th infantry regiments had even more serious damage to their feet than I did. Their feet had frozen during the battle when they lay out exposed in the snow. Some of their toes were black in spots.

As the weather warmed, we began to open the windows and to spend more time out-of-doors when the sun was out. The town of Ziegenhain lay a few miles away among rolling hills and on a couple of occasions an American P-51 Mustang fighter plane or two would find something noteworthy in the town to shoot up. They would usually take several strafing runs until a large column of black smoke would begin rising from the town.

One clear lazy warm day, I was lounging alone at a window and idly watched a Mustang make a run on the town. I couldn't always keep it in sight and didn't give it much thought. All of us were confined inside the barracks whenever there was aircraft activity in the area. I looked out through the open window onto row after row of barracks that stretched in front of me. These barracks were full of French and Russian and other POWs. We Americans were in the last few rows and my barracks was the last of these.

Beyond the barracks in the distance was a guard tower. Ziegenhain lay off to the left, mostly hidden by the rolling hills. The pilot passed over our camp as he circled to put himself in position for yet another attack run. He made the run and then disappeared from view and for a few minutes all was quiet. Then suddenly he burst upon us at roof top level coming over the line of barracks right at us with his .50-caliber machine guns blazing. Bullets pounded the building. One whizzed through the window, narrowly missing me, and hit a bedpost just behind me with the force of a sledgehammer! The Mustang flashed up and over with the roar of its engine shaking the building and was away. I didn't even have time to react and drop to the floor. It was over before it began.

We found out later that the guard tower had unwisely tried to machine gun the Mustang as it circled over our camp. So, after making his attack run

on the town, the pilot circled round again and gave the guard tower about a five second burst. He not only knocked out the tower but raked the barracks in line with the tower as well. We Americans were very lucky because we were at the tail end of the burst as the pilot began to pull up and away. We didn't take many bullets and took no casualties, but the French were badly hit. We saw wounded Frenchmen being hauled out on stretchers for over an hour afterwards.

The news continued to be good. The Russians were driving deeper into Germany and, more importantly for us, the Americans had reached the Rhine River. Outside the barracks at night we could hear the booming and rumbling of heavy artillery fire like distant thunder. Then there was the unexpectedly good news that the Americans had captured a bridge and elements of the First Army were across the Rhine. We knew what it meant as the sound of artillery grew louder at night.

Most of us were growing ever weaker. I was having a very meager bowel movement only once every three or four weeks. I seem to recall that our ration of ersatz bread was cut from seven men to a loaf to eight. If we sat on the floor or on a bench in the headquarters room we'd fold up our blankets to put underneath our bony butts. I believe the secret radio and the news reports were important. They gave us hope and hope was like food helping to keep us alive.

One day I was called out on a work detail. A guard took a dozen of us to a tool shed where we were given picks or shovels and then he took us to some spot where we were supposed to dig a trench. We were so weak we couldn't force the shovels into the hard ground or swing a pick with any force. Finally, after a couple of hours, the guard gave up and quietly took us back to our barracks.

There were constantly more Mustangs searching around for targets of opportunity and almost daily bombing raids on Frankfurt. The guards were looking more and more worried. Our greatest concern was that the Germans would try to move us out of the camp and onto the road and march us East. The news told of continued American advances towards our camp. Finally, the Americans were only about a day away. Late that afternoon a bunch of Red Cross and personal food parcels (not our own) were brought into the barracks. They were to be divided up among the men in each barracks because next morning we were to leave the camp.

Our barracks leaders had a meeting early in the evening and it was agreed that we should try to frustrate this German plan. Much of the food was from broken packages and some of it was spoiled. We made a show for the guards of eating some of this food that evening.

In the morning when the guards started rousting us out of the barracks, some men remained in bed complaining of stomach cramps probably from spoiled food in the packages. The guards started yelling and making everyone go outside. This took time as they forced more and more "sick" men out. It took extra time especially because none of the guards was drawing a gun and threatening to shoot. These were not S.S. fanatics and the Americans were very close.

Eventually by mid-morning almost all of us had been moved out into the compound behind the barracks, the "sick" ones being helped by the more able-bodied men. There were only a couple of guards at the gate. Then a few of our men turned back supported by able-bodied men, hobbling, clutching their guts and shouting, "Sheissen!" (I must shit!). And they started back to the latrines which were located next to the barracks.

Then more men did this, each supported by a man on each side. The trickle of men turned into a river until we had all moved back to the latrine area and then back into the barracks.

We waited, expecting some guards with their non-coms to arrive getting tough with us. We waited in apprehension but nothing happened. By about noon someone noticed that there were no longer any guards marching along the fenced perimeters of our compounds—and there were no guards in the towers! They had all fled! We went outside our barracks to watch the main road which passed near the camp. It was deserted except for the occasional German truck moving in retreat.

LIBERATION

I remember it was Good Friday. At about three o'clock we saw a lone American jeep come slowly down the road and turn into the short road leading into our camp. When they came into the camp we gathered around them cheering. The first thing that struck us was how healthy and rosy these combat GI's looked compared to our skinny bodies and sallow pallor.

And surprise — one of the men in the jeep was the brother of one of our guys! They didn't stay long. They radioed and got orders. We were told to stay in camp and they would get food to us in the next day or so. Although there was no actual fighting in our immediate vicinity, it was a combat zone and food might take a little time.

Our cooks (Americans by this time) got hold of extra camp food supplies so we had a little more for the day than usual and we had the bits and pieces of the food packages. We were feeling elated. Late in the afternoon a few more Americans arrived. Some of them came into the barracks and we chatted. I think most of them were to supervise the camp. The mood was quite festive.

I vaguely recall that somehow some Russians came up to the edge of our compound. We shook hands, I exchanged my cloth tanker hat for a Russian's cloth hat. Afterward when I took a good look at it, I saw that I had made a poor bargain. It was worn threadbare and had been repaired with needle and thread in a couple of places — all in all not too good as a souvenir. Still, I put it on.

At about dusk Lucas — ever resourceful — called me aside and said quietly that German prisoners were being penned in one of the fenced compounds behind us and the combat GI's at the gate had said that the American POWs could go into the compound to look for food the Krauts might have. Luke and I quietly left the barracks and went out and found there were four or five hundred Germans collected there. The GI guard said, "Sure, see what you can find."

As I began to move among them and saw these Krauts up close, I felt angry, especially with their officers for their scarcely concealed arrogance and their ruddy cheeks. I think we all did after what we had been through. They sensed this and didn't resist at all as we went through their stuff.

I took three or four tins of meat about as big as a small coffee can, and some tubes of cheese and a couple of loaves of black bread, soap, a razor, can opener, jackknife and things like that — so much that I took the knapsack from one of these men to carry it all in. Also I found and took a couple of the magnificent aluminum mess kits the Germans were issued to replace the pisspot I had salvaged and had been eating from.

I came across one burly Kraut officer who had a magnificent leather hat with fleece ear flaps. I took it off of his head with one hand and placed the scraggly Russian hat on his head with the other and then put on his hat. There was fury in his eyes but he didn't say a word or make a move.

A private who didn't have any of the superman look about him had on a wedding ring. I took it off his finger and he looked sad. But then I knelt down and tucked it in his sock. He looked relieved and grateful. (Some of our guys were collecting German wedding rings.)

Finally it was dark and I went back into the barracks. The lights were on! I opened one of the large tins and found a solid chunk of pork loaf like Spam encased in fat. I learned that someone had found the location of some potatoes stored in holes in the ground out behind the barracks area. I followed the movement of other guys going to and from what must have been garden plots. I knelt down and felt around in a hole in the ground and found six or eight potatoes and took them back into the barracks.

In the headquarters room there was a hot fire in the tiny stove. We broke up spare bed slats for kindling and opened more cans of pork. We put them on the stove and warmed them until we could pour off the grease from the meat into a larger can. We peeled the potatoes, cut them up and fried the potatoes in the deep fat.

We had a midnight feast of sliced pork loaf, French fries and black bread. We ate and ate. We had no stomach mechanism that normally tells you when to stop eating. We went to sleep with full stomachs but we paid a price later in stomach pains and diarrhea. We just couldn't handle so much rich food. The next day or two, the Army provided us with rice or barley and we ate well, and then we started getting regular GI food.

In three of four days a dozen or so GI trucks showed up and moved us out. I dragged my rucksack full of too much food and other stuff out to a truck but couldn't lift it up and onto the truck, I was too weak. The other guys irritably told me not to hold things up — to get in! So I left that rucksack in the road. I have always been sorry I abandoned those mess kits!

We drove for an hour or two and came to a city called Giessen. The town hadn't been knocked about much but it seemed dead. Almost no one was moving around. Doors were closed. Windows were shuttered. Only a few

U.S. Army vehicles were to be seen. When we saw German civilians they looked down.

We left the town and drove a short distance further to an airfield and there before us were forty or fifty C-47s drawn up smartly in an evenly spaced line. Our trucks drove us out to the planes. We got out, climbed into the passenger compartment which ran the entire length of the plane. There were metal bucket seats along each side where we sat facing each other. We buckled our seat belts and almost immediately the planes started to taxi to the end of the runway and took off. It was impressively organized. Exhausted by the truck ride we fell asleep almost immediately and after a couple of hours we landed in France.

As we left our planes and made our way towards some GI trucks nearby, I noticed one of the rear echelon GI's who had an armful of K-rations and was handing them out. A few other men noticed him too, and I knew I'd have to move fast to get one: something good to have in reserve. I started to run but couldn't. I just tripped and fell. I was too weak to run. By the time I got up it was too late.

We mounted once again into Army trucks and were taken from the airfield to nearby Camp Lucky Strike. This camp had apparently been hastily set up to bring liberated POWs back under Army control. It was near LeHavre. As we left our trucks we were met by American Red Cross girls — they were still "girls" in those days and they looked just wonderful. My stay in Camp Lucky Strike is a bit hazy. It was overwhelming. I sensed that we were one of the first units to be processed at this camp.

Everything was new: the tents, the cots, the sheets and blankets, fresh clothing, everything. Our first question was, "Where's the mess hall?" We had to eat as a tent unit at assigned times. It seems some of the guys just a few days before us had been going through the mess line several times for the same meal and having stomach problems.

We heard there was a Red Cross tent where the girls served coffee and doughnuts. We looked forward longingly to this great luxury only to learn that in typical army overkill the Camp Commandant had closed down that Red Cross tent that morning. Some poor soul had gone in there and eaten about 100 doughnuts. He died.

We talked to some of the privates we left behind at Bad Orb. They were starving even more than we and towards the end had been losing a man a day.

We were registered, given brief medical examinations and arrangements were made to advise next of kin of our return to army control. Within a week I boarded a Navy troop transport (whose name I can't recall) at Le Havre. It was a comfortable ship. We had three meals a day seated in normal fashion. The mess room was pleasant. The ship was only a third full. We were about two thousand men. Toward the end of the voyage we were told we had consumed rations for several thousand men.

As a matter of fact, we ate far too much. It wasn't good for us. Our stomach mechanism for telling us we had eaten enough didn't function and during a meal we had to feel our bellies to see when they were turgid. Then we knew we had eaten plenty. And, to top it off, we were able to buy giant Hershey milk chocolate bars and I can recall eating one after overstuffing on regular food, and lying in my bunk in great discomfort as my belly was tight as a drum and distended with gas from all the food. (For years afterward my stomach would bulge out after a regular meal and I still occasionally suffer from intestinal flare-ups.)

While at sea we saw in the news dispatches posted on the notice board that President Roosevelt had died. It felt almost like losing a family member.

Our voyage to the states took us ten days or so. I can't recall where we landed. I think it was in the greater New York area. We must have gone on to some camp to be issued a full set of uniforms and to be more fully processed. It might have been Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. I seem to recall it was at Fort Sheridan near Chicago where I had some dental work done.

All we returning POWs were given 60 day furloughs. I went to Michigan and saw Dad and then to Indianapolis and broke up with Lucy. After the furlough I was sent to Miami Beach for a week's vacation at one of the deluxe resort hotels that the Army had sequestered for processing GIs returning from overseas. We were given thorough physicals and were assigned to new outfits.

I was sent to Fort Riley to be a radio instructor at the Cavalry School. All POWs were jumped one grade in rank which meant for me from Sergeant (T-4) to Staff Sergeant (T-3). Vic Boucher was also assigned there. He was

advanced to Tech Sergeant. We didn't speak about our POW experiences. We POWs were awarded the same campaign ribbons as those earned by the surviving combat units of the 106th Division.

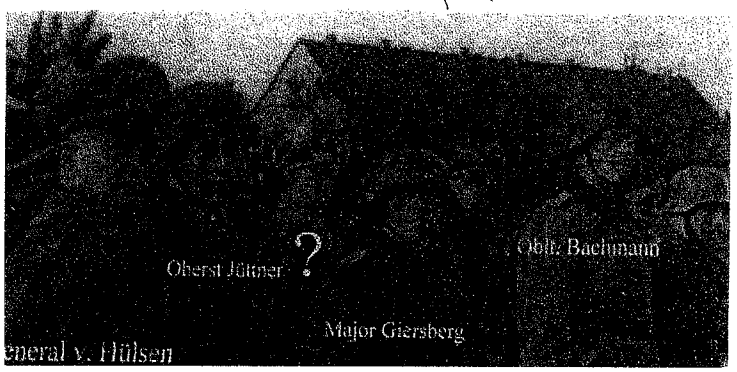
One of my friends who served in the headquarters unit of the 106th until the end of the war told me that General Alan Jones was eventually reduced in rank to Lt. Colonel. Kuzell never made General. He retired as a bird colonel. It may be that in spite of his sterling leadership qualities and West Point credentials, the virtual destruction of the 106th Division cast a long shadow.

I was awarded the Purple Heart and a disability pension for my frozen feet. At Fort Riley I took riding instruction from some old cavalrymen. It was good exercise without requiring being on my feet a lot.

In the late summer of 1945 I was walking down one of the streets of the main post at Fort Riley and saw Million (by then he was a Major) approaching on the other side. He was walking with a couple of other officers. The street wasn't wide and the traffic was light. I know he couldn't miss seeing me but he just walked on by, and that was just as well.

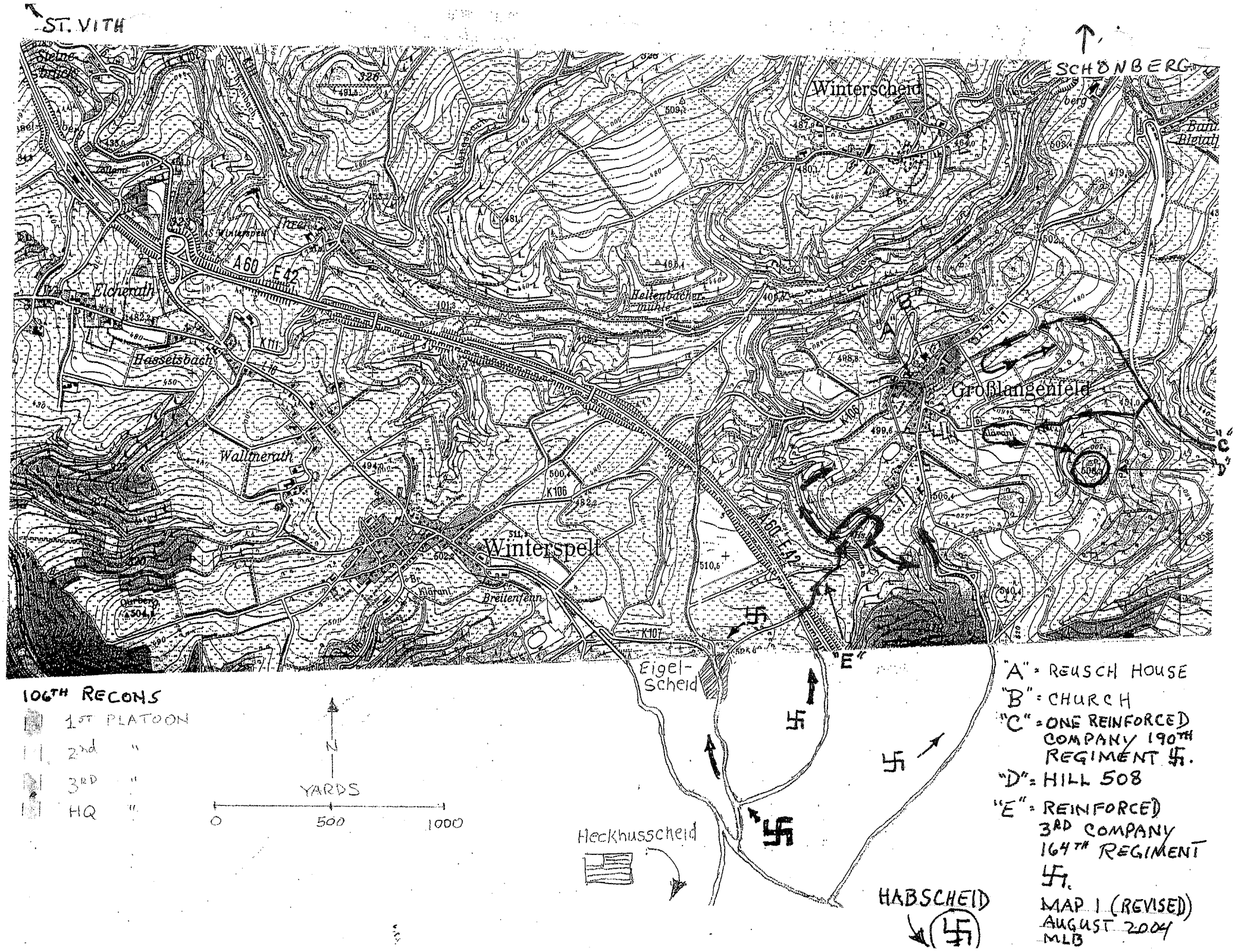
I remained at Fort Riley until discharged in December, 1945.

Bellevue, Washington
October 4, 2001



62ND V.G.DIV.OFFICERS. (DEC. 17TH
BACHMANN TOOK CHARGE OF ROUNDING
UP PRISONERS AND WOUNDED AT GROSSLANGENFELD

MAP 2
(REVISED AUGUST 2004)
MLB


ST. VITH
SCHÖNBERG
Winterscheid
Elcherath
Hasselsbach
Wallmerath
Hellenbachermühle
Großlangenfeld
Winterspelt
Breitenfenn
Eigel-Scheid
Heckhusscheid
HABSCHEID
A60
E42
K111
K106
K107
K109
"A" = REUSCH HOUSE
"B" = CHURCH
"C" = ONE REINFORCED COMPANY 190TH REGIMENT
"D" = HILL 508
"E" = REINFORCED 3RD COMPANY 164TH REGIMENT
106TH RECONS
1ST PLATOON
2ND "
3RD "
HQ "
N
YARDS
0
500
1000
MAP 1 (REVISED)
AUGUST 2004
MLB

U. S. A.

Besetztes Gebiet
Territoire occupé
Südfrankreich
France méridionale
Nichtzutreffendes streichen
Biffer les mentions inutiles

Kriegsgefangenenpost Rec'd 9/6/45
Correspondance des prisonniers de guerre

Postkarte Carte postale

25.1.45. 817

An
A 20

MR & MAURICE L. BOMBAR

Gebührenfrei! Franc de port!

Absender:
Expéditeur:
Vor- und Zuname:
Nom et prénom
T/4 MAURICE L BOMBAR

Gefangenennummer: 23937
No. du prisonnier

Lager-Bezeichnung:
Nom du camp

siehe Rückseite
voir au dos

10992

Deutschland (Allemagne)

U.S. CENSOR

Empfangsort: 2343 HICKORY R#7
Lieu de destination

Straße: PONTIAC, MICH
Rue

Land: U. S. A
Landesteil (Provinz usw.)
Département

Kriegsgefangenenlager
Camp des prisonniers

M.-Stammlager IX B
BAD ORB

Datum: JAN 16 1945
Date

Dearest Father: Another card to let you know I'm alright, having been a prisoner almost a month. Charles Lucas with me and a few other friends. We missed a good deal about your hearing any thing. N. Y. A. so close on the news of mother's death. Please don't worry I am thankful to be alive and unharmed. Please send me all you can as soon as possible with the aid of the Red Cross. Love, Jimmy

JOSEPH & MIA REUSCH
IN FRONT OF THEIR 250 YEAR OLD HOUSE IN GROSSLANGFELD (THREE GERMAN SOLDIERS WERE KILLED IN THE HOUSE BY AMERICAN TANKS IN RETAKING THE VILLAGE IN FEB. 1945)

THE CHURCH – GROSSLANGENFELD

THE REUSCH HOUSE WITH CHURCH IN BACKGROUND (SEE "A" & "B" ON PLATOON SECTOR MAP)

OBIT - ADDED TO JOURNAL

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Seattle Times

Maurice L. BOMBAR, Jr.

Maurice L. Bombar, Jr. died Saturday, May 10, 2008, at Overlake Hospital in Bellevue, Washington. He was 83. Born on July 25, 1924 in Pontiac, Mich., Maurice was the only child of Maurice and Mildred (nee Graves) Bombar and grew up during The Great Depression. With WWII raging in Europe in 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and assigned to the Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop of the 106th Infantry as a Communications Specialist. Maurice survived the Battle of the Bulge and being a Prisoner of War, and was liberated just before the war ended in 1945. He was awarded The Purple Heart. To Maurice, the war was the defining period of his life. In retirement, he wrote a memoir entitled Eight Miles to St. Vith: Recollections of the 106th Recons, a project that reconnected him with some of his war buddies. In its preface Maurice hand-penned: "We were not heroes. We simply did our duty as best we could under the circumstances. What we did mattered, and I'm proud of that." Under the G.I. Bill, Maurice attended Dartmouth College and graduated Suma Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa in Philosophy in 1949. He then traveled through Europe where he met his future wife, Lena Lavestam of Sweden. They were married in New York in 1955 and had three children: Peter, Caroline, and Timothy. Maurice's long career in marketing with Gulf Oil took him and his family to several foreign countries, including England, Switzerland, Italy, and Japan. He was an astute businessman whose sensitivity to local culture and customs gained him genuine friendships wherever his work-life led him. In his free time, Maurice became an accomplished carver and guilder under the tutorship of a master artisan in Rome. He also enjoyed restoring the antiques he collected. His reproduction of an 18th Century Georgian chair was featured in Fine Woodworking magazine. Later in life, Maurice became a devout Catholic and settled in Seattle. He found a deep connection to the community at Christ the King Church in North Seattle. His boxer dog, Kokie, was his constant companion. Then he met Marj Monsen (nee Mendel) in a watercolor class and became devoted to her for the rest of his life. They married in 1999 and settled into a happy life at Marj's home in Bellevue, where "afternoon tea" became a daily custom. They always welcomed visits from friends and family from both sides, and their home was the gathering place for family celebrations and holidays. After loving farewells were said, Maurice received his last rites and passed away peacefully. He is survived by his loving wife, Marj; his children, Peter, Caroline, and Tim; their spouses, Barbara (Dolny) Bombar, Hal Kaplan, and Barb Bruell; his granddaughter, Kristin Anthony; the extended Mendel clan; his POW veterans; his church community; and other close friends.